



BUILDING PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITY

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA PUBLIC HEALTH STRIKE FORCE COVID-19 Public Health Workforce

Iowa Project A.W.A.R.E (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition)

Dates: July 13-14, 2022

Host Sites: Sponsored by Project AWARE, coordinated by N-Compass, Inc., an all-volunteer NPO created to promote environmental education, river cleanups and citizen engagement in the care of Iowa's natural resources.

Location:

The 2022 route covered 63 miles of the West Fork of the Des Moines River, starting in Wallingford, IA, ending at West Bend, IA. Strike Force team member, Nay Fa, participated on Thursday, July 14, starting at Graettinger and ending at Emmetsburg.

Need from Host site:

Volunteers are expected to personal identification, health insurance information, a daypack to bring on the canoe, a personal floatation device, camping gear, and personal items including sunscreen and towels.

Learning Objectives & Gaps Filled:

Through this outdoor conservation experience, students will be able to:

- describe the importance of environmental protection and conservancy and the impact of environmental contaminants related to agricultural and climate change impacts;
- become familiar with issues related to watersheds, geology, archaeology, recycling and other natural resource topics that make Iowa unique and their relationship to public health;
- explain the importance of environmental protection through hands-on experience removing garbage from and exploring Iowa's waterways.

The gaps filled by this trip:

- Introduces students to the public and environmental health initiatives provided by an outdoor educational and statewide cleanup effort,
- Demonstrates the importance of environmental conservation to the health of a community, both physically and economically, and
 - Enforces the importance of and level of success using multi-age, multi-discipline volunteers.

Students Attending: (# of undergraduate & # of graduate students and field of study)

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1 undergraduate, 2 days - BA

Description of project:

For one week each summer, hundreds of kids and adult volunteers converge on a select river to pick up trash during Iowa's largest volunteer river cleanup. During the week, volunteers have fun and get a lot muddy as they explore an Iowa river, remove trash, and learn more about watersheds, geology, archaeology, recycling, and other natural resource topics.

In the 18 years of Iowa Project AWARE, over 918,795 lbs. of trash have been removed from 1,310 river miles.

Description of Field Experience: (student perception & field staff perception)

Each day starts at 7 a.m. with breakfast being served. Lunch foods are available to pack in personal coolers. The student camped at the takeout site on Wednesday night. The volunteers are assigned their canoes, check in with the organizers, are assigned to a team that includes experienced volunteers. The day is spend canoeing and removing trash from the river and riverbanks. Volunteers are advised to wear gloves when handling trash and are required to keep their lifejackets on at all times. Items recovered can include tires, cans, bottles, toys, furniture, engines, and more. At the end of the day, volunteers check in their canoe and take a bus back to camp. Shower houses are sometimes available. As stated in the Project AWARE overview: "Honestly, many participants can tell you that since the majority of the day is spent around trashy, the smell of your fellow volunteers often pales in comparison. You'll also find a dip in the river isn't so bad when shower houses aren't available, and your stench has reached its maximum."

Educational programs are present in the afternoons and evenings of each day. The presentations during the time the Strike Team member participated included evening sessions of "Follow the Water: Local to Global, We Are All Connected" and "Northwest Iowa Archaeology", with the On-River Session held at mile 10 was "1883 Pratt Truss Bridge and Streambank Stabilization Projects" presented by the Palo Alto County Natural Resources Conversation Service

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Summary of Evaluations: (host site & students)

Student Evaluation –

	Strongly Agree	Agree
Timely communication?	X	
Informative experience?		X
Objectives for this project clearly defined?	X	
Your role and responsibilities clearly defined?	X	
Support available when you needed it?	X	
Project AWARE team approachable and available?	X	
Experience's outcome what you expected?	X	

How does this experience enhance your educational goals/field of study?

Project AWARE was an important field experience for me. In this activity, I participated in the cleanup of the river for the first time. Environmental health is also an important part of public health. This experience enhanced my awareness of environmental protection. I realized that the damage to the environment caused by human activities, such as old iron fences and old tires left by human beings, is not only difficult to clean, but also increases the pollution of rivers. However, in the end, humans will also pay for that, because rivers are closely related to human life. The polluted river undoubtedly increases several health hazards. For example, rivers are a source of drinking water for humans. Therefore, it is necessary to protect the environment.

Did this experience expose you to new knowledge you can apply to your academic work? If so, please provide an example(s).

Of course, cooperation is something I learned during this event, and while it may not be new, I think it will be of great help to my academic work. In this event, collaboration is needed everywhere. Canoeing, cleaning iron fences, cleaning tires, etc. all require cooperation. In academic work, cooperation is also necessary, for example, good cooperation can help us get high scores in group work.

What went well?

The staff will actively help me check in and help me find a partner who is proficient in canoeing. They will provide canoeing tools and professional first aid.



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What needs to be improved?

For this time only, the location of the event is a bit far from Iowa City. It takes more than 8 hours to drive back and forth.

What surprised you the most?

The organizers provided free iced drinks and snacks.

Would you do this again?

Yes

19th Annual Iowa Project AWARE Impact Summary West Fork of the Des Moines River, July 10-15, 2022 www.iowaprojectaware.org

2022 Iowa Project AWARE Numbers

- River Miles - 61
- Participants - 348
 - 1st year Participants - 154 (44%)
 - Average participants per day - 200
- Sponsors - 98
- Total Trash & Recyclables – 37,239 lbs (18.6 tons)
 - Recyclables – 33,046 lbs (16.5 tons; 89% recycled)
 - Tires - 300 (10,250 lbs; 5.1 tons)
 - Scrap Metal – 21,460 lbs (10.7 tons)
 - Misc. recycling (plastic; cardboard; pop cans; glass; compost) – 1,336 lbs. (0.67 tons)
 - Trash – 4,193 lbs. (2.1 tons)

2022 Project AWARE Volunteer and Sponsor Summary Stats

- Paddled and removed trash from 61.4 miles of the West Fork of the Des Moines River from Petersburg Access in Minnesota to River Runner Access near West Bend, Iowa.

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- 348 participants registered for the event
- Daily average number of participants on the river – 200. Number of volunteers on the water each day: Monday (208), Tuesday (217), Wednesday (198), Thursday (200), and Friday (174).
- In addition to Iowa, volunteers for this year's Project AWARE were from Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- 154 (44%) of volunteers were first year volunteers; 16 volunteers were recognized for their 5th year on Iowa Project AWARE; 5 participants were recognized for being on Project AWARE 10 year, and 1 participant was recognized for 15 years.
- Volunteers ranged in age from 4 to 80; 93 (27%) of this year's participants were 18 years or younger; 13 (4%) were under 10 years of age; 56 (16%) of the volunteers were age 62 or older.
- 111 volunteers (32%) were registered for all five days on the river.
 - Participants included a group from Pizza Ranch Corporate in Orange City participating as part of their Service from the Heart program. Conservation Corps of Iowa had 41 members participate, including 6 as Iowa Project AWARE staff for the week. Several Green Iowa AmeriCorps members also attended. POET had employees from seven facilities in Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota participate. A youth group from Grace United Methodist Church in Des Moines chose Iowa Project AWARE as their work project to benefit the environment.
 - 98 sponsors made this event possible through both monetary and in-kind donations. Grants supporting this year's event include: Alliant Energy, Arthur W. and Audrey K. Smith Foundation, Cargill, Emmet County Community Foundation, MidAmerican Energy, and REI Co-op.

Click the following to enjoy photos from the 2022 Iowa Project AWARE river cleanup on the West Fork of the Des Moines River.

- [Google Photo Album](#)
- [Dropbox](#) - includes photos and evening slideshows

Nikoel Hytrek, a reporter with Iowa Starting Line, joined us on the river Wednesday. For her article, go to:

<https://iowastartingline.com/2022/07/19/a-day-on-the-river-with-iowas-waterway-clean-up-crew/>

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Blog - [Tire Trash Treasure Phenomenon](#)

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