

Council calls for standards to protect clean water and recreation in Iowa lakes



Center Lake, Dickinson County

Petition filed with rulemaking panel of Iowa DNR

On August 20, the Iowa Environmental Council and the Environmental Law and Policy Center filed a petition for rule making with the DNR. The petition calls on DNR to set water quality standards to protect clean water, public health, and recreation at 159 of Iowa's most significant recreational lakes.

Clean water standards for Iowa's lakes

Water quality standards called for in the petition will provide local communities and watershed groups a way to know if conservation efforts around their lake are working to achieve needed results. Standards will also help DNR write more effective permits that protect lakes from discharges by industrial and municipal wastewater facilities.

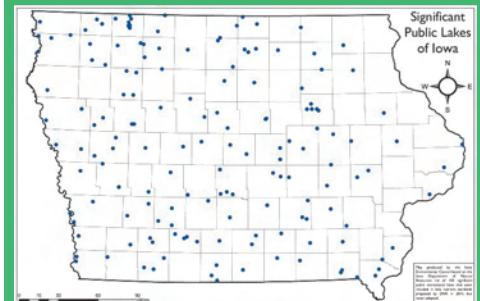
Defined targets for water clarity and algae

The proposed standards define acceptable levels of water clarity and suspended algae in Iowa lakes. They also define maximum acceptable concentrations of phosphorus and nitrogen, the pollutants that cause poor water clarity and harmful algae blooms. The proposed standards are directly based on recommendations from a science advisory committee convened by DNR in 2007. The scientists' recommendations for water quality standards at recreational lakes were never brought to the EPC for a final vote.

EPC has sixty days to grant or deny the petition. Visit the Council's website to see the petition, a memo explaining the purpose and history of the proposed rules, and a large map showing the names and counties of lakes covered by the proposed rules. <http://www.iaenvironment.org/news/pressreleases.php>



Harmful algae blooms produce toxins that have exceeded DNR's safe swimming guidelines for state parks 68 times since 2006.



IEC and ELPC have petitioned for the establishment of water quality standards for 159 of Iowa's most significant recreational lakes.

The **Iowa Environmental Council** is an alliance of diverse organizations and individuals working together to protect Iowa's natural environment. Our mission is to provide a safe, healthy environment and sustainable future for Iowa.

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Clean lakes are an economic asset for many communities

- 11.9 million visits in 2011
- \$1.2 billion in spending
- Over 14,000 jobs

Source: CARD, Iowa State University

Potential effects of contact with harmful algae blooms

- Rashes, hives, and blisters
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Death in pets and livestock

Source: Iowa Department of Public Health

Frequently asked questions

Why are numeric water quality standards needed?

Iowa's lakes have among the highest levels of nitrogen and phosphorus found anywhere in the world. Reducing polluted runoff and soil erosion affecting lakes is essential to cleaning them up.

The proposed water quality standards serve as goals to define what the people of Iowa expect healthy lakes to look like. Our lakes are currently protected from excessive algae and turbidity by only a narrative standard, which simply states that lakes shall be free from "aesthetically objectionable conditions." Thus, an Iowa lake cannot be listed as "impaired," and become eligible for increased federal and state restoration funding, until it has already developed a serious water quality problem. The numeric water quality standards proposed by the science advisory committee, and in our petition, set goals that will *protect* our lakes from offensive conditions, rather than *react* to them.

Will these standards mean that point sources (cities or industrial sites) will have to upgrade their treatment technology?

The impact of this rule on point sources is likely to be minor. In 2011, DNR identified only 17 permitted facilities that discharge to a lake covered by the proposed rule. Eleven of those facilities discharge to a lake that is already designated as impaired for excess nutrients under Iowa's current narrative standards which prohibit "aesthetically objectionable conditions." Therefore, this rule would have minimal additional effect on those 11 facilities.

Do the same standards apply to every lake?

The petition proposes standards that would provide a basic level of protection at 159 of Iowa's most significant recreational lakes. However, if additional research at a particular lake shows that different standards would be more effective at maintaining clean water there, the petition suggests that DNR should be granted authority to develop and use "site specific" standards that would apply only to that lake.

Will voluntary programs designed to improve lake water quality become mandatory if a lake is impaired?

No. Voluntary efforts by watershed improvement groups will remain voluntary under this rule. In fact, those voluntary efforts will be aided by this rule. When a lake is designated as impaired, DNR conducts extensive monitoring and research to determine the nature and sources of the impairment. This information can help watershed groups target their voluntary nutrient reduction efforts to where they are needed most. An impairment designation will also increase those groups' access to federal and state money for voluntary restoration projects within the watershed.

Will this rule cause beach closings?

No. There is no regulation of beaches within this rule. The discretion to close a beach due to the presence of harmful algae will be left up to beach managers, as it is now. This rule will have no effect on the public's access to lakes or beaches.

"It scared most of us into realizing what a big cesspool we could be living on if we don't do something about it."

—Spirit Lake resident Kim Stroud, discussing an algae bloom on the lake last summer.



▲ Rock Creek Lake, near Kellogg



▲ Five Island Lake, Emmetsburg



▲ Big Creek Lake, Polk City



▲ Malone Park Lake, DeWitt