
FISCAL UPDATE Article

Fiscal Services Division

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WATER RESOURCES COORDINATING COUNCIL MEETING — DECEMBER 2019

December Meeting. The [Water Resources Coordinating Council](#) (WRCC) met on December 12, 2019, at the Polk County Extension Office in Altoona. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig called the meeting to order.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Water Quality Resource Coordinator Adam Schnieders (DNR) reported that the draft copy of the Iowa 2018 Impaired Waters Listing, as required by [Section 303\(d\)](#) of the federal Clean Water Act, was submitted to the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on November 14, 2019. Public comments regarding the Listing will be received until December 28, 2019.

Department of Transportation (DOT). Environmental Resources Manager Kenneth Brink, Department of Transportation (DOT), provided an update on the Highway 2 bridge project, which would consist of constructing two overflow bridges across Highway 2 that measure 40 feet wide by 1,100 feet long. The project includes moving the levee on the Missouri River so it is straight across Highway 2. The first overflow bridge is scheduled to be in place by March 1, 2020, and the construction will not stop traffic between Iowa and Nebraska.

Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (DALs). Water Resources Bureau Chief Jake Hansen (DALs) reported that the sign-up for the cover crop cost-share incentive, which is part of the Water Quality Initiative (WQI), was very positive. However, cold and wet weather conditions have prevented several farmers from planting cover crops in 2019. Farmers can obtain cost-share funding from the DALs for planting cover crops through local Soil and Water Conservation Districts. First-time cover crop users are eligible for \$25 per acre, and continuing users are eligible for \$15 per acre for up to 160 acres. As of December 1, 2019, 58 of the 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts had completed the allocation of \$2.0 million for the cover crops cost-share. Chief Hansen also reported that 30 applications were received for urban conservation projects funded by the WQI. Projects will be reviewed and funding will be awarded by the Department, with a beginning project date of April 1, 2020.

National Weather Service. Senior Service Hydrologist Jeff Zogg, National Weather Service, discussed weather conditions for winter and spring. Precipitation is expected to be higher than average beginning in 2020, and there will be a risk for spring flooding.

Iowa Watershed Project. Professor Larry Weber, University of Iowa, and Special Projects Manager Jeff Geerts, Iowa Economic Development Authority, provided an update on the Disaster Resilience Grant for the [Iowa Watershed Approach](#), which was awarded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Iowa Watershed Approach is a collaborative project that includes participation from local, state, federal, and private organizations to address factors that contribute to floods and nutrient flows. The Approach is implementing principles from the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. Urban projects in Dubuque and Storm Lake have been implemented, with a final completion date of September 2021.

Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC). WPAC Chairman John Whitaker discussed the 2019 Annual Report from the WPAC. The report recommendations include:

- Watershed Management Authority (WMA) monitoring activities should be integrated into applications for new watershed projects.

- Officers of the WPAC and ex-officio members will present an annual report to the legislators and report back comments to the WPAC.
- Funding consideration should be given to projects that have demonstrated sufficient involvement of partners within a watershed project.
- Effective long-term watershed projects will improve if the watershed coordinators receive full salaries and benefits from the State.
- Broader public involvement beyond WMA members and agencies should be encouraged.
- To evaluate the cost/benefit ratio of flood protection, Congress should authorize the Army Corps of Engineers to incorporate water quality and flood mitigation practices.
- To accelerate the adoption of new research and data into practice, resources should be dedicated for a data analytic staff position at the Iowa Nutrient Research Center and the Iowa Flood Center.
- New data and recommendations from all existing efforts should be incorporated into future policy recommendations.
- Policy should be reviewed to identify legal and financial barriers such as land purchases, and recommendations should be issued to remediate those barriers.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Kurt Simon, State Conservationist of the Iowa NRCS, reported that the Iowa NRCS received \$36.0 million in funding for the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program Floodplain Easement](#). The Program is designed to restore land to its natural condition, including permanent easements on floodplain land. There were 393 farms that cover 40,000 acres that applied for funding this year, and the applications will be evaluated and ranked to see which farms receive funding.

Next Meeting. The time and location of the next meeting are to be determined.

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