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Page 4: Upper photo - DNR staff · Lower photo - Dan Ceynar



*Project A.W.A.R.E.
Life is a journey,
not a destination
R.W. Emerson*

If Ralph Waldo Emerson could experience the magic of the DNR's annual river cleanup and watershed awareness event, might he be inclined to modify his famous quote? It may be a bit self-indulgent to presume that the leader of the American transcendental movement would hold this humble event in such high regard, but for those who have had an opportunity to experience AWARE, it may not be such a stretch.

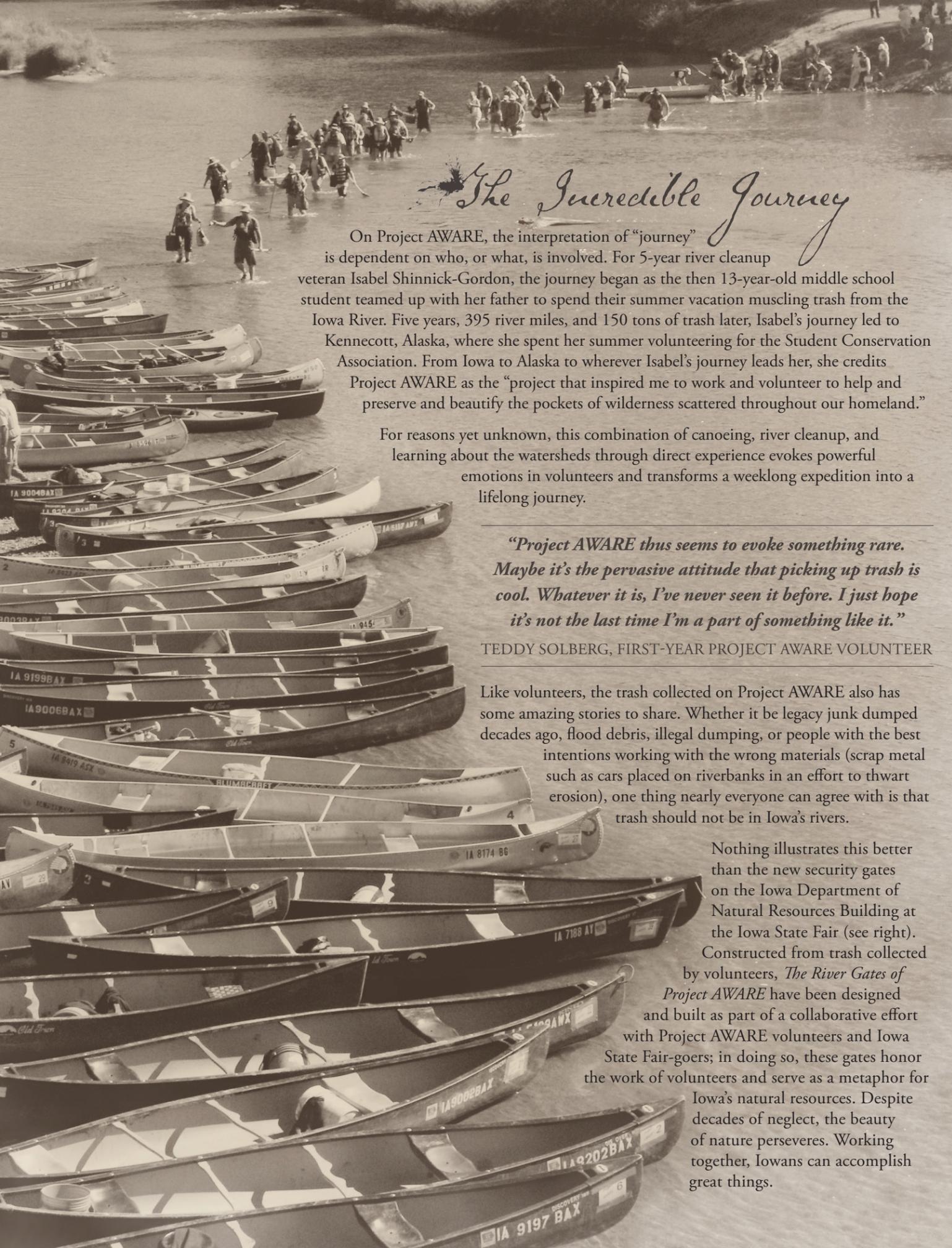
Project AWARE, after all, which stands for A Watershed Awareness River Expedition, moves to a different Iowa watershed each year. As an annual weeklong journey, the expedition is designed to connect Iowans with their rivers, providing them with opportunities to experience Iowa's diverse landscapes while at the same time strengthening their sense of place within the natural world. In other words, Project AWARE is all about the journey.

The ninth annual event, which took place July 9-16, 2011, targeted the Turkey River watershed in northeast Iowa, where in just one week, 429 volunteers removed over 32 tons of trash (96% of which was recycled) from 88 miles of river.

What really made an impression on volunteers, however, wasn't the staggering statistics, the overwhelming support from local communities, or striking scenery. Rather, it was something much simpler. Something everyone wants for Iowa's rivers, but something few rivers achieve. Unlike previous Project AWARE destinations, the water in the Turkey River ran clear.

Therefore, it was with great interest that volunteers learned about the efforts of the Turkey River Watershed Alliance and Turkey River Recreational Corridor, and with great excitement that they celebrated the official dedication of the Turkey River Water Trail amongst scores of local river enthusiasts. Working together, watershed residents in this region have built a model that works for stronger economies, enhanced quality of life, and healthier rivers.

Had Mr. Emerson had the opportunity to experience this event in the Turkey River Watershed, perhaps his quote would change altogether. Project AWARE is a journey, and the destination helped make it incredible.



The Incredible Journey

On Project AWARE, the interpretation of “journey” is dependent on who, or what, is involved. For 5-year river cleanup veteran Isabel Shinnick-Gordon, the journey began as the then 13-year-old middle school student teamed up with her father to spend their summer vacation muscling trash from the Iowa River. Five years, 395 river miles, and 150 tons of trash later, Isabel’s journey led to Kennecott, Alaska, where she spent her summer volunteering for the Student Conservation Association. From Iowa to Alaska to wherever Isabel’s journey leads her, she credits Project AWARE as the “project that inspired me to work and volunteer to help and preserve and beautify the pockets of wilderness scattered throughout our homeland.”

For reasons yet unknown, this combination of canoeing, river cleanup, and learning about the watersheds through direct experience evokes powerful emotions in volunteers and transforms a weeklong expedition into a lifelong journey.

“Project AWARE thus seems to evoke something rare. Maybe it’s the pervasive attitude that picking up trash is cool. Whatever it is, I’ve never seen it before. I just hope it’s not the last time I’m a part of something like it.”

TEDDY SOLBERG, FIRST-YEAR PROJECT AWARE VOLUNTEER

Like volunteers, the trash collected on Project AWARE also has some amazing stories to share. Whether it be legacy junk dumped decades ago, flood debris, illegal dumping, or people with the best intentions working with the wrong materials (scrap metal such as cars placed on riverbanks in an effort to thwart erosion), one thing nearly everyone can agree with is that trash should not be in Iowa’s rivers.

Nothing illustrates this better than the new security gates on the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Building at the Iowa State Fair (see right). Constructed from trash collected by volunteers, *The River Gates of Project AWARE* have been designed and built as part of a collaborative effort with Project AWARE volunteers and Iowa State Fair-goers; in doing so, these gates honor the work of volunteers and serve as a metaphor for Iowa’s natural resources. Despite decades of neglect, the beauty of nature perseveres. Working together, Iowans can accomplish great things.

“At the end of the week, Project AWARE had lived up to its name, raising awareness of the beauty and biodiversity of the river, both among participants and observers who watched from bridges, backyards, and boat landings or who saw its story told in newspapers and on televisions. Along the way, its 400 volunteers removed over 600 tires and over 30 tons of junk, letting the water flow over a more completely natural riverbed once again. Future paddlers will glide over a river that is now a bit wilder and more scenic; the river and its wildlife will be appreciated more widely by a public more aware of its values.”

JOHN PEARSON, 8-YEAR PROJECT AWARE VOLUNTEER



9TH ANNUAL PROJECT AWARE ACCOMPLISHMENTS JULY 9 – 16, 2011 | LITTLE TURKEY, TURKEY & VOLGA RIVERS

EVENT STATS	
River Miles	88 miles
Total Participants	429
Youngest	2 years
Oldest	76 years
Average per day	152
Sponsors	104

SOLID WASTE	
Total Materials Collected	64,722 lbs. (32.36 tons)
Trash: 4%	2,640 lbs. (1.32 tons)
Recyclables: 96%	62,082 lbs. (31 tons)
Household Hazardous Materials	50 lbs.
Cardboard	65 lbs.
Plastic	92 lbs.
Redeemable Cans & Bottles	335 lbs.
Tires (611)	24,600 lbs. (12.3 tons)
Scrap Metal	36,940 lbs. (18.47 tons)

WATER QUALITY	
Sites Monitored	40
Transparency*	60 centimeters
Water Temp.*	70°F
Air Temp.*	75°F
pH*	8
Dissolved Oxygen*	5 mg/L **
Nitrate-Nitrogen*	5 mg/L
Nitrite-Nitrogen*	0 mg/L
Phosphate*	0.2 mg/L
Chloride*	less than 33 mg/L

* Median values ** milligrams per Liter



Embark on an Amazing Adventure this Summer



IOWA RIVER: JULY 7 – 14, 2012

It’s Project AWARE, a cleanup event that celebrates rivers and the fellowship of people who volunteer to clean them up. Hardworking folks who aren’t afraid to get dirty. Volunteers who, by exploring Iowa’s rivers and picking up trash, make life better for the rest of us...and, of course, for our rivers. This summer, scores of volunteers from across Iowa will spend their vacations working as aquatic garbage collectors – cleaning up, learning about, and exploring over 90 miles of the Iowa River in central Iowa.

For more information about Iowa’s national award-winning river cleanup project and to register for the 2012 Project AWARE, visit our website: www.iowaprojectaware.com