

Project A.W.A.R.E. – One Week, One Mission, One Piece of Junk at a Time

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Biographical Sketch of Author

Brian joined the IOWATER team in March 2002. He graduated from the University of Northern Iowa in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in Natural History Interpretation. Prior to coming to the IDNR, Brian worked as an Interpretive Ranger for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Coralville Lake in Johnson County. His primary duties with IOWATER include program and workshop development, public relations, and coordination of the IDNR's annual Project AWARE.

Abstract

Tenacious rains and bone-chilling winds were no match for dozens of hard-nosed Iowans who spent the first week of National Rivers Month 2003 slogging through mud, wrenching canoes over sand bars and shallow riffles, and spending their vacations dungy, drenched, and dead tired – all in the name of water quality. Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) is an Iowa DNR-sponsored, weeklong canoe trip down an interior Iowa River. The project is a collaborative effort amongst governmental agencies and private organizations and has proven to be a wonderful tool for engaging citizens in a hands-on, water quality monitoring action project. Over one hundred volunteers from the first annual Project AWARE hauled 109 tires, 16 chairs, 20 barrels, 91 bags of trash, some methamphetamine lab items, a BMX bicycle, and an Easy-Bake® Oven, and much more junk, from the Maquoketa River.

Although daily rains dampened gear, spirits soared as volunteers participated in wildlife and water quality monitoring, educational programs, and streamside cleanup. The 100-mile expedition stretched from the headwaters to the mouth of the river, allowing participants to observe the affects of the watershed surrounding it. Scenic, rocky-bottomed, riparian-protected stretches of the river sharply contrast the cut-banks, silty streambeds, pastures, and junk piles that exist along the way.

Project AWARE strengthens personal connections with natural resources, illustrates the power of volunteerism, promotes advocacy for the environmental ethic, and increases environmental awareness, all of which will help future generations of Iowans respect and honor the legacy they will inherit.