



Iowa General Assembly

2013 Committee Briefings

Legislative Services Agency – Legal Services Division

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IOWA RIVERS AND WATERWAYS STUDY COMMITTEE

Meeting Dates: [December 10, 2013](#)

Purpose. *This compilation of briefings on legislative interim committee meetings and other meetings and topics of interest to the Iowa General Assembly, written by the Legal Services Division staff of the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency, describes committee activities or topics. The briefings were originally distributed in the Iowa Legislative Interim Calendar and Briefing. Official minutes, reports, and other detailed information concerning the committee or topic addressed by a briefing can be obtained from the committee's Internet page listed above, from the Iowa General Assembly's Internet page at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/>, or from the agency connected with the meeting or topic described.*

IOWA RIVERS AND WATERWAYS STUDY COMMITTEE

December 10, 2013

Co-chairperson: Senator Dick Dearden

Co-chairperson: Representative Lee Hein

Background. The Legislative Council approved the Iowa Rivers and Waterways Study Committee on July 18, 2013, and authorized one meeting date in which to consult with interested parties in considering options for restoring the quality of Iowa's rivers and waterways. The committee adjourned without making recommendations other than to meet again once the 2014 Legislative Session begins.

Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Mike Steuck, Manchester Fisheries Management Office, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, provided information regarding the necessary ingredients for river restoration, components of quality streams in Iowa, factors that affect stream quality, and the benefits of restoring rivers and streams. Mr. Nate Hoogeveen, Director of Rivers Programs, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, identified parties interested in river restoration, the positive economic growth opportunities resulting from river restoration, healthy ecological rivers, and types of restoration techniques. Mr. Mike McGhee, Lake Restoration, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, described the lake restoration program for Iowa's public lakes. Mr. McGhee discussed the methodology for prioritizing lake restoration projects which included factors such as water quality, the benefit to the public, restoration potential, and the hydrology of the watershed where the lakes are located. The goals of lake restoration are water clarity; beaches meeting recreational use standards; sustainable, healthy lake systems; and removal of lakes from impaired water lists. Mr. McGhee stressed the importance of community-based planning in the lake restoration process. Mr. Todd Bishop, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, discussed the funding of river conservation projects by leveraging state money for federal money.

Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. Mr. Jim Gillespie, Director, Soil Conservation Division, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, provided information regarding the department's watershed and water quality projects around the state, how each project is different and requires different solutions, the importance of local partnership, and the need to stop downcutting of timber along rivers, slow the incidence of vertical river banks, stabilize the toe or base of riverbanks, protect and build floodplains, re-meander streams, and establish deep-rooted prairie vegetation with intermixed trees.

Nongovernmental Organizations. Mr. Jerry Peckumn, Iowa Rivers Revival, identified the river-related activities of his organization and what practices are included in river restoration. Mr. Peckumn advocated for a statewide river restoration program that would include public/private partnerships, establish statewide criteria and regional targeting, provide education and training, set criteria priorities for river restoration moneys, and research and monitor river restoration projects. Mr. Peckumn recommended appropriating \$300,000 to the Department of Natural Resources for purposes of allowing the department to conduct a planning process for a statewide program. Mr. Todd Sutphin, Environmental Programs and Services, Iowa Soybean Association, identified the environmental programs and services that the association provides and discussed projects in 65 defined watersheds that the association is either active in or supporting. Mr. Sutphin also discussed the association's efforts in oxbow restoration.

Experiences From Other States. Mr. Martin Melchior, Regional Director, Interfluve, discussed the economic importance

of rivers and river restoration in terms of tourism, land, and job creation. Mr. Melchior identified river restoration practices from other states which included the use of riparian vegetation, habitat recovery, spawning habitat creation, bank stabilization, bank reconstruction, channel relocation as required by mitigation, remeandering of streams, urban channel reclamation, incised channel reclamation, ditch reclamation, wetland channel reclamation, golf course reclamation, fish bypass channel routes, culvert fish passages at blockages, dam removal, passive bluff stabilization, and grade control to prevent headcut migration and soil loss. Mr. Melchior discussed the varying costs of projects and that typically in other states with statewide programs, projects are led by local watershed groups with assistance from dedicated state staff who hire prequalified experts in design and construction. Rarely do states have a unified statewide plan; rather, states typically either have active, well-organized state plans or more commonly piecemeal projects or a general plan. Mr. Melchior identified the essentials to a state river restoration program as multiple cooperating partners, a dedicated restoration staff at the state level, adequate program and project funding, watershed group initiation and assistance, technical guidance from the state, enforceable dam safety laws, and qualified designers.

County Conservation Boards. Mr. Larry Gullett, Director, Johnson County Conservation Board, identified the needs of local communities including expertise for methodology and techniques, stream assessment protocols, identification of river and stream segments that can improve as part of mitigation efforts, and training and education. Mr. Gullett stated that a statewide river restoration program would address local issues including clean water, protection of stream banks and infrastructure, flooding, fish and wildlife habitat, economic benefits, mitigation needs related to negative impacts from development, removal or modification of aging and deteriorating dams, and providing local focal points for communities.

Urban Waterways. Ms. Mimi Wagner, river restoration consultant, stated that the goal of river restoration should be to develop resilient and self-sustaining natural systems and described the stream assessment protocol that she uses. Ms. Wagner described the stream assessments and projects that she has conducted in Ames. Mr. Tom Brownlow, City Administrator, Charles City, explained the river and water quality projects conducted recently in Charles City. Mr. Brownlow discussed the various aspects of the river park and the economic impact the park has had on the city. Mr. Brownlow described the permeable paving projects the city has undertaken and the resulting reduction in storm water runoff. Mr. Brownlow also suggested the adoption of a water quality trading program. Mr. Wayne Petersen, Urban Conservation Program, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, discussed his work with stream corridor stabilization in urban and suburban areas in the state. Mr. Petersen discussed the special challenges of working with streams in urban areas which include the infrastructure included in urban stream corridors, private property structures that are often at risk, confined spaces, corridors that are fragmented by multiple ownership, and the increased costs of urban stream stabilization.

Private Landowners. Ms. Jody Kerns and Mr. Eric Boehm shared their experiences of doing river restoration projects on their own land at their own expense in rural Iowa.

Discussion and Recommendations. The committee agreed to meet again once the 2014 Legislative Session begins.

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