

EcoNewsWire

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 8, 2025

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Easter Lake thriving thanks to local watershed improvement efforts



Easter Lake in Polk County

MEDIA CONTACT: Jennifer Kurth, DNR, at 515-639-8464
or Jennifer.Kurth@dnr.iowa.gov

DES MOINES – Easter Lake, a popular area for fishing and swimming in Polk County, has a cleaner and clearer future thanks to a community-led effort.

The metropolitan lake was added to Iowa's impaired waters list in 2004 due to declining water quality caused by sediment runoff and elevated phosphorus levels. These issues negatively affected the lake's aesthetics and harmed fish and other aquatic life by reducing visibility due to algae blooms and cloudy water.

The land use in the watershed was primarily agricultural when the lake was constructed. By the 1970s, the western half of the watershed had undergone

significant urbanization. In the early 1990s, housing developments rapidly began emerging around the lake. As a result, silt from construction sites and sediment from stream bank erosion in Yeader Creek led to a 30% reduction in water volume by 2012. Today, most of the watershed is urbanized, which has increased stormwater runoff.

The Easter Lake Water Quality Management Plan was created in 2013 with two key goals: to improve water quality and to reconnect residents and visitors of the Des Moines metro area with the natural amenities of Easter Lake and its surroundings. In 2014, local residents and government agencies collaborated to launch the Easter Lake Watershed Project, an initiative aimed to reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the lake by strategically implementing conservation practices on the land and fostering a culture of conservation within the community.

"Project watershed coordinators provided outreach and education, technical expertise, and implementation of urban green infrastructure to help achieve the success and outcomes in this watershed," states Jennifer Welch, Polk Soil and Water Conservation District Urban Conservationist.

Partners removed more than 40,000 dump truck loads of sediment from the lake bottom during the restoration process. Residents and landowners in the area also implemented various environmental measures, including the installation of 16,697 square feet of permeable pavers, 38 rain gardens, and 982,233 square feet dedicated to soil quality restoration. Additionally, they restored 23,282 feet of streambanks and shorelines, established 141,570 square feet of prairie buffers, and created a 38-acre stormwater wetland. These initiatives prevent excess stormwater runoff, sediments, and phosphorus from entering the lake.

Michelle Balmer, DNR Lakes Restoration Program Coordinator says, "When the community started discussing how to improve Easter Lake fewer than 400,000 visitors came to the park each year. Through long-term planning, a shared vision, and the collective efforts of over 100 partners, today the lake welcomes more than one million visitors annually and boasts better quality and a thriving fishery."

The watershed project has significantly improved the water quality in the lake, resulting in enhanced clarity and better habitat conditions for fish and other aquatic species, as well as for human users. As a result of these improvements, the lake was removed from the impaired waters list in 2024.

"Subsequent projects spurred by the restoration are a beautiful 4.1-mile recreational perimeter trail, a restored fishery, and the Athene North Shore at Easter Lake; an accessible park we describe as the most universally-designed park in the U.S.," says Rich Leopold, Polk County Conservation Director.

"This really is a success story about what happens when residents embrace ownership of a lake," says Jennifer Kurth, DNR aquatic biologist.

The Easter Lake Watershed Project was funded and supported by the Iowa DNR, Polk County Conservation, the City of Des Moines, the citizens of Polk County and local landowners. Other partners include the Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship.

To learn more about the Easter Lake success story, go to:

<https://www.epa.gov/nps/success-stories-addressing-sediment-and-nutrient-sources-restores-Easter-Lake>

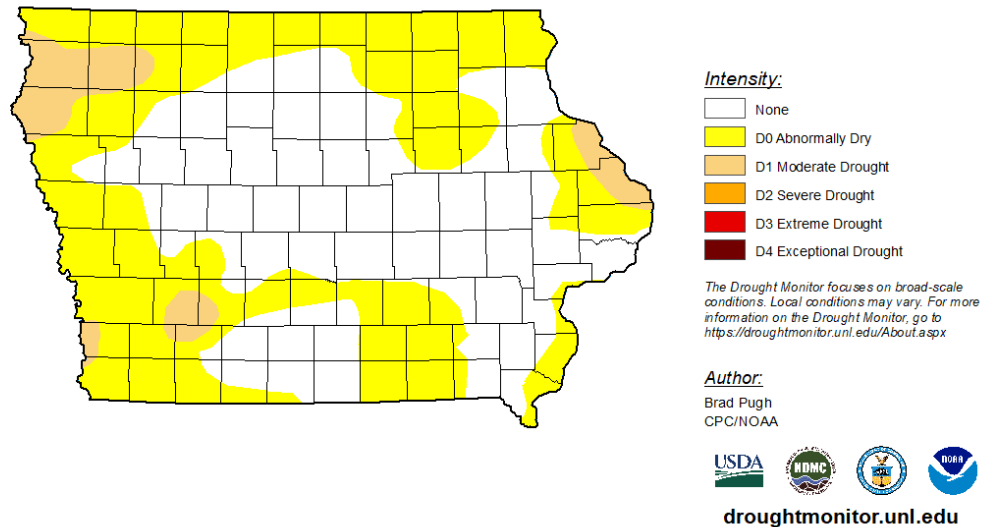
You can also find more Iowa success stories on the EPA's website at:

<https://www.epa.gov/nps/success-stories-about-restoring-water-bodies-impaired-nonpoint-source-pollution#ia> and clicking on the Iowa map.

Water Summary Update: Spring rainfall improves drought conditions across Iowa

U.S. Drought Monitor Iowa

May 6, 2025
(Released Thursday, May. 8, 2025)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



U.S. Drought Monitor map showing drought conditions across Iowa

MEDIA CONTACT: Jessica Reese McIntyre at 515-725-9547
or Jessica.ReeseMcIntyre@dnr.iowa.gov

DES MOINES – Drought conditions have improved across the state despite below-normal rainfall in April, according to the latest Water Summary Update.

After a wetter-than normal March, April saw below-average precipitation across all regions of the state. However, recent spring rains have helped alleviate drought and abnormally dry conditions across Iowa. April's average statewide precipitation was 3.33 inches, or 0.34 inches below normal. The state also experienced warmer weather, with statewide temperatures averaging 50 degrees, or 1.4 degrees warmer than normal.

At the end of April, Iowa's Drought Plan dry conditions improved or remained the same in all drought regions except the southeast, which only degraded slightly. A drought watch issued in March for the northeast region has been removed as

severe drought has significantly decreased. Conditions remain stable in the other drought regions, with the entire state carrying a normal drought designation.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM), just over half of Iowa continues to experience abnormally dry conditions or drought conditions.

The May precipitation outlook from the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center indicates a chance of below-average precipitation across the northeast and eastern half of the state, and an equal chance for above, below, or near-average precipitation for the rest of the state. Reduced rainfall in May could raise concerns about deteriorating conditions.

"Drought and dry conditions improved across the state due to spring rain in March and April, but most notably in northeast, west, and central Iowa. The drought watch issued in March for northeast Iowa has been removed. The National Weather Service precipitation outlooks predict an equal chance for the entire state for above, below, or normal precipitation for much of the state through July," said Jessica Reese McIntyre, DNR Environmental Specialist.

For a thorough review of Iowa's water resource trends, visit

www.iowadnr.gov/watersummaryupdate.

The report is prepared by technical staff from Iowa DNR, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, IHR—Hydroscience and Engineering, and the U.S. Geological Survey, in collaboration with Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Department.

DNR enforcement actions

MEDIA CONTACT: Tamara McIntosh, DNR, at 515-901-3294
or Tamara.McIntosh@dnr.iowa.gov.

DES MOINES – DNR staff work with individuals, businesses and communities to help them protect our natural resources by complying with state and federal laws. This approach is very effective. In the few cases where compliance cannot be achieved, the DNR issues enforcement actions. The following list summarizes recent enforcement actions. Find the entire, original orders on DNR's website at www.iowadnr.gov/EnforcementActions

Consent Orders A consent order is issued as an alternative to issuing an administrative order. A consent order indicates that the DNR has voluntarily entered into a legally enforceable agreement with the other party.

Montgomery County

Duane Bergren Jr.

Comply with the facility's previously-developed plan to prevent manure discharges; monitor the stream bank and the tributary for manure runoff at all times and report any future releases within 6 hours; and pay a \$5,500 administrative penalty.

Winneshiek County

Kyle Mracek

Surrender time of transfer inspector license for six months; and pay a \$1,000 administrative penalty.

Administrative Orders

Responsible parties have 60 days to appeal the order or 60 days to pay the penalty.

Air quality permits for review

MEDIA CONTACT: Peter Zayudis, DNR, at 515-201-4596
or Peter.Zayudis@dnr.iowa.gov for Construction permits.

DES MOINES – The DNR Air Quality Bureau has the following draft permits up for review. The permits help protect Iowans' health and the air where we live. DNR's permitting staff review the applications to ensure facilities comply with state and federal air quality standards. The public has the right and is encouraged to comment on draft permits. DNR considers [public comments](#) before finalizing the permits. Submit comments in writing to the assigned permit writer before 4:30 p.m. on the last day of the comment period.

Construction Permits

DNR engineers review and issue construction permits to facilities before they build new or modify existing sources of air pollution. The public may review the following air quality construction permits available online at <https://idnraqrr.iowadnr.gov/ConPermitSearch> or through the [EASY Air Public Inquiry Portal](#) and then click the Public Notice tab.

Black Hawk County John Deere Product Engineering Center, 6275 Cedar Heights Dr., Cedar Falls. Project No. 25-075, Modification of existing PSD permits by allowing for ethanol use and modifying limits. The public comment period ends June 8.



Iowa DNR



www.iowadnr.gov

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