



Iowa beach advisories HIT DECADE HIGH



Pedal boats sit on the water Aug. 29 at Lake Macbride State Park in Solon. The Iowa DNR issued warnings that swimming was not recommended at the beach three out of 15 weeks this summer because water tests showed high E. coli levels. (Savannah Blake photos/The Gazette)

Two-thirds of state park beaches posted swim warnings this summer

By Tom Barton, Gazette Des Moines Bureau

Two-thirds of Iowa's state park beaches faced "swimming not recommended" advisories at least once this summer, with heavy rains fueling higher bacteria levels that pushed advisories to their highest rate in a decade, according to state monitoring officials and data.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources issued 156 advisories across 39 state beaches, up from 145 advisories last year. That meant about 26 percent of weekly water samples collected from Memorial Day through Labor Day tested high enough for bacteria or toxins to trigger warnings — the highest advisory rate since at least 2016.

Wet years tend to drive bacteria spikes, while calm, dry summers allow algal blooms to build. Iowa was wetter this year than the past few summers, washing bacteria downstream into Iowa's lakes and beaches, said Daniel Kendall, who oversees the DNR's beach monitoring program.

"We've had a lot of rain this year flushing through those beach watersheds," Kendall said. "We've had a lot of days where we were



A warning sign is posted by the front gate of the beach area Aug. 29 at Lake Macbride State Park in Solon. The Iowa DNR issued a warning on Aug. 20 advising that swimming was not recommended at the beach due to high E. coli levels found in the water.

"A lot of the bacteria gets attached to the sediment, and so that's just constantly churned up in the water."

Daniel Kendall, Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Emails shed light on UI decision to end lease at Macbride

University would have to spend \$15M at nature area

By Vanessa Miller, The Gazette

A year ago — in early September 2024, just as a 10-member committee was starting to review the feasibility of continuing the University of Iowa's 66-year-old lease of the Macbride Nature Recreation Area — a UI land manager for the 485-acre property emailed Parking and Transportation with a request.

"We have some major potholes that need to have more repairs than just fillers to maintain the safety of our road," she wrote. "In several places it could pull someone into the ditch. Would you mind taking a look at them and seeing what can be done?"

The question came amid rumors the university planned to exit its no-cost lease with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and news UI executives had convened a committee "to engage the community regarding the use of Macbride Nature Recreation Area."

Administrators at the time indicated they were withholding any decision on whether to leave the lease, pending the "in-depth review of the financial and operational sustainability" of the area — given the university is responsible for all maintenance and operational costs associated with the land and its programming.

But an associate vice president hinted toward their thinking in her Sept. 3, 2024 response to the road-repair request.

"The project to fix this road as it needs to be is on hold," Debby Zumbach, associate vice president and director of Business Services and Parking and Transportation, wrote. "But if we can patch etc. until we are no longer managing MNRA, we should keep it operational."

A Parking and Transportation manager responded with a list of concerns, recommending work across 10 sites that had either been "compromised" or "pulverized beyond what patching can fix."


Zumbach took the request to UI Senior Vice President and University Architect Rod Lehnertz, who suggested taking the question to an upcoming "core team MNRA future meeting" — given it is "sensitive and actions may have implications."

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