

## **IOWA STATE REPORT**

### **January 2022-December 2022**

**Pete Hildreth, Division Administrator**  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**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 Divisions within the DNR are the Environmental Services Division (ESD) 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.

**Strategic Deployment:** In May of 2022, CRD leadership held their second Strategic Deployment workshop. Strategic Deployment aims to ensure the objectives (strategy), management plans (tactics) and tasks accomplished by all employees (operations) are in alignment and addresses critical or breakthrough long-range goals to strengthen and improve the organization. Strategic Deployment is a top-down and bottom-up process involving dialogue between management and teams in which progress indicators are developed from the top down and results come back from the bottom up. It is also a communication process to ensure that every employee pulls in the same direction at the same time and is considered the act of setting direction and steering towards your True North.

Using the Division's Wildlife Action Plan, Forest Action Plan, and Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan as guiding documents, six annual goals were set for FY2023. Leadership's intent for each goal was to gather diverse, cross-divisional teams that would meet for one year to improve processes and communication among bureaus. For each goal, teams assessed the current status of work, challenges they encountered, and improvements that could be made which were realistic and attainable. To date, teams are in the final months developing templates, tools or training necessary for implementation. In May of 2023, CRD leadership will attend another workshop to review work from the 2022 and 2023 teams, look at challenges and successes they had, and develop FY2024 annual goals and teams.

**Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund:** 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 the Invest in Iowa Act in her FY21 budget which supported the funding of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. The issues of 2020 did not help advance the cause. The DNR continues to submit 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](http://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/Grants-Other-Funding/Natural-Resources-Rec-Trust).

### **Fisheries Bureau:**

Rathbun Lake, a federal flood control reservoir constructed in the late 1960s, is one of Iowa's significant publicly-owned lakes. Reservoir aging has resulted in habitat loss (shoreline erosion, increased turbidity, sedimentation, loss of embayments, and loss of woody structure), which has direct implications for multiple fish species and lake aesthetics. A previously completed Continuing Authorities Program Section 1135 project, in cooperation with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), addressed regions of severe bank erosion. This project resulted in measurable improvements to water quality and has protected critical spawning and nursery habitat for multiple fish species. The Iowa DNR recently entered a contract with the USACE to participate in a second Section 1135 project for additional shoreline ecosystem restoration and the implementation of an in-lake electric fish barrier. The continued shoreline restoration will protect much of the remaining critical fish spawning and nursery habitat, whereas, the construction of the electric fish barrier will effectively reduce fish emigration (especially Walleye) in the face of increasing floodwater discharge rates. This two-pronged approach is the result of substantial study, planning and cooperation among all partners, over decades of work at Rathbun Lake, Iowa.

### **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 331 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 longhorned 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 derecho storm.

Foresters continued to monitor for serious insect, disease, invasive plant species, and environmental problems in Iowa's woodlands. Aerial surveys of 1,422,180 acres was mapped to determine forest health problems and potential management plans. There were 1,411,712 aerial

acres mapped out that had 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 4,215 spongy moth traps that captured 742 male gypsy moths. A total of 631 walnut twig beetle monitoring traps were placed around the state. No walnut twig beetles were captured. However, 10,478 ambrosia beetles, Pityophthorus beetles and weevils were collected and submitted as part of the national survey. A total of 11,123 maples in 34 counties were examined for the presence of Asian longhorned beetle. No Asian longhorned beetles were found. Iowa confirmed two first instar larvae of spotted lanternfly in Dallas County. This is Iowa's first detection of this pest and no established population was discovered. Several meetings were held to cover non-native invasive plants and various other plants.

### **Land and Waters Bureau:**

The Public Land Acquisition and Management Program aids operating bureaus to acquire lands and to address land management issues, such as unauthorized land-uses and boundary issues. It also assists programs with agreements such as habitat leases, county or city management agreements, office leases and building disposal agreements. In 2022, public land and conservation easement acquisitions totaled 2,462 acres, protecting natural resources, providing Iowans with new and enhanced outdoor recreational opportunities, impacting water quality and watershed improvement efforts and impacting recovery efforts for threatened and endangered species.

The Rivers Program contains four major areas: water trail outreach, including real-time reporting on hazards in interactive 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 1,100 miles of dedicated water trails have been developed. On major rivers, 34 dams have been removed or made fish passable and safer since the low-head dam public hazard program began in 2008.

The Environmental Review and Sovereign Lands 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 and Endangered Species staff coordinate the conservation of federally listed species of plants and animals and 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 preserves on lands with significant biological, geological, archaeological, historical, or scenic value.

Engineering and Construction Services oversee 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 2022, 103 engineering, construction, and public capital improvement projects totaling \$31,909,635 on public lands were contracted; \$10,275,306 of these projects were associated with lake restoration, watershed, and water quality improvement projects.

The Lake Restoration Program's focus is on restoring Iowa's significant publicly owned lakes and publicly-owned shallow lakes/wetlands. 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 goal is to invest in projects with multiple benefits including improving water quality, building a healthy aquatic community, and increasing public use and recreational opportunities. Iowa has completed restoration work at 30 lakes, with 21 projects underway, and 14 projects in the initial planning stages. Additionally, restoration work has been completed on over 42 shallow lakes/wetlands across the state.

#### **Law Enforcement Bureau:**

The Turn in Poachers (TIP) board proved to be a great supporter for the bureau. Their assistance has been instrumental, not only with enforcement cases, but also with securing needed equipment through donations. The board provided Tactacam cameras and Spy High mounting systems to many officers in each of the 6 districts. The officers have been able to make several great cases using this equipment. Along with the cameras, the board was able to provide some new wildlife decoys and a new TIP trailer to be taken to events across the state.

A concerted effort has been made with updating the bureau's training program. Conservation Officers have three mandatory use of force sessions throughout the year, and in addition to the required qualifications that are done within the districts, all officers meet for 1/3 state trainings. Through these trainings, three dates are provided where officers receive extra hands on training that range from positional shooting with handguns and long guns, tactical shooting around and in vehicles, and scenario based defensive tactics training. After the 1/3 state training is completed, a use of force meeting is held within each district. Instructors work on adult learning techniques and reemphasize the lessons learned at 1/3 state trainings. The bureau has identified training needs for 2023, placing efforts on officer safety when on and in the water, along with responding to mass shooting events.

A law enforcement strategic alignment team, consisting of Conservation Officers and Park Rangers, is working together to look at aligning law enforcement efforts in DNR to enhance operational efficiencies, ensuring that the structure and use of resources are managed to create the best possible future for protecting our natural resources and the citizens of Iowa. In 2022, the Law Enforcement bureau had 86 sworn officers and appointed Craig Cutts as the new Bureau Chief.

#### **State Parks, Forests, and Preserves Bureau:**

The DNR manages 71 State Parks, Recreation Areas and State Forest Campgrounds with a total of 104,614.7 acres and had an estimated 14 million visitors in 2022. The State Park infrastructure

system has 4,447 campsites, 93 rental cabins, 29 day-use lodges, and 153 picnic shelters, and over 750 miles of trails. Park amenities can 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, electrical lines, transformers, roads, parking lots, sidewalks, lights, offices and storage buildings. In 2022 there were 33 capital construction projects that were contracted and an additional 70 that were in the design phase for a total of 103 active maintenance and renovation projects.

**Operational Changes:** In 2022, the campgrounds at Lake Manawa and Walnut Woods State Parks went to 100%/Same Day reservations with a cut-off time of 9 pm CST to make a reservation. These two parks implemented this operational change to provide convenience to customers in order to have real-time availability of campsites, provides additional time to plan before booking a trip, and allows customers to reserve vacant campsites if a cancellation occurs, which all improves the customer experience and customer service. Customers who arrive at either park without a reservation could use their cell phone or contact the call center to make a camping reservation. The Lake Manawa campground has an electronic gate where a customer must have an access code in order to enter the campground. The access code is provided on confirmation emails, which is automatically sent by the reservation system once the reservation is finalized.

**Parks Statewide Signage Master Plan:** A signage and wayfinding master plan was developed to include signage guidelines and best practices for the future planning and implementation of signage across all of Iowa's state parks. The master plan will act as a template to ensure that signage within the state's parks remains functional, consistent and adaptable for future generations, connecting visitors to resources, facilities and amenities in each area. In 2022, Phase I of the project was completed with the installation of new entry portals at every park and recreation area entrance. Phase II, full park signage replacement, is anticipated to take five years, and will begin in 2023 with installation at 10 parks and planning for the next 10-12 parks. A variety of installation strategies are being tested to meet the challenge of getting signs in the ground in the ideal weather window during parks busy season.

**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 over 80,800 acres of forest stand improvement, 80 acres of reforestation, over 1,000 miles of trail maintenance, 2,000 acres of prescribed fire, 140 acres of prairie and savanna management, collected 500 bushels of seed, and conducted 11 educational programs in 2022. Through the public bid process, in relation to timber stand management and harvesting, they also sold over 580,000 board feet of timber.

### **Wildlife Bureau:**

All of the public lands managed by the wildlife bureau continued to experience high usage again during 2022. Access to places to hunt remains one of the primary concerns of Iowa's resident hunters, and Iowans continue to demonstrate support for additional public lands and outdoor

recreation opportunities. The Wildlife Bureau operates and maintains 503 public fish and wildlife areas spanning 420,606 acres. About one-third of these acres are federal lands managed by the wildlife bureau under agreements with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Federal lands include more than 23,300 acres of Waterfowl Production Areas in the Prairie Pothole Region of Iowa. All of these public lands are managed to provide quality wildlife habitats and hunting, fishing, and other consumptive and non-consumptive fish and wildlife related recreational opportunities. Managed wildlife habitats include nearly 100,000 acres of wetlands, 140,000 acres of grasslands, and 115,000 acres of forest/woodland. Annual management activities include burning nearly 37,000 acres of prairie, and managing wetland habitats through water level manipulation utilizing 881 water control structures, 246 miles of dams, dikes, and levees and 32 pumping stations.

One of the most popular public hunting programs has been the Iowa Habitat Access Program (IHAP) which provides public hunting on private land. Iowa received its 3rd USDA Voluntary Public Access grant in 2020 and subsequently enrolled/re-enrolled 109 sites and 15,118 additional acres to public hunting prior to the 2021-22 hunting season. This resulted in a significant increase in public hunting opportunities compared to the previous year; increasing the number of IHAP sites from 160 to 233 and the IHAP acres open to public hunting from 22,000 to 32,382. This increase in opportunity was met with increased use of IHAP sites across Iowa as these sites increase in popularity with both resident and nonresident hunters. As of today, 233 sites and 32,382 acres are enrolled in IHAP and scheduled to be open to public hunting during the 2023-24 hunting season.

The wildlife bureau, through multiple partnerships, provides support to a growing workforce of wildlife and forestry professionals that provide conservation assistance to private landowners across the state. Staffing includes 18 private lands forestry positions and 29 private lands wildlife biologists, technicians, and habitat specialists. During 2022, these staff developed 486 wildlife plans on 26,820 acres and 647 forestry plans on 27,724 acres.

As part of the wildlife depredation program, DNR staff work with cities and state parks to establish deer management zones (DMZs) with the purpose of holding special antlerless deer hunts in areas that would not otherwise be open to hunting or to provide additional harvest in areas where CWD has been detected. During 2022, the Natural Resource Commission authorized 69 DMZs, and allocated 13,294 antlerless deer licenses for purchase by qualifying hunters. Hunters purchased 41% of the available tags and harvested 2,474 antlerless deer for a harvest success rate of 45%. Depredation staff also worked with 527 landowners meeting crop damage thresholds for enrollment in the deer depredation program. Landowners were allocated 8,478 licenses for purchase by hunters hunting on those properties. Hunters purchased 61% of the allocated licenses and harvested 2,896 antlerless deer for a harvest success rate of 56%. These deer depredation programs have proven successful at forming partnerships between cities, private landowners, and hunters to manage deer numbers and provide additional recreational opportunities in these areas. Combined, these two deer depredation programs accounted for 8.5% of the statewide antlerless deer harvest.