

IOWA'S WATER

Ambient Monitoring Program

CLEAR

Community Leaders Enhancing Area Rivers

Since 2003, over 2,000 volunteers have contributed thousands of hours toward beautifying Iowa's aquatic resources through river cleanup events. Through one of these cleanup events, Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition), volunteers are proving they can make a difference – one river, one week a year, one piece of trash at a time. This annual event, held since 2003, is organized by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' (IDNR) IOWATER and Keepers of the Land volunteer programs. Over the last three years, a flood of requests have come from citizens and legislators who are interested and excited about developing their own river cleanup events. While many of these groups have tremendous local support (from both a participation and sponsorship standpoint), they often lack adequate funding. This funding is necessary to dispose of river trash in an environmentally ethical manner and to fully educate the public about how our actions on land impact the quality of our waters and the responsibility Iowans have to care for our natural resources.



The Conservation Education Program (CEP) is a key provision of Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Act of 1989. A five-member board implements the REAP CEP and allocates approximately \$350,000 in grants annually for conservation education in Iowa. While this funding is an essential first step, on average, REAP CEP grants provide less than half the total requested funding for education projects across Iowa. Often private contributions and expert services make up the difference.

During the fall of 2005, IDNR's Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Section applied for and received an \$18,000 REAP CEP grant for river cleanup events. This funding allowed communities to apply for up to \$1,000 to support their cleanup. CLEAR (Community Leaders Enhancing Area Rivers) awarded seventeen mini-grants to local groups who used the funds to recycle river trash and educate the public about water quality. The grants were divided into three application cycles throughout 2006, and all seventeen cleanup events were completed by September 2007. Some of the REAP CEP funds also supported Project AWARE in 2006.



Overall, \$15,673.26 was allocated to the 17 cleanup events, which produced impressive results in the amount of trash removed (31.41 tons), number and distribution of volunteers involved (896), number of stream miles cleaned (162 miles) in 2006 and 2007, and maybe most importantly – a greater appreciation for Iowa streams. Overall, 65% of the trash removed (i.e., tires, glass, plastic, metal, etc.) was transported and recycled locally. The remaining 35% was non-recyclable (i.e., styro-foam, hazardous waste, and silt-laden items) and was transported to local sanitary landfills for proper disposal.



The *Raccoon River Clean Rivers Team* cleaned the greatest number of river miles (33 miles) with the *Skunk River Cleanup* a close second at 24 stream miles. The *West Des Moines River Cleanup* had the highest percentage of recycled material (89%), while the *Big Rock Volga River Cleanup* collected the largest amount of river trash (9.89 tons), which included a 3,000-pound fuel tank that had to be airlifted from the river by helicopter. *Missouri River Relief* cleanup had the greatest number of volunteers (167 volunteers), resulting in the third largest amount (5.1 tons) of river trash collected from a CLEAR-supported event. Some of these cleanup events evolved to have their event supported completely by local sponsorship



Photos

Top: Two of 118 volunteers canoe down the Des Moines River searching for river trash during the Dragoon River Romp in September of 2006.

Middle: Volunteers hold up a used tractor tire found on the Des Moines River. Thirty-one tires were found weighing 2,300 pounds total.

Bottom: Gary Siegwarth navigates the trash barge to shore at a stopping point along the Turkey River during the Tidying the Turkey cleanup event.

in 2007. Self-sustaining river cleanup events are the ultimate goal of the CLEAR mini-grant program.

Volunteers who care about our water resources are truly the heartbeat of this program. Not only have volunteers provided countless hours of hard work to improve Iowa's water resources, they have also had numerous local, county, and state organizations provide matching funds or act as sponsors for their local river cleanup events. Contributions (i.e., labor, funding, food, equipment, etc.) from these organizations and local citizens have been incredible, both in the time and effort spent organizing and coordinating these events and in the amount of volunteer hours generated by the events.

"Streamkeepers," a new program developed through the IDNR Water Trails and Keepers of the Land programs, is in its pilot year. The program will provide clean-up efforts with a guide for organizing and coordinating river cleanup events, as well as educational materials and reusable mesh bags for collecting trash. A "Land Ownership Guide for Watershed Cleanups" will also be distributed to organizers. This program will also provide statewide recognition to communities conducting cleanup events.

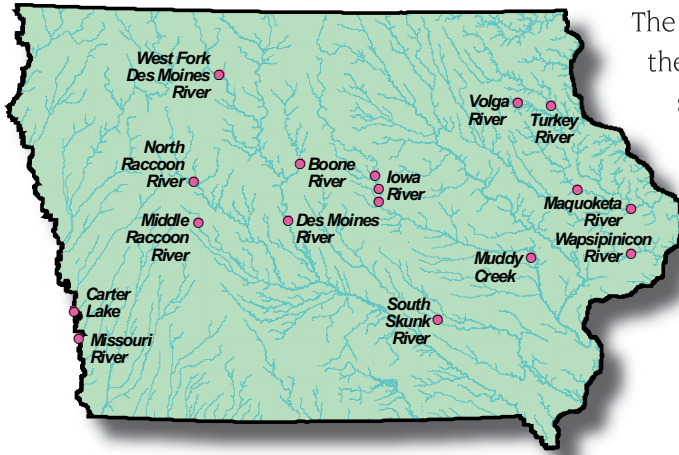
Photos

Top: Dan Ceynar paddles an abandoned jon boat loaded with river treasure trash down the lower Wapsipinicon River during the Grove to Grove Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup in August 2006.

Middle: Pile of collected river trash awaiting sorting into recyclable and non-recyclable during one of the many CLEAR funded cleanup events.

Bottom: Don Propst of Des Moines works to cut a metal, sediment-filled tank in half for transport down the lower Wapsipinicon River during the Grove to Grove Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup in August 2006.





Location map showing sites of CLEAR-supported cleanup events.

The IDNR has contributed significantly to support these localized river cleanup efforts by providing staff participation, technical support, analysis of event summary reports, administration of funds, press release preparation and submission, equipment (e.g., gloves, bags, etc.), and CLEAR program marketing. Pre- and post-event press releases are sent to newspapers, organization newsletters, and as informational e-mails to encourage and increase participation. IOWATER staff announce event dates at IOWATER workshops held statewide, in their quarterly newsletter, and on the IOWATER website.

Due to both the overwhelming success of the program and the ongoing need for assistance to first-time event coordinators, CLEAR has been awarded a second REAP CEP grant for approximately fifteen additional river cleanup events in 2008 and 2009.

CLEAR mini-grant information can be found on the IOWATER website at www.iowater.net (click on the activities tab and select CLEAR mini-grants). For more information contact Brandon Harland at Brandon.Harland@dnr.iowa.gov

Acknowledgements

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Photos were taken by CLEAR event coordinators or participants for each event.

Iowa Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Program Web Site – wqm.igsb.uiowa.edu



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