Iowa River Impairments of aquatic life and recreation uses

There are 8 segments of the Iowa River on Iowa's 2004 list of impaired waters totaling 98 miles and about 32 percent of the total river length of 309 miles. Six of the impaired segments are listed because recreation uses are impaired by high bacteria levels and four segments are listed because of declining freshwater mussel species in the river, including several species that are listed as threatened and endangered.

In the upper part of the river in Hardin County, the local communities have worked hard to protect the river corridor through a partnership effort to protect and restore the Iowa River greenbelt. Yet despite these efforts, the Iowa River downstream of Eldora is one of the segments listed on the impaired waters list because of high bacteria levels. Several tributaries of the Iowa River in the area have a history of manure spills and repeated fish kills and this pollution is contributing to the problems in the Iowa River downstream. In fact, the area around the Iowa River in Hardin, Hamilton and Wright Counties has the highest concentration of large livestock confinements anywhere in the state.

Down river in Johnson County, near the town of Iowa City there is a different problem affecting the river. The entire length of the Iowa River in Johnson County is listed as impaired because of high bacteria levels. A major source of this impairment is human sewage from small communities that have no public sewer systems or have failing sewage treatment systems.

Four segments of the river have aquatic life uses impaired due to more than 50% decline in freshwater mussel species. Three of these impaired segments are in Johnson County downstream of the Iowa City area (2 of these segments are also impaired by bacteria). The fourth mussel impaired segment is in Louisa County.

Iowa River List of Impairments

Location on Iowa River	Length of Segment (Miles)	Cause of Impairment	Use Impaired	Comments
Louisa Co., from Cedar R. to Johnson/ Washington Co. line	17.7	biological	aquatic life	ISU mussel surveys found greater then 50% decline in Mussel species compared to past surveys.
Johnson Co. / Washington Co. line to English R.	5.6	biological	aquatic life	ISU mussel surveys found greater then 50% decline in Mussel species compared to past surveys.
Johnson Co., from English R. to Burlington St. dam in Iowa City	19.5	indicator bacteria and biological	primary contact recreation and aquatic life	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards. ISU mussel surveys found greater then 50% decline in Mussel species compared to past surveys.
Johnson Co., from Burlington St. dam to Coralville dam	8.8	indicator bacteria and biological	primary contact recreation and aquatic life	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards. ISU mussel surveys found greater then 50% decline in Mussel species compared to past surveys.

Johnson Co., from upper end Coralville Reservoir to Hwy 149 in Iowa Co.	16.4	indicator bacteria	primary contact recreation	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards.
Marshall Co., from Timber Cr. to Asher Cr	13.7	indicator bacteria	primary contact recreation	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards.
Marshall Co., from Asher Cr to Minerva Cr	8	indicator bacteria	primary contact recreation	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards.
Hardin Co., from South Fork Iowa R. to Pine Creek	8.5	indicator bacteria	primary contact recreation	DNR ambient monitoring found E coli bacteria exceeds recreation use standards.