



# The Environmental Advocate

S P R I N G 2 0 0 3

Published by  
Environmental Advocates  
P.O. Box 1831  
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## The Clean Water Act Needs Your Help By April 16

adapted by Becky Soglin from information provided by Iowa Wetlands in Need (IWIN) and the Sierra Club

Federal rulemaking soon will address how the Corps of Engineers, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), will protect "Waters of the United States" as those waters are defined in the Clean Water Act. Individuals and organizations have the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes by April 16—and help protect all waterways that do not possess a year-round surface connection to a traditionally navigable waterway, i.e., isolated wetland as well as small streams (ephemeral and/or intermittent), small ponds and waters that flow through a man-made conveyance.

The rulemaking comes in light of a 1991 Supreme Court decision known as Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County (SWANCC), a decision Environmental Advocates and Iowa Wetlands in Need (IWIN) have addressed over these past two years. SWANCC changed the way the Act worked, by determining that use of a wetland by migratory birds is not enough reason to protect that water under the Act. An extension of that ruling (which is inconsistently applied across Corps districts) is that wetlands are only protected if they are navigable by watercraft.

Iowa's landscape is dotted with wetlands that were protected by the Clean Water Act prior to SWANCC. These wetlands formed as part of our state's natural history, and while they are often not connected to navigable waterways, they're still wetlands in terms of their soils, hydrology, and vegetation. And they still function in ways that are familiar to us: they store floodwater, provide habitat, allow for the deposition of sediments and other pollutants, and perform other critical functions in a hydrologic cycle.

By April 16, the public may comment on this rulemaking, and we encourage you to address in particular how it reflects our concerns for Iowa waters.

To prepare a comment, you can easily educate yourself about the issue (sites

## Clean Water Authority Restoration Act of 2003

### In this issue

New Water Plant	page 2
Spring Grants Awarded	page 3
Board Members Needed	page 3
EPA Listening Session	page 4
Iowa Wetlands Update	page 5
Wetlands Update	page 5

### Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 29  
10:30 am–12:30 pm  
Iowa City Public Library  
Meeting Room A  
Johnson County Heritage Trust  
sponsors "[Saving Land with Conservation Easements](#)"

Tuesday, April 15  
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Second Floor Ballroom  
University of Iowa Memorial Union  
[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) public listening session](#) to shape a "National Agenda on the Environment and Aging"

Tuesday, April 22  
6:30 pm  
Zion Lutheran Church (310 N. Johnson St. in Iowa City)  
[Environmental Advocates Annual Board Elections and Spring Presentation](#)

. . . cont. on page 5

# The Water We Drink

Ken Bickner spoke with the Iowa City water department's information officer, Carol Sweeting, about the new water plant.

## **With the new water plant on line, will we still be drinking river water?**

The water for the plant comes from alluvial aquifers. They're "river influenced," meaning some of the soluble contaminants in the river water come in through the wells, but the water is filtered through several hundred feet of sand and gravel before it gets to the well. The river intake you see north of the I-80 bridge is for future capacity.

## **What about deep well water?**

Maybe one percent of total use will be from Silurian and Jordan aquifers will mostly be used when the contaminant levels in the river are high, so we can avoid pulling contaminants into the alluvial aquifer. There's a concern about lowering the water levels in these aquifers, so we won't be relying on them heavily.

## **Will the "river influenced" alluvial water still contain nitrate and agricultural chemicals like atrazine and alachlor?**

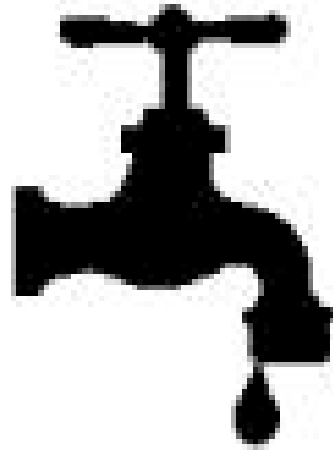
Both nitrates and ag chemicals will be present, but at lower levels than we had with the river water. The water plant filters have three feet of activated carbon, which will reduce the remaining ag chemicals to very low levels.

## **What effect will the use of chloramines [a chemical combination of ammonia and chlorine] have on the levels of disinfection byproducts, which are regulated for their health effects?**

Chloramines, along with the much cleaner water we're getting out of the wells, will allow us to stay well below the standards set by the EPA. We'll be using chlorine until the chloramines come on line in June. Bear in mind, the law requires us to use a disinfecting chemical because otherwise bacteria can grow in the distribution system.

## **Has the Iowa City water department worked on building a coalition to protect the quality of water in the Iowa River so that some of these contaminants can be avoided?**

Most of the Iowa River basin from our intake up to the Amanas is in nature reserves. The new intake is upstream of Clear Creek, which has generally carried much higher contaminant levels than the Iowa River, so we are avoiding that source. As far as building a coalition upstream beyond the Amanas, it might be hard because we're the only city that uses Iowa River water for drinking.



## **A personal question, if you don't mind: Do you drink Iowa City tap water?**

Absolutely.

## **Do you use a filter?**

I used to soften and use an activated carbon filter, because my kids didn't like the taste of chlorine. I plan to stop using the filter. It's important for people to remember, if you're filtering your water under a doctor's orders—which some people do because of allergies and so on—you should talk to your doctor before you stop. But when I'm away from home, like at the plant, I drink it as it comes from the tap.

## **EA Newsletter Goes Quarterly**

Beginning with this issue, the *Environmental Advocate* will now be published quarterly.

The newsletter is put together and published by EA boardmembers and the decision to switch to a quarterly publishing schedule was made by the board. This decision was based on the time and cost involved in publishing a bi-monthly newsletter.

# Environmental Advocates Awards Spring Grants

Environmental Advocates (EA) has awarded three grants for its spring 2003 grants program.

A \$500 grant was awarded to the Roosevelt Elementary School science program, under the direction of Vicki Saunders, to establish a rain garden of native plants near the Bloomington Street entrance of Hickory Hill Park. Science students will participate in planning and planting local ecotype vegetation. The rain garden will soak up excess rainwater reducing soil erosion, stream bank degradation, and runoff into Ralston Creek, part of the Iowa River watershed, while also providing wildlife habitat. Additional support for this project will be provided by Friends of Hickory Hill Park.

A grant of \$500 will help students in the ECHO program at Clear Creek Amana High School convert a 5 acre soybean field into a high quality outdoor classroom. Under the leadership of Ellen Hartz, environmental science teacher and EA member, students will plant native prairie plants and seeds for a prairie 'arboretum'. Native wetland plants will be established in a wetland wastewater treatment system. In addition, a riparian area near a drainage ditch will be restored with native plants, and a windbreak of trees will be established.

An award of \$400 will help a member of Iowa Wetlands in Need (IWIN) attend a wetlands conference sponsored by the Isaac Walton League in May in Minneapolis. The grant will cover conference attendance fees and lodging costs. The purpose of the conference is to educate and inspire people to initiate and sustain on-the-ground wetland conservation and education projects. The conference attendee will conduct a wetland conservation or education project in Johnson County following the conference.

The EA grants program supports projects that make the Johnson County area environment cleaner, safer and more life sustaining. The next EA grants application deadline is October 1.

For more information, contact Jennifer Hurley O'Hara, EA grants coordinator at 624-3954 or [jandsohara@juno.com](mailto:jandsohara@juno.com), or visit the EA web site at [www.environmental-advocates.org](http://www.environmental-advocates.org) for a copy of the application form.

## Spring Fever? Turn That Energy Loose on Environmental Advocates!

We're seeking three board members to serve two-year terms, beginning in May. Board members define and work on local environmental issues, help plan monthly educational events, and vote on providing awards to deserving groups with innovative ideas. Board meetings are held monthly, with the exception of August. Participation on the board can give you the opportunity to develop new skills or interests -- such as writing news releases or learning how a prairie is restored -- and to partner with many individuals and organizations working on progressive environment causes.

If you are interested in running for a spot on the board, contact Becky Soglin, current EA chair, at 351-6410 or [bsoglin@earthlink](mailto:bsoglin@earthlink), by Friday, April 11. This year's board election will be held April 22 (however, you need not need to be present to win!).

## Wetlands Protection in Iowa

At the time this newsletter was going to press, EA learned from Jane Clark of the Sierra Club that there is a new wetland bill proposed in the Iowa legislature that seems very good overall. The bill is HF 287, submitted by Rep. Pam Jochum of the Dubuque area. We encourage you to review the bill and provide comments, as needed.

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### about this newsletter...

The *Environmental Advocate* is the newsletter of Environmental Advocates, P.O. Box 1831, Iowa City, IA 52244. An elected board of directors sets policy and oversees the organization's activities.

EA welcomes letters and submissions to the newsletter. We reserve the right to reject or edit any submission; articles represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of EA. If you would like to contribute, contact Sarah Walz, newsletter editor, at 466-0908 or by e-mail at [sarah-walz@uiowa.edu](mailto:sarah-walz@uiowa.edu).

E-mail submissions should have all text included within the body of the message; no attachments, please.

## The University of Iowa to Host Public Listening Session on the Environment and Aging

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will hold a public listening session to shape a "National Agenda on the Environment and Aging" on the University of Iowa campus. Because of space limitations, individuals who want to attend or speak must pre-register for the event, which will be held in the Second Floor Ballroom of the Iowa Memorial Union (corner of Jefferson and Madison Streets). The registration deadline is April 8.

The event is co-sponsored by the UI College of Public Health, the UI Center on Aging and the Heritage Area Agency on Aging. For more information about attending the event, contact Lori Benz at the UI Center on Aging at (319) 335-6546 or [lori-benz@uiowa.edu](mailto:lori-benz@uiowa.edu). Information also is available online at the UI Center on Aging Web site [http://www.uiowa.edu/~centrage/res5\\_news\\_frm.htm](http://www.uiowa.edu/~centrage/res5_news_frm.htm).

## The Environmental Protection Agency wants to hear:

- What environmental health threats affect older persons
- What interventions will prevent exposure to these hazards
- What impact could a rapidly aging population have on the environment
- How to encourage volunteerism among older persons in their communities to reduce these hazards

Tuesday, April 15, 2003

1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Second Floor Ballroom

University of Iowa Memorial Union

Corner of Jefferson and Madison Streets

Iowa City, IA

Free shuttle service from the Iowa City Senior Center, 28 S Linn St., to the IMU every 15 minutes from 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. with a return shuttle from 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

Pre-registration is required. Go to ([www.epa.gov/aging/agenda](http://www.epa.gov/aging/agenda)). Registration deadline is April 8.

**Be Heard. Be Involved. Register Today.**

For additional event details, see <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ournews/2003/march/031003epa-session.html>.

### JOIN US!

Become a member or renew your membership

\$10 member     \$25 sponsor     \$50 supporter     other

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

EA occasionally provides mailing labels (never mailing lists) to other groups for single-use to contact our membership about events we feel are reputable and of interest. If you do not wish to have your address shared, please mark this box.

### RETAIN THIS RECEIPT FOR TAX PURPOSES

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Make check payable to **Environmental Advocates** and mail with this form to:  
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cont. from page 1 . . .

listed below). The Clean Water Network in Washington, DC is working to engage persons across the country who can share their reasons why the scope of SWANCC should be narrowly interpreted. A narrow interpretation of SWANCC would help Iowa preserve its few remaining wetlands leaving our fens, swamps, bogs, and seeps to provide habitat; preserve water quality; manage stormwater volumes and velocities; and play their precise roles in our hydrologic balancing act.

A possible legislative fix could restore the Clean Water Act's authority over all waters of the United States. If passed, this bill would trump the actions being taken by the EPA and the Corps described above. However, it still is important that you send comments to the EPA on the separate proposed rulemaking.

## TIPS:

- **To find out more about CWN's efforts**, visit their web site at [www.cwn.org](http://www.cwn.org). Their Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator is Ryan Hamilton, and his telephone number is 202/289-2421. If you want to send correspondence to CWN in the mail, you should send it to Clean Water Network, 1200 New York Ave NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005.
- **To learn more about SWANCC**, go to [www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/swanccnav.html](http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/swanccnav.html). This site will also provide you with information about the Advance Notice for Public Rule-Making.
- **To see a sample letter**, visit this Sierra Club site: [http://www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/get\\_involved.asp#influence](http://www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/get_involved.asp#influence)
- **For more information about local efforts**, or additional guidance on the issue, contact Iowa Wetlands In Need, at 338-9185, or by email at [jtallman@avalon.net](mailto:jtallman@avalon.net) or [bsoglin@earthlink.net](mailto:bsoglin@earthlink.net).

Your comment may be submitted electronically to the EPA at <http://www.epa.gov/edocket>. The docket number is OW-2002-0050. If you want to send your comment in the mail, send it to US EPA Region 7, Office of External Programs, 901 N. 5th Street, Kansas City, Kansas 66101, with a note on the outside of the envelope, specifying the docket number, and that a comment is enclosed.

### Clean Water Authority Restoration Act of 2003

Senators Feingold (D-WI), Jeffords (I-VT) and Boxer (D-CA) in the Senate, and Representatives Oberstar (D-MN), Dingell (D-MI), Leach (R-IA), Boehlert (R-NY) and other members of the House introduced this legislation at a press conference on Capitol Hill on Thursday, February 27. This bill will ensure federal protection is maintained for all U.S. waters.

### Go to [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov) to view the text of the legislation.

Relevant bill numbers: H.R. 962 and S. 473 Congress should clarify the Clean Water Act so that it says that small water bodies deserve the same protection as large ones.

## Special Events

### Conservation Easement Seminar

March 29, Iowa City, IA  
The Johnson County Heritage Trust is sponsoring a seminar in Meeting Room A of the Iowa City Public Library on "Saving Land with Conservation Easements" from 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Seminar leader will be Bruce Mountain from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. The seminar is part of the JCHT's 25th Anniversary celebrations and is open to the public.

### Grinnell Students Host Environmental Conference

April 4-6, Grinnell, IA  
Grinnell College's "Free The Planet!" chapter will host a conference on environmental issues. Speakers include John Pasacantanto (Director of Greenpeace USA), Liz Butler (The Paper Campaign) and other leaders of major environmental organizations. For more information, contact [ftp@grinnell.ed](mailto:ftp@grinnell.ed).

### Friends of Hickory Hill Park Invasive Species Project

April 12, Iowa City, IA  
Friends of Hickory Hill Park will sponsor an educational event on controlling garlic mustard. At 9:00 am, Brad Freidhof, Johnson County naturalist at F.W. Kent Park, will describe garlic mustard and the safe methods for controlling its spread. Following Brad's talk volunteers will help pull garlic mustard in the woodland areas of the park. All volunteers will receive a free woodland plant guide. For more information contact Sarah Walz at 466-0908.

### National Wetlands Conference

May 1-4, Minneapolis, MN  
The Izaak Walton League of America's biennial American Wetlands Conference is an important training and networking opportunity for anyone interested in wetland conservation. An agenda, travel information, and more conference details are available at <http://www.iwla.org/sos/awm/conference> or by calling 800/BUG-IWLA.



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## Support Iowa Shares

Iowa Shares is a coalition of 18 social and environmental nonprofit organizations working to build better communities through research, education, advocacy and direct service. Environmental Advocates, Women's Resource & Action Center and United Nations Association are three local organizations addressing community problems at their roots.



Payroll deduction is available through the University of Iowa and Iowa City Community Schools. Donors can give cash or checks. Contact: Del Holland, 338-5220 or Jean Martin 351-6391 for further information.

Environmental Advocates

# Annual Board Elections and Spring Presentation

Tuesday evening, April 22  
Zion Lutheran Church (310 N. Johnson St. in Iowa City)

To welcome spring and celebrate Earth Day, join us Tuesday, April 22 for hors d'oeuvres and a **colorful presentation on the natural history of local butterflies** by **Steve Hendrix**, University of Iowa professor of biological sciences. Prof. Hendrix "Butterflies in Your Pocket" guide will be published this spring by University of Iowa Press.

Socializing begins at 6:30 p.m. with tasty treats provided free of charge. A painless and quick board election will take place around 7 p.m. The butterfly presentation will begin at 7:15 p.m. We expect to have guides available for purchase at the event.

For more information, contact Becky at 351-6410 or [bsoglin@earthlink.net](mailto:bsoglin@earthlink.net)

