

The Iowa Environmental Council's position on

REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection Program)

Iowa's landmark REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection Program) works for Iowa's land and people. This cost-effective program (only 1 percent goes for administration) protects our precious soil and water, enhances state parks, saves habitats, educates our young people about Iowa, and beautifies roadsides. REAP should be strengthened, because it is one of the most important programs we have for making Iowa a better place.

1. REAP should be funded at \$20 million, the amount authorized by law.
2. The carefully crafted formula used to distribute REAP funds should be left intact.

Background

If you live in Iowa, it is likely REAP has enriched your life. Because of REAP, you see more parks and open space, splashes of color from summer wildflowers growing along Iowa's roadways, windbreaks and grassed waterways on Iowa farms, and key places and events of Iowa's heritage preserved.

REAP is an essential part of our efforts to protect Iowa's natural treasures — our abundant rivers, streams, wetlands, and lakes, our soils, our forests and prairies — and the plants and animals that rely on all of these treasures.

REAP funds are channeled into eight different programs, based upon percentages that are in Iowa law. These percentages — called the REAP formula — specify that the first \$350,000 of REAP funding goes to conservation education, with an emphasis on educator workshops and conferences, and development of teaching materials. 1 percent of REAP funding goes for administering the program through the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

REAP funds are then distributed based on the following formula:

City parks and open space (15 percent): This funding improves local communities, large and small, by funding park expansion and multi-purpose recreation developments.

Open space acquisition and development of land and waters (28 percent): Because of this funding, we are able to protect and enhance our special and unique natural areas and our biodiversity. This money also allows DNR to improve our state forests, fish and wildlife areas, and state parks. *Using money from the open space account, DNR continues to pay taxes on land acquired, so that the state does not financially burden local governments.*

Soil and water enhancement (20 percent): These funds go to landowners for soil and water conservation and enhancement projects and practices (such as reforestation, woodland protection and enhancement, wildlife habitat preservation and enhancement, protection of highly erodible soils, and water quality protection).

County conservation (20 percent): County conservation boards need this money for land easements or acquisitions, capital improvements, stabilization and protection of resources, repair and upgrading of facilities, environmental education, and equipment.

Roadside vegetation (3 percent): This money is used to plant prairie grasses and flowers, shrubs, and trees in road rights-of-way. Doing so reduces maintenance costs and improves wildlife habitat — and makes Iowa a more beautiful place.

Historical resources (5 percent): Grants under this program support historic preservation, libraries and archives, and museums.

Land management by DNR (9 percent): Development and management of state conservation lands, including trail renovation, restroom

replacements, and repairs to shelters and cabins are accomplished using this money.

REAP is funded by the state's infrastructure fund and receipts from the sale of the natural resources license plate. The program is authorized to receive \$20 million per year until 2021, but it has been funded at that level only once (1991) since its inception in 1989. During the 1999 Legislative session, the program was funded at \$10.5 million from the infrastructure fund. Receipts from the sale of REAP license plates and interest from the REAP account added \$1 million to this amount.

REAP funding is well-spent money that is poured directly into Iowa communities. Moreover, the program involves extensive public participation, which ensures that REAP goes to areas Iowans consider priorities.

The Iowa Environmental Council's position

1. REAP should be funded at \$20 million, the amount authorized by law.

Iowans must work to make our state a more attractive place to live, work, and play. REAP is an excellent vehicle for doing this. The program has little administrative overhead, and because it is so diverse, it improves cultural, recreational, and educational possibilities for all Iowans.

At last year's funding level (\$11.5 million), most REAP proposals were left unfunded. DNR reports that there is no money to fund many excellent projects. For example, in 1999, 78 applications (for a total request of \$6.7 million) were submitted for city parks and open space monies; only 17 received funding (for a total of

\$1.64 million). County conservation boards submitted 23 applications (for a total request of \$5 million); only four projects were funded (for a total amount of \$893,000). Our communities deserve better than this. REAP deserves to be fully funded.

2. The carefully crafted formula used to distribute REAP funds should be left intact.

The REAP formula is a tried-and-true way to distribute REAP funds that works well for a diverse group of interests. The formula has held up well over time. Every time the "REAP Congress" is held, citizens from across the state have voted overwhelmingly to maintain the integrity of the formula.

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