



Funding Iowa's Water Testing Program

The Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club is calling on the DNR to expand its program of testing and monitoring of Iowa's rivers, streams, and lakes for pollution. To that end, the Iowa Chapter is calling on the DNR:

1. To increase the number of employees who are involved in testing Iowa's waterbodies.
2. To increase the number of remote continuous water sensors.

The advantage of remote continuous water sensors is that they can operate relatively free of human labor once they are set into the waterbody. They also provide information continuously.

In order to assess if the rivers, streams, and lakes in Iowa are becoming less polluted or more polluted, the waterbodies must be tested and monitored on a regular basis. Further, to assess how effective on-the-ground projects are in improving water quality, regular testing must be performed. Testing is the only way Iowans will know the quality of their water. If you do not test a water, you don't know its status and you won't be able to initiate water quality improvements. Not all pollution can be seen and not all pollution can be smelled.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources dismantled citizen water testing

In the spring of 2017, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) disbanded a water testing program called IOWATER due to severe budget cuts. The IOWATER Program, administered by the DNR, trained citizens to collect water quality samples and provided a database for recording the testing results. The DNR even paid for testing supplies. For a number of years prior to 2017, the DNR had not adequately staffed and funded the IOWATER program.

The citizens who participated in the IOWATER Program played a vital role in assisting the DNR in identifying pollution flowing in our rivers, streams, and lakes. The IOWATER test results flagged water bodies that had increased pollution, which aided DNR staff in determining what water bodies needed further sampling and testing.

In its place, the DNR expects that watershed management authorities, county conservation departments, demonstration projects administered through the Iowa Department of Agriculture, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to assume the responsibility to test and monitor the water in their local areas. These organizations are

expected to pick up the responsibility of identifying volunteers to perform water testing, training water testers, and paying for testing supplies.¹ The DNR will train trainers who will then be responsible for training others to perform water testing. Furthermore, the DNR will no longer maintain a database for recording test results, instead referring folks to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) database.²

However, this is troubling for several reasons.

1. Without a centralized organization supporting and administering the program, most water bodies simply will never be tested.
 - a. Watershed management groups cover a small area of the state.³
 - b. Not all county conservation departments engage in water quality testing.
 - c. By their nature, demonstration projects administered by the Iowa Department of Agriculture will be performing water quality testing. Yet those projects cover only a small area of the state.⁴
 - d. Not all Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which are administered through the United States Department of Agriculture, have programs to perform water testing.
2. The bulk purchase of supplies makes them cheaper. The DNR has claimed that the supplies were wasted since they were not used by their expiration date. However, with proper staffing, the supplies could have been broken into smaller units, resulting in less waste.
3. Although the DNR is expecting local organizations to pick up the functions of the IOWATER program, no funding support will be provided to those organizations to pay for staff and supplies. For those not currently testing the water, there certainly is no guarantee that they will voluntarily adopt a water testing program.

The Iowa DNR needs to step up and increase water monitoring

Given that the DNR is walking away from citizen testing, the DNR needs to replace the water sampling performed by citizens, not abandon the testing that was done. It is understandable that citizens lose interest over time, become busy, and move away from an area. That means that recruiting of new water testers and training them is essential to having a healthy viable water monitoring program.

Quite honestly, protecting Iowa's water quality falls on the Iowa DNR and the DNR should be responsible for insuring that the water quality is improving. The way to know the water quality status is to test the water. Local government agencies and non-profit

¹ See information on the Iowa DNR citizen water monitoring program at www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/Water-Monitoring/Volunteer-Water-Monitoring

² More information about the EPA database is found at www.epa.gov/waterdata/storage-and-retrieval-and-water-quality-exchange

³ A list of active watershed management authorities can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Water-Quality/Watershed-Management-Authorities/Iowa-WMAs

⁴ See maps of the Iowa Department of Agriculture demonstration projects at www.cleanwateriowa.org/

organizations should not be responsible for picking up the expenses for labor and materials to perform water testing.

Furthermore, the Environmental Protection Agency granted Iowa, through the DNR, the right to manage its own water program. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the DNR to follow through with water testing and to provide a state-wide framework.

Paying for increased water quality monitoring

In 2010, 63 percent of Iowa voters gave overwhelming support to a constitutional amendment that would allow increased investment in Iowa's parks, recreation and clean water. Article VII Section 10 of the Iowa Constitution created a Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (Trust) that is to be supported by a sales tax of $\frac{3}{8}$ of one cent. This trust fund is to be used "for the purposes of protecting and enhancing water quality and natural areas in this State including parks, trails, and fish and wildlife habitat, and conserving agricultural soils in this State."

All that is needed is for the sales tax to be approved.

The funds derived from the sales tax that are dedicated to water quality initiatives should be spent on water quality monitoring.