

Clean Water Starts with Us

IN THIS ISSUE:

WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT IN IOWA

DNR ♦ DSC ♦ NRCS

WINTER 2008

1
Get ready for
2009 grant cycle

2
Partnerships
work to save
park pond,
improve Camp
Creek; New
videos on
conservation

3
Coordinators
share their field
knowledge;
Work with
landowners
now to repair
flood-damaged
practices

4
Sims named
State
Conservationist;
Iowa Water
Conference in
March

5
Spruce up your
outreach efforts
and plans this
winter

6
Creating
Watershed
Management
Plans

clean water
starts with you.

Get ready for 2009 grant cycle

Get the assistance you need to make the most of your applications

If you're looking for help to get your watershed improvement effort off the ground or for funding to keep your project going, now is the time to apply for watershed improvement grants.

Grant applications will be available at the beginning of January for funding from the DNR's Section 319 program and DSC's Watershed Protection Funds (WSPF) and Water Protection Funds (WPF).

You can apply for funding from one or all of the sources in one application, due April 1.

With changes to this year's application process, DNR and DSC staff are at the ready to answer questions and provide suggestions for applications.

"We welcome any questions about the application process, and we'd be happy to sit down with folks to discuss the potential for their watershed effort," said Steve Hopkins with the DNR's Watershed Improvement Program.

At your request, the DNR and DSC can also review drafts of applications for content and concepts, and can help interpret any data you may already have.

This year, applicants who secure a Section 319 grant will need to develop a nine-element watershed management plan (WMP) before receiving funds from EPA.

A WMP, required by EPA, is a comprehensive plan designed to help you meet water quality goals. WMPs identify problems and offer solutions – a full description and comparison to the average watershed "project" is found on page 6.

If you've never heard of a WMP before, don't worry. DNR staff and DSC regional watershed coordinators can provide detailed assistance to help groups complete their plans.

"EPA requires WMPs for these grants because they've seen real changes in water quality where groups have used comprehensive plans, compared to projects

without a plan," Hopkins said.

While WMPs are not required prior to applying for a 319 grant this year, they will be next year. The DNR is currently developing a WMP template for groups to create their own plans. DNR and DSC regional coordinators will also continue to offer help in developing WMPs.

"It may sound like extra work, but it can really focus a local watershed effort, and help secure other funding," Hopkins added.

If you're just starting your local watershed efforts, consider applying for a Watershed Planning Assistance Grant (due Jan. 15). This grant can help you identify problems in your watershed and propose ways to address them, laying the groundwork for a WMP.

Regardless of where you are in your watershed efforts, DSC regional coordinators and DNR staff are ready to help you plan your next steps (see below for contact information).

For grant application assistance:

DNR:

Steve Hopkins, (515) 281-6402 or
Stephen.Hopkins@dnr.iowa.gov

Kyle Ament, (515) 242-6196 or
Kyle.Ament@dnr.iowa.gov

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Rachel.Glaza@dnr.iowa.gov

DSC Regional Coordinators:

Vince Sitzmann, SE Iowa, (515) 242-6008 or
Vince.Sitzmann@iowaagriculture.gov

Jeff Tisl, NE Iowa, (563) 422-6201 or
Jeff.Tisl@iowaagriculture.gov

Bob Waters, West Iowa, (712) 243-2913 or
Bob.Waters@iowaagriculture.gov

Find grant applications, assistance and more at:

<http://watershed.iowadnr.gov/grants.html> | www.iowaagriculture.gov/soilConservation.asp

Partnerships work to save park pond, improve Camp Creek

Talk about effective conservation practices - the pond in Thomas Mitchell Park in eastern Polk County had trapped so much sediment in its 40 years that it was in danger of filling in completely.

The Camp Creek Watershed Project stepped in, seeking partnerships to save the once-popular fishing spot.

The pond, located in the Camp Creek watershed, started out almost 30 feet deep and was now only 7 or 8 feet deep. Four major gullies cut through the park, dumping almost

250 tons of dirt in the pond every year.

Camp Creek Watershed Project Coordinator Brandon Dittman learned about the pond's problems while working with the Polk County Conservation Board (CCB) on a timber stand improvement project at Thomas Mitchell Park.

Dittman offered to assess the watershed, locating problem areas and brainstorming how to improve them.

"It was a small watershed, and we knew what the problem was," Dittman said.

He's partnered with NRCS, which will design and site a series of water and sediment control basins above the pond to trap sediment and cut erosion from the gullies by 90 percent.

Dittman worked with the CCB to apply for - and receive - a grant from the Watershed Improvement Review Board (WIRB) to pay for the basins and dredging the pond. He also reached out to landowners along the park property line.

The partners working together,

and the assistance they could offer, made a project like this feasible.

"The more interaction you have with other agencies, the more opportunities will present themselves," Dittman said. "Once the right people get involved, everything falls into place."

The timber project that led to the pond collaboration will improve timber stands on 57 acres of parkland adjacent to Camp Creek, reducing the soil reaching Camp Creek by five tons per year.

The effort will remove undesirable trees and woody brush to encourage the growth of new grasses and bushes that will better hold soil on the shady forest floor.

The Camp Creek project is no stranger to collaboration, already partnering with the DNR, IDALS-DSC, NRCS, Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, Metro Waste Authority, the Izaak Walton League, Iowa Department of Transportation, Iowa Farm Bureau, IOWATER, the local school district, co-ops and others.

Have a success story from your watershed effort to share? Send it to Jessie Brown at Jessie.Brown@dnr.iowa.gov.



Top left: George Warford, DNR district forester, works on the Camp Creek timber stand improvement project in Thomas Mitchell Park.

Bottom left: Partnerships are helping improve this pond in Thomas Mitchell Park. Photos courtesy of Brandon Dittman.

Iowa Learning Farm offers new videos on conservation

A new video series, "A Culture of Conservation," is now available from the Iowa Learning Farm (ILF).

The series of five short videos explores the relationship humans have with soil and water and offers ways for everyone to have an active role in protecting and preserving the Earth's natural resources.

Beginning this month, every Iowa Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) office and all Iowa State Extension offices will have a copy of the

video series.

Curriculum will be developed for middle and high schools, and community colleges for use in the classroom by fall 2009.

ILF assistant project manager Jacqueline Comito received an SWCD Initiatives grant from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to produce the videos.

Comito intends that the videos will inspire dialogue as well as actions to help preserve natural resources for

now and the future.

The videos can be shown individually or collectively and each video is approximately seven to eight minutes long. The viewer does not need to see one to understand the next. All carry a specific, individual message.

To request "A Culture of Conservation Video Series" DVD, contact the Iowa Learning Farm, e-mail:

ilf@iastate.edu.

-Carol Brown, ILF

Coordinators share their field knowledge

If you want to know what really works in the field, ask someone who's been there before: a watershed project coordinator.

At their semiannual meeting in September, coordinators discussed the tricks of the trade in a roundtable session. Here are some ideas to consider for your own watershed effort:



GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED

- Show the landowner how the practice will benefit his or her land, more than the watershed
- Capitalize on successful practices installed; use respected folks in the community with a conservation ethic as champions
- Socialize where landowners gather, like cafes and coffee shops
- Use your people skills - maintain a positive attitude, be persistent but not pushy, be truthful and upfront
- Find out what stakeholders want and need first and use that information to drive your efforts
- Keep a flexible balance when selling practices— stakeholder may not be interested in plan A but willing to do plan B
- Develop and maintain an advisory board
- Call absentee landowners to get them involved
- Look to civic organizations, school groups and churches to help promote your effort

GREEN GRATITUDE

You're invited to apply for the Governor's Iowa Environmental Excellence Awards.

These awards are the premier environmental honors in Iowa, recognizing leadership and innovation in the protection of Iowa's water, land and air.

Awards will be given for overall Environmental Excellence, along with Special Project Awards in:

- Air Quality
- Energy Efficiency/ Renewable Energy
- Habitat Restoration
- Waste Management
- Water Quality
- Environmental Education
- Disaster Recovery

For more information and to download an application, go to www.iowadnr.gov/other/ee/index.html or contact Emily Grover at (515) 242-5955 or Emily.Grover@dnr.iowa.gov.

Work with landowners now to repair flood-damaged practices

As harvest season sets, Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey is calling on soil conservation and water quality professionals to work one-on-one with farmers to assess soil and water conservation resource needs this winter and spring, whether it's repairing existing practices damaged by storms or calling attention to practices that may have helped lessen the impacts of stormwater runoff.

"Initial reports showed nearly 10 percent of the state's cropland experienced heavy erosion," said Northey. "The heavy rains and flooding we experienced this May and June overwhelmed many conservation practices and showed places where more work is needed, an excellent

opportunity to work together on these projects."

An IDALS-NRCS survey showed an estimated \$40.4 million in damage to conservation practices from the record rainfall and flooding, and that 2.284 million acres experienced heavy erosion, losing more than 20 tons of topsoil per acre. With more than 12,000 waterways and 8,000 terraces across the state in need of repair following the flooding, there is a lot of work to be done.

"There is no way to be completely prepared for the record rainfall we received this year, but it's important we keep working to improve

conservation practices throughout the state," Northey said. "I encourage our watershed improvement projects to reach out to farmers and landown-



ers to help them before planting next spring."

-Tess Capps, IDALS

DATES TO REMEMBER

January 15: Watershed Planning Assistance Grant applications due

January 15: Quarterly reports due

January 28: Iowa Conservation Partnership Day, Capitol Rotunda, Des Moines

January 30: Watershed Improvement Fund (through WIRB) grant applications due

January 31: Governor's Environmental Excellence Awards applications due

March 9-10: Iowa Water Conference, Scheman Center, Iowa State University, Ames

March 11: Statewide Project Coordinators Meeting, Scheman Center, Iowa State University, Ames

March and April : Annual review meetings

April 1: 319/WPF/WSPF grant applications due

Sims named State Conservationist

Richard Sims, former State Conservationist with the NRCS in Idaho, began his duties as Iowa's State Conservationist in June 2008. In this top management position, he manages and provides overall leadership for agency operations statewide, including NRCS' involvement with current and future watershed projects.

NRCS is responsible for administering many of the USDA's Farm Bill programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the new Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The agency is also charged with providing the state's landowners with conservation planning assistance on a voluntary basis.



Richard Sims

agencies, but most importantly, our customers."

Sims previously worked for Iowa NRCS as an area conservationist from 1990 to 1996 in Fort Dodge and West Union. While serving as Idaho's state conservationist, Sims completed two details to National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. as the Director of Financial Assistance Programs Division. Before returning to Iowa, Sims most recently served as Acting Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment.

Sims began his career with NRCS in 1980 as a soil scientist in Illinois. He worked in three counties before changing career paths to soil conservationist. Throughout his tenure, he has held various positions, including district conservationist in Illinois, and Assistant State Conservationist for Operations, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs and State Administrative Officer in West Virginia.

A native of Will County, Ill., Sims grew up on a corn, soybean and Black Angus farm. He graduated from Illinois State University in 1977 with a Bachelor of Science degree in agronomy. You can reach Sims at (515) 284-6655 or richard.sims@ia.usda.gov

-Laura Greiner, NRCS

Focus on floods, partnerships at Iowa Water Conference in March

The Iowa Water Center and the Iowa Storm Water Conference, organized by the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities, have teamed up to provide a unique balance of water resource information for rural and urban Iowans at this year's Iowa Water Conference.

The March 9-10 conference in Ames will include multiple half-day tracks for urban planners, farmers and scientists. Plenary presentations will focus on lessons from the 2008

flood and address best science-, social- and economic-based strategies to avoid similar future outcomes.

Dr. Gerald Galloway, who led the White House committee assessing causes of the 1993 floods, will lead a discussion on how recommendations were followed and barriers to implementing them in the future.

Tom Schueler of the Chesapeake Stormwater Network will speak on building partnerships between local, statewide and regional groups in ad-

dition to an urban hydrology plenary session.

For more information, contact Pat Sauer, with the Iowa Stormwater Education Program, at PSauer@iamu.org or (800) 810-4268; or Hillary Olson, with the Iowa Water Center, at holson01@iastate.edu or (515) 294-7467.

The spring meeting for coordinators of DNR- and DSC-funded watershed projects will follow on March 11.

<http://www.aep.iastate.edu/water/homepage.html>

Spruce up your outreach efforts and plans this winter

When was the last time you took a good look at your public outreach plan? This winter is a great time to evaluate your information and education efforts, or if you don't have a formal plan, a great time to create one.

Public outreach is more than press releases and newsletters; it's a way to help you motivate people to participate in your project.

Public outreach takes a social science approach to help you approach your project's water quality goals – it goes beyond just informing people of your project and motivates them to take action and change their behavior for the greater good.

The key to getting people to participate in your project – whether that's installing conservation practices on their farm or using less fertilizer on their lakeside lawn – is knowing why those people (your audience) do what they do and what may keep them from participating in your project.

Armed with this information, you can create an effective plan to help you involve people in the project and meet your water quality goals. After all, without willing participants to make changes on the land, there can



be no water quality improvement.

Public outreach efforts are most effective when:

- based on what you know about your audience
- planned ahead of time
- evaluated and lessons learned are applied next time

An outreach plan doesn't have to be long or complicated to be effective. A good plan is a simple roadmap to help you get practices on the ground by reaching the people you need to reach.

Ultimately, creating a public outreach plan should happen before a project is launched, but can be developed at any time if you don't already have one. The plan will provide you with tools to reach your water quality goals.

To create your own plan, follow these six steps:

1. Set your project goals
2. Determine your target audiences
3. Research those audiences
4. Use research to strategize your outreach
5. Carry out plan
6. Measure your successes and evaluate

You should evaluate your efforts on a regular basis – what's working, what's not? Plans are fluid and can be updated as needed. Other watershed projects can be helpful resources and sources of new ideas.

If you have questions about creating a plan, contact Jessie Brown with the DNR at (515) 281-5131 or at Jessie.Brown@dnr.iowa.gov, or visit www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/coord.html.

Using public outreach to meet project goals: an example

WATER QUALITY PROJECT GOAL: Establish no-till on 1,000 acres

AUDIENCES: Landowners, tenant farmers, media, community leaders

BARRIERS: perceived cost; would be seen as "sloppy" by neighbors; rumors of lowered yields

SOLUTIONS/BENEFITS: cost-share and grants; actual reductions in input and energy costs; provide examples of no-till in use; increases in yields

MESSAGE: No-till can save you money, time and soil

MESSAGE DELIVERY: face-to-face contacts with targeted landowners; create fact sheet on no-till to leave with landowners; host field days so farmers can see how neighbors have used no-till successfully; list benefits of no-till in project newsletter article; work with local reporter to highlight a landowner successfully using no-till in newspaper; ask landowners using no-till to place a sign next to field

Creating Watershed Management Plans

A Watershed Management Plan (WMP) may be a new requirement for watershed funding from the DNR (see page 1), but it can create a stronger project and local effort.

To help understand WMPs, here is a comparison of the average watershed “project” and an effort directed by a WMP.



A watershed project:

- Lasts a relatively short period of time, such as 3 to 5 years
- Has a goal of implementing conservation practices to reduce pollutant loads
- Relies upon assessments to target problem areas within a watershed
- Targets a simple list of work tasks to achieve pollutant load reductions
- Estimates the total cost of the project based on anticipated funding

- Ends when the project is completed, regardless of whether it has met water quality goals

A Watershed Management Plan:

- Sets a goal of removing a waterbody from the impaired waters list or ensuring the waterbody supports its designated use
- Relies upon a comprehensive list of assessments
- Compiles a comprehensive list of actions needed in a watershed in order to achieve the water quality goals
- May propose work lasting a relatively long period of time, such as 15, 20 or 25 years
- May include a series of shorter-term (2 to 5 year) projects, completed in phases
- Estimates the total costs needed to complete each project, regardless of the funding source
- Targets a comprehensive list of work tasks, completed in a certain order, to achieve measured water quality improvements
- May be changed due to changing circumstances in the watershed
- Continues to monitor water quality even after the water quality goals are achieved

SOILS INFO ONLINE

Soil survey manuscripts with soils data, maps, diagrams, tables and other details are now available online for 52 of Iowa's 99 counties.

The Soil Survey Division of NRCS recently placed the manuscripts online at http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/iowa/.

Soil survey manuscripts contain detailed information about every soil in the county – including soil formation, properties, classification, total acres, and interpretations and suitability for each soil.

Suitability ratings for cropland, pastureland, wildlife habitat, tree planting, building site development, sanitary facilities, and other purposes are also available.

More county information will be continually added and updated. If you live in a county without an online soil survey manuscript, contact your local NRCS office for a copy.

Visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=ia> to locate the NRCS office nearest you.

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