

# IOWATER

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring

## Water Trails Program Puts Focus on Iowa Streams

article and photos by Nate Hoogeveen, Iowa DNR Water Trails Coordinator

"Water trails" are a new way for Iowans to look at their waters. An article in *Paddler Magazine* last fall suggested that the name conjures up "liquid highways to adventure" in people's minds.

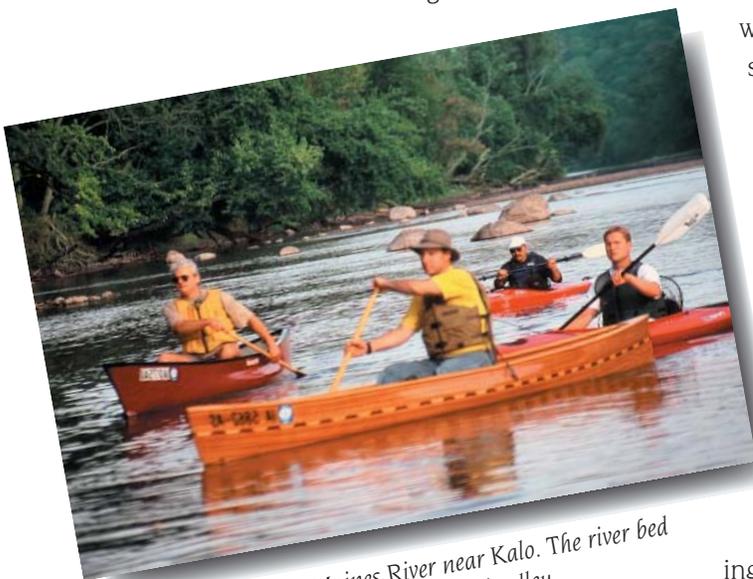
The Iowa DNR Water Trails program was initially formed in March of 2005 as a response to several groups of canoeists and kayakers asking the DNR for a program. At first glance, it appears that approximately 2,500 miles of waterways in Iowa could lend themselves to being good quality water trails. I began working as water trails coordinator in October, 2005.

My commitment to getting Iowans engaged with their rivers is personal. From 2003 to 2004, I spent hundreds of days paddling more than 1,800 miles of Iowa rivers and streams to research the guidebook

*Paddling Iowa*. Most of those miles were in my trusty blue Necky Look-sha Sport, a 14'4" short touring kayak with front and rear bulkheads for storing gear, food, and water. I camped on sandbars and at county and state parks.

It gradually dawned on me that rivers were becoming good friends. Each was a character. Some moved at frenetic paces with clear purpose. Some meandered with little direction at all. Others were languid and dirty, and I loved them for it. Others were workers of magic, providing the solace, the calling birds, and the wooded backdrop and reflective waters for evening gold light to yield a soulful moment.

Some river bluffs were magnificent and humbling. I also met human friends. Many had similar feelings about rivers in general, or about a river near them.



Paddling down the Des Moines River near Kalo. The river bed is rocky at the bottom of a narrow, wooded valley.

## ...from IOWATER's Coordinator

What's Project AWARE? Think RAGBRAI, but with a splash of ecotourism and a focus on river cleanup. Each year during the third week of June, volunteers from Iowa and beyond spend a day, the entire week, or anywhere in between on the Iowa DNR's annual outdoor adventure and river cleanup event.

The idea behind Project AWARE is simple – if there's trash in the stream, remove it. Using an arsenal of tools, from bare hands to pick axes to come-alongs, AWARE volunteers muscle thousands of pounds of trash out of Iowa's rivers. The end result is always the same: muddy volunteers, a cleaner, more aesthetically pleasing river, and a sense of accomplishment and pride that lasts a lifetime.

River cleanup is something volunteers participate in, but Project AWARE is something they experience. There's something about the place, the people, and the trash; something that gets in your blood; something that, if enough people experience it, will lead to a cleaner, healthier, and stronger Iowa.

After the 2004 AWARE expedition, Governor Vilsack addressed a crowd of AWARE volunteers saying, "There's 72,000 miles of rivers and streams, so you're going to have to keep doing this for quite a few years or you're going to have to get a whole lot more people doing it." We hope to get as many as we can.

I'll see 'ya on the river,

*Brian Soenen*



**IOWATER Mini-Grants**  
awarded to the following  
IOWATER monitors and  
partnering organizations.

- **Grant Wood Area Education Agency – \$1,000** grant for continued support of their Enhancing Education Through Technology (E<sup>2</sup>T<sup>2</sup>) initiative. This project will use the grant to purchase water monitoring probes and calculator-based labs to enhance their schools' current IOWATER projects.
- **Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District – \$828** grant to purchase water monitoring equipment and sample analyses for their Farmers and Prairie Creek watershed projects.
- **Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District – \$632** grant to monitor nitrates in the Cedar Lake watershed. Cedar Lake is used as a drinking water source for the City of Winterset.
- **Marshalltown Water Works – \$815** grant to purchase equipment and publicity supplies to increase monitoring, engage local youth, and inform the public about the Iowa River Watershed.
- **South East Junior High ECHO Club – \$410** grant to purchase monitoring equipment for their monitoring projects on Ralston and Snyder Creeks in Johnson County.



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Recent years have given those of us who love Iowa's rivers reasons to hope for a brighter future for all of Iowa's waterways. Thanks to the IOWATER program, thousands of volunteers now monitor water and provide valuable data that haven't existed before. Thanks to Project AWARE, people are better aware of challenges facing rivers, select rivers are getting trash cleaned from their banks, and a wider culture of river cleanups is being fostered. Thanks to the DNR Environmental Protection Commission leadership, it appears Iowa is on track toward meeting Tier 1 of the Clean Water Act. Thanks to the Iowa General Assembly, the Watershed Improvement Review board has awarded \$5 million toward cleanup efforts statewide.

The advent of the DNR Water Trails program is a similar expression of hope. Water trails provide economic incentives for local communities to treat their rivers well. For example, a 1999 study of the Kickapoo River in southwest Wisconsin showed that river's canoeists were worth \$1.7 million in local economic impacts during the summer season. We know from a recent DNR survey that cleaner water would be of value to people who enjoy fishing in streams.

To date, 11 water trail projects are being funded in part by the Iowa DNR Water Trails program, which provides both money and technical assistance to county conservation boards and non-profit organizations working on water trails development. For fiscal year 2006 and 2007, \$100,000 has been awarded. These projects will provide signs that will clarify and enrich experiences for river users, improved access, and create portages and safety modifications at low-head dams on various rivers.

In coming years, rivers will increasingly see more attention as the Iowa DNR assists local communities in promoting their rivers and other waterways as valuable natural resources.

For more information about the Iowa DNR's Water Trails program, contact Nate Hoogeveen at [Nate.Hoogeveen@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Nate.Hoogeveen@dnr.state.ia.us) or 515-281-3134.



## IOWATER action!

*Press releases, events, & news articles involving IOWATER monitors – Many thanks to all of you for your continued efforts.*

- **Johnson County** – Congratulations to Gary Arner and Dave Ratliff, who were awarded the President's Award and Conservation Award, respectively, at the annual meeting of the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association.
- **Statewide** – Thanks to Lloyd and Gaylan Crim, Vicki Wilson, Ed Askew, and Katie Foreman for their assistance in the Citizens Monitoring Bacteria Project. Results from their work were the focus of *The Volunteer Monitor* newsletter's Winter 2006 featured article ([www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/volunteer/newsletter/volmon18no1.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/volunteer/newsletter/volmon18no1.pdf)).
- **Story County** – Congratulations to Admiral Jim Colbert and the Skunk River Navy, who will receive a Governor's Environmental Excellence Award in May for their service to their natural resources.
- **Union County** – Thanks to Ri Hannah, who is conducting IOWATER monitoring and collection of water samples for lab analyses as part of the Lake McKinley Watershed Improvement project in Creston.

*If we missed your happenings, please call or email Jackie Gautsch with an update.*

# Volunteer viewpoints ... in their own words.



## Water Quality in Iowa and LEGOs...what's the connection?

by Marta Hershner – Facilitator, Viola Gibson Elementary School



FRONT ROW (left to right): Kerry Broussard, Chandler Heisler, David Hynek (holding trophy), Quinn Jamrok, Nolan Butler (holding trophy), Mark Mettler, Marissa Menge, Kelsie Coates. BACK ROW: Landon Crippes, Sarah Koch, Chris Nelson, Kathleen Reyner, Marta Hershner. Photo by Rich Jamrok.

Nine fourth and fifth grade students at Viola Gibson Elementary School in Cedar Rapids have been working on the connection between water quality and LEGOs since fall. They are members of a FIRST LEGO League team called Global Gators and are assisted by mentors from Rockwell Collins. FIRST LEGO sponsors a two-part "Challenge" each year for students ages nine to fourteen. The theme this year is Ocean Odyssey. The students

design and program a robot from LEGO bricks to perform specified missions on an ocean playing field, as well as develop and present a research project related to the theme. The Global Gators became interested in the hypoxia zone in the Gulf of Mexico for the research portion of the Challenge. The students learned about Iowa's contribution to pollution problems in the Gulf and the importance of water testing as a first step in determining the quality of water, whether it be in the Gibson Gulch on our school grounds or in the Gulf of Mexico.

At the school's Water Quality Fair on March 18, students shared their project called 'From the Gulch to the Gulf' with our local community, including Mayor Kay Hallorhan. Students enacted a trip downstream from the detention basin in our schoolyard to the Gulf of Mexico, explaining what is carried along in the water as it journeys south and the pollutants' impact on the Gulf. They also shared video clips of the robotics portion of the state competition at Iowa State University. After the student presentation, invited water experts shared information about their connection to water quality in Iowa and offered solutions to help the situation in the Gulf. Students learned what experts are doing about a real problem related to oceans and then developed their own solution to improve the situation for present and future generations.

The Global Gators won the FIRST LEGO Iowa tournament this year and will represent Iowa at the International World Festival in Atlanta, GA, in late April. Team information is available at <http://gibson.cr.k12.ia.us/Classroom/Hershner/index.htm>

***Congratulations to the Global Gators and good luck in Atlanta!***

## North Raccoon River, will you be my Valentine?

by Mike Delaney – President, North Raccoon Watershed Association

Since I am a "Nature-Lover" I decided to spend a few hours with my love today. I own a little farm that spans the North Raccoon, like in the movie "A River Runs Through It." But the fly-fishing is not that great – yet.



I sat in my cabin gazing out and down through the white oaks across my field to the river and valley wall beyond. I was watching the

ice sheets crash together on the "Coon" as the ice went out for the second time this winter. It was sixty-two degrees outside and sunny. The sun felt great on my face as I rocked in my chair behind the double pane glass of my sliding doors. A decision had to be made. Should I let the silence of nature in winter overtake me and have a little nap? Or, should I rise, gather my IOWATER gear and do my duty? One last look through my Brownell spotting scope at the ice flow and then I rose to get my backpack and tall boots.

I walked down the steep path through the oaks that I had carefully preserved when my friend and I built the cabin. I crossed the field that I would plant to prairie in a few weeks. I walked through the switch grass buffer strip and the silver maples and river willows to a lovely sandbar. I stood on the warm sand and gazed at the crunching ice. I slipped on my light weight boots and waded into the 36 degree water to test the clarity. The ice had stirred up the bottom, so the clarity was down to 30 centimeters. The nitrate was up to 5. The dissolved oxygen was 8, phosphate was 0.8, and chloride was normal. I knew the readings would be better once the river settled down after the ice was gone.

As the shade slid across the river and onto the sandbar I packed my gear and headed up a dry streambed. As I broke through the willows I saw something large fly up from the stream bed. As I moved further inland, a rooster pheasant flew over my head. All of his brilliant colors were ablaze as he rose into the sun's last rays of the day. A few steps further and three more took flight from above the left bank. In a flash, three more clattered through the brush and trees and then more. Eleven hens and roosters came up from one spot like a bunch of quail.

As I crossed the field, I recalled the tiny pheasant chicks that scurried around my feet in a three-year old prairie restoration strip the previous August. I also recalled a clutch of seven eggs that hatched late in the fall, so late I thought they might not live through the winter. I wondered if the eleven pheasants I saw were all in the same family.

Not bad for a Valentine's Day in Iowa.

We'd like to hear from you, so **send us a note...** about your IOWATER activities, thoughts, and ideas **...in your own words.**

# Upcoming events

... snapshot sampling & more.



**May 13** (Sat); Johnson & Iowa County Snapshot  
Contact: Dave Ratliff (319) 354-1397  
[oldmanscreek@qwest.net](mailto:oldmanscreek@qwest.net)

**May 13** (Sat); Central Iowa River Watershed Snapshot  
Contact: Dr. Dean Reynolds (641) 753-3997 (day);  
(641) 753-0103 (evening)  
[dean@marshalltownwater.com](mailto:dean@marshalltownwater.com)

**May 13** (Sat); IOWATER Spring Statewide Snapshot  
Contact: Katie Foreman (319) 335-1571  
[kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu](mailto:kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu)

**May 16** (Tues); Muscatine County Snapshot  
Contact: Ellen Myers (563) 263-8933  
[emyers@ci.muscatine.ia.us](mailto:emyers@ci.muscatine.ia.us)

**May 20** (Sat); Wapsipinicon Watershed  
Contact: Katie Foreman (319) 335-1571  
[kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu](mailto:kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu)

**May 20** (Sat); Iowa Clean Rivers Team Cleanup  
North Raccoon River – Booneville to Walnut Woods  
State Park. Contact: Don Propst (515) 265-8733  
[dpsprftr@netscape.com](mailto:dpsprftr@netscape.com)

**May 21** (Sun); Scott County Snapshot  
Contact: Sara Klindt (563) 326-6150  
[Sara.klindt@ia.nacdn.net](mailto:Sara.klindt@ia.nacdn.net)

**May 24** (Wed); Polk County Snapshot  
Contact: Susan Heathcote (515) 244-1194  
[Heathcote@earthwshare.org](mailto:Heathcote@earthwshare.org)

**June 3** (Sat); Whitebreast Creek Snapshot  
Contact: Anne Hildebrand (515) 961-5246  
[Anne.hildebrand@ia.nacdn.net](mailto:Anne.hildebrand@ia.nacdn.net)

**June 10** (Sat); Cedar River Watershed Snapshot  
Contact: Roy Hesemann (319) 286-5972  
[royh@cedar-rapids.org](mailto:royh@cedar-rapids.org)

**June 17-24** (Sat - Sat); Project AWARE – Iowa River  
Contact: Brandon Harland (515) 281-3150  
[Brandon.Harland@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Brandon.Harland@dnr.state.ia.us)

**July 8** (Sat); Beaver Creek Snapshot  
Contact: Steve Witmer (515) 727-7765  
[switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us](mailto:switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us)

**July 8** (Sat); Iowa Clean Rivers Team Cleanup  
North Raccoon River – County Road D15 to Sac City  
Contact: Don Propst (515) 265-8733  
[dpsprftr@netscape.com](mailto:dpsprftr@netscape.com)

**July 15** (Sat); Johnson & Iowa County Snapshot  
Contact: Dave Ratliff (319) 354-1397  
[oldmanscreek@qwest.net](mailto:oldmanscreek@qwest.net)

**July 15** (Sat); Central Iowa River Watershed Snapshot  
Contact: Dr. Dean Reynolds (641) 753-3997 (day);  
(641) 753-0103 (evening)  
[dean@marshalltownwater.com](mailto:dean@marshalltownwater.com)

**July 15** (Sat); IOWATER Spring Statewide Snapshot  
Contact: Katie Foreman (319) 335-1571  
[kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu](mailto:kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu)

**July 22** (Sat); North Raccoon River Watershed Snapshot  
Contact: Steve Witmer (515) 727-7765  
[switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us](mailto:switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us)

**Aug. 19** (Sat); XStream Clean Up (Quad Cities)  
Contact: Roy DeWitt (563) 468-4218  
[rdewitt@kscb.org](mailto:rdewitt@kscb.org)

**Aug. 25-27** (Fri-Sun); Grove to Grove Lower Wapsi  
River Cleanup. Contact: Melisa (309) 737-9016  
or KJ at [rebar@netins.net](mailto:rebar@netins.net)

**Sep. 16** (Sat); Iowa Clean Rivers Team Cleanup  
North Raccoon River – Merritt Access to Brown's Bridge  
Contact: Don Propst (515) 265-8733  
[dpsprftr@netscape.com](mailto:dpsprftr@netscape.com)

**Sep. 23** (Sat); Beaver Creek Snapshot  
Contact: Steve Witmer (515) 727-7765  
[switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us](mailto:switmer@ci.johnston.ia.us)

**Sep. 23** (Sat); Upper Iowa River Cleanup  
Contact: Deb Keefe (877) 787-2267  
[keefe@earthlink.net](mailto:keefe@earthlink.net)

**Oct. 14** (Sat); Johnson & Iowa County Snapshot  
Contact: Dave Ratliff (319) 354-1397  
[oldmanscreek@qwest.net](mailto:oldmanscreek@qwest.net)

**Oct. 14** (Sat); Central Iowa River Watershed Snapshot  
Contact: Dr. Dean Reynolds (641) 753-3997 (day);  
(641) 753-0103 (evening)  
[dean@marshalltownwater.com](mailto:dean@marshalltownwater.com)

**Oct. 14** (Sat); IOWATER Spring Statewide Snapshot  
Contact: Katie Foreman (319) 335-1571  
[kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu](mailto:kforeman@igsb.uiowa.edu)

## IOWATER 2006 Level I Workshop Schedule

Date & Time	Location	Contact	Phone	E-mail
May 19, (5-9 PM) May 20, (9 AM- 3 PM) @ Cardinal High School	<b>Wapello County</b>	Terry Hamm 4045 Ashland Rd Eldon, IA 52554	(641) 652-7531	hammt@aea15.k12.ia.us
June 2 (5-9 PM) June 3 (9 AM - 3 PM) @ Sleep Inn & Suites Meeting Room	<b>Emmet County</b>	Bill Moreau 1820 Central Ave. Estherville, IA 51334	(712) 260-2507	DConline@myclearwave.net
July 7, (5-9 PM) July 8, (9 AM - 3 PM) @ Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center	<b>Woodbury County</b>	Brian Soenen 3625 Nebraska St. Sioux City, IA 51104	(515) 205-8587	brian.soenen@dnr.state.ia.us
July 17, (5-10 PM) July 18, (5-10 PM) @ Jester Park Lodge	<b>Polk County</b>	Heidi Anderson 11407 NW Jester Park Dr. Granger, IA 50109	(515) 323-5360	handers@co.polk.ia.us
July 28, (5-9 PM) July 29, (9 AM -3 PM) @ Gilbertson Nature Center	<b>Fayette County</b>	Dawn L. Amundson Fayette County Conservation Board 22850 A Ave., Elgin, IA 52141	(563) 426-5740	gncfccb@alpinecom.net
August 18, (5-9 PM) August 19, (9 AM -3 PM) @ Starr's Cave Nature Center	<b>Des Moines Co.</b>	Kim Perlstein 11627 Starr's Cave Rd. Burlington, IA 52601	(319) 753-5808	starcave@co.des-moines.ia.us
Sept 8, (5-9 PM) Sept 9, (9 AM- 3 PM) @ JF Kennedy Memorial Park Lodge	<b>Webster County</b>	T.J. Lynn 1200 3rd Ave. NW Fort Dodge, IA 50501	(515) 573-4411	Thomas.Lynn@ia.nacdn.net
Sept 15, (5-9 PM) Sept 16, (8 AM- 2 PM) @ Hurstville Interpretive Center <i>This workshop will be followed by a Bacteria Monitoring workshop (Sept 16, 2-6 pm), contact Ann for details.</i>	<b>Jackson County</b>	Ann Burns 18670-63rd St. Maquoketa, IA 52060	(563) 652-3783	amburns29@jacksonccb.com
Oct 6, (5-9 PM) Oct 7, (9 AM- 3 PM) @ North Liberty Recreation Center	<b>Johnson County</b>	Jason Egly 520 W. Cherry St. North Liberty, IA 52317	(319) 626-5716	jhegly@yahoo.com

To register for a particular workshop, get in touch with the contact person listed.

### Wanna' Get Connected? Wanna' Get Connected? Wanna' Get Connected?

Thousands of people from across the nation volunteer to monitor the quality of their waters, and all of them have stories to share, advice to give, and questions to ask. Thankfully, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) manages **The Volmonitor Listserver**, which enables anyone with an interest in water quality to contact others across the nation. The listserver functions as an internet forum for questions, announcements, and discussion on topics of interest to the volunteer monitoring community. And the best part is, it's FREE and anyone can join!

**To subscribe to the Volmonitor listserver:** Send a blank email to [volmonitor-subscribe@lists.epa.gov](mailto:volmonitor-subscribe@lists.epa.gov). Once you have subscribed, you will receive a welcome message with instructions on using the listserver. This will confirm your membership. You may unsubscribe at any time.

**IOWATER**

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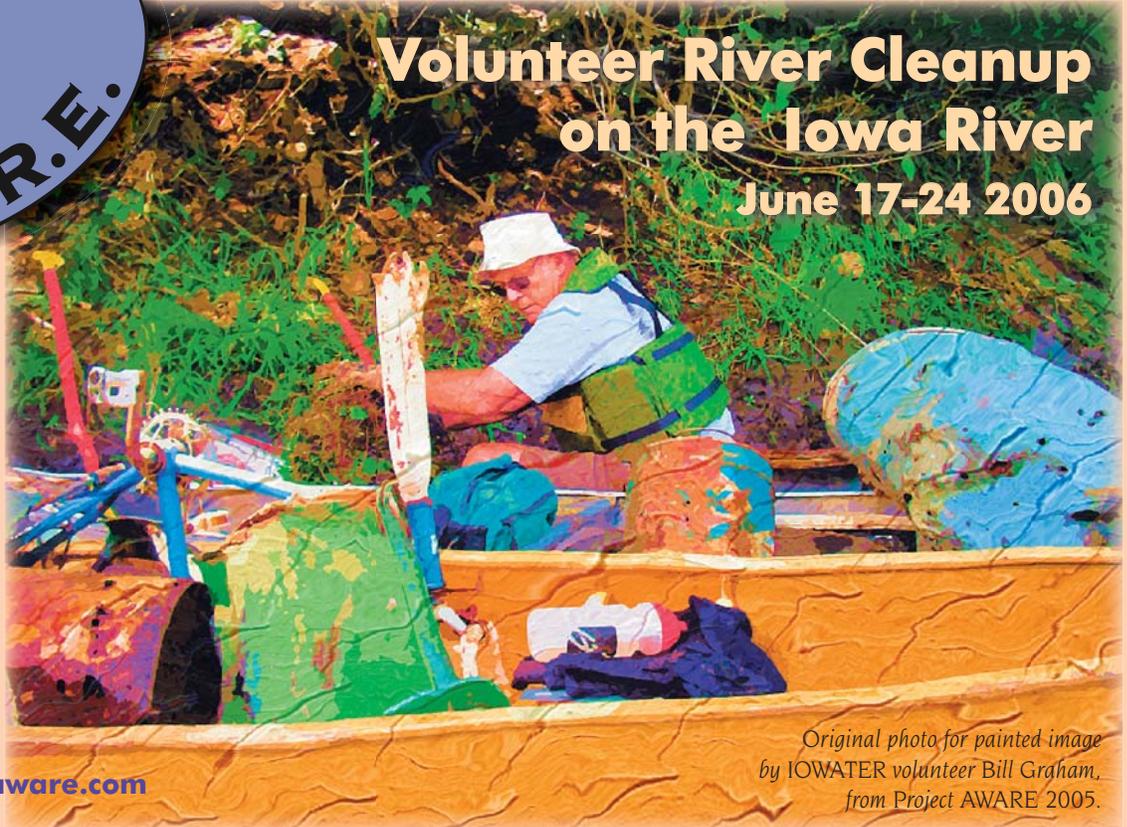


Registrations  
must be  
postmarked by  
June 2, 2006

**Join us!**

[www.iowaprojectaware.com](http://www.iowaprojectaware.com)

**Volunteer River Cleanup  
on the Iowa River  
June 17-24 2006**



*Original photo for painted image  
by IOWATER volunteer Bill Graham,  
from Project AWARE 2005.*