

LAKE DARLING: Project Near Completion

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The Iowa Department of Natural Resources held a ceremony Wednesday to celebrate the work being done to restore Lake Darling in Washington County.

That work began in 2008 when the 304 acre lake was drained. The DNR says over 60 years enough silt and nutrients flowed into the lake from the watershed that it could have filled a football field – 12 stories high. The silt was removed from the lakebed.

The DNR says local landowners have had a major impact on its efforts to make sure once the lake is refilled, the water quality remains good.

“Without landowners, we would not have any of this done,” says watershed coordinator Stan Simmons. “Everything that happens up here is on land. It is owners cooperating with each other. Problems did not start at line fences. They did not stop at line fences. Many times, landowners had to work together to get problems solved. And we were very successful in most instances.”

One-hundred and sixty-two conservation projects are in the works around the lake, with the goal of slowing the water moving down the watershed. That should cut down on the silt and nutrients that make it into Lake Darling.

Wednesday’s event was held on the dam at the lake, with dozens of people participating. The “ceremonial first water” was poured into the lake from bottles of water to commemorate the conclusion of the \$16 million project.

DNR Fisheries technician Vance Polton says as long as there are normal spring conditions, Lake Darling should be filled by the end of April.

Access to the lake will be limited this summer as crews finish up construction on a new campground, boat ramps, and other projects. The DNR plans to stock the lake with small fish early in the summer.

The economic impact of the lake's restoration on the local community is estimated at \$8.5 million.

The lake is named for former Des Moines Register editorial cartoonist, and conservationist, Jay N. 'Ding' Darling. The man-made lake was dedicated in 1950.

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