



Mississippi River Network

A coalition of 37 organizations from throughout the ten-state Mississippi River region, working to protect the land, water and people of America's Greatest River

Conservation Programs Protect Iowa's Family Farmers, Water and Land Resources

The Mississippi River flows through the heart of our nation. It provides drinking water for 18 million people, a diverse habitat for wildlife and the backbone of our economy. But the once mighty Mississippi is in trouble. Pollution from farms damages our River and causes the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico, an area in which no fish, shrimp or wildlife can survive. This pollution threatens our drinking water, economies and quality of life.

Agriculture has long been a significant contributor to Mississippi River runoff pollution and water quality problems. These problems have been exacerbated in the last twenty years with the advent of factory farming and industrialized agriculture. According to a National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council report entitled *Improving Water Quality in the Mississippi River Basin and the Northern Gulf of Mexico: Strategies and Priorities*, the total annual load of nitrogen to the Gulf of Mexico exceeds **1 million metric tons** and degrades the water quality of over **13,670 square miles**.



The report found that while high levels of nutrient loadings are discharged into the Mississippi River from both point and nonpoint sources, “the large majority of nutrient yields across the Mississippi River basin are nonpoint in nature and are associated with agricultural activities, especially applications of nitrogen-based fertilizers and runoff from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs).”

The farmer incentive programs in the Farm Bill Conservation Title not only advance clean water goals and objectives by implementing agricultural practices that reduce polluted runoff, but they also take marginally productive land out of farming to create critical wildlife habitats, protect and restore vital wetlands and produce other valuable conservation benefits.

Conservation programs such as the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** and the **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** are increasingly the focus of significant cuts in both the House and the Obama Administration budget proposals, even though they provide direct environmental and conservation benefits by helping farmers meet specific water quality and conservation goals.

Conservation Program Dollars and Acres in Iowa

While there are other programs that provide significant and valuable benefits to the Mississippi River basin, the farmer incentive programs have demonstrated efficiency in using taxpayer dollars specifically to implement practices that have a direct, positive impact on the River.

These programs are heavily utilized by farmers throughout the Mississippi River basin and in **Iowa**:

- **EQIP** addresses water quality, ground and surface water conservation, air quality, soil erosion, sedimentation and wildlife habitat creation for at risk species. In order for farmers to receive EQIP payments, they are required to develop a plan detailing specific conservation and environmental objectives, the conservation practices they will implement to achieve those results and an implementation schedule.

In 2009, there were 1,227 EQIP contracts awarded in Iowa, bringing Illinois' farmers over \$20 million.

- **CSP** encourages farmers to undertake additional conservation activities and improve existing conservation systems through financial support and technical assistance. CSP participants receive payments based on performance.

In Fiscal Year 2010, over \$20.2 million was obligated to Iowa farmland through CSP.

- **WRP** restores and protects wetlands that provide numerous water quality, flood control, wildlife habitat and nutrient filtration benefits. Most of the acres enrolled in WRP were previously drained or cleared for agricultural production and are still suitable for restoration and protection.

From the program's inception through 2008, 80,083 acres have been enrolled in WRP in Iowa.

While these programs have their shortcomings and are in need of refinement, the direct environmental and conservation benefits of the farmer incentive programs are necessary to offset the increasing stresses that industrialized agriculture is placing on our land and water resources. These programs and the funding available through them are increasingly used to support targeted, science-based and performance driven programs such as the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI).



The Mississippi River Network and 1 Mississippi campaign are building a national constituency of citizens and organizations dedicated to protecting the land, water and people of this remarkable watershed.

We currently have over 250 River Citizens, people who have pledged to take action, in Iowa. We have over 2,000 River Citizens nationally, and the numbers are growing daily. In addition to national organizations like The Nature Conservancy and Ducks Unlimited, there are several local organizations working with the Network in Iowa, including: National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium (Dubuque), River Action (Davenport), Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque (Dubuque), Iowa Environmental Council (Des Moines) and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (Des Moines).

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Protecting the Land, Water and People of America's Greatest River Basin

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