

Ames Tribune

STATE

Fisherman drowns near Boone

Staff Writer Ames Tribune

Published 10:29 a.m. CT Aug. 4, 2012 | Updated 10:31 a.m. CT Aug. 4, 2012

BOONE — A 68-year-old Laotian man apparently died from drowning after he fell into the Des Moines River while he was fishing close to the low-head dam near the City of Boone Water Treatment Plant on Friday afternoon.

Boone County Sheriff Ron Fehr said the man, whose name had not been released as of late Saturday afternoon while family members were being notified, was “fishing from the end of a sandbank, lost his balance, fell in and could not get out.”

The sheriff’s office received the call of a possible drowning at 3:01 p.m., Fehr said. Boone County Search and Rescue personnel found the man’s body in the river below the dam near a cement wall on the west bank about 5:15 p.m., he said.

The victim’s sister, Katie Chinlasith, 48, who also immigrated from Laos and became an American citizen, said her brother, who was retired, fished the river for bass, catfish and striper. On Friday, he went fishing with a friend, Bonlia Geerdes, from Ames.

Chinlasith said Geerdes did not see her brother fall into the river, but saw him come up and saw his “hands out of the water.”

“If she was close, she would have helped him,” Chinlasith said. “But he was on the other side. He was a very strong swimmer. In Laos, you swim everywhere.”

Chinlasith said her brother fished at that spot every summer day for 15 years.

“The water was not deep where he was,” she said.

In January 2011, the city of Boone hosted a daylong session at city hall about converting low-head dams. City and county officials were on hand, along with state personnel from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife personnel and other agencies.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources estimates there are between 200 and 260 low-head dams in the state.

The city of Boone was hoping to begin reconverting the low-head dam in the fall of 2011 and possibly finish it by December of this year, City Administrator Luke Nelson said.

Fehr said the low-head dam is dangerous.

“It’s like a washing machine,” he said. “It’s very difficult to get out of the tumbling action. People might not think they’re dangerous, but this afternoon tells you different.”