

BOOTS ON THE GROUND = CONSERVATION ON THE GROUND

DECLINING STAFF PUTS CONSERVATION ON HOLD

The decline in funding for state field office staff is affecting Districts' ability to serve landowners. Since 2008, Conservation Assistants have been reduced from 100 to 84 and Soil Technicians from 46 to 34. At one time we had 79 Soil Technicians.

Our federal partner, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is down 100 employees since 2003 and additional cuts at the federal level can be expected. This declining federal staff is tasked with their own workload, programs and priorities. If the state does not keep up its side of the partnership, state priorities will take a backseat and the partnership will be strained.

Long waiting periods leave farmers disenfranchised with conservation and the government causing them to not install conservation practices. Also, many farmers would implement conservation with technical assistance alone but the assistance is not available. Landowners are not the only ones who suffer. Our state staff feels the added pressure and stress of these declines as well.

STATE FIELD OFFICE STAFF, OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELD

Staff market, plan, design, contract, oversee construction, and certify completion for all conservation programs and practices. In 2015, State Secretaries were retitled Conservation Assistants to better represent their diverse knowledge and many skill sets.

The staff is required to understand numerous state programs in addition to local and federal programs. With the \$9.8 million spent in state cost share alone last year, staff worked with 3,385 residents to process 4,120 financial claims for over 50 different kinds of conservation practices.

ADDITIONAL STAFF NEEDED FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE & CLEAN WATER IN IOWA

Despite the decline in staff, program funding is up with increased dollars for cost share and new funding for the Water Quality Initiative to address the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. There is also a \$16.9 million backlog of conservation practices awaiting installation. While traditional soil conservation practices protect and improve water quality, staff must also learn and promote new programs and practices. More staff is needed for sustainable agriculture and clean water in Iowa.



2016/2017 SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BUDGET DETAIL

| LINE ITEM | RECEIVED IN 2016 | 2017 NEED |
|--|--|--|
| Operations: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship | \$17.66 million General Fund | \$19.23 million (\$1.57 million increase) |
| Operations: Soil Conservation Account | \$2.7 million Environment First Fund | \$2.7 million |
| Water Quality Initiative/Nutrient Reduction Strategy | \$4.4 million General Fund | \$10 million |
| | \$5.2 million Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund | |
| Iowa Financial Incentive Program/Cost Share (IFIP) | \$6.75 million Environment First Fund | \$7.5 million |
| Agricultural Drainage Wells | \$1.92 million Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Fund | \$1.92 million |
| Urban Conservation | \$0 | \$1.1 million |
| Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) | \$1 million Environment First Fund | \$5 million |
| District Initiative/Conservation Reserve Program | \$1 million Environment First Fund | \$2 million |
| Watershed Protection Fund | \$900,000 Environment First Fund | \$3 million |
| Integrated Farm and Livestock Management (IFLM) | \$625,000 Environment First Fund | \$850,000 |
| Loess Hills Hungry Canyons | \$600,000 Environment First Fund | \$600,000 |
| Southern Iowa Development & Conservation Authority (SIDCA) | \$0 | \$250,000 |
| Watershed Improvement Review Board (WIRB) | \$0 | \$5 million |
| Resource Enhancement and Protection Fund (REAP) | \$16 million Environment First Fund | \$20 million |
| Iowa's Water and Land Legacy (IWILL) | \$0 | Support funding |

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