

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LEADING IOWANS IN CARING FOR OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

CHUCK GIPP, DIRECTOR | BRUCE TRAUTMAN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Kelley Myers

Conservation Recreation Administrator

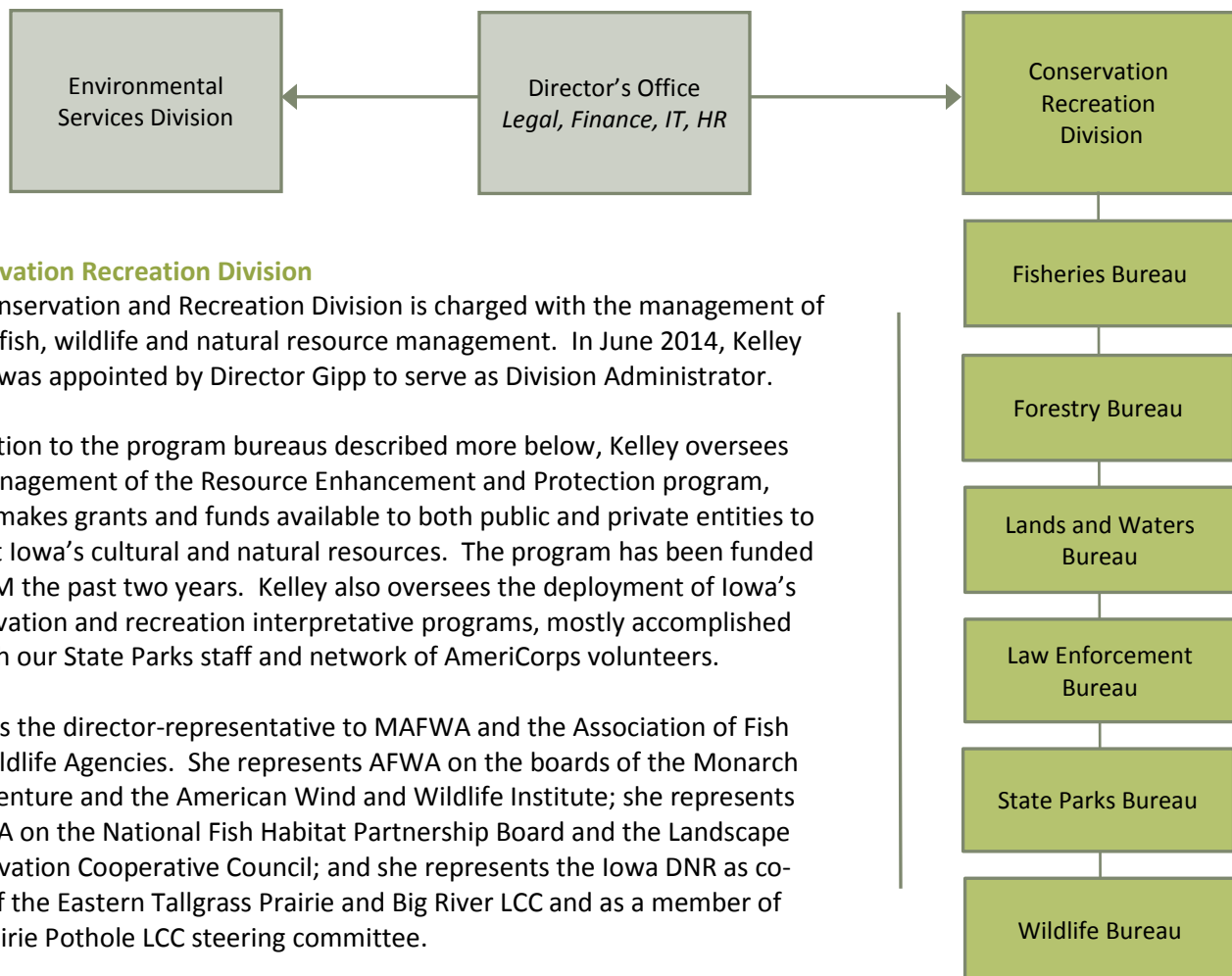
IOWA STATE REPORT, 2015-2016

Iowa DNR Mission Statement:

To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for Iowans and ensure a legacy for future generations.

Iowa DNR Vision Statement:

Leading Iowans in caring for their natural resources.



Conservation Recreation Division

The Conservation and Recreation Division is charged with the management of Iowa's fish, wildlife and natural resource management. In June 2014, Kelley Myers was appointed by Director Gipp to serve as Division Administrator.

In addition to the program bureaus described more below, Kelley oversees the management of the Resource Enhancement and Protection program, which makes grants and funds available to both public and private entities to protect Iowa's cultural and natural resources. The program has been funded at \$16M the past two years. Kelley also oversees the deployment of Iowa's conservation and recreation interpretative programs, mostly accomplished through our State Parks staff and network of AmeriCorps volunteers.

Kelley is the director-representative to MAFWA and the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. She represents AFWA on the boards of the Monarch Joint Venture and the American Wind and Wildlife Institute; she represents MAFWA on the National Fish Habitat Partnership Board and the Landscape Conservation Cooperative Council; and she represents the Iowa DNR as co-chair of the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie and Big River LCC and as a member of the Prairie Pothole LCC steering committee.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Fisheries Bureau

▪ **Improving Bluegill Growth Following Fish Renovation in Iowa Lakes**

Fish managers have been frustrated with the variable growth rate of bluegills following fish renovations in lakes using traditional fish restocking methods. A new largemouth bass /bluegill restocking strategy study was initiated in 2013 to produce dependable fast bluegill growth to 8 inches. Two study lakes were chosen to be renovated: Little River Lake (788 ac) in 2012 and Prairie Rose Lake (204 ac) in 2013. The new restocking strategy included stocking 200-300/ac (2") bluegill in the fall and 1/ac pre-spawn adult largemouth bass in the fall or spring following a complete lake fish renovation. Shoreline seining and electrofishing surveys in June showed that the adult largemouth bass stocking produced a very strong year class of young bass and bluegill growth exceeded expectations reaching 8 inches within two years of restocking. This restocking method has been repeated at five other Iowa lakes with the same results. Anglers have been very supportive of this new stocking strategy.

▪ **Record Setting Spring Walleye Season**

Although natural reproduction of walleye does occur in Iowa, research has shown it's not sufficient to sustain fishable walleye populations across the state, especially at densities Iowa anglers expect. So each spring, about 80 members of the Iowa DNR Fisheries Bureau step up to help raise about 150 million walleye fry. As soon as the ice is out, they collect brood stock from one of several lakes. Each fish is measured and tagged for research purposes and the ripe females are "squeezed" to collect the eggs. The eggs are then fertilized and shipped to one of two satellite hatcheries in the state, where they are hatched and reared.

Some impressive statistics from this year include: over 6,500 brood stock walleye were captured with gill nets fished at night; nearly 250 million eggs spawned, fertilized and placed in incubation jars; 150 million fry hatched and stocked directly into Iowa waters or held and raised to fingerling size to be stocked at a later date.

▪ **Partners in Nutrient Reduction Strategy**

The Fisheries Bureau is contributing to the goals of Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, a comprehensive science- and technology-based strategy aimed at reducing nutrients into Iowa's waterways and therefore improving water quality in Iowa and downstream. Supervisors in the Fisheries Bureau have written goals into the annual performance plans of their management biologists in an effort to support the strategy and improve Iowa's aquatic habitats. The Iowa strategy was developed in response to the 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan, which calls for the 12 states along the Mississippi River to craft strategies to reduce nutrients reaching the Gulf of Mexico. The Iowa strategy follows the recommended framework provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 2011.

▪ **Iowa Turtles Find Additional Protection**

The Iowa General Assembly passed legislation this year requiring the Natural Resource Commission, the citizen board with rulemaking authority over many Iowa DNR programs, to adopt a season and daily catch limits for four species of turtles in Iowa. Iowa DNR has been working over the last year with a varied group of stakeholders, representing harvesters, environmental groups and academic institutions, to address the threats and challenges facing sustainable turtle populations in Iowa. With this legislative charge, Iowa DNR will be proposing rules later this summer.

For more information about these updates or any Iowa DNR Fisheries matters, contact Chief Joe Larscheid at joe.larscheid@dnr.iowa.gov.

Wildlife Bureau

▪ **More Access, Better Habitat**

Iowa is leveraging habitat stamp dollars with federal grants to deliver a popular hunter access program throughout the state. The program, called the Iowa Habitat Access Program, allows DNR wildlife biologists to work with private landowners to improve wildlife habitat on private lands in exchange for public hunting access to the improved areas.

To date, the IHAP has enrolled 25,671 acres on 175 private sites. IHAP works in concert with other conservation programs, most notably the Conservation Reserve Program.

Through IHAP an incentive payment is provided for the development or improvement of habitat in exchange for the property being opened to the public for hunting. Fishing and trapping are not authorized on IHAP sites. Iowa DNR staff evaluates each potential property and write a wildlife habitat development and management plan. This plan determines which habitat practices are installed and therefore what incentive payments are made.

One dollar from every Habitat Stamp purchased in Iowa goes to fund IHAP, which is about \$180,000 annually. The Habitat Stamp fund is used to leverage other federal funds to fully maximize the program's enrollment potential. To date the State funds have leveraged ~\$13 million in additional funds (2 VPA-HIP Grants \$4,000,000 and 4 WREP Grants \$9,000,000).

- ***Iowa State Wildlife Action Plan Update***

Iowa completed its first comprehensive review and revision to its State Wildlife Action Plan, "Securing a Future for Fish and Wildlife: A Conservation Legacy for Iowans." All State Wildlife Action Plans are mandated by Congress to be fully reviewed every ten years; the first revision deadline was October 1, 2015. Iowa's revision was completed and submitted in advance of that deadline, and approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in April, 2016. The revision was a collaborative effort among staff across many sections of Iowa DNR and conservation partners across the state. Periodic review and revision are an opportunity to keep Wildlife Action Plan relevant with up-to-date information, and to clearly reflect the conservation priorities of the state's scientists, educators, natural resource professionals, outdoors people and interested citizens.

- **Chronic Wasting Disease**

In 2013, Iowa DNR detected CWD in deer for the first time in the state. Those CWD-positive deer were located on a hunting preserve in southern Iowa. The breeding facility, from which those deer came, in north central Iowa, was also found to have CWD detected deer. Both facilities were ultimately depopulated, the hunting preserve through a voluntary agreement between DNR and the owner and the breeding facility through an indemnification agreement through the state department of agriculture and the USDA. Since the hunting preserve was voluntarily depopulated, the state of Iowa, through the DNR, has been embroiled in lawsuits surrounding the quarantine imposed on the property. The case is now before the Iowa Supreme Court and we expect final resolution this fall or winter. The main arguments from the owner in that case are (1) that the state acted without authority because the statute authorizing the DNR to quarantine the hunting preserve extends only to diseased whitetail deer and not the property, itself; and (2) that the state's action amounted to an unlawful taking of private property (in the form of lost business profits). The DNR disagrees with both arguments.

The first positive detection of CWD in the wild whitetail herd occurred in 2015, in a two deer in far northeast Iowa. Another four deer were detected in the same area this past year. An elk in captive herd in western Iowa was also detected for CWD this past fall. (Iowa DNR does not have regulatory authority for captive elk according to Iowa law.)

Iowa DNR's Wildlife Bureau has a statewide CWD surveillance program that has been in place since 2005, but it has increased the frequency and number of tests in those areas in and around the detections over the past three years. To date since 2005, Iowa DNR has tested over 50,000 whitetail deer in Iowa. Iowa DNR tested X deer this past year.

- **Monarch Conservation**

The DNR Wildlife Bureau has been active in monarch butterfly conservation projects, both at the state and regional level. Last October, the Iowa DNR hosted practitioners from MAFWA states plus Texas and Arkansas as well as numerous federal agencies, NGOs and academic institutions to share updates on state and federal efforts surrounding monarch conservation. The meeting resulted in a number of takeaways and recommendations (which are available in the written report). Since that meeting, Iowa DNR has been working regionally with many of those

participants to develop a mid-continent flyway for monarch conservation coordination and was active in developing grant applications for consideration by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

Internally, the DNR Wildlife Bureau developed some management guidelines for monarch butterflies, to be used by all land managers in the Division. (These guidelines are available upon request.) The bureau also received a State Wildlife Grant to restore prairies adjacent to remnant prairies in an effort to promote conservation of monarch butterflies and other species of conservation need.

Kelley Myers was appointed as the AFWA representative to the Monarch Joint Venture and serves on a working group of AFWA's Science and Research Committee, staffed by Dr. Jonathan Mawdsley. Iowa DNR continues to serve on the Iowa Monarch Consortium, which is a broad-based organization representing a multitude of sectors, designed to address monarch conservation in the state; and has recently been asked to join the Monarch Collaborative through the Keystone Policy Center.

For more information about these updates or any Iowa DNR Wildlife matters, contact Chief Dr. Dale Garner at dale.garner@dnr.iowa.gov.

Conservation Law Enforcement Bureau

▪ **Hunting over Bait Challenged**

In September 2015 the Department charged an individual with four counts of illegally hunting deer with the aid of bait. Knowledge of the events surfaced when a video of the hunt went viral on social media. These charges were based upon (1) irrefutable evidence of a large and likely old bait site in visual and firing distance to a deer blind built by the defendant, from which he shot and killed a large trophy buck on October 12, 2012; (2) inconsistencies in the defendant's testimony that he had covered the bait site, so as to remove it from the hunting scheme, and purchase receipts of said supplies; and (3) photographic evidence from trail cameras of the deer's conditioning to the bait site, also confirmed by the defendant statements.

A judge found the defendant not guilty of all charges, concluding that neither the defendant's inconsistent statements nor the proximity of his deer blind to the partially uncovered bait site was enough (individually or together) to warrant a conviction because the State did not present concrete evidence that the defendant, in the moment of shooting the deer, took advantage of the deer's conditioning to the bait such that he was unfairly advantaged in his hunt.

This case also addressed the state's use of the "Open Fields Doctrine," contending the Department's access of the defendant's property and collection of soil samples from inside the bait site without a warrant violated his 4th Amendment rights. The court ruled in favor of the State, finding that the areas was in an unimproved open field, unencumbered by structures, and that the defendant had no reasonable expectation of privacy in that area.

▪ **Forfeiture of an Illegally Obtained Trophy Sustained**

Another defendant shot and killed a large trophy buck on or about November 11, 2012, and at that time failed to timely or properly apply a transportation tag to the antlers, and also failed to timely report his hunt; the deer was processed on or about November 16, 2012. These facts came to the Department's attention on November 11, 2013 and the defendant was cited with unlawful possession, a simple misdemeanor. The antlers (with the improperly attached tag still on it) were seized as evidence. The defendant challenged his citations, and a jury trial commenced on September 30, 2015. The court determined that the one-year statute of limitations had tolled and the action against the defendant was dismissed, but only after he stipulated to having violated the tagging and reporting regulations.

The parties proceeded to a civil forfeiture action, as it was the State's position that the defendant's stipulation, confirmed in the record by the court, invalidated his right to possess the antlers, even absent a formal criminal conviction. The former defendant disagreed, arguing a criminal conviction was necessary to usurp his ownership (that, in essence, Iowa's conclusive presumption of on-going state title to wildlife taken "in violation of" relevant

hunting regulations required an actual conviction.) At a hearing on his claim, the court ruled in favor of the State, finding that the former defendant had violated Iowa's tagging and reporting requirements, and that he had not presented any evidence of lawful ownership or right to possess the deer or its parts to overcome these violations.

Lands and Waters Bureau

This bureau houses the DNR's engineering and facilities maintenance programs, realty services, sovereign lands permitting, threatened and endangered species programs and river restoration and dam mitigation programs.

▪ **Better Best Management Practices**

The Bureau has coordinated a division-wide review of the Iowa DNR's habitat leases, agreements that authorize agricultural production on state-owned areas. The primary goal of these leases is improved habitat and/or forest stewardship. The modifications will include stronger enforcement of the terms, more consistent terms across the programs and improved practices. The leases will also incorporate the Beginning Farmer program, a new program that gives preference to producers have not been farming long.

▪ **River Restoration Program**

Staff in this bureau has been instrumental in a DNR-wide effort, crossing both divisions, to inventory all of DNR's programs that relate to or regulate activities on rivers. Iowa is a land between two major rivers, with a series of smaller rivers, creeks and streams cutting across the landscape. We held a week-long event to inventory the programs and then held a series of multi-day follow up meetings to establish some coordinated strategies for improving Iowa's river resources. Some products include: a report of findings; draft Iowa Method for stream mitigation, subject to review and approval of the Army Corps of Engineers and the federal review team; review of "in-lieu fee" mitigation strategies to prioritize and fund necessary restoration work; best management practices manual with accompanying web-enabled decision matrix (in-development); and improved collaboration among Fisheries, Wildlife and Water Quality programs.

In addition, the Bureau is responsible for two major dam mitigation projects this year, including a dam removal in NW Iowa and a river restoration project in NE Iowa. The program also trained over 180 paddling instructors in an effort to keep our waterways safe.

▪ **Permanent Land Protection**

During the past 12 months, the Iowa DNR has secured purchase agreements to acquire 38 tracts (37 fee title acquisitions and 1 conservation easement) of land totaling 4,003 acres. All of the acres are managed as either Wildlife Management Areas or State Forests and are open to hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, wildlife viewing, and other compatible outdoor recreation. All of these acquisitions will be completed by the end of the current state fiscal year and will be open to public hunting by fall 2016.

In addition, DNR is partnering with Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and many other local partners on two North American Wetland Conservation Act grants to provide funding for two Waterfowl Production Areas to FWS (90 acres) and to acquire a 223 acre addition to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. These projects were originally slated for FWS funding through either Migratory Bird Conservation Fund or Land and Water Conservation Fund, but were included in NAWCA grants because funding has not been available to complete projects with either MBCF or LWCF dollars.

In total, these lands have an appraised value of \$10,521,383. Federal contributions to these acquisitions were in the amount of \$4,713,609 provided through Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (\$2,448,210) and NAWCA (\$1,529,439). Primary state matching funds were provided by Iowa sportsmen through their purchase of Iowa Wildlife Habitat Stamps and Iowa State Duck Stamps (\$1,082,999). Six other state funding sources partnered to complete acquisition projects, adding another \$3,245,326 in state contributions. NGO's provided cash contributions toward these projects in the amount of \$375,861. Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, landowners provided \$1,019,362 (10% of the total appraised value) toward these projects in the form of donated land value on 19 of the 41 acquisition projects.

For more information about these updates or any Iowa DNR Lands and Waters matters, contact Travis Baker at travis.baker@dnr.iowa.gov.

Forestry Bureau

- **Emerald Ash Borer Continues its March**

Emerald Ash Borer was first observed in the wild in Iowa in 2010. Since that time, the pest has spread throughout the southern and eastern portions of the state. It is found in about a third of Iowa's 99 counties. Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau continues to work with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship on responding to inquiries and potential sightings and on confirmations.

- **Wins and Losses**

While the state of Iowa has lost about 100,000 acres of forest since 2009, the Forestry Bureau, through its district foresters, continue working with private landowners to improve and replace lost forestry resources on private lands. A few statistics:

- 1,000 acres of forest stand improvement on state forests
- Nearly 1,400 forest management and tree planning plans written for private landowners, impacting roughly 68,000 acres
- 148 communities assisted, including consulting, resource planning and inventorying

- **State Forest Nursery**

Last year, Iowa DNR considered closing its State Forest Nursery after years of dwindling demand and losses. The State Forest Nursery, which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and has been in operation since 1936, provides high-quality, native shrubs and trees in high volumes throughout Iowa and the region. The shrubs and seedlings are mostly utilized in and appropriate for conservation plantings. Iowa law requires that the nursery operate on its receipts and no other appropriations, a requirement which has been challenging to meet over the past few years of dwindling sales. Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau has implemented a number of strategies to reduce waste and gain efficiencies; it is also in the process of adjusting prices to be more consistent with other private and public nurseries.

For more information about these updates or any Iowa DNR Forestry matters, contact Chief Paul Tauke at paul.tauke@dnr.iowa.gov.

State Park Bureau

- **Resort State Park under New Management**

Honey Creek Resort State Park, a first-of-its-kind resort for Iowa that opened in 2008, is now being managed by Delaware North Companies. The park was originally funded with revenue bonds that limited private investment in the property. The Iowa General Assembly paid the outstanding debt in 2014, at which time the DNR embarked on a process to find a private partner to operate and invest in the facility. After a comprehensive selection process, Delaware North Companies, who has a long history with the National Park Service, other state park systems, and NASA, was chosen.

- **Good Earth at Blood Run Master Planning**

The state of Iowa is getting closer to converting a National Historic Landmark and State Preserve in the far northwest corner of the state to Iowa's newest state park. This project, which would coordinate with South Dakota's ongoing development efforts across the Big Sioux River, would form a bi-state park and offer preservation and interpretation for a number of natural and cultural resources in the area. The planning process, which has been over a year-in-the-making, has involved members of various tribal organizations, historic preservation offices, archaeologists, consultants, park planners and citizens. The final plan will be revealed later in July and celebrated with tribal ceremonial events.

- **Management from the Bottom Up**

The State Parks Bureau has initiated a number of working groups, comprised of various employment classifications within the bureau, to address issues in the bureau, including: improving and expanding reservations at state parks; updating the bureau’s uniform policy and content; providing excellent customer service and considering the user experience; managing cabins; operating off-highway vehicles safely; designing, installing and maintain appropriate signage; improving interpretive plans and offering; planning and maintain trails; and finally, monitoring beaches for both water quality and safety. The teams are developing recommendations, which will be provided to management and considered at regular management team and annual bureau-wide meetings.

- **Growing First Day Hikes**

In 2015, Iowa DNR’s State Parks Bureau hosted five First Day Hikes throughout its system. First Day Hikes are organized hikes, typically led by a Park Ranger, on New Year’s Day. On January 1, 2016, Iowa State Parks hosted 17 First Day Hikes, moving attendance from 200 in 2015 to 600 in 2016. It was a chilly day, but over 600 people, ranging in ages from 1 to 89, participated.

- **Stay Where You Play**

Iowa DNR’s Parks Bureau is collaborating with the Fisheries Bureau to develop consistent and coordinated marketing strategies in what they are calling the “Stay where you play” program. Many state parks boast beautiful lake resources, so it is a natural fit to cross-promote fishing and camping.

For more information about these updates or any Iowa DNR Parks matters, contact Chief Todd Coffelt at todd.coffelt@dnr.iowa.gov.

Departing Shot:

Social Media buzz over 25 year old Muskellunge

The netting of a 47 pound female and 25 year old male musky from the Iowa Great Lakes during this year’s spring gillnetting season created great excitement for Iowa anglers which quickly spread throughout the country. A Facebook® posting featuring the netting of the female, which had been caught by gillnetting crews 7 times, reached 91,341 people and a similar Twitter® post received 45,582 views. A reporter from KWQC (Davenport) contacted our social media staff requesting more information for a story. That story was picked up by media outlets like The Today Show, CNN, OutdoorHub, local stations like Tampa, plus Iowa media. A video of crews netting the 47 pound female reached 125,043 people via Facebook and received 6,176 views on Twitter. The picture and video sparked a lot of interest in our gillnetting methods and fisheries staff answered lots of questions from curious social media followers.



For more information about this report or any Iowa DNR Conservation Recreation matters, please contact Administrator Kelley Myers at kelley.myers@dnr.iowa.gov.

THANK YOU
