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## **STATE'S LARGEST RIVER CLEANUP SET TO TAKE ON THE WEST FORK OF THE DES MOINES RIVER**

JACKSON, EMMET & PALO ALTO COUNTIES – As of March 15, volunteer registration will be available for the 19<sup>th</sup> Iowa Project AWARE river cleanup event.

The West Fork of the Des Moines River, beginning in Minnesota, and extending into northwest Iowa, will be cleaner, safer and prettier after this summer. This July, hundreds of volunteers will spend their vacation hauling garbage from sixty-one miles of the West Fork of the Des Moines River from Petersburg, Minnesota to near West Bend, Iowa.

“This will be the 17<sup>th</sup> year the State Hygienic Laboratory at the University of Iowa has been a major sponsor of the event” says SHL employee Louise Biderman. “Last year was my first time on AWARE and I was impressed by the enthusiasm and comradery shown by the volunteers and staff. I’m excited to return!”

“We are excited to be a part of this year’s project,” says Penny Clayton with the City of Estherville, “Not only will the cleanup directly benefit our local river ecosystem, improve water quality and increase recreational potential, the event also heightens awareness to the community and bring volunteers together to work on this worthwhile effort.”

The “AWARE” of Iowa Project AWARE stands for A Watershed Awareness River Expedition and is scheduled for July 10-15. Iowa Project AWARE is an unparalleled event where volunteers of all ages embark on a multi-day river cleanup that allows the convenience of participation in one day, all six, or anything in between.

Iowa Project AWARE provides a unique opportunity for Iowans to actively improve the quality of our rivers. Since 2003, nearly 3,000 volunteers have removed over 459 tons of trash from rivers all around Iowa. What’s even more impressive is that 78% of the garbage has been recycled. In previous years, a creative-thinking volunteer even used the proceeds from the scrap metal to stock the river with walleye fingerlings!

From personal experience, longtime volunteer Sara Mildenstein reflects, “I am always astonished by the different things we find in the river each summer. Cars, tractor tires (highly coveted), bowling pins, bags full of gym clothes lost during someone’s camping trip. What’s funnier than the trash we find is the efforts of Iowa Project A.W.A.R.E. volunteers will go to get it out.”

Not only is giving back to the environment an instantly gratifying experience, but you also bond with fellow outdoor enthusiasts in your community. Campsites provide an intimate experience with fellow volunteers where everyone unwinds and chats with one another after a day on the river. But the fun doesn’t stop there. Multiple educational programs are held each night ranging in topics from geology, ecology and natural resources to local history and archeology. This year, volunteers will paddle the entire length of the newly-dedicated West Fork of the Des Moines River Water Trail in Emmet County.

For more information about Iowa Project AWARE, or to register as a river cleanup volunteer please visit [www.iowaprojectaware.org](http://www.iowaprojectaware.org).