



Project AWARE Sets New Records in 2015:

1,000 Miles

to Service, Friendship & Community

From the first mile paddled on the Maquoketa River in 2003 to the thousandth mile on the Wapsipinicon River in 2015, 3,700 Project AWARE volunteers and more than 1,000 sponsors have made a massive impact, removing 337 tons of trash from Iowa's rivers – and recycling 76 percent of it.

In 2015, Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) tackled the Wapsipinicon River in Buchanan, Linn, and Jones counties in east-central Iowa. Several significant milestones were reached by AWARE's 2015 River Family:

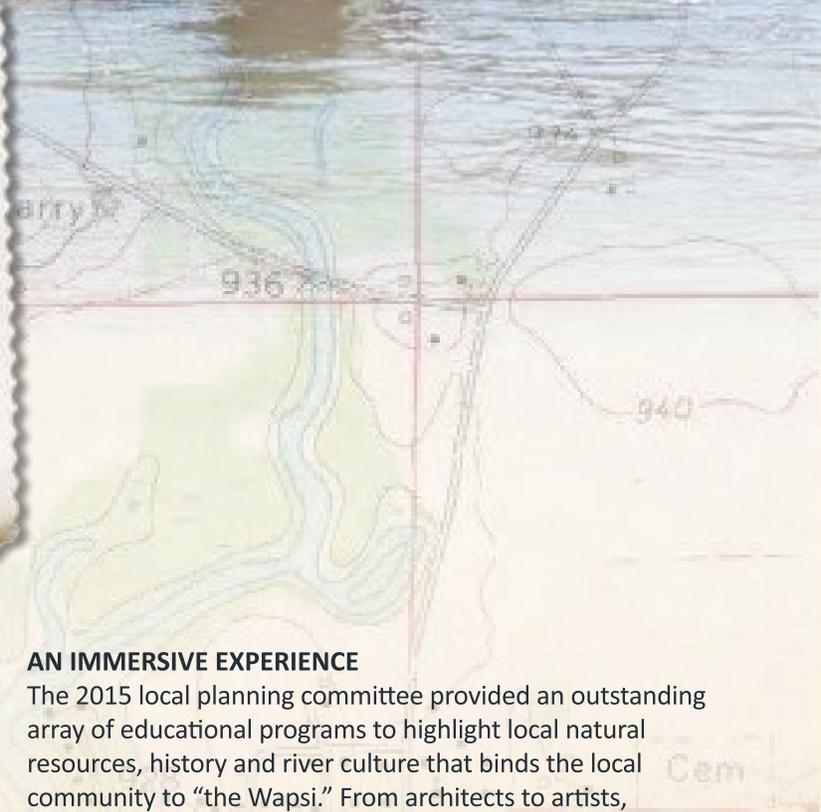
RECORD-BREAKING VOLUNTEERS

With 433 registered volunteers, Project AWARE 2015 set a new record for total participants. This year also set a record for total participants in one day (277) and set a new record for the average number of volunteers on the water each day (225).

Over the years, the event has become a family tradition for many extended families. A record 15 percent of volunteers on the 2015 event were 18 years of age or younger. As one veteran Project AWARE volunteer commented, "Even before they were born, I knew this was something I wanted to do with my kids. What a fantastic opportunity for the family!"

LANDOWNERS SHOW THEIR SUPPORT

Iowa river towns are often closely-knit local communities, and the landowners and communities along the Wapsipinicon River made sure to show their thanks to AWARE volunteers. Locals provided drinking water along the route, displayed thank-you signs and even serenaded volunteers from the riverbank. In partnership with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Project AWARE also featured an evening program for landowners to learn about options to permanently protect their land along the river.



FROM TRASH TO TREASURE

Some trash salvaged from rivers can fetch a good price as salvage material. Project AWARE 2015 worked with local partners to salvage valuable river trash and raise money for local projects. More than 14.6 tons of scrap metal came off the river and supported local efforts to enhance the Wapsipinicon River area.

With the funds generated, the City of Quasqueton will improve their new shower facility at Veterans Memorial Park; Linn County Conservation plans to purchase a new dock system for the boat ramp at Pinicon Ridge Park; and Jones County Conservation plans to use their funds on a local conservation project.

A STRONG COMMITMENT

A record 122 volunteers experienced the full Project AWARE cleanup in 2015, participating in each day of the cleanup. During the opening day introductions, throughout the week, and in post-event feedback, volunteers noted the sense of community created by Project AWARE brings them back year after year. Newcomers noted their eagerness to share in the sentiment.

AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

The 2015 local planning committee provided an outstanding array of educational programs to highlight local natural resources, history and river culture that binds the local community to “the Wapsi.” From architects to artists, museums to prairie walks, plants and animals, volunteers learned about and experienced what makes the Wapsipinicon River watershed and its communities unique to Iowa.

PARTNERSHIP PRIDE

This year, volunteers had the opportunity to participate in two additional cleanup events on the Wapsipinicon River the same week. Buchanan County Conservation organized a half-day pre-AWARE cleanup, and the Lower Wapsipinicon River Cleanup, which credits its start to Project AWARE inspiration, celebrated its tenth anniversary by sponsoring a three day post-AWARE cleanup.

Thirteen years, one thousand miles, and tons of trash no longer in Iowa’s rivers comprise a series of significant achievements and milestones for Project AWARE. This continued success, support, and sustained momentum of the dedicated volunteers, sponsors, and Project AWARE staff testify to the love Iowans have for their rivers – and their river communities.

13th Annual Project AWARE

July 11-16, 2014 Wapsipinicon River

River Miles: 63 miles
Participants: 433
Trash Recycled: 54,656 lbs
Total Trash Removed: 30.1 Tons

SOLID WASTE	
Total Materials Collected	30.1 tons
Trash 9%	2.75 tons
Recyclables 91%	27.3 tons
• Misc. Recycling (Appliances, Household Hazardous Materials, Cardboard, Plastic, Redeemable Cans/Bottles).....	2.2 tons
• Tires (677).....	10.43 tons
• Scrap Metal.....	14.56 tons

WATER QUALITY*	
Sites Monitored	22
Transparency	27 centimeters
Water Temp	74° F
pH	9
Dissolved Oxygen	10 mg/L
Nitrate-Nitrogen	10 mg/L
Nitrite-Nitrogen	0 mg/L
Phosphate	0 mg/L
Chloride	less than 31 mg/L

* Represents average values



An Outdoors Tradition

In 2003, Project AWARE set forth to connect Iowans with the water resources they love. As part of Project AWARE, volunteers clean up a different river and watershed each year. People come together to adventure, paddle, learn about the river and the communities along it, and experience firsthand water quality opportunities and challenges across Iowa. The group enjoys the Iowa summer weather while doing their part to clear trash and debris so others can enjoy these waters in the future.

The inspiration for Project AWARE came from Chad Pregracke, founder of Living Lands and Waters. Pregracke demonstrated how one person cleaning up the Mississippi River could transform the power of one into the power of many. His efforts on the Mississippi River inspired the Iowa DNR to launch Project AWARE in 2003, setting off on its first adventure along the Maquoketa River. Historically Project AWARE has averaged 80-100 river miles on a new river each year.

From its humble start, AWARE organizers could never have predicted the impact the event would have – on local communities, volunteers and Iowa’s waters. Volunteers and adjacent landowners work together as “river neighbors” and come together as one community. Each year, new volunteers join the “river family.” About half of each year’s participants are return volunteers who come back to experience a different river, attend daily educational programs, and make new friends. “River family” reunions occur year after year, and the ongoing bond carries forth as new volunteers join in.





What Volunteers Say-

“Thank you so much for sponsoring AWARE! This is such an important program and brings such great awareness to not only our rivers, but our environment too.”

– Amanda, 11-year volunteer

“It is heartwarming to have a community of volunteers with the same goal of cleaning trash out of the river.”

– Mike, 8-year volunteer

“Project AWARE is a life changing experience.”

– Jasper, 3-year volunteer

“It’s more than just a river cleanup. It has a unifying effect among the locals who manage, maintain, and know the area and the visitors who don’t. It leaves a lasting impression on the locals and positive face to the DNR.”

– John, DNR Staff

“Project AWARE was such a powerful, enlightening experience that I would definitely recommend to anyone.”

– Brad, 1-year volunteer

“Thank you so much for the opportunity to better connect with one of our Iowa rivers. The opportunity to make it safer, enjoy the amazing scenery, learn what is available in the area for tourism – it is such an empowering experience and I feel it will have a positive impact in the future for the communities/parks/areas that we visited for the cleanup.”

– Melisa, 11-year volunteer

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