

# River Restoration – Aligning DNR Programs

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The Iowa Legislative Council authorized the creation of *The Iowa Rivers and Waterways Study Committee* in 2013. The Committee was directed to consult with interested parties in considering options for restoring Iowa's rivers and water ways. The Committee was also charged to develop recommendations for an initial plan to prioritize restoration projects, and provide defined goals and measurable improvements.

The Committee produced the following recommendations:

- That the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, in collaboration with other involved entities, develop a plan that builds upon current and emergent efforts and related programs to identify and facilitate meaningful and effective river restoration priorities.
- That the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship continue to initiate and cooperate in demonstration projects with local landowners and watershed groups to provide examples of options and outcomes that could address a range of restoration needs and opportunities.

A significant number of DNR program efforts relate to rivers, river corridors, watersheds, and water quality. In response to the legislative recommendations these programs came together to identify priority actions to improved alignment and coordination of the programs and better connect them to river restoration efforts in the state. In addition, DNR is actively

developing a *Stream Mitigation program* that will provide opportunities for restoration.

## Why River Restoration

Rivers and streams, their channels and valleys, are a defining feature of Iowa's landscape. They have formed and evolved over thousands of years, in response to the climate, soils, and geologic setting of their watersheds. Human modifications to the landscape, and to the rivers themselves, have altered waterways across the world; Iowa is no exception. Through time this alteration has affected water flows, in-stream and near-stream habitat, sediment loss, and water quality. River restoration attempts to overcome the effects of these alterations and improve the function and value of our waterways for water quality, recreation, wildlife and fisheries habitat, flood mitigation, quality of life, and associated economic benefits.



The guiding principles behind this River Restoration planning include:

- **Evaluate:** A rivers program must evaluate a broad range of information relating rivers to human health, biological diversity, and economic vitality.
- **Protect:** The protection of the ecological/hydrological functions of Iowa's river corridors in a sustainable way is critical to the viability of this resource, landscape, the health, safety & enjoyment of future generations.
- **Enhance:** Opportunities exist to enhance the functionality and overall quality of Iowa's rivers and streams.
- **Connect:** A comprehensive river programs requires the connection of people to rivers, coordination of programs and sharing of information.

The priority actions identified in this plan follow from these guiding principles, and include:

#### **Evaluation:**

- Developing a Comprehensive Website for Water Quality and River Data.
- Creating More and Better Data Interpretation Products.
- Inventorying and Improving River-Related Human Health Alerts.

#### **Protection:**

- Increasing collaboration of Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water Trails Programs on Conservation Plans and Overlapping Priorities.
- Developing and Implementing a River Conservation Areas program.
- Developing a Stream Mitigation Program for Iowa.

#### **Enhancement:**

- Adding Hydrologic - River Modeling Capabilities to DNR Staff Expertise.
- Coordinating with Floodplains Program during Project Planning.
- Developing a Best-Practices Toolbox for River Restoration.

## Connection:

- Coordinated Education, Interpretation and Communication Approaches.
- Connecting DNR River Programs to Restoration Efforts.



The state of our river corridors is fundamental to the health and happiness of Iowans. With limited resources available, we must take advantage of opportunities to pool our efforts to achieve successful stream improvements that can be appreciated by Iowans for generations to come. River restoration is a multi-dimensional process that yields an array of benefits, including, more productive fish and wildlife habitat, enhanced recreational opportunities, improved water quality and support for local economies. DNR aims to work with partner agencies and communities to achieve restoration goals. This plan outlines the priorities the Department will address to better evaluate and protect our rivers, enhance the function and health of our streams, and better connect people and their waters.

*Iowa Department of Natural Resources – December 2015*

The DNR River Restoration Strategy is available at: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/River-Restoration>