

Iowa Rivers Revival-2009 Legislative Review

In November 2008 IRR hosted a River Congress to bring together individuals committed to improving and protecting the quality and condition of Iowa's rivers. The key concerns about Iowa's rivers were identified and included poor ecological health, a lack of appreciation, awareness and political will, and a need for greater safety and access. Outcomes from the Congress helped to guide IRR Board and staff in developing a policy agenda. IRR's first year on the hill brought success, visibility and greater experience in the legislative process.

SF 263-Signage for Iowa National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)

In the interest of public health and safety, IRR supported SF263, a bill requiring facilities with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits (allowing the discharge of treated wastewater to a stream or river) to post a sign at the discharge point. Signage must be periodically and reasonably maintained and would identify the permit holder, the NPDES permit number, discharge contact information (phone and website), and the name and number of the permit holder. A violation to this provision is subject to civil penalty.

Thanks to the commitment and leadership of Senator Joe Bolcom and the help of Iowa's river advocates and IRR board and supporters, the Iowa Senate passed SF263 by a margin of 26-24 on March 18, 2009. The bill now resides in the Iowa House of Representatives and must pass in 2010 for the legislation to be enacted.

Currently there is no way to identify a discharge location when out on or along Iowa's rivers – either by easily marking the location (coordinates or an address) or by visibly recognizing that the discharge even exists – some discharge locations are not obvious pipes, but rather what appears to be a tributary of the river. It is important that the public knows they could be exposed to potential harmful bacteria or chemicals when paddling, fishing, swimming or walking near those locations.

SJR1/HJR1- The Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund

Iowa Rivers Revival is working in coalition with Iowa's Water and Land Legacy, a diverse group of Iowa organizations to secure the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. Many of Iowa's rivers and streams are in poor health and condition. The Trust Fund would provide a tremendous boost in enhancing and preserving many of Iowa's natural resources by providing a permanent and constitutionally protected funding source to conserve and enhance Iowa's water and soil resources.

The Iowa House of Representatives passed HJR1 (the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund constitutional amendment) with a margin of 82-14 on February 17, 2009, and the following day, the Iowa Senate passed the same legislation (SJR1) 48-1. This victory marks the first step in securing the Trust Fund to protect and enhance Iowa's water quality and natural areas, including parks, trails, and fish and wildlife habitat, and conserving agricultural soils. Now let's make history – vote Yes for the Trust Fund on the ballot in November 2010!

SF442 (SSB1260) "Dirty Water"

IRR opposed SF442, a bill nullifying administrative rules that were developed by the Iowa DNR to that enact the EPA's clean water act and at the time were being considered by the Administrative Rules Review committee. The legislation would have limited the ability of the state of Iowa to protect outstanding Iowa waters from increased pollution. Amendments were later added that *appeared to* not prevent the DNR from establishing a category for Outstanding Iowa Waters, but was vague about whether this category of waters would receive

enhanced protections. After several near-attempts of being introduced on the Senate floor, the bill was killed and with the potential to be brought up again next year-if relevant.

Legislative Reception – February 4, 2009

IRR organized a 2nd Legislative Reception for Iowa's rivers to engage Iowa legislators about the importance of our rivers and how they provide many economic, environmental and recreational resources for our state. This reception provided supporters and Iowa legislators an opportunity to share our concerns, ideas and experiences related to Iowa's rivers. One notable outcome from the evening: Representative Annette Sweeney organized a community canoe float to raise awareness about river quality on the Iowa River (June 13, 2009). Getting our legislators on and near rivers within their communities will help to raise awareness and legislative commitment to improve and protect Iowa's rivers and water quality. Thank you to reception sponsors: Central Iowa Paddlers, Environmental Advocates of Iowa and Raccoon River Watershed Association.

Lobby Day – March 3, 2009

A small group of IRR supporters participated in IRR's first Lobby Day. The goal for Lobby Day was raising visibility and awareness for river issues. The day began with an informative grassroots lobbying training led by Jim Obradovich, Iowa Environmental Council lobbyist, before we moved to the Capitol for conservation conversations. Working in a group, each individual tried to meet with their legislators to discuss river issues and IRR's legislative agenda, and then we talked to legislators who had influence on the bills that IRR was supporting or opposing. IRR's "lobby team" discussed the "signage bill", the "dirty water bill", and appreciation for supporting HJR1 or SJR1 (the Natural Resources Trust Fund).

Senator Bolkcom credits IRR with getting his signage bill (SF263) out of committee for the first time ever and on the Senate floor for a vote – **a huge victory for IRR**. Lobby Day was a great success as we began to develop some very important relationships and connections to help make Iowa's rivers a legislative priority.

Looking ahead to 2010...

...encourage the Iowa House to pass SF263 – requiring NPDES permit holders to post a sign at their discharge locations.

...raise public awareness and support for the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund ballot measure in November 2010.

...increase political will through ongoing conversations with Iowa legislators about the importance of our rivers and our appreciation for this valued resource – we must continue to build a constituency that advocates for the protection of Iowa's rivers.

...expand IRR's legislative agenda.