

IOWA
STATE REPORT
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Conservation and Recreation Division
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Iowa DNR Mission Statement: To conserve and enhance our natural resources in cooperation with individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life in Iowa and ensure a legacy for future generations.

The Department of Natural Resources – Conservation and Recreation Division:

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is led by Director Kayla Lyon and Deputy Director Alex Moon. The current Divisions within the DNR are Environmental Services Division (regulatory) and the Conservation and Recreation Division (CRD). CRD is charged with the management of Iowa's fish, wildlife, and natural resource management under a Forestry Section and the Bureaus of Fisheries; Land and Waters; Law Enforcement; State Parks, Forests, and Preserves; and Wildlife. In October 2020, Pete Hildreth was appointed to serve as Division Administrator.

Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (formerly known as Sustainable Natural Resource Funding): In 2006, the legislatively appointed Sustainable Funding Advisory Committee, chaired by the DNR, began their in-depth four year internal and multi-state research in preparation for their comprehensive reports to the Governor and General Assembly. In 2008 and 2009, proposed legislation was overwhelmingly passed to allow the people of Iowa to vote on a Constitutional amendment that would create a dedicated trust fund. In November 2010, the people of Iowa voted to amend Iowa's Constitution to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund and authorize a dedicated funding source of 3/8 of 1% of sales tax the next time the tax is legislatively raised. Iowa Code Chapter 461 provides the framework for the distribution, use, and accountability of this Trust Fund. Since the Trust Fund's enactment on January 1, 2011, legislators continue to discuss sales tax options to finance this Trust Fund. To date, the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund has not acquired any receipts, although, in 2019, the Governor moved to include in her FY2021 budget the Invest in Iowa Act which supported the funding of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, and the issues of 2020 did not help advance the cause. The DNR submits mandated reports to the General Assembly annually. These reports and more information can be found at: www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Grants-Other-Funding/Natural-Resources-Rec-Trust.

Fisheries Bureau: The Iowa DNR recently completed a study designed to inform its Community Fishing Program (CFP). The CFP was initiated in 2016 to address the challenges of a continuously urbanizing population and associated reductions in fishing recruitment, retention, and ultimately participation in angling. To guide the program, DNR's Fisheries Research Section

conducted a general population survey to determine constraints and preferences unique to urban and suburban residents and to identify important factors affecting response.

The survey was sent to 2,500 addresses in the CFP area, which encompassed 18 communities across the state, resulting in 693 valid responses (27.7% response rate). Approximately 29% of Iowans living in the CFP area were not interested in fishing at all. Of the remaining 71% interested in fishing in some way, 8% had never fished before but were interested (i.e., potential anglers), 31% had fished in the past (lapsed anglers), and 33% fished during the last year (active anglers). Levels of interest in fishing were explained by childhood initiation, gender, age, race, and moving frequently during childhood. Notably, those exposed to fishing as children had 4.6 times greater odds of being interested in fishing as adults than those who were not exposed to fishing as children. Although moving frequently was important, the rurality of the respondent's background (city kids versus country kids) was not. In other words, increasingly urban lifestyles are not necessarily the death knell for recreational fishing.

Instead, provision of appropriate fishery resources and associated communications is key. Significant differences in constraints and preferences existed between traditional active anglers and the recruitment pool living in urban and suburban areas. For example, potential anglers associated convenience with an ideal fishing trip, emphasizing the importance of providing fishing opportunities close to home. This may require extensive partnership with municipalities, counties, housing associations, and other private entities to establish greater public access to urban fishing ponds or streams. Fishing locations also require certain amenities to draw underrepresented groups in the CFP area; a pond alone is often not enough for urban users. Potential anglers were also interested in a unique set of educational and outreach programs, and these preferences can be used to better target specific audiences. Preferences also differed consistently by childhood initiation, gender, age, race, and rurality. Targeted efforts by an agency focused on engaging underrepresented demographics groups should be tailored accordingly to maximize effectiveness in recruiting and retaining new anglers in urban and suburban areas.

Forestry Section: The Urban and Community Forestry Program continues to provide technical, educational and financial assistance to communities, individuals and organizations. Last year the program provided support to 246 communities. One of the main components of assistance continues to be tree inventories, forestry management plans and emerald ash borer (EAB) preparation for communities under 5,000 in population. A recent statewide canopy cover assessment provides data on where and how much tree cover we have in Iowa. Iowa communities have 18.5 percent tree cover, about 253,056 acres of community forest. Urban Forests continue to be threatened by canopy loss. The economic loss caused by the top five key pests (Gypsy moth, bur oak blight, EAB, Asian long-horned beetle and thousand cankers disease) is an estimated \$1.4 billion over 20 years for forest landowners and wood products businesses and over \$20 billion in urban tree removal. Forest Service studies show 4.5 million trees were lost due to development in Iowa from 2010 to 2015. Additionally, over 4 million trees were damaged or lost in Iowa communities from the August 10, 2020, derecho storm.

Foresters continued to monitor for serious insect, disease, invasive plant species, and environmental problems in Iowa's woodlands. Aerial surveys of 1,842,932 acres were mapped to determine forest health problems and potential management plans. There were 1,688,862 aerial

acres mapped out of dead and dying trees from emerald ash borer alone. Ground confirmations were conducted to resolve any issues identified in the aerial survey. District foresters worked with impacted landowners on appropriate salvage and reforestation efforts in areas with oak wilt, Dutch elm disease, oak tatters, aspen decline, bur oak blight storm, and flood damage. In cooperation with the IDALS State Entomologist and the USDA, the Forestry Bureau assisted in contracting, placing, and monitoring 3,841 gypsy moth traps that captured 35 male gypsy moths. A total of 604 walnut twig beetle monitoring traps were placed around the state. No walnut twig beetles were captured. However, 2,789 ambrosia beetles, Pityophthorus beetles, and weevils that were collected and were submitted as part of the national survey. A total of 18,352 maples in 17 counties were examined for the presence of Asian longhorned beetle. None of the trees were positive for Asian longhorned beetle. Several remote meetings were held to cover non-native invasive plants and various other plants.

Land and Waters Bureau:

Public Land Acquisition and Management Program: This program provides assistance to operating bureaus to acquire public lands and to address land management issues, such as unauthorized land-uses and boundary issues. It also assists the program bureaus with agreements such as habitat leases, county or city management agreements, office leases and building disposal agreements. In 2020, public land and conservation easement acquisitions totaling 4,090 acres, protected natural resources, provided Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities, impacted water quality and watershed improvement efforts, and impacted recovery efforts for threatened and endangered species.

Rivers Program: This program contains multiple program areas over four major areas, including: water trail outreach, mapping, planning, designing, constructing and signing; low-head dam mitigation to remove or reduce hazards to public safety and/or fish passage; moving water education instruction and training; and comprehensive conservation efforts, in partnership with local groups and stakeholders, in identified protected water areas. A total of 1,008 miles of dedicated water trails have been developed, 91 miles are pending designation and, 209 additional miles are under evaluation. On major rivers, 33 dams have been removed or made fish passable and safer since the low-head dam public hazard program began in 2008.

Environmental Review & Sovereign Lands Program: This program provides services for DNR and the public to ensure compliance with state and federal rules and regulations pertaining to public trust resources in Iowa. Staff apply information about protected species, state preserves, natural communities, and other significant natural resources for the review of potential environmental impact of proposed construction and development projects requiring a permit from the Department through the Environmental Review and Sovereign Lands Construction Permit sections. The Threatened & Endangered Species staff coordinate the conservation of 17 federally listed species of plants and animals and over 300 state-listed species. Staff also develop and maintain a database of locations of listed species and special natural communities such as prairie and fen wetlands and oversee research activities including federally funded projects. The State Preserves staff work with the State Preserves Advisory Board to develop and maintain a statewide network of 97 preserves on lands with significant biological, geological, archaeological, historical, or scenic value.

Engineering and Construction Services: This program oversees the Department's capital improvement projects. From the smallest outhouse to complete lake and watershed renovation projects, professional staff provide and put into practice the most advanced technology to ensure safe and cost-effective solutions to architectural and engineering projects. Services provided include; planning and development, topographic surveys, professional engineering and architectural design services, contract administration, project management and construction inspection, federal emergency management, emergency response projects, consultant selection and contract negotiations, and investigative reporting. In 2020, 83 engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$11,005,533.38 on public lands were contracted; \$1,799,433.47 of these projects were associated with lake restoration, watershed, and water quality improvement projects.

Lake Restoration Program: Many of our Iowa Lakes, similar to our nation's lakes, are impaired and suffer from excessive algae growth and sedimentation due to nutrient loading and soil loss. The Lake Restoration Program's focus is on restoring Iowa's significant publicly owned lakes and publicly-owned shallow lakes/wetlands. The goal is to invest in projects with multiple benefits such as improved water quality, a healthy aquatic community, and increased public use. Iowa has completed restoration work at 27 lakes, with 17 projects underway, and 18 projects in the initial planning stages. Additionally, restoration work has been completed on over 35 shallow lakes/wetlands across the state.

Law Enforcement Bureau: 2020 was a challenging year for law enforcement in general. The world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic as well as added challenges with social movements that contained anti-law enforcement sentiments. The Iowa DNR Law Enforcement (LE) Bureau worked effectively through this challenging year. Our Conservation Officers continued to work and practice safe methods of proactive enforcement, especially with the thousands of new users who engaged in the outdoor recreation opportunities managed by the Iowa DNR. The State Parks were packed, water trail and public lands usage increased, and more fishing and hunting customers engaged in the sport. This increased usage, with our current level of staffing, caused us to increase active coordination with our other bureaus to ensure there was adequate coverage at the many recreation sites across the State.

With more people participating in water related activities, navigation enforcement was busy. This was challenging because we were only able to operate with about half the number of seasonal Water Patrol Officers (WPOs) due to being unable to hold our hands-on training in May because of COVID-19 restrictions. The shortage of available WPOs was made up by increased efforts by Conservation Officers. Officers traveled out of their regular areas to help out at busy lakes and areas of the State's rivers.

Administratively, we were able to address support staff needs by updating assignments; a Support Services Captain was identified who, along with other tasks, has the core responsibilities of handling training planning and fleet management; and six Sergeants, spread out equally across the State, provide support for the District Captains. And, for better identification and consistency, the Bureau also began a program to mark all LE patrol trucks with decals identifying them as State Conservation Law Enforcement Officers.

On the technology front, body cameras were rolled out to all Conservation Officers and Captains. This was the culmination of two years of body cam testing and evaluation. The decision was made to go with Visual Labs for the cameras. These were deployed to the Officers in the fall of 2020.

All of the LE Bureau stepped up in a dynamic and difficult year to provide proactive enforcement and excellent customer service.

State Parks, Forests, and Preserves Bureau:

State Parks: The DNR manages 71 State Parks, Recreation Areas and State Forest Campgrounds. These areas encompass 102,000 acres and host an estimated 15 million visitors each year. The State Park infrastructure system has 4,406 campsites, 94 rental cabins, 31 day use lodges, 157 picnic shelters, and over 450 miles of trails. Park amenities also include shower buildings, restrooms and latrines, beaches, lodges and shelters, concession buildings, boat ramps, docks and piers. Providing service to these amenities requires the construction and maintenance of sewer systems, lagoons, water systems, wells, electric lines, transformers, roads, parking lots, sidewalks, lights, offices and storage buildings. In 2020 there were more than 80 maintenance and renovation projects underway in Iowa State Parks and Forests areas.

New Legislation: In 2018 the Iowa Legislature passed Senate File 2389, which authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to establish certain fees at state parks and recreation areas. This significant change eliminates the need for the DNR to go through rule making to establish, change and manage fees for camping, use of rental facilities, and other special privileges in state parks and recreation areas. The new pricing structure allows the DNR flexibility to set and change fees to attract new park visitors, expand state park visitor customer base, maximize facility use, manage capacity issues, maintain state assets and respond to trends and promotional opportunities in a timely manner. DNR spent most of 2018-2020 compiling data to use in its creation of new fee schedules for all state park, recreation area and forest campgrounds and rental facilities, and began the rule making process to adopt new rules to implement the new legislation. The new rules went into effect in 2019 and 2020 with a soft roll out, and will be fully implemented in 2021.

State Forests: Iowa's state forest system of over 46,000 acres is comprised of four large state forests. State Forests provide some of the largest contiguous tracts of public forest land in Iowa. They are sustainably managed to yield forest products, wildlife habitat, soil, and water protection, protection of unique plant and animal communities, and outdoor recreational opportunities. They are the backbone of several of Iowa's Bird Conservation Areas. State Forest staff completed 927 acres of forest stand improvement, 33 acres of reforestation, 524 miles of trail maintenance, 3,031 acres of prescribed fire, 126 acres of prairie and savanna management, collected 105 bushels of seed, and conducted 14 educational programs in 2020. Through the public bid process, in relation to timber stand management and harvesting, they also sold over 500,000 board feet of timber.

Wildlife Bureau: The Wildlife Bureau, through multiple partnerships, provides support to a growing workforce of wildlife and forestry professionals that provide private lands conservation assistance to private landowners across the state. Staffing includes 19 private lands forestry

positions and 29 private lands wildlife biologists, technicians, habitat specialists, and depredation staff. In total, this 48-person workforce includes 26 DNR full time employees, 13 contract positions, and 9 Pheasants Forever Farmbill Biologists. In addition to the substantial support provided by NRCS, these staff reflect our partnerships with Conservation Districts of Iowa, Pheasants Forever, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

During the 2020 pandemic, Iowa DNR has been able to keep all public lands open and conduct all hunting seasons, for both residents and non-residents. All of our public lands experienced higher usage during 2020. Iowans expressed increased appreciation for public lands and outdoor recreation opportunities. These trends are evidenced, in part, by increases in hunting license purchases and increases in harvest for those species which have harvest reporting requirements. For example, deer license sales increased from 330,185 for the 2019-20 season to 349,663 for the 2020-21 season, a 6% increase which is the largest single year percentage increase since 2005. Deer harvest increased from 99,999 for the previous year to 109,549 for the 2020-21 season, a 10% increase. Number of deer hunters participating was 160,519. The 5-year average for number of spring turkey hunters is 38,989 with a 26.2% success rate. In spring 2020, 43,991 spring turkey hunters participated with a success rate of 28.5%. Of the 43,991 spring hunters: 59% hunted last year, an additional 18% within the past 5 years; and 17% were new hunters. The number of new hunters (7,611) is a 177% increase over the 5-year average for new hunters (2,749). Hunters included a record number of youth participants. The highest number since 2005 which was the initial year of electronic licensing data allowing us to track hunters by age. Spring turkey harvest increased in 15 of the 16 wildlife management units covering the state, with the only decline occurring in the SE corner of the State.

We continue to see increase in interest in hunting as a source of protein. Iowa deer hunters also support the Food Bank of Iowa by donating harvested deer to the Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program. For the 2019-20 deer season, hunters donated 3,750 deer to the Iowa Food Bank (630,000 meals) which were processed by one of the 60 participating lockers. During 2020, meat locker participation in the HUSH program dropped from 60 to 35, but final numbers on donated deer are not yet available. In response to this drop in local meat locker participation, Iowa DNR launched the Iowa Deer Exchange in August 2020 modeled after a successful effort in Nebraska to connect hunters with people interested in receiving venison. The Iowa Deer Exchange registered 91 hunters interested in donating venison and 558 people interested in receiving venison. Donors were most interested in donation of field dressed deer (73%), but also showed significant willingness to provide quartered or boned-out meat. Recipients most frequently requested “any condition” (48%), with an additional 13% requesting field dressed deer, 7% quartered or boned-out venison. Overall, 81% of hunters were interested in donating entire deer and 74% of recipients were interested in receiving the meat from an entire deer.

Landowner interest remains strong in Iowa’s Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP) which provides public hunting on private land. During the 2020-21 hunting season, 160 IHAP tracts totaling 22,000 acres were open to public hunting. Iowa received its 3rd USDA Voluntary Public Access grant in 2020 and has subsequently enrolled/re-enrolled 78 sites that will open 14,940 additional acres to public hunting. As of today, 233 sites and 36,202 acres are enrolled in IHAP and scheduled to be open for public hunting during the 2021-22 hunting season.