

Budget Unit Brief

FY 2017



Lake Restoration and Water Quality Program - ENDW

Purpose

During 2006, the General Assembly established and codified the Lake Restoration Program in Iowa Code section [456A.33B](#).¹ The statute requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use a science-based approach to achieving lake water quality improvement. In addition, the DNR is required to provide a Lake Restoration Plan and Report annually to the Transportation, Infrastructure, and Capitals Appropriations Subcommittee and to the Legislative Services Agency. The statute also specifies the requirements for the projects in the Program to improve and restore lakes and water quality around the state.

History

Lake restoration, specifically dredging, has taken place in Iowa lakes for more than 50 years. During 1915, the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring the State Highway Commission (predecessor to the Department of Transportation) to study lakes and lake beds in the state and to determine the lakes that should be preserved, drained, or drained and the land sold. The State Highway Commission coordinated with other departments and universities, and made surveys of 24 lakes, including more than 63,000 acres of topography, in order to prepare the report. The Commission's findings included recommendations for legislative action, including the adoption of a general policy for lake preservation and improvement.

In 1980 and 1992, through funding provided by grants from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the DNR worked with Iowa State University (ISU) to conduct studies in response to the federal requirement that each state make a survey of public lakes and develop a priority ranking of the lakes for restoration. Utilizing this information, additional studies by the DNR and ISU in 2004 and 2005 were completed to establish the current science-based lake restoration prioritization system that was established in statute in 2006. The DNR developed the current Lake Restoration Program and modeled it after the federal Clean Lakes Program that was established in the 1970s.

Prior to 2006, four lake restoration projects were completed at Lake Ahquabi, Little Wall Lake, Swan Lake, and Union Grove Lake. The General Assembly provided appropriations to the DNR for lake dredging for several years. During FY 1999 to FY 2006, the funding ranged from \$350,000 to \$4.2 million, totaling approximately \$12.9 million. Funding was typically appropriated from the Environment First Fund or the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund (RIIF). The funding was provided for the DNR to use in accordance with the Department's "Classification of Iowa Lakes Restoration Report."

Current Program

The five statutory goals that the projects must be designed to achieve include:

1. Ensure a cost-effective, positive return on investment for the citizens of Iowa.
2. Ensure local community commitment to lake and watershed protection.
3. Ensure significant improvement in water clarity, safety, and quality of Iowa lakes.
4. Provide for a sustainable, healthy, and functioning lake system.
5. Result in the removal of the lake from the impaired waters list.

In addition, science-based criteria for how DNR approaches the projects were added, in addition to water quality targets including clarity, biota, sustainability, and safety. Lakes must meet depth criteria and support a diverse, balanced, and sustainable aquatic community. Water quality benefits must be sustained for at least 50 years and beaches and water used for recreational use must meet water quality standards. Also, biologic controls must be used to the maximum extent possible and any dredging must meet depth criteria. Any delivery of phosphorous and sediment from the watershed must be controlled and in place before lake restoration begins.

More Information

Iowa DNR Lake Restoration Program and Water Quality Improvement:
<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/WaterQuality/LakeRestoration.aspx>

Map of the Lake Projects: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/portals/idnr/uploads/water/lakerestoration/35lakes.pdf>

Iowa General Assembly: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/index.aspx>

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The 2006 legislation put the initial focus on 35 significant public lake projects. Each year the DNR provides the Lake Restoration

¹ HF 2782 – FY 2007 Infrastructure Appropriations Act

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Report and Plan to the General Assembly and includes the status of existing projects as well as recommendations for future projects with anticipated funding. The [DNR Lake Restoration Map](#) provides the location of all lake projects. Currently, the DNR has identified 22 projects completed or near completion, 21 active projects, and 14 in the planning stage.

Funding

Since FY 2007, funding levels have varied and has typically been provided from the RIIF. Between FY 2007 and FY 2016, the Program received a total of \$70.7 million, averaging approximately \$7.8 million annually.

In addition to state funding, projects have received funding from local groups such as conservation boards and city or county governments. In addition, the DNR has partnered on occasion with the Army Corps for Engineers. Also, private funds may be provided toward a particular project through community fundraising efforts. Iowa Code section [456A.33B](#) requires the DNR to meet with representatives of the communities to develop a joint lake restoration action plan.

Related Statutes and Administrative Rules

Iowa Code section [456A.33B](#)
[571](#) Iowa Administrative Code [31](#)

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