

WEEKLY

# WATER WATCH

IOWA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

**There are FOUR beach advisories for the week of**

**7/5**

**3 Beaches with E.Coli-Related Advisory:**

Backbone Beach (*Dundee, Delaware County, IA*)

Lower Pine Lake Beach (*Eldora, Hardin County, IA*)

McIntosh Woods Beach (*Ventura, Cerro Gordo County, IA*)

**1 Beach with a Microcystin-Related Advisory:**

Green Valley Lake Beach (*Creston, Union County, IA*)

## **Numeric Nutrient Criteria are Necessary to Protect Iowa's Lakes**

Protecting Iowa's lakes from nutrient pollution is vital for public health and the economic vitality of the communities that rely on lakes to bring in tourism dollars. Nutrient pollution, which includes nitrogen and phosphorus, contributes to the growth of harmful algae blooms that reduce lake water clarity and create patches of foul-smelling muck on the water's surface that choke Iowa's lakes. The algae blooms

can also produce toxic microcystin, which can cause serious illness in people and pets. With four microcystin warnings so far this summer, harmful algae blooms are not unusual in Iowa, but they are not normal for a healthy lake.



*Algae bloom at Rock Creek State Park in 2013.*

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has been calling on states to establish numeric limits on nutrient pollution in waterbodies for decades, and numeric nutrient criteria (NNC) are expected to be a part of a state's nutrient reduction strategy. **Numeric limits are vital for establishing the amount of nutrient pollution a lake can withstand while remaining usable.** During a process led by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2008, scientists developed recommendations for recreational lake NNC, but rulemaking to codify those recommendations was never completed. Current standards for nutrient pollution are narrative – they essentially state that the water should be reasonably clear and not have floating patches of algae. Numeric criteria are science-based, objective standards that would establish a threshold to protect against the conditions that make it possible for harmful algae blooms to occur.

In 2013 and again in November 2018, IEC and the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) petitioned the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) to initiate rulemaking to set NNC for recreational lakes. The EPC denied IEC and ELPC's first petition in 2013, arguing that the then newly-adopted Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) should be given time to work. The EPC denied IEC and ELPC's latest petition in February 2019, again citing the existence of the state's NRS and narrative standards.

**Over five years since the adoption of the NRS, Iowa has seen an increasing trend in microcystin warnings.** The NRS calls for voluntary adoption of conservation practices that reduce nutrient pollution from agricultural sources. The voluntary approach is not working to curb the pollution

facing Iowa's lakes. Furthermore, the NRS is not a substitute for water quality standards required by the Clean Water Act. IEC continues to explore options to call for the adoption of recreational lake NNC, a step that is necessary to protect public health and fulfill statutory water quality requirements.

- Grace Holbrook  
IEC Water Program Contractor

[Read more about the EPC's denial of the petition](#)



## Microcystin: An Alarming Trend

Over the past ten years, the number of annual swim advisories issued for microcystin, a harmful cyanobacteria created by some blue-green algae, by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has increased dramatically. [Take a look at the historical data of microcystin advisories.](#)



## Safe to Swim?

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) conducts weekly monitoring of 39 state park beaches in Iowa for microcystin and E.coli. We're tracking the IDNR weekly monitoring reports - [find out which Iowa state park beaches are currently under swim advisories.](#)



Summer sunset on Lake Okoboji!  
Send us your holiday weekend  
photos to be featured on  
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## What's New in Iowa's Water News

[The world's appetite is threatening the Mississippi River](#) (*Wall Street Journal*)

["No swim" advisories at public beaches amid water quality concerns](#) (*Iowa Public Radio*)

[After the flash flood: Fourmile, Beavertdale one year after a devastating deluge](#) (*Des Moines Register*)



## Recent Research & Reports

[Choosing the right stream: How Iowa can keep clean water priorities and funding equity together](#) - David

Osterberg, Peter Fisher, and Natalie Veldhouse. July 2, 2019, [www.iowapolicyproject.org](http://www.iowapolicyproject.org).



## Upcoming Water Events

[Women, Farming, and the Future: Your Land, Your Decisions - Perry](#) - July 18

[Women for Water Happy Hour](#) - Perry - July 18

[Iowa Summer Games: Canoe Kayak](#) - Ames - July 20

[Point to Point Swim and IEC Breakfast on the Beach](#) - West Lake Okoboji - August 3

[Okoboji Blue Water Festival](#) - Arnolds Park - August 10

[River Run Garbage Grab](#) - Saylorville to Yellow Banks Park - August 16

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