

# Iowa Rivers Revival

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## Manchester Named “River Town of the Year”

**Iowa Rivers Revival hails Manchester’s stunning new whitewater park, and other cooperative efforts to make the Maquoketa River “the defining attraction for the town.”**

**Manchester, Iowa.** Iowa Rivers Revival, a group that advocates for rivers, has named Manchester “River Town of the Year” for 2015. The award recognizes the city and its many partners for removing a dam and creating the Manchester Whitewater Park slated to open this spring, and for other efforts aimed at making the Maquoketa River “the defining attraction for the town.”

“Manchester is making the Maquoketa River the heart and soul of the community again, a focus for recreation, economic development, and environmental stewardship,” said Jerry Peckumn, Board Chair of Iowa Rivers Revival (IRR).

Iowa Rivers Revival is presenting the “River Town of the Year” award at a reception Wednesday afternoon (4 pm) at the Franklin Street Brewing Company overlooking the new whitewater park. Doug Hawker with the River & Rec Committee, Dean Sherman, Chair of the Good to Great (G2G) Committee, Tim Vick, City of Manchester, and Ryan Wicks, Chair of G2G River & Rec Committee are accepting the award on behalf of Manchester.

“Manchester is on a mission to connect people to the river,” Peckumn said. “The town was founded in 1850 on the Maquoketa, and now Manchester is celebrating its river again.”

### **Iowa Rivers Revival pointed to several key river-related projects in and near Manchester:**

- **Manchester Whitewater Park.** The \$1.8 million whitewater project – removing the nine-foot downtown dam, constructing six 18-inch drops and rocky pools over an 800-foot run, and enhancing the riverfront – is near completion after construction all winter. The Whitewater Park, right in the heart of town, will open this spring – a recreational playground for citizens and visitors, a setting for community events, a destination for anglers, a magnet for kayakers, canoers, and tubers. This rehabilitated section of the Maquoketa is coming back to life.
- **Revitalizing the riverfront:** expanding walking / biking trails along the river, with a goal of connecting several city parks; removing dilapidated buildings in the greenbelt; beautifying the

riverfront; improving access for anglers and boaters; creating places for spectators; organizing cleanups; making a place for music events and public celebrations.

- **Making the Maquoketa a designated “Iowa Water Trail.”** Manchester is working with the Iowa DNR River Programs office, Delaware County, land owners, and other stakeholders to study, evaluate and plan for a state water trail designation for much of the Maquoketa River between Backbone State Park and Lake Delhi, including through Manchester. Water trail designation could improve access, signage, maps and other factors to foster increased and responsible use of the river.
- **Protecting the river and environment.** Manchester has invested over \$8.6 million to improve its wastewater system over the last five years, and it plans to replace a sanitary sewer trunk line and seven blocks of sanitary sewer in 2015.
- **Restoring the river, and fostering fisheries.** Removing the dam, restoring free flow, creating pools, providing fish passage, and connecting habitats all will benefit fish and aquatic life up and down the river – and improve the prospects for anglers and wildlife viewers.
- **Removing the Quaker Mill Dam upstream.** The dam is likely to be removed later this year, restoring the river, improving fish passage, making it safer (where two people have died), and reducing potential liability of private dam owners. “It’s a win-win-win,” Peckumn said.
- **Returning to the river supports economic development and improves quality of life.** Manchester knows its river projects will make it a better place to live and work, and an appealing place to visit. Charles City – with Iowa’s first dam-to-whitewater park conversion project – has proved that visitors will come and residents will enjoy such amenities. City officials say Manchester already has two new businesses “as a direct result of our river revival efforts” – The Watershed (a kayak and canoe livery business), and the Franklin Street Brewery overlooking the whitewater park. Other river-related business ventures are in the works.

There are predictions that Iowa may become a “whitewater Mecca,” with three features running now and others expected. With three fairly close to one another (Charles City, Elkader, and Manchester), some out-of-state visitors might come to try two or three, or have three to choose from when water levels fluctuate in the three separate watersheds.

### **Manchester’s “River Town of the Year” Award Recognizes the City and Partners for Extraordinary Cooperation.**

“The Manchester Whitewater Park and all these projects are impressive,” Peckumn said. “IRR is recognizing the extraordinary cooperation that makes it all possible.”

Manchester’s “Good to Great” organization has been a catalyst. In 2009, it formed a “River & Recreation” committee (RRC). The RRC’s goal was to develop partnerships, envision projects and find funding to make the riverfront the town’s “defining attraction,” as the city told IRR recently. “They realized that the time was now to restore the river to its natural state and to do it in a manner beneficial to both the health of the river and the health of the community.”

The Whitewater Park is the premier result, and its financial framework reflects the working partnership. The \$1.8 million project was funded by \$600,000 from the city; \$200,000 from the State DNR’s “Low-Head Dam Mitigation & Water Trails” program; \$300,000 from Vision Iowa CAT &

RECAT grant; \$100,000 from State REAP grant; \$50,000 from Delaware County; and \$630,000 in community campaign private donations by generous citizens and businesses.

“Collaboration is crucial,” said Peckumn, the IRR’s board chair. “All these efforts in Manchester and on the Maquoketa are characterized by a rich mix of public and private cooperation, and partnerships between city, county and state governments, other public agencies, businesses, organizations, land-owners, and volunteers. That’s how communities embrace their rivers and become River Town of the Year.”

### **The Iowa DNR’s River Programs Play a Crucial Role.**

Peckumn put in a plug for the State DNR’s work on river programs, dam mitigation and water trails. “The State has been an invaluable partner,” Peckumn said, “a catalyst for transforming how communities relate to their rivers.”

DNR programs provide matching funds, planning, technical support, fishery and wildlife expertise, reports on existing conditions in watersheds, “reconnaissance” of biological and archaeological conditions, and coordination of efforts to create water trails and better access so Iowans can fully enjoy and protect their rivers.

A dozen low-head dams have been removed or modified over the last four years with State coordination, and 15 more projects are under way. Three include whitewater recreation features that bring visitors and bolster the local economy – Charles City, Elkader, and soon Manchester.

“IRR urges the Governor and Legislature to maintain and increase funding for dam mitigation and water trail work and river restoration,” Peckumn said.

The dam mitigation and water trail appropriation is \$2 million this year, and the Governor has proposed \$2 million for the year starting July 1.

“It’s money very well-spent,” Peckumn said. “It’s a matter of safety to remove or modify dangerous dams. It’s a matter of restoring natural rivers with good fishing, more aquatic life, and cleaner waters. It’s a matter of recreation and enjoyment. It’s a matter of economic development. All told, it’s an investment in improving quality of life for Iowa river towns,” Peckumn said.

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Previous “River Towns of the Year” recognized by Iowa Rivers Revival are Webster City, Elkader, Coon Rapids, Cedar Falls, Charles City, Central City, Dubuque, and Decorah. (For details, go to [www.iowarivers.org](http://www.iowarivers.org).) NOTE: Iowa Rivers Revival is naming COUNCIL BLUFFS 2015 “River CITY of the Year,” at an event at 10 a.m. Friday, March 6, in Council Bluffs.

Iowa Rivers Revival was founded eight years ago to be a voice for rivers. IRR is committed to helping Iowans work on education and public policy to restore and protect Iowa’s rivers and streams.

#### **Helpful web sites:**

**[www.iowarivers.org](http://www.iowarivers.org)**

**[www.facebook.com/ManchesterWhitewaterPark](http://www.facebook.com/ManchesterWhitewaterPark)**

**[www.delawarecountytourism.com](http://www.delawarecountytourism.com)**

**[www.manchester-ia.org](http://www.manchester-ia.org)**

**[www.manchesterwhitewater.com](http://www.manchesterwhitewater.com)**

**[www.iowawhitewater.org](http://www.iowawhitewater.org) (database of 192 fatalities at low-head dams in Iowa.)**

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