

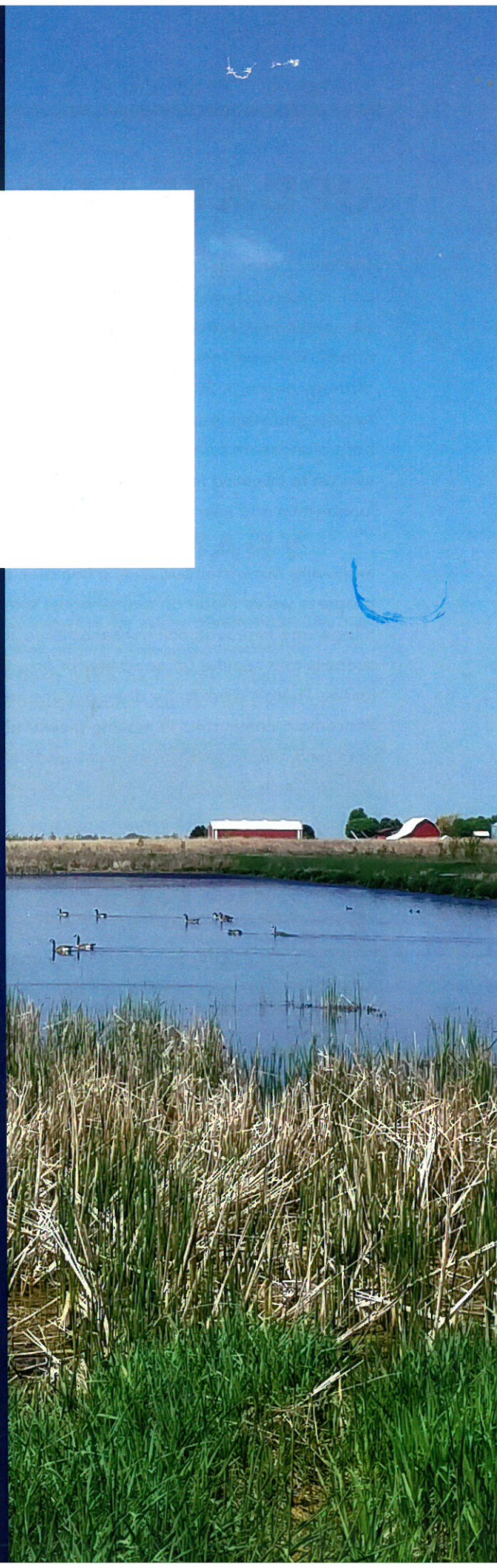
**2020 LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

# **IOWA WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE**



**IOWA DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE &  
LAND STEWARDSHIP**

[IOWAAGRICULTURE.GOV](http://IOWAAGRICULTURE.GOV) | 515.281.5321





## UPDATE FROM SECRETARY NAIG

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship appreciates the continued investment from Gov. Reynolds and the Iowa legislature, which allows us to expedite the state's soil health and water quality improvement efforts. We know more now than we did when the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy began in 2013, and there are new practices available to aid in reducing nutrient losses. More farmers and partners are engaged than ever before and more funding is available to help with implementation. That's why we're investing in local technical resources to help cities, farmers and landowners add new conservation practices.

Improving our water quality is a complex process. We're proud of the progress we've made on phosphorous through advances in reduced tillage and improved soil conservation efforts. We're building on this success and scaling up capacity for practices that reduce nitrogen losses. There's work to be done and it's not going to happen overnight. We remain committed to making measurable progress to improve water quality in Iowa and downstream — and both urban and rural citizens have a role to play in helping reach our shared water quality goals.



**Mike Naig**  
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture

## HIGHLIGHTS

The Department is accelerating the pace at which it's implementing water quality conservation practices.

- New technologies, funding and resources are allowing the Department to scale-up. There are currently 30 wetlands under development. By comparison, it took 15 years to construct the first 90 wetlands. Appropriately sited, every acre of these wetlands reduces 1,500 pounds of nitrogen annually.
- The Department doubled the amount of saturated buffers and bioreactors in the state over the last two years.
- Eight rural water quality and development projects, 11 urban conservation water projects and seven watershed projects were funded in 2019.
- The Department recently submitted four USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) applications and is partnering in four additional proposals.
- The Department partnered with Ducks Unlimited on four wetland restoration projects, with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) contributing to three of the four projects. The wetlands are estimated to remove 116,000 pounds of nitrogen per year.
- The Department was selected for a \$1.15 million cooperative agreement from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Gulf of Mexico Program. The funding will be used to install up to six wetlands in targeted locations to improve water quality and habitat in the Middle Cedar River watershed. It is estimated this project will reduce downstream nitrogen loads by 58,000 pounds per year.

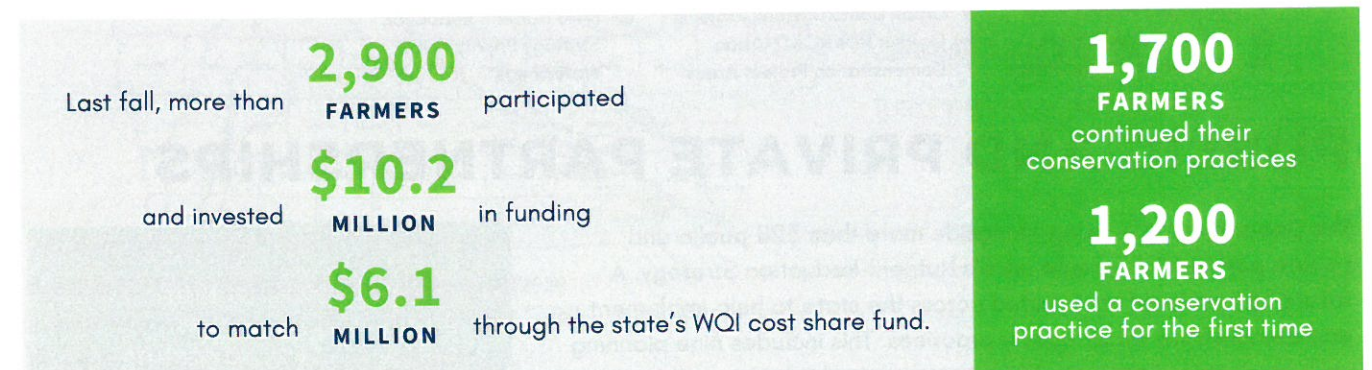
## ABOUT THE IOWA WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE

The Water Quality Initiative (WQI) was established during the 2013 legislative session to help execute Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS). The NRS provides a roadmap to achieve a 45 percent reduction in nitrogen and phosphorous losses to our waters using an integrated approach that includes point and non-point sources working together.

The WQI harnesses the collective ability of both private and public resources and organizations to rally around the NRS and add proven conservation practices to reduce nutrient loss and improve water quality in a scientific, reasonable and cost effective manner.

## STATEWIDE WQI PROGRAM SUMMARY

The agriculture community recognizes the value of conservation practices and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is committed to protecting our natural resources for future generations. The Water Quality Initiative cost share funds help farmers and landowners install nutrient-reducing conservation practices around the state. The funds can be used to off-set the cost of cover crops, no-till/strip till or a nitrification inhibitor, which help improve soil health, reduce erosion and improve water quality.



## CROP INSURANCE PREMIUM DISCOUNTS FOR COVER CROP USAGE

Under a joint, three-year demonstration project administered by the Department and USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA), farmers who plant cover crops in the fall may be eligible for a \$5 per acre reduction on their spring 2020 cash crop insurance premiums. To qualify, the cover crop acres cannot be enrolled in other state or federal cover crop cost share programs.

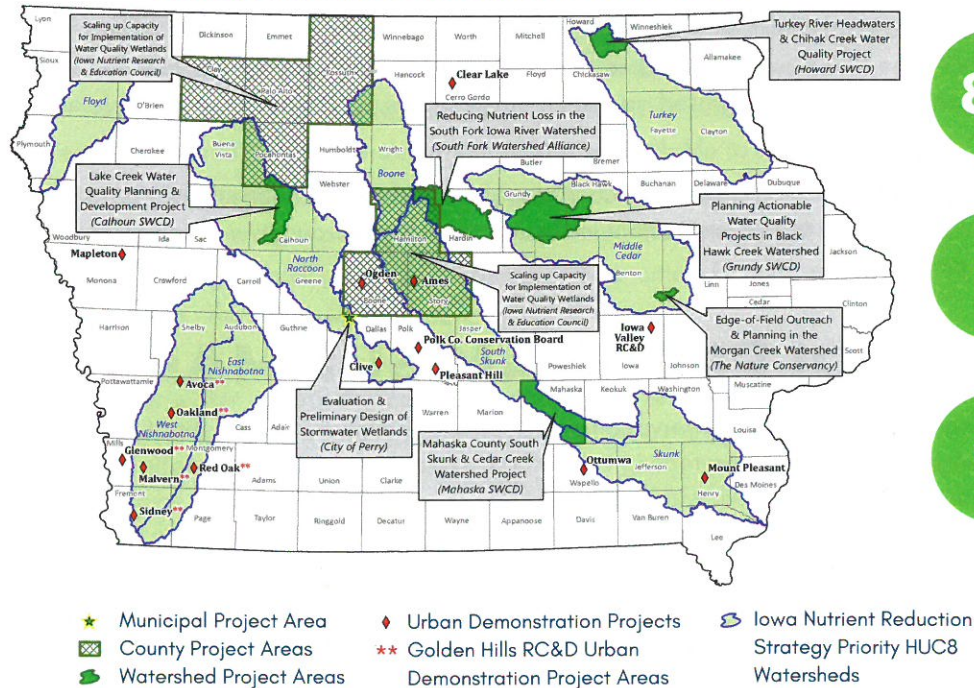
Planting cover crops helps improve soil health and prevent erosion, especially during high-intensity rainfalls. Cover crops are also proven to reduce nitrogen loads by 28 to 31 percent and phosphorous loads by 29 percent, which helps improve water quality.

During the first two years, more than 1,200 applications were received for this program. The Department approved more than \$1.5 million in funding for farmers and landowners to plant 305,000 acres of cover crops. Neighboring states in the Mississippi River basin have taken notice and are using Iowa's cover crop insurance discount program as a model to encourage adoption within their own borders.



## PRIORITY WATERSHED DEMO PROJECTS

### 2019 WQI PROJECTS: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS & URBAN DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS



84

DEMO PROJECTS  
ACROSS THE  
STATE

9

WATER QUALITY  
PLANNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROJECTS FUNDED  
IN FY2020

11

URBAN WATER  
QUALITY PROJECTS  
FUNDED IN FY2020

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

The Department is working alongside more than 320 public and private partners to execute Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy. A total of 84 projects are located across the state to help implement and demonstrate water quality practices. This includes nine planning and development projects, 13 targeted watershed projects, seven projects focused on expanding the use and innovative delivery of water quality practices and 55 urban water quality demonstration projects. The state awarded these 84 projects over \$29.5 million in funding. Private partners and landowners invested more than \$49 million to support these projects.

In September, Secretary Naig and the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) presented a Public-Private Partnership award to the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance (IAWA) Business Council.

The NASDA Public-Private Partnership award recognizes private organizations that partner with a state Department of Agriculture to implement a program, project or service that positively impacts its residents. Secretary Naig nominated the IAWA Business Council, made up of 14 organizations, for collaborating with the Department to improve Iowa's water quality.

"Collaboration among public and private partners is key to scaling-up scientifically-proven solutions that improve water quality locally and downstream. These demonstration projects are great examples of what we can accomplish when public and private partners all work together to expedite the implementation of conservation practices."

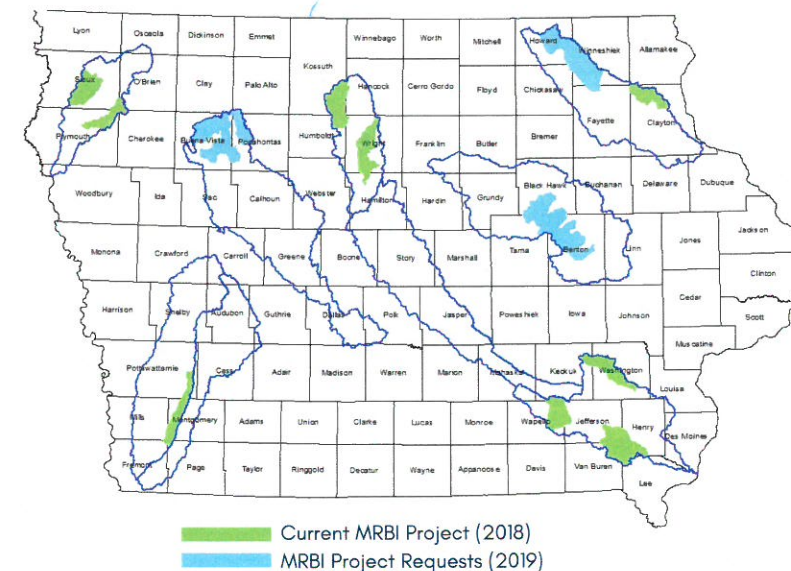
**Mike Naig,**  
Iowa Secretary  
of Agriculture

## LEVERAGING STATE APPROPRIATIONS WITH FEDERAL FUNDING

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship worked with several WQI watershed project coordinators to submit a request to USDA-NRCS for Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative (MRBI) funding.

In 2019, five WQI projects were submitted for inclusion in the MRBI to leverage WQI funding. Funding will support practices to improve water quality in these watersheds. A critical component to qualifying for this funding was to show active projects with continued financial support, committed landowners and farmers in the watersheds, and development of watershed assessments and plans to help inform activities.

Watershed projects submitted for MRBI funding include:



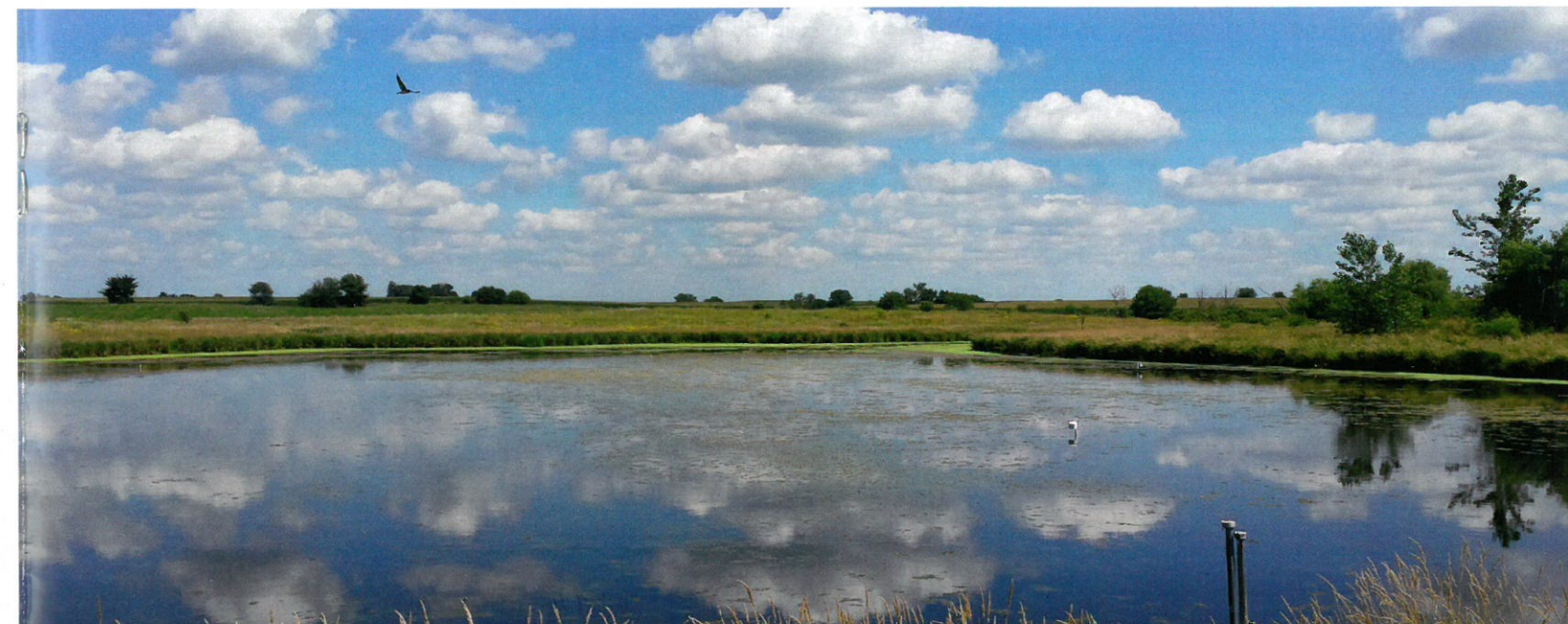
MILLER CREEK WATER QUALITY  
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

BENTON/TAMA NUTRIENT REDUCTION  
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

HEADWATERS OF THE NORTH RACCOON

CENTRAL TURKEY RIVER

TURKEY RIVER HEADWATERS





# USDA-NRCS REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM (RCPP)

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is currently leading or partnering in seven USDA-NRCS RCPP projects. These projects are leveraging WQI and partner funding to bring in more than \$19.3 million in additional federal funding for technical and financial assistance.

PROJECT NAME	LEAD PARTNER	AWARD DATE	RCPP FUNDING AMOUNT	WQI CONTRIBUTIONS	OTHER IDALS PROGRAM MATCH
Iowa Targeted Demonstration Watersheds Partnership Project	IDALS	2015	\$3,500,000	\$4,600,000	\$ -
Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership	IDALS	2016	\$9,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$ -
Middle Cedar Partnership Project	City of Cedar Rapids	2015	\$2,100,000	\$874,000	\$ -
Upper Cedar Watershed Urban-Rural Partnership	City of Charles City	2016	\$1,600,000	\$275,189	\$540,240
Fox River Water Quality Project	Davis SWCD	2017	\$900,000	\$ -	\$651,350
Innovative Conservation Agriculture	Allamakee SWCD	2017	\$646,670	\$ -	\$19,000
SmithfieldGro: Sustainable Grain Supply Chains	Environmental Defense Fund	2018	\$1,080,000	\$100,000	\$ -
TOTALS:			\$19,326,670	\$8,349,189	\$1,210,590

Projects are awarded RCPP funding for up to five years. Financial assistance is being delivered through the local NRCS offices directly to landowners and farmers to install water quality practices.

In 2019, a new RFP was released by NRCS requesting proposals for new RCPP projects. The Department partnered with several groups to lead proposals on four projects and partnered on another four. The Department committed \$37.2 million in contributions to bring in more than \$50.6 million from NRCS. \$250 million was made available nationwide by NRCS so at least 20 percent of available funds were requested by Iowa-based projects. NRCS anticipates announcing funding decisions in the summer of 2020.

# EPA GULF OF MEXICO FUNDING

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship has been selected for a \$1.15 million cooperative agreement by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Gulf of Mexico Program. The funding will be used to install up to six wetlands in targeted locations to improve water quality and habitat in the Middle Cedar River watershed. It is estimated this project will reduce downstream nitrogen loads by 58,000 pounds per year.

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship is partnering with the Cities of Cedar Rapids, Cedar Falls and Waterloo, Iowa State University and Iowa Corn Growers Association on this project to locate, promote, design and construct these wetlands.

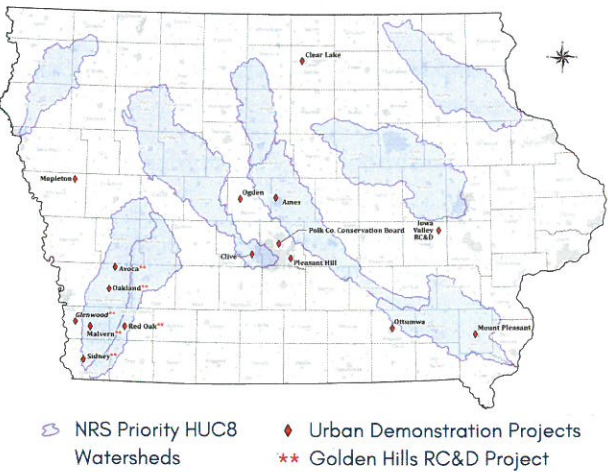
The Department also received a \$1 million water quality grant from the EPA – Gulf of Mexico Program in 2018 to support conservation drainage practices in the Des Moines River Basin.

# URBAN CONSERVATION PROJECTS

Urban conservation projects capture storm water and allow it to soak into the soil instead of running off the surface. This reduces the property’s contribution to water quality degradation, stream flows and flooding. Partnerships, outreach and education are also key components of urban water quality projects. They raise awareness about water quality improvement practices and encourage others to adopt permanent infrastructure that reduces the nutrient loads in surface waters.

Practices which may be installed as part of these urban projects include bioretention cells, bioswales, native plantings, permeable pavement, rain gardens, soil quality restoration and wetlands.

Funding was established for 11 new urban projects in 2019: Amana Colonies, Ames, Avoca, Clear Lake, Clive, Des Moines, Glenwood, Malvern, Mapleton, Mount Pleasant, Oakland, Ogden, Ottumwa, Pleasant Hill, Red Oak and Sidney.



“We’re on a journey to improve our natural resources for the next generation of Iowans. Whether you own a quarter acre lot in town or a quarter section in the country, you have a role to play. We must all work together to reach our shared water quality goals. We ask rural and urban citizens and public and private partners to work alongside us to raise awareness about conservation practices, promote available funding sources, and help us implement effective solutions.”

**Mike Naig,**  
Iowa Secretary of Agriculture

The new 2019 projects received over  
**\$900,000**  
in state funding.

The communities will also contribute  
**\$2 MILLION**  
in matching funds from public and private partnerships.

# IOWA NUTRIENT RESEARCH CENTER

The Iowa Nutrient Research Center at Iowa State University funded 16 new projects related to water quality. The Center addresses needs or gaps in nitrogen and phosphorus research that are important to helping Iowa reduce nutrient losses. Its research is evaluating the performance of current and emerging practices, providing recommendations on using new or tested practices and developing tools to help decision-makers adopt effective management practices. The Center has funded more than 60 projects led by scientists at Iowa State University, the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa in cooperation with other interested partners.

More information can be found at [cals.iastate.edu/inrc/](https://cals.iastate.edu/inrc/).



## MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT

Iowa State University, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship issue an INRS annual report to provide progress updates on point source and nonpoint source efforts to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loads leaving the state. The reports can be viewed at [nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu](http://nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu).

From 2018–2019, the Iowa State University Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology partnered with the Iowa Nutrient Research and Education Council (INREC), Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to employ a new best management practices land survey to better measure the number of permanent, land-based practices implemented across the state.

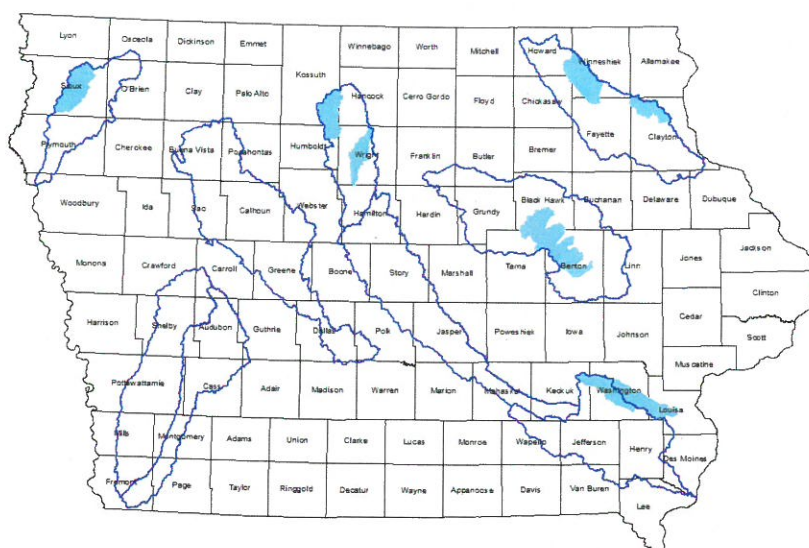
## LOOKING FORWARD

Increased funding is allowing the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to add targeted full-time staff to accelerate the adoption of conservation practices.

- Added watershed coordinators in targeted watersheds (North Raccoon, South Skunk, Middle Cedar, Floyd River and Boone River) to work with urban planners, farmers and landowners.
- Hired an edge-of-field coordinator to work state-wide and streamline the process of adding edge-of-field conservation practices, including wetlands, saturated buffers and bioreactors.
- Will have one dedicated Conservation Assistant to support each Soil and Water Conservation District office.

Contracts with engineering and construction companies to streamline and reduce the backlog of infrastructure-based practices. Currently, there are more than 30 wetlands under development in Iowa.

Additional funding was established for seven Water Quality Initiative demonstration projects starting mid-2020:



WQI 2020 Demonstration Projects

BENTON/TAMA NUTRIENT REDUCTION  
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

BOONE RIVER WATERSHED NUTRIENT  
MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

TURKEY RIVER WATER QUALITY  
INITIATIVE

DEMONSTRATION OF TARGETED  
NUTRIENT REDUCTION SYSTEMS FOR  
CLAYTON COUNTY

MILLER CREEK WATER QUALITY  
IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

WEST BRANCH OF THE FLOYD RIVER  
WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE PROJECT

WEST FORK CROOKED AND LONG  
CREEK WATER QUALITY AND SOIL  
HEALTH PROJECT