



ELEVEN YEARS AGO IN A MEETING ROOM NOT FAR AWAY...

TRASH WARS

In 2002, with citizen interest in water quality surging, coordinators with the Iowa DNR's volunteer water quality monitoring program known as IOWATER were discussing creative solutions to a welcome challenge: what is the best way to connect Iowa citizens to their state's waters.

With 72,000 miles of rivers and streams (18,000 of which the DNR considers "navigable") and an army of the most hard-working, dedicated volunteers in the country, a river cleanup seemed to be a natural solution. Thus, Project AWARE (which stands for A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) was conceived and the war on trash began.

As its acronym states, Project AWARE is an expedition; a band of volunteers who partake in a journey with a specific purpose. For many of these volunteer aquatic garbage collectors, the shared mission is simple: to remove as much trash from Iowa's rivers as possible.

Inevitably, as this battle with refuse wages on, awareness is nurtured. By experiencing Iowa from the seat of a canoe, volunteers begin to view rivers as more than just water. The catfish, evicted from its discarded culvert, reminds them of the importance of natural habitat. The sediment, eroded from the surrounding landscape, remind them that water and land are not separate and unrelated, but rather intricately connected. And the mussels, at times numbering in the thousands, remind them why they spend their vacations muscling trash from Iowa's rivers.

Statewide, Project AWARE sets the bar for river cleanups, and has amassed some out-of-this-world statistics. To date, more than 2,539 AWARE volunteers have cleaned up over 786 river miles, removing more than 250 tons of trash (70% of which has been recycled) from rivers all across Iowa.

Dredging trash from Iowa's rivers is definitely a good thing to do, and there's certainly a lot of it out there. More importantly, however, is how this simple act of picking up garbage helps build meaningful connections between our lives and the quality of our rivers.



TRASH WARS

EPISODE 10: THE VOLUNTEERS STRIKE BACK

A few months ago in a watershed known as the Iowa...

For nearly a decade, volunteer forces fought to clean up Iowa's rivers. To celebrate ten years of triumph over trash, they set their sights on one of the state's most cherished yet endangered* rivers – the Iowa River.

Drought gripped the state. River levels were historically low, dropping daily. Supported by local citizens and communities, volunteers numbering nearly 400 strong descended on the Iowa River in central Iowa.

Low river levels, which dominated the region, brought blessings and challenges alike. Trash had no place to hide. Tires, barrels, and other debris that had been buried in the murky depths of the Iowa River for countless years were exposed. Volunteers seeking to remove this junk, however, were faced with the challenge of navigating a fully loaded canoe in uncharacteristically shallow water.

While ordinary volunteers might balk under these circumstances, these volunteers, armed with canoes and determined to make a difference, persevered to complete the 85-mile river cleanup between Dows and Marshalltown. These, of course, were no ordinary volunteers. . .if they were in a Star Wars movie they'd have been Jedi Knights taking Master Yoda's advice, "No! Try not. Do...or do not. There is no try."

And "do" they did; in just seven days, this cadre of volunteers removed 1,371 tires, 42,700 pounds of scrap metal, and over 17,000 pounds of garbage from the Iowa River. Totaling 60 tons, 86% percent was recycled, a small portion of which in a very unique way.

The River Gates of Project AWARE can be found on the west side of the DNR building at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Fabricated from trash dredged from Iowa's rivers on Project AWARE, these gates commemorate the efforts of the Project AWARE volunteers and focus on one of Iowa's greatest resources...WATER.

**In 2007, American Rivers listed the Iowa River as number three on its America's Most Endangered Rivers*

FROM THE VOLUNTEER ALLIANCE

"It is amazing what a group of passionate people can do when they get together. Knowing that you're making a difference locally is **more satisfying than any beach vacation** – and you'll still get the staples- sun, sand, water, and fun!"

"Simply being around this group inspires a sincere desire to take better care of the resources we have. It's **truly a profound experience.**"

"It is the best project you could get involved with... it will **change the way you live your life.**"



"I look forward to this event all year long, and if I only had one week of vacation a year, I would use it with Project AWARE."

"Project AWARE goes beyond the "feel good" aspects of cleaning a river, there is a **great sense of community** that is unmatched."

"Cleaning up the river together builds community and supports a clean, healthy environment. It brings us closer to ourselves, our neighbors and the natural world."

10TH ANNUAL PROJECT AWARE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

JULY 7 – 14, 2012 | IOWA RIVER

EVENT STATS	
River Miles	85.1 mi.
Total Participants	387
Average per day	146
Youngest	3 years
Under Age 10	26
Under Age 18	58
Over Age 62	40
Oldest	78 years
Rookies	189
5+ Year Veterans	78
Sponsors	105

SOLID WASTE	
Total Materials Collected	120,720 lbs. (60.4 tons)
Trash: 14%	17,400 lbs. (8.7 tons)
Recyclables: 86%	103,320 lbs. (51.7 tons)
Tires: 1,371	58,120 lbs. (29 tons)
<i>Directly From River</i>	823 tires
<i>Land-based Cleanups</i>	548 tires
Scrap Metal	42,700 lbs. (21.35 tons)
Miscellaneous Recycling	2,500 lbs. (1.25 tons)
<i>(Appliances, Cardboard, Plastic, Redeemable Cans/Bottles)</i>	

WATER QUALITY	
Sites Monitored	28
Transparency*	44 centimeters
Water Temp.*	77°F
Air Temp.*	80°F
pH*	8
Dissolved Oxygen*	5 mg/L **
Nitrate-Nitrogen*	0 mg/L
Nitrite-Nitrogen*	0 mg/L
Phosphate*	0.4 mg/L
Chloride*	less than 32 mg/L
* Median values ** milligrams per Liter	



TRASH WARS

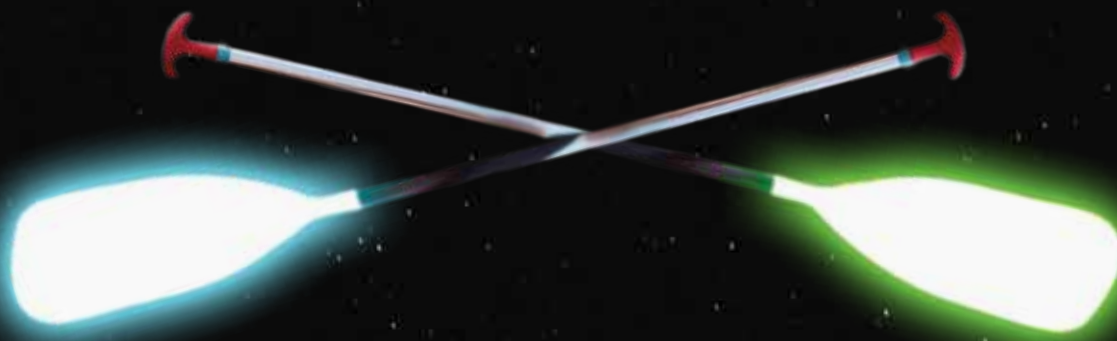
EPISODE 11: RETURN OF THE VOLUNTEERS

Next summer, on the longest river in Iowa...

A target of Project AWARE in 2004, the Des Moines River evaded cleanup that year as high water surged through the watershed. Instead of cleaning up the river, volunteers focused their heroic efforts on area prairies, lakes, and streams, but for the past decade they have remained determined to return to clean up the Des Moines River.

On July 6 - 13, 2013, Project AWARE forces will once again unite, this time targeting 90 miles of the Des Moines River between Algona and Lehigh. Exploring 10-17 miles per day, these volunteers will wage war on trash by day, learn through "infotainment" programs along the way, and connect with the river and communities through which it flows while camping alongside its banks by night.

Join Project AWARE and help clean up the Des Moines River!



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