

## Viewing and Obtaining Public Records

Access to public records is key to the work the Sierra Club does in Iowa, regardless if these records are maintained by federal, state, county, school or municipal employees.

If government is able to keep public records secret, then the public does not have important information to use in supporting or opposing projects. Sometimes officials attempt to hide embarrassing details or mistakes from the public. There are some types of records, such as income tax and medical records, which are confidential and, thus, are not available for public review.

When you want public records, first check the website for the government entity, agency or department that holds the records. You may be able to find what you want on-line. If you cannot find the records on-line, you can ask to view public records or ask for copies of records. You do not have to tell the public employee why you are requesting the records.

Requests for records can be made in person, over the telephone, via email or via hardcopy letter. Be sure to include a description of the information you are seeking, your name, address, e-mail address and phone number in your written requests. You can request an estimate of cost before the records are copied since some of the copying fees can be costly, especially if a large number of pages are copied.



*Eagle. Photo by Nick Graceffa.*

### **Records held by Iowa State Government, Iowa Municipalities, Iowa Counties, Iowa Public School Districts**

When you are asking for records held by state government, Iowa municipalities and counties or Iowa public school districts, ask for the information under the Iowa Open Records Act. Currently, more than 70 types of records are exempt from open records in the Iowa Code. If there is a question about whether the records you are requesting are confidential and, thus, exempt, then the government entity has 10 working days and 20 calendar days to make the determination and to provide you the information or to let you know that the material is exempt. Otherwise, you should be given reasonable access to the records. You may be charged for copies and, in some cases, you may be charged a fee for searching for the records. As mentioned above, you can request an estimate of the copy fee before you authorize the actual copying.

If you are denied access to public records for items held by the state, county, municipal or public school employees, you can file a complaint with the Iowa Public Information Board within 60 days of the denial. See <https://ipib.iowa.gov/file-complaint> for access to an on-line form for submitting the complaint. Also a written complaint can be sent to Iowa Public Information Board, Wallace Building, 502 East 9th St., Des Moines, Iowa, 50319

### **Records held by Federal Government Agencies**

When you are asking for federal records, you should indicate that you are asking for the records under the Freedom of Information Act. You may be charged for copies. If you are denied access to federal records, you can ask for the denial to be put in writing and can ask for the process to initiate an appeal.