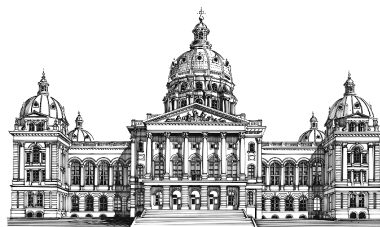


---

# Iowa Legislative Fiscal Bureau

Dennis Prouty  
(515) 281-5279  
FAX 281-8451



State Capitol  
Des Moines, IA 50319  
January 8, 2000

---

## Iowa Recreational Trails Program

### ISSUE

This *Issue Review* examines the Iowa Recreational Trails Program including funding and project commitments since the establishment of the Program.

### AFFECTED AGENCIES

Department of Transportation (DOT)  
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

### CODE AUTHORITY

Chapter 465B, Code of Iowa  
Chapter 165, Iowa Administrative Code

### BACKGROUND

The Recreational Trails Program was established by the General Assembly during the 1987 Legislative Session with the passage of HF 575 (Recreational Trails Act). In the Statement of Purpose (Section 465B.1), Code of Iowa, the General Assembly stated that the purpose of a statewide trails program would be for the State to acquire and develop 2,000 miles of new recreational trails and completion of existing trail projects before the year 2000. The DOT currently does not have a complete inventory of the total number of miles of developed recreational trails in Iowa. However, the DOT estimates this number to be between 800 and 1,000 miles, which includes developed multi-use recreational trails and off-road paths throughout the State.

The Recreational Trails Program was first funded in FY 1989, when the General Assembly created a \$1.0 million standing appropriation from the Road Use Tax Fund for deposit into the Recreational Trails Fund. Since the establishment of the Program, other State and federal resources have become available and have contributed substantially to the development of recreational trails.

## **RECREATIONAL TRAILS FUNDING PROGRAMS**

Since FY 1989, a total of \$42.8 million has been invested in developing recreational trails in Iowa. Funding for trails has come from State, federal, and local sources. The DOT administers three programs that provide funding for trails development and the DNR administers two. The programs under the DOT's purview include the State-funded Recreational Trails Fund, the federal Transportation Enhancement Program, and the federal Recreational Trails Program. The DNR administers the Resource Enhancement and Protection Fund and the Recreation Grant Program.

- **Recreational Trails Fund** - From FY 1989 to FY 1996, this Fund received a \$1.0 million standing appropriation annually from the Road Use Tax Fund. In FY 1997, the General Assembly eliminated the Road Use Tax Fund standing appropriation and funded the Trails Program from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund through the annual appropriations process. For FY 1998 and FY 1999, the appropriation was increased to \$2.0 million each year. In FY 2000 and FY 2001, the General Assembly has appropriated \$2.25 million per year and directs \$250,000 each year be used for off-road motorized vehicle trails. Grants funded through the Recreational Trails Fund require a minimum local match of 25.0%. Applications for funding from the Recreational Trails Program are considered for funding twice per year and are approved by the Transportation Commission. The following is a list of eligible expenses from this fund:
  - Land acquisition.
  - Trail surfacing, resurfacing, reconstruction and related costs.
  - New trail construction including grading, drainage, paving, and erosion control.
  - Bridge and culvert repair, replacement and construction.
  - Roadway intersection and interchange improvements that are integral to a project.
  - Construction of, or improvement to rest areas, information centers, waysides, interpretive displays, lighting, and restrooms, including the costs of utility connections that are an integral part of the project.
  - Design, engineering, and construction inspection costs directly associated with a project.
  - Utility relocation costs.
  - Trail signs, fencing, landscaping, parking areas, and walkways.
- **Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Fund** - The REAP Fund was created in FY 1990 and has received funding from lottery receipts, the State General Fund, and revenues from the sale of Natural Resources license plates. In FY 2000, the REAP Fund is being funded with a \$10.5 million appropriation from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund. The REAP Fund is used to fund a variety of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs including recreational trails. Funding for recreational trail projects financed through the REAP Fund must be approved by the Natural Resources Commission.
- **The DNR Recreational Grant Program** - This Program was created in FY 1999 and received a \$2.5 million appropriation from the Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund. In FY 2000, the appropriation was increased to \$3.5 million. This Program is used to finance one-third of project costs for repairs, renovations, new construction, and land acquisition for recreation facilities or complexes. Recreational Trails are an eligible expense of Program funds. Applications must be approved by the Natural Resources Commission.
- **Federal Transportation Enhancement Program** - This Program receives 10.0% of the federal Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds which in turn receives its funding through the federal Highway Trust Fund. In FY 1999, the amount allocated to the

Enhancement Program was \$8.3 million. Funding for recreational trails development is one of the eligible expenses of the Enhancement funds. These funds require a 20.0% minimum local match. Applications must be approved by the Transportation Commission.

- **Federal Recreational Trails Program** - The DOT is apportioned approximately \$600,000 to \$750,000 annually for the federal Recreational Trails Program. Forty percent of these funds are to be used for projects that facilitate diverse recreational use, 30.0% for motorized trails, and 30.0% for non-motorized trails. States are allowed to waive the motorized versus non-motorized requirements. These funds require a minimum 20.0% local match. Applications must be approved by the Transportation Commission.
- **Local Sources** - Local governments and nonprofit organizations generally serve as individual project sponsors and provide matching funds required. These groups have contributed an estimated \$13.7 million in trails funding since FY 1989. This represents 32.1% of the total funds spent on trails. The \$13.7 million represents only the local funds contributed as match associated with the State and federal programs. The amount of local funds spent on trails is larger than reported in this *Issue Review* because local jurisdictions and organizations spend funds outside of the grant programs.

Since FY 1989, there have been a total of 189 trail projects funded through the various funding programs at a total cost of \$42.8 million. Of the total \$42.8 million, 46.9% has come from State sources, 32.1% from local sources, and 21.0% from federal sources. The following table summarizes the total amount of funds obligated in projects by source since the creation of the Recreational Trails Program in FY 1989.

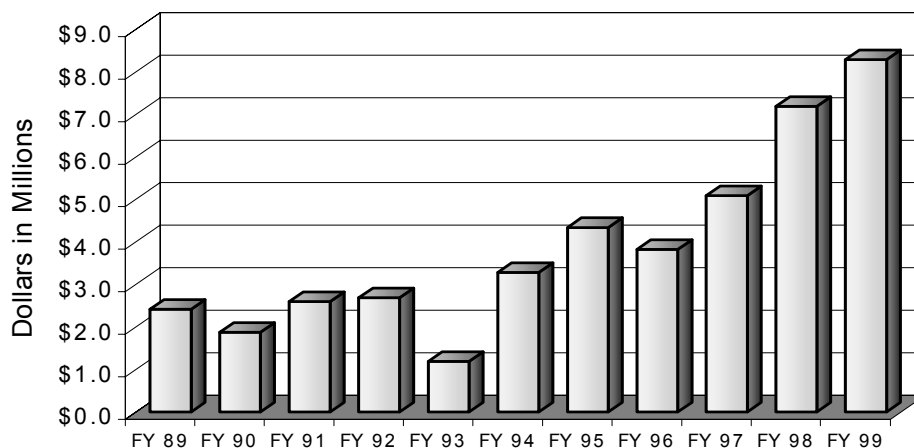
**State of Iowa  
Funds Expended for Recreational Trail Projects**

|                | DOT<br>State Rec.<br>Trails Funds | DNR<br>REAP Fund    | DNR<br>Rec. Grant<br>Program | Federal Trans.<br>Enhanc. Funds | Federal<br>Trail Funds | Local Funds*         | Total                |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| FY 1989        | \$ 1,527,905                      | \$ 0                | \$ 0                         | \$ 0                            | \$ 0                   | \$ 892,143           | \$ 2,420,048         |
| FY 1990        | 1,118,092                         | 386,587             |                              |                                 |                        | 373,558              | 1,878,237            |
| FY 1991        | 1,594,392                         | 471,747             |                              |                                 |                        | 531,464              | 2,597,603            |
| FY 1992        | 1,419,861                         | 694,953             |                              |                                 |                        | 570,552              | 2,685,366            |
| FY 1993        | 196,610                           | 756,439             |                              |                                 | 128,522                | 109,915              | 1,191,486            |
| FY 1994        | 618,407                           | 502,665             |                              | 1,235,720                       |                        | 925,236              | 3,282,028            |
| FY 1995        | 685,127                           | 748,348             |                              | 1,661,988                       |                        | 1,246,927            | 4,342,390            |
| FY 1996        | 912,549                           | 629,870             |                              | 1,021,920                       | 206,346                | 1,052,752            | 3,823,437            |
| FY 1997        | 1,053,000                         | 982,140             |                              | 1,281,078                       | 212,966                | 1,559,686            | 5,088,870            |
| FY 1998        | 2,063,425                         | 1,057,629           |                              | 1,229,807                       | 874,000                | 1,970,651            | 7,195,512            |
| FY 1999        | 2,000,000                         | 281,550             | 358,109                      | 1,154,000                       |                        | 4,499,064            | 8,292,723            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$ 13,189,368</b>              | <b>\$ 6,511,928</b> | <b>\$ 358,109</b>            | <b>\$ 7,584,513</b>             | <b>\$ 1,421,834</b>    | <b>\$ 13,731,948</b> | <b>\$ 42,797,700</b> |
| Total Projects | 57                                | 78                  | 12                           | 19                              | 23                     | Not Applicable       | 189                  |

\* The Local Funds include only funds contributed towards projects in which a local match was required. The REAP Program does not require local matching funds, therefore, any local funds contributed towards these projects were not reported.

Over the last several years, funding for recreational trails has increased significantly as illustrated on the chart below. The increase is largely the result of increased funding for the State Recreational Trails Fund and local funding contributions that exceed the minimum match requirements. Forty-eight percent of the total amount spent on trails has been expended over the last three years.

**Funds Expended for  
Recreational Trail Projects**



### **DOT AND DNR PROGRAM COORDINATION**

The amount of coordination between the DOT and DNR varies among funding programs. Grant applications for funding through the DOT's Recreational Trails Fund are evaluated and scored by DOT staff and a Trails Review Committee. This Committee is comprised of representatives from the Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, Cultural Affairs, and Economic Development. Proposed trail projects are required to be part of a local, areawide, regional, or statewide plan. The Committee's recommendations are presented to the Transportation Commission for consideration.

Projects funded through the federal programs are reviewed by representatives from the DOT and DNR as well as trail user groups. These projects are also required to be part of a local, areawide, regional, or statewide plan. This group makes funding recommendations to the Transportation Commission for consideration.

The DOT does not get involved in the project review process of DNR programs that provide funding for trails. Trail projects funded through the REAP Program are reviewed and scored by a committee comprised of DNR staff and local representatives involved in the local REAP committees. The project recommendations are then presented to the Natural Resources Commission for consideration.

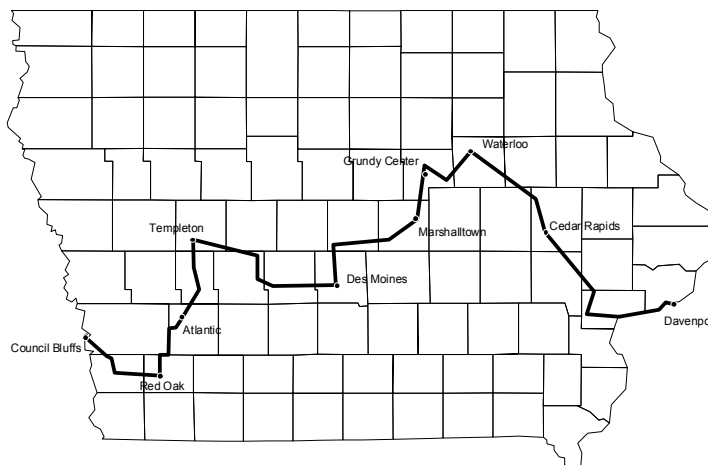
Trail projects funded through the DNR's Recreation Grant Program are reviewed by a six person committee consisting of two persons representing cities, two representing counties, one person representing other organizations, and one person with expertise in the vertical infrastructure industry. The Committee's recommendations are presented to the Natural Resources Commission for consideration.

The DOT is currently in the process of updating the Statewide Recreational Trails Plan which provides overall guidance for investment and policies concerning the Trails Program in Iowa. The current plan was developed in 1990. The development of the Plan is being overseen by a Project Management Team which includes DOT staff, a consultant, and a Technical Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory Committee includes representatives from the Departments of Natural Resources, Cultural Affairs, and Economic Development, and various user groups including the Natural Heritage Foundation, and county conservation boards.

**AMERICAN DISCOVERY TRAIL**

The American Discovery Trail is a nationally designated trail proposal of approximately 6,100 miles, which links California to Delaware along existing trails developed at the local level. The concept was first started by the American Hiking Association. The American Discovery Trail segment in Iowa connects Council Bluffs and Davenport and extends approximately 520 miles. To date, approximately 312 miles (60.0%) of the Iowa segment of the American Discovery Trail has been developed. While the exact location of some trail segments may change, the DOT has included the American Discovery Trail as part of the State’s backbone network of trails.

**American Discovery Trail  
Iowa Segment**



**American Discovery Trail**



**ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED**

With the development of 800 to 1,000 miles of trails in place, consideration may need to be given to the long-term funding for ongoing maintenance and upkeep of existing trails. Currently, there is no funding policy directing a specified amount of funding for ongoing maintenance. As the trail system begins to age, adequate funding for resurfacing and other improvements will need greater emphasis.

Consideration should also be given to improving the coordination of funding processes for recreational trails between the DNR and DOT. In order to maximize the benefits of trails funding, overall investment decisions in trails development should be made through the guidance of a single set of goals established in the Statewide Recreational Trails Plan.

STAFF CONTACT: David Reynolds (Ext. 16934)