

Watershed Planning Advisory Council Recommendations for 2024 Legislature

Monitoring and Measurement

1. Update the Iowa Water Plan and prioritize water use as water becomes limited with three consecutive years of drought.
2. Iowa State University's Know Your Carbon Landscape Project is part of a soil carbon program for working lands. Monitor what that team comes up with as part of that national program.
3. Implement more small-scale monitoring that will show actual results in real time, in addition to existing large-scale monitoring. Develop better tools to better interpret large-scale water monitoring data.
4. NRS dashboard has been updated with close to real-time results, and three principles of NRS. Continue with those processes.

Partnerships

1. Encourage state legislature to explore funding frameworks or incentives for administrative and technical staffing support for watershed coordination in the state of Iowa considering city, county, state and Watershed Management Authority needs to accelerate conservation practice adoption. For watershed projects to be effective long-term, watershed coordinator and other technical assistance full time employee (FTE) positions should continue to be funded and expanded by the state, including watersheds outside of priority Water Quality Initiative areas. Identify where there is a need and the local support for additional staff capacity based on project demand and existing efforts such as Watershed Management Authorities (watershed coordinators, technicians, outreach specialists). By funding at least one coordinator per Hydrologic Unit Code-8 watershed long-term, this will enable more effective relationships with partners including landowners. The state should work with partners such as NRCS to continue to support watershed coordinator and other technical staff as needed in watersheds where project demand exists. We request that the legislature be favorable to requested increases to state agency FTE caps in order to support this goal.
2. For partnerships to be more effective at the watershed level, we encourage broader public and private stakeholder involvement beyond WMA members and agencies. Consideration for funding should be given to projects that are building new and innovative partnerships and have demonstrated involvement of private partners within a watershed project. Partners and the public should be invited to regular and annual local or regional watershed meetings to share updates and opportunities for involvement in the watershed.

3. Partnerships are encouraged as a means to support and promote water quality practices as a component of drainage systems. Continue to support partnerships such as the current Batch & Build projects emerging across the state and seek additional opportunities for similar efforts by allocating state resources in a way that increases the pace of practice implementation.
4. Support public and private involvement in comprehensive watershed planning efforts that incorporate climate resiliency and co-benefits such as source water protection, water availability, and sustainable agricultural systems. Establish a schedule for developing watershed management plans for each HUC-8 basin across the state. Provide state support for regular updates and revisions of watershed management plans.

Economics

1. Encourage the DNR to continue building upon the early success of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Exchange program by expanding to additional communities throughout Iowa in partnership with other organizations. This program creates a path to incentivize cities/communities to invest in water quality improvements.
2. To encourage the implementation of water quality improvement projects, the legislature should explore the constraints to the development of water quality improvement projects, including improved collaboration with the Army Corps of Engineers. This should be addressed within one year by the legislature for efficient use of non-point source funding (SF512 and other).
3. Encourage legislature to study the fee structure for water use permitting to reflect the value of water. Such study should include effects on various surface water and groundwater recharge systems. Studies should also include effects that large users and individual ratepayers have on overall water system availability. Any increase in fees considered to be returned to the Groundwater Protection Fund.
4. To address soil health, regenerative agriculture, and long-term sustainable agriculture, we suggest the legislature re-evaluates the role of the Leopold Center and consider re-establishing funding for this Center. In support of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, regenerative agriculture and soil restoration are key to water quality improvements. We recommend evaluation of Center funding in the upcoming legislative session.