

OUTDOORS

Keep It Clean initiative starts in Iowa Great Lakes



STEVE WEISMAN
Outdoors Editor

For all the years I have ice fished, I've always been frustrated with the amount of litter (garbage) that is left on the ice. By the end of the winter season, where ice fishermen have congregated, it's often been one big mess.

There is simply too much garbage left on the ice. Whether it's snowmobiling, ice fishing or just recreating on the ice, too many people leave their refuse behind. Nothing is more infuriating than going out on the ice and getting to our fishing spot and witnessing plastic bags, pop and beer cans, partially eaten sandwiches, banana peels, apple cores, candy wrappers, bait containers, empty propane cylinders ... you name it!

According to Terry Thomsen, president of the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club, after visiting with Iowa DNR officials, area bait shops, anglers and people who simply love the Iowa Great Lakes, the IGLFC is spearheading the "Keep It Clean" initiative! The goal is to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the ice clean as we recreate on the ice this winter.

DEFINITELY NEEDED

With the partnership of the OPA, the East Lake Improvement Corporation and the Spirit Lake Protective Association, the IGLFC is implementing the "Keep It Clean" campaign.

THE PLAN

First off, reflective 4-foot color signs will be placed just on the edge of the ice at all of the lake accesses on Big Spirit, East Okoboji, West Okoboji, Upper Gar and Lake Minnewashta. The signs will read, "Keep it clean — it's the law — ice is no place for your garbage or waste!"

At the same time, throughout the ice season, beginning in December, the IGLFC will partner with KUOO radio station with a "Keep It Clean" advertising blitz.

Thomsen said, "We've talked about this over the years, and last year when Joe Henry, executive director for the Lake of the Woods Tourism in northern Minnesota, was here for the Okoboji Blue Wa-



ter Festival, he encouraged us to do a keep the ice clean initiative. He even suggested we could model our efforts after the Minnesota Keep It Clean program. In 2023, their initiative became law in Minnesota."

DNR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Captain Greg Harson, northwest Iowa district law enforcement supervisor, gave the stance he and his conservation officers take on the issue.

"We take littering seriously, and if we see littering going on, we will address the situation and write citations," he said. "The 'Keep It Clean' initiative will definitely help our conservation officers. We can't always be on the ice, so we encourage everyone who sees littering happening on the ice to give one of our conservation officers a call. There is a \$95 fine for littering on the lake."

Here is the code: "No person shall discard any litter onto or in any water or land of this state." It specifically prohibits placing waste, refuse, or litter in any area or receptacle on public lands and waters, except those provided for that purpose.

Keeping the ice clean begins with each one of us individually! If each of us does our job to "Keep It Clean," it's easily taken care of. So, let's do our part, and if we see garbage on the ice, let our conservation officers know!

PORTA-POTS IN PLACE

A tip of the hat goes out to the Spirit Lake Protective Association. Its board of directors has authorized a trial program for the remainder of 2025 into early 2026 to put winterized Porta-Pots at the boat ramp access areas of Mini-Wakan State Park and Marble Beach State Recreation area on Big Spirit.

SLPA has entered into a trial agreement with Iowa DNR (who must close nonwinterized restrooms in October of each year) to provide at least one Porta-Pot at each location. These are provided in an effort to improve the "Quality of Life" for late open water anglers and ice anglers.

According to John Smeltzer, president of the SLPA, "The SLPA will positively impact the 'Quality of Water' at least a little. Thanks to Tim Richey and Mike Weis of Iowa DNR for coordinating this effort and to Boji Portable Toilets <https://bojiportabletoilets.com> for 'facility' management."

Snowmobilers cheer return of winter



It's middle December, and much of Iowa is covered under a thick blanket of snow with a weekend forecast calling for high temperatures that barely scratch double digits.

Winter has returned. And for Iowa's snowmobilers, that's music to their ears.

"Clubs are already grooming trails," said Jessica Flatt, with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Parks Bureau that oversees the snowmobile program. "With the early snowfall and cold temperatures in the forecast, the snowmobiling outlook is positive."

And with the return of snow comes a safety reminder to those who haven't had the sled out in a few years.

"It's always good to review the safety aspects of snowmobiling," she said.

Avoid alcohol or other drugs while operating a snowmobile, operate at reasonable speeds and stay on designated trails or routes, Flatt said. With Iowa in the crosshairs of another Alberta clipper this weekend, cold weather gear — including helmets — will be of upmost importance.

"Be aware of the weather and

snow conditions, never ride alone and let someone know where you're going and when you'll return," Flatt said.

Traveling on unfamiliar frozen bodies of water is also discouraged.

These safety messages, along with rules and regulations, machine maintenance, general precautions, how to plan for emergencies and more are part of Iowa's Snowmobile Education Course, that is required for Iowa's aged 12-17 in order to operate a snowmobile.

Children under age of 16 may operate a snowmobile while under direct supervision of an adult.

The Snowmobile Education Course is part of a national program, with regulations specific to Iowa. The course is currently only available online at www.iowadnr.gov/things-to-do/snowmobiling, with a onetime fee of \$34.95; of which, \$5 goes to support the snowmobile program.

The course is also available to adults who need to show they have completed a safety course in order to operate other states.

In Iowa, most snowmobiling is done on trails maintained by clubs affiliated with the Iowa

State Snowmobile Association. The snowmobile program purchases small directional and hazard signs marking the trails and association volunteers install and maintain them.

The association's website, www.iowasnowmobiler.com, has links to different regions of the state, club contacts and officers, links to trail maps and more.

"This is a volunteer-heavy program. Iowa State Snowmobile Association is an important partner that does the majority of the grooming and trail work," Flatt said.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has a web-based trail system at www.iowadnr.gov/stateparks that identifies recreational uses allowed on trails in each state park, including whether or not the park allows snowmobile use. However, few trails on public land are groomed.

Anyone operating a snowmobile on public land or ice — including ditches or highways — are required to have a current registration sticker, available from their local county recorder. Registration fees directly support the program through trail grants to local snowmobile clubs.

New job: Lakes area land stewardship director

STEVE WEISMAN
Outdoors Editor

EXCITING NEWS: LAND STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR

I could not believe it when I saw the release posted by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. It was for a new position: Lakes area land stewardship director. What an opportunity! What great news for all of northwest Iowa. Here is the job description.

DESCRIPTION

The Lakes area land stewardship director is a full-time, exempt position that reports directly to the senior land stewardship director, supervises part-time employees, land stewardship interns and volunteers in the Lakes area, and works collaboratively with all Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation staff and partners to protect and restore land in northwest Iowa. Work will focus on

projects in northwest Iowa, especially in the Spirit Lake/Okoboji area. Leading the stewardship and conservation of INHF-protected lands in northwest Iowa through direct land restoration planning and management activities will be the focus of this position. Knowledge and experience in stewarding remnant prairies, reconstructed prairies, wetlands, oak savannas, woodlands and agricultural land is required.

EDUCATION & QUALIFICATIONS

This position requires a minimum of five years relevant experience, along with the requisite education requirements, (bachelor's, master's or professional degree) in natural resource management, environmental resources, landscape architecture or related fields.

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