

Iowa Environmental Council 2010-2011 Water Priorities

The following initiatives will be priorities of the Iowa Environmental Council in 2010-2011. They are expected to require a significant amount of effort, our coalition is in a position to lead, the initiative has statewide significance, and there is a good chance for success.

1. Reduction of nonpoint source pollution

Nonpoint source pollution including sediment, nutrients and bacteria is the largest source of water quality pollution problems in Iowa. While there are many good voluntary programs in Iowa that provide incentives for landowners to implement conservation programs on private land, most of these programs are not strategically implemented to achieve water quality goals. The Iowa Environmental Council will promote comprehensive watershed planning with strong local leadership and commitment for implementation as the most effective way to assure the public investment in conservation programs will achieve water quality goals. Specific nonpoint source initiatives that the Council will work on in 2011 include:

- **Federal Farm Bill** - The renewal of the Farm Bill in 2012 provides a strategic opportunity to influence federal policies that drive many of the decisions farmers make about what to grow and how to grow it. The federal conservation programs that are authorized through the Farm Bill are the major source of funding for farm conservation programs in the US. With a new administration at USDA and growing recognition of the need to get more benefits in return for continued public support for farm subsidies, we believe that significant environmental gains could be made in the next Farm Bill
In preparation for the next Farm Bill we will advocate for a few key reforms in the Farm Bill. These reforms include:
 - Better enforcement of Conservation Compliance to assure that existing conservation plan requirements are being met for all farmers that receive tax-payer funded subsidies.
 - Expansion of Conservation Compliance to more effectively address conservation priorities on all cropland, including:
 - Require conservation plans on all cropland that receive subsidies.
 - Require setbacks from waterways for row crop production.
 - Requiring nutrient management planning as part of conservation plans on all cropland.
 - Increased funding through the Farm Bill conservation programs for staff and technical assistance to assist farmers in development of conservation plans and speed adoption of new technologies to achieve better environmental and economic performance.
 - Targeting of funding to have the most impact through implementation of watershed based plans.
 - Consolidation of working lands conservation programs (i.e. EQIP and CSP) and consolidation of land retirement and easement programs (i.e. CRP, WRP, GRP)
- **State Nonpoint Source Management Plan** – Iowa’s Nonpoint Source Management Plan (NPSMP) is required by the Clean Water Act in order for the state to be eligible for Section 319 grant funding. These plans identify the state’s strategies and programs that will be used to effectively control

nonpoint source pollution. Iowa's plan was first developed in 1989 and parts of the plan were revised in 2000.

- We will work with Iowa DNR to review and update Iowa's NPSMP and advocate for new state initiatives including both voluntary and regulatory programs, as appropriate, to restore waters impaired by agricultural pollution.
- We will promote adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and elimination of practices that are the most harmful to water quality. Specific state initiatives include:
 - improved management of riparian corridors including pasture management and setbacks from streams for row crop production,
 - improved soil erosion control practices
 - use of cover crops along with annual row crops to provide a continuous living cover
 - Improved nutrient management for both fertilizer and manure.
 - Increased focus on control of nonpoint source pollution that passes unseen through subsurface tile lines into our rivers and lakes.
- **Integrated Drainage and Wetland Landscape Initiative** – The Iowa CREP wetland project has been in existence since 2001 and more than 50 constructed wetlands have been installed, with another 25 under development. The Iowa Environmental Council has been a strong supporter of the Iowa CREP project as it has been implemented in the past. This new project, called the Integrated Drainage and Wetland Landscape System Initiative, proposes to combine improvements to the capacity of an agricultural drainage district tile outlet with a constructed CREP wetland at the drainage outlet. A particularly controversial aspect of the new project includes the use of public money to pay a portion of the drainage improvement costs in addition to the usual cost share assistance provided for construction of the wetland at the outlet. While the wetland component of this initiative is generally supported by the environmental community, the drainage improvement component of this initiative has generated significant concerns.

To address these concerns, the Council will work with a coalition of environmental and conservation organizations to review and comment on the initial 5 pilot projects to ensure that adequate monitoring and assessment is conducted to allow evaluation of the net environmental benefits of the integrated drainage and wetland system and to assess the impact of unintended consequences of the enhanced drainage to natural wetlands and down-stream flooding.

2. Water Resources Coordinating Council and State Water Plan

Establishment of the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) and development of a Comprehensive State Water Plan is a high priority for the Council. The WRCC was established by the legislature in 2008 as part of the Surface Water Protection Act (SWPA), and was expanded in 2009 to include flood plain management as an additional responsibility. The Council serves on the Watershed Planning Advisory Council to the WRCC that was created by the legislature in 2010. In 2011, the Council will continue to work to expand the responsibilities and effectiveness of the WRCC:

- Work with WRCC, including key agencies such as IDALS and IDNR, to implement the Water Quality Planning Task Force Recommendations to implement a watershed based framework for assessing water resources and developing restoration plans for impaired waters. We will engage in subcommittee work with WRCC/ACOE assessment of Iowa/Cedar Rivers basin study and

encourage the WRCC to actively engage in the new USDA Mississippi River Healthy Watershed Initiative to assure that Iowa successfully competes for our share of the federal dollars targeted for this program.

- We will also work to assure that the WRCC implements the Water Quality Research and Marketing Campaign called that is part of their responsibilities. The goal of this campaign is to rekindle the conservation ethic in all Iowans and involve all citizens, both rural and urban, in the effort to improve our stewardship of our public water resources.
- Educate the WRCC and legislators about the importance of a comprehensive State Water Plan that deals with both surface water and groundwater and both quality and quantity and seek support from the WRCC for development of this plan.
- Work with WRCC on the flood mitigation plan to ensure policies for long-term planning utilize a watershed framework to reduce risk of future flooding. Oversee coordination of WRCC, RIO, DNR and the new Flood Center on flood management planning to assure cooperation.

3. Improve Water Quality Standards to comply with Clean Water Act

We will continue with our efforts to ensure compliance and enforcement of Clean Water Act regulations. New antidegradation rules were adopted in 2010 and significant progress was made in completion of the stream use assessment. In 2011, we will work with our partners to facilitate:

- Completion of the DNR's Use Attainability Analyses and implementation of new protections for recreational and aquatic life uses for all perennial rivers and streams in the state
- Assist in the defense of the lawsuit challenging the legality of the new antidegradation rules. Work with DNR to implement antidegradation procedures for lakes and rivers that assure that our highest quality waters will not be degraded and, where water quality exceeds the minimum state standards, that quality water will be maintained unless it is necessary to allow some degradation to support important economic and social development
- Development and implementation of numeric nutrient water quality criteria for lakes recommended by the Nutrient Science Advisory committee that will set goals for restoration activities for lakes impaired by frequent algae blooms that impair recreational uses. We will also work to begin the process of developing recommendations for numeric nutrient criteria to protect rivers and streams.
- Work with Iowa DNR to develop new use designation and chemical and biological criteria specifically for wetlands. We will also work to update the chemical criteria for coldwater trout streams including updated chemical criteria for existing cold water streams and new chemical criteria and designations for the tributary cold water springs.

4. Enforcement of point source regulations and policies

Many good environmental laws and programs exist but are not implemented and/or enforced in Iowa. In 2011 we will:

- Focus strategically on a review of Iowa's permit programs for point sources including wastewater discharge permits, storm water permits, wetland dredge and fill permits. We will comment on permits and work directly with the agencies charged with enforcement of these programs, and use permit challenges and other legal action only when necessary.