

Report: River Cleanup, October 2nd, 2021

9-1 pm

Organizers and sponsors

City of Ames: Liz Calhoun, Jake Moore

Skunk River Paddlers: Rick Dietz, Cindy Barrowcliff

Prairie Rivers of Iowa: Dan Haug, Mike Kellner

Story County Conservation: Sarah Carmichael

Thank you to OASCO for supporting this event by providing food for volunteers. The \$250 covered five boxes of Jimmy John's mini sandwiches, chips, granola bars, and cookies. We encouraged volunteers to bring their own water bottles (but brought a few extras left from another event) and brought jugs for refills.

Volunteers

29 people participated. This included 5 City of Ames employees, 3 Prairie Rivers of Iowa employees, and 1 Story County Conservation employee. Aside from staff, all but one of the volunteers that registered had Ames addresses—the exception was from West Des Moines.



Route covered

We cleaned up 3 miles of Ioway Creek, starting at the wellfield east of South Duff and ending at South Grand. If time had permitted, we would have gone all the way to Brookside Park, but this stretch had the most trash and took longer than expected.

Near start, by well-field



Approaching S. Duff Ave



Ending point at Grand Ave.



Using the SARTOPO backcountry hiking app, we collected GPS data tracking our movements.

Blue: On reconnaissance Tuesday, Rick Dietz took 20 minutes to walk the first section to South Duff (0.6 miles) and 22 minutes to walk the second section to Grand Ave (0.9 miles), including a few stops on the first section to uncover trash.

Red: During the event on Saturday, it took us four times what it might have taken to walk! Due to backtracking and detours to gather trash, Dan Haug's track was 3 miles and took 3 hours, evenly split between the two sections.



Logistics

Volunteers walked on sandbars and waded in ankle deep water. We used mesh bags and buckets for small trash and used wheeled bins for larger items.



We had designated trash drop-off points at bridges. Two interns with the City of Ames loaded the trash into a pickup truck and unloaded it into the roll-off located at Furman Aquatic Center, making four trips.



Story County Conservation (Sarah Carmichael) shuttled volunteers between Furman Aquatic Center and the drop points on the river in a 13 passenger van.

The City of Ames ordered backpack style drawstring swag bags emblazoned with River Town of the Year, and tiny spray canisters of disinfectant. The bags were helpful for keeping hands free while carrying a water bottle. They also had tiny spray bottles of disinfectant.

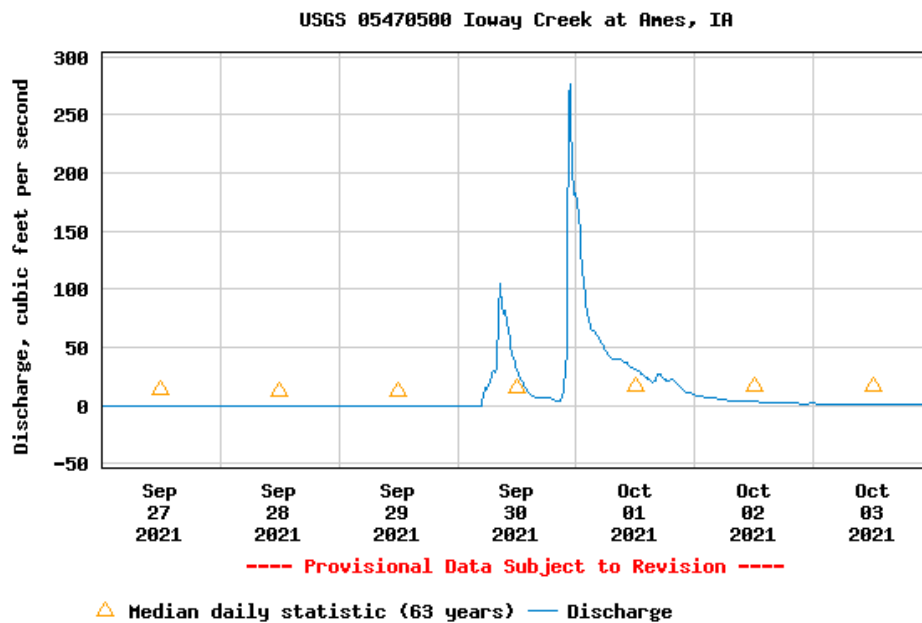
Registration was done with a form on Prairie Rivers of Iowa's webpage, and followup email from City of Ames with directions and liability release, and an in-person check-in.

Mike Kellner (Prairie Rivers of Iowa) was the designated photographer.

We had three models for river cleanup events.

- In Project AWARE, volunteers paddle canoes and pick up trash along the way.
- In the Skunk River Navy, volunteers walk (and sometimes wade or swim) and pull canoes that are loaded with trash.
- In the College Creek Cleanup (Iowa State University), volunteers walk in the stream or along the banks and pile up trash on the edge of the stream corridor, where it can be picked up by a truck or utility vehicle.

Due unexpected heavy rains (3.5 inches over two days), we were not certain until the last minute whether we would walk or pull canoes. With the drought this year, Ioway Creek has been very flashy, quickly returning to a low level (or drying up completely) within a day or two of a rainstorm. The upper section of the river had deeper pools (knee to waist deep on Friday morning), but less trash.



Trash removed

2,500 pounds of trash were removed, including 13 car tires. A few intrepid volunteers (Rick, R.J. and Ida) went back to retrieve an engine block and more trash from an upper stretch.



The strangest pieces of trash recovered were this gargoyle and a baby stroller.



The mattresses we left in place, as they were heavy and partially decomposed. Much of the trash likely came from homeless encampments near the river.



Future events

There was enthusiasm from City of Ames and other partners to do this again next year and try to make it an annual tradition—Jake Moore even suggested doing one in spring and one in fall. A better option might be to do one river cleanup in the Ames area and the second in another part of Story County—the South Skunk River, Indian Creek in Nevada, and Bear Creek in Roland would be candidates. Jake noted that the smaller tributaries in Ames have plenty of trash, but may have steep banks and thick brush.

Overall, the organizers felt the event went smoothly and the same methods could be employed again if water levels are low. The only headache were the bins, which were difficult to pull through water and mud when full. Next time, we might try a utility vehicle if water levels are dry enough. If water levels are higher, a canoe would allow us to haul heavier items while covering more ground.



Why it matters

A river cleanup event like this furthers outdoor recreation and conservation by:

1. Getting people in the creek and experiencing nature from a different perspective
2. Removing unsightly trash from the creek so that the experience is more enjoyable for the next people who hike or paddle along it.
3. Creating some compelling visuals that can help remind Story County residents to pick up after themselves.
4. Removing items that could harm wildlife



loway Creek may be in an urban area, and the lower stretch is under construction for a flood control project but it is still a place of beauty and a wildlife corridor. While wading in the creek for reconnaissance on Friday, Dan Haug spotted a heron, bald eagle and woodchuck. We saw kingfishers and frogs on Saturday.

