

Help Support Restoration of the Maquoketa River

January 3, 2012



To: All Concerned Citizens and Organizations of Iowa

We invite you to join us in supporting the restoration of the Maquoketa River and opposing the use of state monies towards rebuilding a failed dam that would re-create an environmentally and economically costly river impoundment.

The previous impoundment, known as Lake Delhi, was created on the Maquoketa River with the construction of a hydroelectric dam during the 1920s. Power generation ceased in 1973. The dam failed on July 24, 2010. The failure caused considerable damage downstream with millions of cubic yards of sediment that was flushed from the lake bed, blanketing farm fields, woodlands, sidewalks, roads, homes, and businesses with silt and sand. The failure also resulted in dramatic downstream river habitat damage from rapid, severe erosion moving upstream from the failed dam (more than 200,000 cubic yards of sediment released by head-cutting).

Because of the magnitude of the economic and environmental impacts and the number of Iowans affected by the dam's failure, a "Recover and Rebuild Task Force" was created and charged with "leading long-term regional and community planning efforts and identifying best practices with respect to managing the Maquoketa River watershed, reducing the likelihood of future damage by flooding and maintaining or improving water quality." This task force identified river restoration as one option and dam rebuilding as an alternate option. The river restoration option is predicted to have a slower economic restoration for the area but with a predicted greater positive economic impact over time (river restoration economic projection: \$8,322,263 in single day expenditures, \$989,372 in labor income, 65 jobs versus impoundment recreation economic projection: \$4,297,664 in single day expenditures, \$510,918 in labor income, 33.5 jobs).

From the environmental standpoint, river restoration is a clear winner over re-creating the impoundment. Dams disrupt aquatic habitat, decrease habitat complexity, decrease species diversity, and have detrimental effects on water quality. Regarding the failed dam in particular, impoundment sedimentation accumulation and water quality issues (algal blooms and pathogens) were ongoing problems before the failure and would continue to be problems if an impoundment were re-created. A prime reason for the sediment and water quality problems stems from the extremely unfavorable watershed to impoundment ratio. An ideal watershed to impoundment ratio is 20 acres of watershed for each 1 acre of impoundment surface. Most Iowa impoundments used as multipurpose reservoirs have ratios of 40 to 1 or less. The Lake Delhi impoundment ratio is 500 acres of watershed for each 1 acre of impoundment surface (223,630 acre watershed, 448 acre lake). This impoundment ratio means that dredging would be an ongoing necessity (5 year cycle predicted with increased need following flood events, \$2,200,000 dredging cost for 2006 which was mostly negated by the floods of 2008). While ongoing dredging can be used to address sediment problems, the high nutrient problems with accompanying algal blooms and the pathogen problems would still remain. River restoration would avoid the perpetual sedimentation problems of the impoundment while also improving water quality.

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In terms of state resident use for recreation, free flowing stretches of the Maquoketa River have been some of the most frequently paddled river sections in Iowa. Free flowing stretches of the Maquoketa River are also home to such river species as smallmouth bass and freshwater mussels (neither of which do well with the decreases in habitat complexity and water quality caused by river impoundment). Restoring the previously impounded and impaired section of the Maquoketa River to a free flowing condition offers the return of a valuable environmental and recreational resource to all Iowans while avoiding the perpetual environmental and economic costs of re-creating a dam with a completely unsuitable watershed to impoundment ratio.

We believe in the need to invest in a vision of an environmentally healthy Iowa with a healthy, free flowing Maquoketa River being an important part of that vision (clean water, support of native aquatic species, in state recreational opportunities such as great fishing, paddling, scenery, and wild-life viewing). We invite you to join us in supporting the restoration of the Maquoketa River and opposing the use of state monies towards rebuilding a failed dam and re-creating an environmentally and economically costly impoundment.

Let the Maquoketa River Flow Free!

Support signatures:

Iowa Whitewater Coalition, Lyle Danielson, President
American Rivers, Sara Strassman, Director, River Restoration
Central Iowa Paddlers, Ned McPartland, Secretary
Friends of Iowa Trails – Friends of Iowa Rivers
Iowa Environmental Council – Iowa Rivers Revival

Scott Bandstra, Des Moines – Ronn P. Beebe, Fairfax – Sarah Costa, Des Moines
Whitney S. Davis, Grinnell – Tony Dunsky, Johnston – Chuck Eckhardt, Grinnell
Richard Gill, Texas – John & Diane Hall, Marshalltown
Linda Hiller – Dick Howard, Van Meter – Verna E. May, West Des Moines
Ned McPartland – Heather Meggers, Hiawatha – Bennett Pearson, Whidbey Island, WA
Gerry Rowland, Des Moines – Leo Salat, Cedar Rapids – Mike Scheuermann, Boone
Theresa Shay, Decorah – Christopher Stafford, Clive – Jim Todd, Boone
Margaret Vernon, Indianola – Julie Young, Johnston – Kirsten Winter

PS. We thank you for your dedication to healthy rivers. We urgently need to know if you or your organization will actively support this effort. If you have any questions please feel comfortable in calling Peter Komendowski personally at 319.269.8493. An email sent to iowaWhitewater@yahoo.com will confirm your support and we'll add you to the list. Keep checking the IWC website to see the growing list of support signatures.

<http://www.iowawhitewater.org/maquoketarestore.html>

References:

Final Report and Associated Appendices – Lake Delhi Recover and Rebuild Task Force, Released December 1, 2010.

Iowa DNR Delhi Dam and Head Cut Update, October 14, 2010.

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