

## Our urban gems

Each person views Polk County's river corridors through a certain lens. For some, the river corridor is a place to fish, or to view wildlife such as eagles, beavers, or songbirds. Many like to hike or bike on unpaved trails in a wild setting. For others, their river greenbelts surround a paved bike path. And those who get on the water itself like to water ski, row, or dip a paddle. Des Moines is fortunate that most of the river banks are publicly owned. Large tracts of riverfront woodlands snake along the rivers. It is time to consider how our rivers and their surrounding corridors are both an interconnected biological system, as well as an undervalued urban amenity. The rivers are beautiful, but it's time to "polish the jewel" so the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers become known as far and wide as great recreational destinations.

## Linking topnotch water trails

Creating easily accessed water trails will promote river recreation. Signs and maps will denote distance between accesses. Kiosks displaying historical and ecological details will enrich the experience. Restrooms and drinking water at accesses are needed amenities. Water trails will heighten awareness of fine resource.

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## Reconnecting the green corridors

The phrase "down by the river" should come to mean something positive – a place for conservation and recreation. In certain blighted areas, new plantings of native trees, shrubs, and grasses

## Creating urban whitewater at former dams.

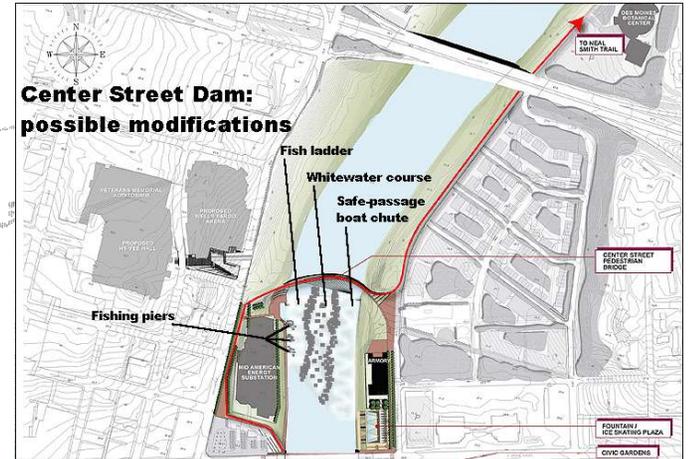


## Modifying dams with rock-arch rapids.

can create a green shield around the rivers, reducing sights and sounds of nearby traffic or industry. Greenscaping can also beautify and help stabilize streambanks from erosion while creating new wildlife habitat and linking existing large swaths of forest along river corridors. Iowa Whitewater Coalition is working with other groups, government bodies, and private landowners to create natural areas along rivers.

## Reconnecting the Rivers

- Joins green spaces
- Replaces hazardous dams with exhilarating recreation



Water Trail	
Canoe Access	
Greenbelt/Park	



## Safety: converting low-head dams

Iowa Whitewater Coalition proposes Iowa's movement to physically reconnect rivers beginning right here in Polk County. At least four people have drowned at central Iowa dams since 2000, two of them in Des Moines. The abrupt and uniform falls at low-head dams create "boils" below them – extremely dangerous for anglers and canoeists. Neighboring states have

taken the lead in demolishing and retrofitting low-head dams into rapids, recognizing the liability concerns of newly constructed dams. Low-head dams also block fish migration.

Because pool levels must be maintained at various points in Polk County, Iowa Whitewater Coalition advocates creating rapids at each structure as part of the Principal Riverwalk and Des Moines Water Works projects. Rapids not only allow fish to migrate, but also create new habitat for rock-dwelling game fish species.

There are no known cases of a drowning at a human-made rapids to date.

Numerous whitewater features will create a whole new form of recreation in Des Moines, and will set us apart from other Midwestern cities. Whitewater courses have demonstrated economic and quality-of-life benefits – and not just for paddlers. According to the Denver Post, June 2, 2003: “The city of Golden, which boasts the state’s most popular playpark, credits the park with attracting 45,000 users and pumping \$23 million into the economy in three years.” Similar benefits have been reaped at Midwestern whitewater play parks, but none with the geographic access and free-flowing water Des Moines has to offer.



Water trail offer urban people access to wild areas, furthering opportunities for camaraderie and healthful family outings.



Arranging boulders below a low-head dam on Reno's Truckee River.

### About Iowa Whitewater Coalition

Iowa Whitewater Coalition members are canoe and kayak enthusiasts whose mission is to: “protect, support, and improve whitewater resources and water trails by reconnecting the rivers throughout Iowa.” IWC supports low-head dam removal or modification wherever feasible in Iowa, and promotes conservation of Iowa’s rare swiftwater streams. IWC opposes channelization and supports water of the highest quality.

### Joining Iowa Whitewater Coalition

See us online at [www.iowawhitewater.org](http://www.iowawhitewater.org). Whether you are a paddler, or just would like to see the rivers reconnected, please join the Iowa Whitewater Coalition by sending \$10 annual dues to:

Bruce Hinrichs, Treasurer  
Iowa Whitewater Coalition  
PO Box 65453  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

name

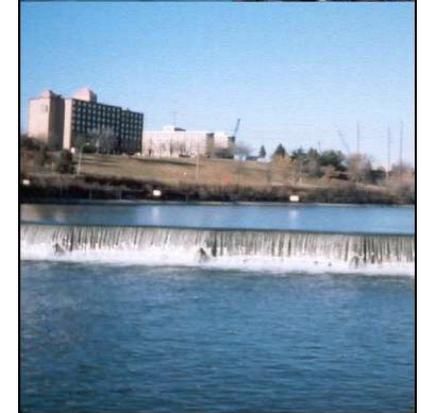
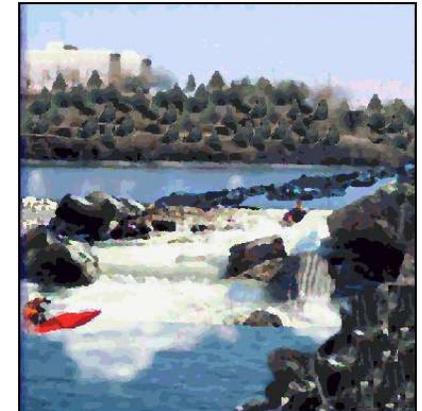
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# Reconnecting the Rivers



[www.iowawhitewater.org](http://www.iowawhitewater.org)

