



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF  
**AGRICULTURE &  
LAND STEWARDSHIP**

# **SOIL CONSERVATION AND WATER QUALITY 2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

## **Accelerating Iowa's Soil Conservation and Water Quality Progress**

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## UPDATE FROM SECRETARY MIKE NAIG

Iowa's hardworking farmers lead the nation in corn, egg, pork and biofuels production. Did you know they're also conservation leaders, adding more buffer and filter strips, grassed waterways, water quality wetlands, conservation tillage, bioreactors, pollinator habitat, terraces and saturated buffers than any other state?

Because of the dedicated and sustained funding from the Iowa Legislature, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Iowa State University (ISU) have been working alongside nearly 450 public and private partners since 2013 to continue implementing the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS). The INRS outlines a suite of tools farmers and landowners can use to right-size crop inputs and reduce nitrogen and phosphorus losses to capture valuable nutrients in the fields and filter them before reaching our lakes, rivers and streams.

Implementing the INRS takes financial, engineering and construction resources, as well as farmers and landowners who are willing to make long-term changes to their fields. The boots-on-the-ground work is hard, the process takes time and there's no silver bullet. It took decades to achieve Iowa's phosphorus-reduction progress, but that's how we know a farmer-led approach to conservation can work in Iowa. Now we're focused on deploying nitrogen-reducing practices. There is still work to do but we are making progress.

Momentum continues to build across the state. We saw strong adoption of conservation practices in 2025 and successfully completed both rural and urban water quality projects. We supported more than \$34.3 million in soil and water cost-share, nearly \$7.2 million more than last year's record. We processed more than 7,300 completed project cost-share claims — 630 more than last year, and 1,800 more than five years ago.

We saw record demand for the state's cover crop cost-share program, and Iowa farmers are now planting nearly four million acres of cover crops. We initiated 26 wetland projects in 2025, the most in a single year. We expanded the cattle and conservation working lands project to eight counties, and we have active batch and build agreements in 28 counties.

In FY2026, we're allocating even more financial and staffing resources to accelerate work upstream of the Des Moines, Raccoon and Middle Cedar Rivers. I introduced a \$3 million streamside buffer pilot project which encourages farmers and landowners in these priority watersheds to add perennial buffer strips at the edge of their fields to filter water before it enters neighboring creeks.

We hit exciting conservation milestones this year, and we battled very real challenges along the way. The federal government shutdown closed field offices during the peak conservation planning and enrollment period. IDALS continued pushing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to roll back regulatory red tape that slows the pace and increases the cost of constructing water quality wetlands. And yet we continued to make progress because farmers said yes to conservation, even in a challenging ag economy.

There are conversations happening about water quality, and in many cases you're only hearing one side of the story. If you have questions about the Water Quality Initiative, please reach out to my staff. We'd be happy to introduce you to people who come to work every day to help farmers and landowners implement water quality solutions, and we need even more partners to get involved. As you talk to constituents in your districts, please encourage them to join us and help make a meaningful impact on Iowa's source water quality.

Thank you for your continued support of Iowa's Water Quality Initiative.



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Naig".

# ANOTHER RECORD YEAR FOR CONSERVATION

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), working with Iowa's 100 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, USDA-NRCS, Iowa State University and many other partners, once again shattered a record for conservation and water quality practice adoption within Iowa during FY2025. The pace of adoption continues to accelerate as more farmers, landowners, partners, practices, people and resources are added. While these results are encouraging and we are making progress, there is much more work to do.

## WATER QUALITY & SOIL CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

**\$77.2M** IDALS DIVISION EXPENDITURES

**\$34.3M** STATE COST-SHARE INVESTMENT

**\$47M** ESTIMATED FARMER AND OTHER PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

**8,000+** FARMERS AND LANDOWNERS PARTICIPATING IN CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

**COVER CROP ACRES**

**3.8M**  
(\*2024 INREC SURVEY)

**WETLANDS**

**147**

COMPLETED

**94**

IN DEVELOPMENT

**SATURATED BUFFERS AND BIOREACTORS**

**484**

COMPLETED

**200+**

IN DEVELOPMENT

## WQI PROJECT AREAS

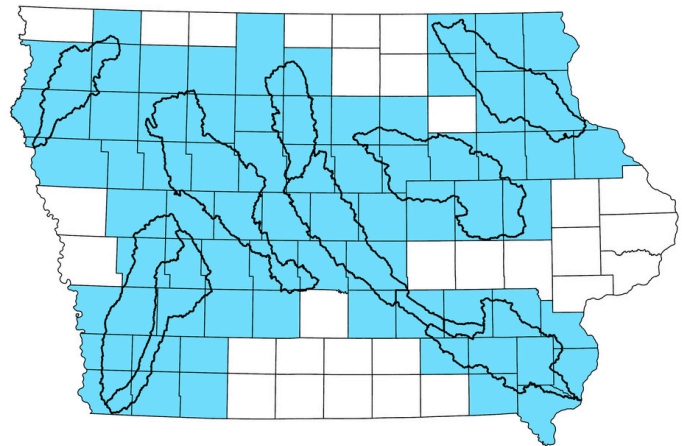
Though we target much of our water quality and soil conservation investments into priority watersheds, impactful work is happening across the state.



**Priority HUC-8 Watersheds**



**Counties with existing WQI projects**



## LEVERAGING STATE FUNDS

**\$3.3M** EPA GULF OF AMERICA

**\$34.7M** NRCS MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN

**\$122.8M** NRCS REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

**\$1.05M** PRIVATE/NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

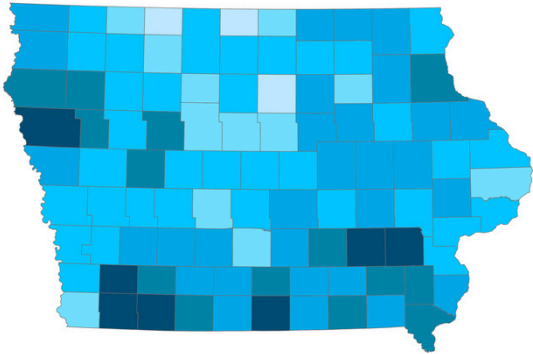
**\$25M** CONSERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

**\$4.17M** GULF HYPOXIA PROGRAM

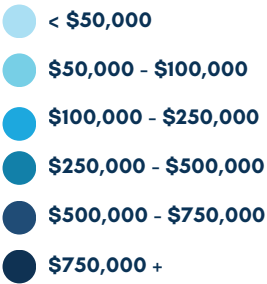
*Note: Summary is the total amount received since the start of the WQI and directly tied to WQI activities. Many of these projects are multi-year and are in various stages of their project term. These totals do not include investments made by individual farmers or landowners.*



# INCENTIVES FOR CONSERVATION ADOPTION PROVIDED TO IOWA FARMERS AND LANDOWNERS



## FY2025 COST-SHARE DOLLARS EXPENDED BY DISTRICT



Diverse landforms across Iowa directly affect the cost and type of conservation practices best suited for each field and impact the funding each county needs and receives.

PERMANENT STRUCTURES PROVIDE ONGOING BENEFITS	TONS OF SOIL SAVED PER YEAR	DID YOU KNOW? THAT'S EQUAL TO
342 Terrace projects covering 859,900 feet (162.8 miles)	18,984	= 1,356
116 Grade stabilization structure projects	25,038	= 1,788
89 Water and sediment control basin projects	8,966	= 640
91 Grassed waterway projects	9,424	= 673



dump truck loads of soil

## PRACTICE EXAMPLES



TERRACES



COVER CROPS



GRASSED WATERWAYS



WATER AND SEDIMENT CONTROL BASINS



GRADE STABILIZATION STRUCTURES

## HOW COST-SHARE WORKS



Legislature appropriates funding



IDALS allocates funds to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD)



Farmers and landowners apply for cost-share at SWCD offices



SWCD Commissioners approve cost-share applications



Local contractors install conservation practices

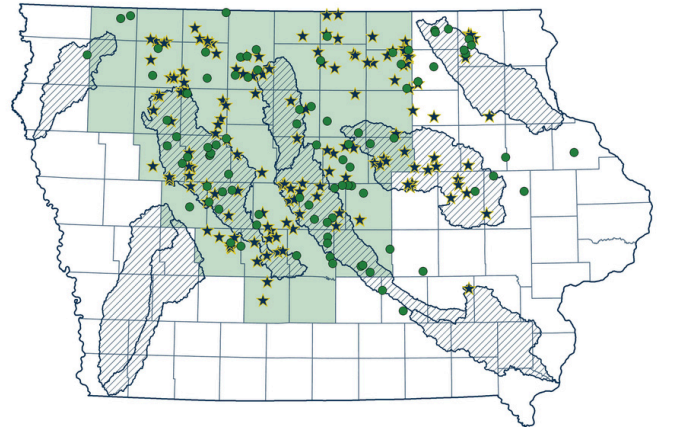


Conservation practices improve soil health and water quality

# WATER QUALITY WETLANDS

Water quality wetlands act like filters, removing nutrients from stormwater before it reaches our rivers, lakes and streams. In FY2025, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) initiated 26 wetland projects — the most ever in one year.

In addition to water quality benefits, these beautiful wetlands provide important habitat for wildlife and pollinators, flood mitigation and much more. Research and ongoing monitoring by Iowa State University have demonstrated that strategically sited and designed nutrient reduction wetlands remove an average of 40-70% of nitrates from cropland drainage waters, providing a high return on investment for this efficient and effective permanent practice. To date, 147 wetlands have been built with dozens more in the design process.



★ **COMPLETE (147)**      ▨ **PRIORITY HUC8 WATERSHEDS**  
 ● **IN PROGRESS (94)**      ■ **CREP-ELIGIBLE COUNTIES**

## 147

WATER QUALITY WETLANDS HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED

## 280M

EST. POUNDS OF NITROGEN WILL BE REMOVED BY WETLANDS OVER THEIR LIFETIMES

## 1.87M

POUNDS OF NITROGEN REMOVED BY WETLANDS ANNUALLY

## \$0.27

AVERAGE COST TO REMOVE ONE POUND OF NITROGEN USING WATER QUALITY WETLANDS

## 167K+

WATERSHED ACRES PROTECTED BY 1,367 ACRES OF WETLANDS

## INNOVATIVE “BATCH AND BUILD” MODEL RAMPS UP

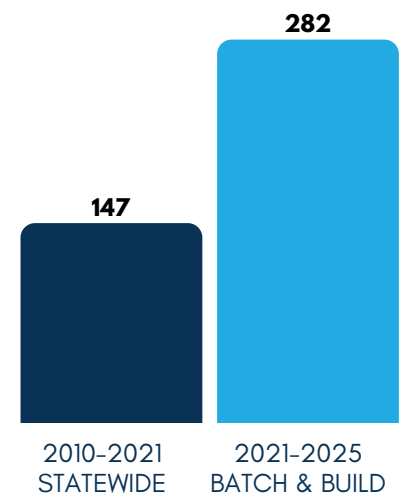
The “Batch and Build” model modernizes and streamlines the project management process by installing batches of edge-of-field conservation practices on multiple farms at once, making it easier for farmers to say yes to conservation and accelerating the rate of adoption. The model is used to install edge-of-field infrastructure, which filters and denitrifies water as it leaves the farm field before it enters our waterways.

- IDALS deployed this model in 2020.
- **11** active Batch and Build agreements in place, installing practices in **28** different counties.
- Additional agreements with local partners are in the planning stages.

### PARTICIPATING COUNTIES

Benton	Cedar	Hancock	Marshall	Story
Black Hawk	Dallas	Hardin	Muscatine	Tama
Boone	Franklin	Humboldt	Pocahontas	Webster
Buchanan	Greene	Jasper	Polk	Wright
Buena Vista	Grundy	Johnson	Poweshiek	
Calhoun	Hamilton	Linn	Sac	

### EDGE-OF-FIELD PRACTICES IN IOWA



# MEASURING PROGRESS

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS) is a science and technology-based framework developed by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Iowa State University (ISU) to guide state-led efforts and investments aimed at reducing nutrients in surface water in a scientific, reasonable and cost-effective way. In 2025, the INRS was updated to reflect new research, conservation practices, public and private partnerships and funding sources that have emerged since the original strategy was finalized in 2013.

ISU leads the INRS's ongoing measurement and reporting efforts using an online dashboard. The dashboard is updated regularly as data is collected from a variety of sources and public and private partners. Each update focuses on one of the "measurable indicators of desirable change" – inputs, human, land and water – that guide the INRS. The dashboard is available at [nrstracking.cals.iastate.edu](http://nrstracking.cals.iastate.edu).

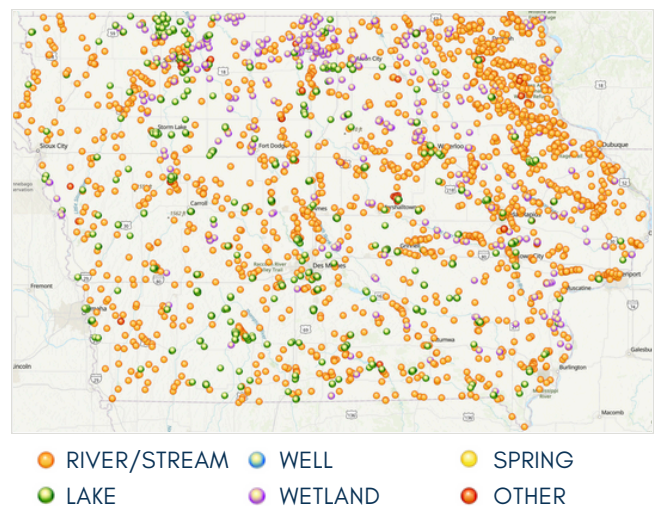


*The Logic Model of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy is guided by measurable indicators of desirable change*



# WATER QUALITY MONITORING

The State of Iowa invests nearly \$3 million per year to support a statewide water quality monitoring network, which includes 60 stream and 185 lake locations. The Iowa DNR collects water samples at 18 long-term, pre-determined monitoring stations every month, all year long to monitor nitrogen and phosphorous loads, in addition to other water quality parameters like bacteria, pH and temperature. This is the data used to report statewide nutrient load reductions, evaluate long-term water quality trends, and measure progress towards the goals outlined in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The monitoring data is available online at the DNR's AQUA portal, [programs.iowadnr.gov/aqua/](http://programs.iowadnr.gov/aqua/).

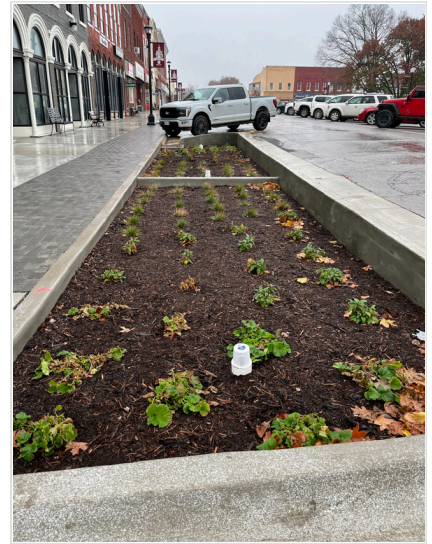




# URBAN CONSERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

## BLOOMFIELD

Bloomfield has finished major upgrades to its historic downtown square to fix failing sidewalks, resolve chronic drainage issues and improve local water quality. The original sidewalks had cracked and settled, causing stormwater to pool against buildings, leak into basements and carry pollutants into storm drains, nearby streams and the Fox River. With \$366,250 in support from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and additional resources from the State Revolving Fund Sponsored Project program (administered by the Iowa DNR and Iowa Finance Authority,) the city replaced three sides of the square with permeable pavers and installed four bioretention cells. These practices filter and slowly release stormwater, reducing suspended solids, nitrogen and phosphorus while capturing runoff from nearby streets. With the Iowa DOT completing the final side, Bloomfield now has a fully updated downtown that better manages stormwater and flooding, and protects local waterways.



## URBAN CONSERVATION SNAPSHOT

*Includes WQI and other funding sources*

	PROJECTS	ALLOCATED FUNDS	LEVERAGED FROM APPLICANTS AND PARTNERS
<b>IN 2025</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>\$2.68M</b>	<b>\$3M</b>
<b>SINCE 2015</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>\$17.39M</b>	<b>\$51.57M</b>

## PERRY

Perry has completed a new stormwater wetland that improves water quality, manages runoff and offers a hands-on educational space for the community. The project includes two hydraulically-connected, constructed wetlands — six acres and three acres in size — that now treat stormwater from about 315 acres of agricultural land, industrial park property and low-density residential areas. Visitors will park on permeable pavers that infiltrate stormwater and reduce peak flows. IDALS supported the work with two Urban Water Quality Initiative awards totaling \$500,000, including \$250,000 specifically for the wetland. Additional partners contributed to Perry's broader stormwater improvements, including \$500,000 from the Iowa Finance Authority for Frog Creek and \$1.6 million in an Iowa DNR and Iowa Finance Authority State Revolving Fund Sponsored Project.



## SECRETARY NAIG LAUNCHES STREAMSIDE BUFFER INITIATIVE IN PRIORITY WATERSHEDS

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig launched the Streamside Buffer Initiative in August, a new state-funded pilot project supporting farmers and landowners in priority watersheds, including those upstream of Des Moines and Cedar Rapids. The initiative promotes establishing perennial buffers or prairie habitat along streambanks to reduce nutrient loss, improve soil health and protect critical source water areas. The effort is part of the ongoing implementation of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) is investing \$3 million from the Water Quality Initiative (WQI), which is made possible through continued funding provided by the Iowa Legislature.

The pilot provides flexible, state-led cost-share assistance to install 30 to 100-foot buffers on row-cropped acres in the North Raccoon, Boone, Middle Cedar and Turkey watersheds, and in Dubuque County. Participants receive one-time payments to cover establishment costs and foregone income, with higher payments available for non-harvested buffers. The initiative is designed to accelerate conservation adoption, complement federal programs, and deliver measurable water-quality benefits in key source water areas.



*Before streamside buffer installation*



*After streamside buffer installation*

## NEW TOOL HELPS FARMERS OPTIMIZE NITROGEN USE

The Iowa Nitrogen Initiative (INI) reached a major milestone in 2025 with the launch of the Nitrogen Fertilizer Application Consultation Tool (N-FACT), a new resource that provides Iowa farmers with customized, field-level nitrogen recommendations. Developed by Iowa State University leveraging funding from the Iowa Legislature and IDALS, N-FACT helps farmers improve productivity, reduce input costs and support the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy.



This investment enabled INI to significantly expand its research base in 2025, completing 600 on-farm trials and building a dataset that now supports more than 21,000 possible nitrogen-rate scenarios. More than 6,000 farmers used N-FACT in its first year. Free to use at [N-Fact.Ag](https://N-Fact.Ag), the tool incorporates weather, soil nitrogen, field location, planting dates and market conditions to recommend optimal rates. Based on INI field trials, farmers save, on average, \$34 per acre by applying the N-FACT rate instead of the legacy MRTN recommendation, yielding positive financial and environmental outcomes. The INI and its partners will continue expanding both farmer adoption and the tool's capabilities as additional field research and data become available.