

Watershed Planning Advisory Council

Annual Report To The Iowa Legislature

July 30, 2013



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Background

The Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC) was established by the 2010 Iowa Legislature in [House File 2459](#) to assemble a diverse group of stakeholders who would review research and make periodic recommendations to various state and federal agencies regarding methods to best protect water resources in Iowa, assure an adequate supply of water, mitigate and prevent floods, and coordinate the management of those resources in a sustainable, fiscally responsible, and environmentally responsible manner.

The advisory council consists of mostly non-governmental organizations and associations that were involved in the 2008 [Watershed Quality Planning Task Force](#) - <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WPAC/pdf/finallegislativereport2007.pdf> (WQPTF). That task force made recommendations to the Iowa Legislature in 2009 on how to improve watershed planning effectiveness, and led to creation of the [Water Resources Coordinating Council](#) - (WRCC). <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WRCC.asp>

The WPAC seeks to continue its original work of the WQPTF by consulting with other governmental or non-governmental organizations in the development of its future recommendations for watershed planning and implementation effectiveness, and advise the WRCC member agencies and the legislature as necessary on these matters.

The WPAC committee received reappointment in 2011. During 2012, they held quarterly meetings in March, June, October and December. Much of the content of the 2012 WPAC meetings was devoted to monitoring the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) meetings including presentation of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS) and prioritized HUC-8 watersheds for implementation. Consequently, WPAC's June, October and December meetings were held in conjunction with WRCC meetings. Individuals who are also members of the WPAC participated in additional WRCC committee meetings related to INRS development and implementation. Minutes of the March WPAC meeting can be found at this link: <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WPAC.asp>

This report provides updates on the WPAC recommendations made in its 2012 legislative report, including actions taken on those recommendations and any follow-up recommendations from WPAC. Recommendations include needs and challenges identified by WPAC; a list of WPAC members; and an Appendix documenting some of Iowa's legislative and other water policy history.

Update on WPAC's 2012 Recommendations to the Iowa Legislature

2012 RECOMMENDATION A. Improving water quality and optimizing the costs of voluntarily achieving and maintaining water quality standards.

The WPAC recommends that entities, both public and private, involved in watershed planning and implementation programs conduct a strategic evaluation on how those programs are implemented in order to make watershed work more understandable, more easily accessed, and more effective.

2013 Update: No Action on this has been taken.

The WPAC recommends that the WRCC agencies, in cooperation with WPAC members should utilize a process like Value Stream Mapping (VSM) where programs can be viewed and gaps and overlapping programs can be identified. Potential outcomes for conducting VSM may include: Clarifying the roles of various agencies; identifying entry points for potential watershed grant applicants; and determining “road maps” for watershed improvement programs.¹

2013 Update: No Action on this has been taken.

The WPAC recommends that prioritization of watersheds and sub-watersheds across the state be used to help guide investment of limited time and resources.² Congruent with this recommendation is for the state of Iowa to adopt an Adaptive Watershed Management Implementation framework which would follow a logical progression of targeting, planning, implementation and measurement with the primary goal of optimizing public and private return on investment along with measureable and reportable progress. The WRCC in cooperation with the WPAC could utilize a variety of data to prioritize watersheds and sub-watersheds reflecting assessment of receiving water problems, public and private drinking water supply impacts, N & P loadings, opportunity to address high-risk sediment, N & P problems, flooding or other related factors and local support or interest in addressing resource concerns.

2013 UPDATE: Individuals who are also members of the WPAC participated in and monitored the work of WRCC's Watershed Prioritization committee, which considered the factors recommended above, including overlays of maps representing loading and concentration of N and P, major point source locations, geographic distribution of watersheds, and local activity in selecting 8 HUC-8 watersheds to recommend to the WRCC as priority watersheds for implementation projects.

¹ Chris VanGorp of the IDNR January 12, 2010 –WPAC [Meeting Minutes](#)

² Bill Northey and Jeff Berckes November 17, 2011 –WPAC [Meeting Minutes](#)

2013 Update: No action on adopting an Adaptive Watershed Management Implementation framework which would include targeting, planning, implementation and measurement with the primary goal of optimizing public and private return on investment with measureable and reported progress.

2013 Recommendation: WRCC and WPAC need to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that define working relationships for future implementation.

2012 RECOMMENDATION B. Creating economic incentives for voluntary nonpoint-source load reductions, point source discharge reductions beyond those required by the federal Water Pollution Control Act, implementation of pollution prevention programs, wetland restoration and creation, and the development of emerging pollution control technologies.

The WPAC recommends greater emphasis be placed on leveraging public and private investment designed to create economic incentives for watersheds that are of higher priority. For example, state agencies should identify new opportunities like reverse auctions to reward and encourage local communities to adopt watershed approaches to solve water quality problems. Another example would be state agencies or private entities allocating dollars for technical assistance paired-up with federal planning and implementation. This essentially expands the funding pool available for watershed implementation. State programs not leveraging additional cash and in-kind support is likely a missed opportunity that may be unsustainable over time.³

2013 UPDATE: WPAC continues to recommend strengthening public-private partnerships in all programs.

2012 RECOMMENDATION C. Establish a process for WPAC to review progress of TMDL, NPS Plan, unsewered communities, urban stormwater runoff, watershed plans, etc, as related to prioritized watersheds.

The WPAC intends to focus on helping Iowa establish priority watersheds – and can then review the progress of these programs and efforts by requesting the appropriate staff from those programs to present information at a WPAC meeting, and to engage the WPAC members in discussion about those issues. During 2011 a presentation was made by the Iowa DNR’s Watershed Improvement Section about the Nonpoint Source (NPS) Management Plan, and the WPAC members were able to engage in discussion about that plan. Similar presentations and discussions can be held in 2012.

2013 UPDATE: As noted above, individuals who are also members of the WPAC participated with the committee that recommended the following targeted HUC-8 watersheds to the WRCC. On February 28, 2013, at its regular meeting, the WRCC confirmed these watersheds:

³ Ehm and Kling Presentation November 17, 2010 – WPAC [Meeting Minutes](#)

1. Floyd
2. Boone
3. Turkey
4. South Skunk
5. Skunk
6. Nishnabotna (East and West combined)
7. Middle Cedar
8. North Raccoon

2013 Update: Through presentations in 2012 WPAC focused on learning about successful watershed projects in Iowa. This included presentations at joint meetings with WRCC and a presentation on the INRS.

2013 Update: Through the regulated permit process, 148 municipal and industrial facilities are targeted in the point-source section of the INRS for compliance with best available management technology.

2013 Recommendation: Develop an open transparent process to engage WPAC members in committees and sub-committees of the WRCC per MOU that needs to be developed. (Set a deadline-October 1, 2013.

2012 RECOMMENDATION D. New Technologies and Best Management Practices

The WPAC should continue to investigate and update its members, the WRCC and the public on the current state of research relative to Iowa's nonpoint source and point source control technologies; research and application of these technologies in the field, including unsewered communities and the financial impacts to them of these new technologies. These efforts are intended to help Iowa communities and citizens build confidence in the positive impact on water quality of these technologies and aid in their increased adoption and use.

2013 UPDATE: The Science Team assembled by Iowa State University presented the team's Science Assessment to the WRCC and WPAC, and a recommendation has been made that the work of this team be continued.

2012 RECOMMENDATION E. Providing greater flexibility for broader public involvement through community-based and performance-driven watershed management planning.

- There must be local interest and/or leadership
- Generate buy-in from stakeholders throughout the watershed
 - Host a kick-off meeting for targeted watersheds with local leaders to generate interest
 - Develop an organizational structure (could be informal like a taskforce or formal like an alliance or 501C3)

- Conduct a watershed assessment (what is happening in the watershed to impact water quality, flooding, soil loss, etc.)
- Create a watershed management plan (This allows the group to set goals, action steps, and evaluate success.)
- Engage “experts” to provide on-the-ground technical assistance, building a better understanding of watershed needs and strategies available to landowners/operators
 - This hands-on approach is the most effective way to implement a watershed plan
 - One-on-one allows for greater understanding of cost-share programs and leverages a landowners investment
- Encourage private/public partnerships for funding and implementation of BMPs and education
- Continually evaluate data and communicate results to all watershed stakeholders
- Encourage assessment of stream health in targeted HUC-12’s as needed

Recommended action(s):

1. WPAC meetings will include a stakeholder engagement opportunity.
2. WPAC will reinforce collaboration by suggesting state agencies identify and develop one central web-based location where citizens can go to get watershed information and that will facilitate discussions between watershed organizations.

Both actions are designed to elicit broad perspectives on watershed issues, community and landowner/operator engagement, public education, and open communication with the WRCC and WPAC.

2013 UPDATE: Regarding the first recommendation, the WPAC meetings are open to guests, who are invited to participate in the committee’s discussions and offer input. Beyond that, WPAC resources are limited, and that limits outreach efforts.

Regarding the second recommendation, while Iowa State University and the Iowa Flood Center host sites that meet some of these needs, progress remains to be made on this recommendation. The primary obstacle to that progress, from WPAC perspective, is limited funding support.

2012 RECOMMENDATION F. Assigning responsibility for monitoring flood risk, flood mitigation, and coordination with federal agencies.

The WPAC recommends the Iowa Flood Center (IFC) be assigned responsibility for monitoring flood risk, flood mitigation and coordination with federal agencies. The WPAC further reiterates support that the Iowa Flood Center should be included as a member of the WRCC and continue to provide updates to the WPAC.

UPDATE: Active IFC representation on the WRCC has been established and has made a positive contribution to advancing WRCC goals, including INRS targeted watershed prioritization.

2012 RECOMMENDATION G. Establish Watershed Management Authorities.

In the 2012 report, WPAC highlighted the opportunity offered by the WMA application process and supported that process. In addition, WPAC made the following recommendation:

The WPAC believes that cities and counties may be in need of additional training relative to watershed issues, including learning what incentives might be available or appropriate to encourage greater watershed planning. This need for training might be best addressed at the annual ISU Water Conference usually held annually in March in Ames, Iowa.

2013 UPDATE: The March 2013 Iowa Water Conference at Iowa State University offered a variety of program options of value to communities, including presentations and Q&A with a panel of successful Watershed Management Authority developers. As of this writing, all six areas receiving grant support for WMA development were able to form partnerships of counties, municipalities and Soil and Water Conservation Districts and to successfully file 28E agreements for WMAs by the second quarter 2013. The following WMA 28E agreements (listed as watershed (filing entity), number of partners) have been filed with the Secretary of State:

1. Squaw Creek (Story County), 11
2. Turkey River (Clayton County), 35
3. Upper Cedar (Floyd County), 23
4. Catfish Creek (City of Dubuque), 6
5. Indian Creek (City of Marion), 6
6. Middle-South Raccoon (Dallas County), 6

WPAC supports development of WMAs, as this effort helps recruit and involve local leadership at various levels and can serve to raise awareness of the watershed approach.

2013 Commentary on Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS):

Much of WPAC's effort in 2012 focused on learning about successful watershed projects in Iowa and updates from WRCC. The January 11, 2013, WPAC meeting was devoted to a review of the proposed INRS and consensus recommendations WPAC might make to the legislature regarding its adoption and implementation. (At that time, the priority watersheds had not been identified, individuals who are also members of the WPAC participated in that selection process.) In general, WPAC members tended to agree on the following points:

- 1) WPAC sees significant sustainable and targeted funding will be required to achieve nutrient reductions in Iowa.

- 2) An open and transparent communications approach to increase public and other stakeholder awareness, understanding and involvement in advancing nutrient reductions in Iowa.
- 3) WPAC supports the value of the science assessment and recognizes the need for future research pertaining to environmental, social, and economic assessments of Iowa's watersheds.
- 4) WPAC sees the need to couple that research and communication strategies to the benefits and challenges of statewide nutrient reductions.
- 5) Establish a centralized database for ongoing monitoring and inventory of statewide environmental conditions and conservation practices.
- 6) Continue to support the ambient monitoring of the DNR for assessing broad-scale water quality improvements but support public-private partnerships to expand that network at the HUC-12 project scale level.
- 7) WPAC sees value in the subwatershed priority approach and its intent to address both point and non-point sources in a process that brings the two together, rather than pitting them against each other.
- 8) WPAC should have active involvement in the INRS going forward, but recommends locating additional resources and developing an overall strategic direction for WPAC before considering any possible expansion of their role beyond one of monitoring, reviewing and advising.

In addition to the consensus suggestions captured above, WPAC and guests also discussed a potential series of needs and challenges they see for moving INRS forward, including:

- Identifying and obtaining adequate funding strategies—these are not fully fleshed out in the plan, particularly development of sustainable public-private partnership funding strategies.
- Developing accountability strategies without devolving to divisive discussions.
- Connecting the plan to Iowa results while also relating water quality concerns to the Gulf of Mexico.
- Expanding the information, data, and research on the effectiveness and sustainability of management practices in watersheds.
- Increasing clarity for the implementation approach to the INRS and action steps required.

Watershed Planning Advisory Council Membership

Organization	Member Name or Delegate
Senate Seat 1 (non-voting member)	Senator Dick Dearden
Senate Seat 2 (non-voting member)	Senator Dan Zumbach
House of Representatives Seat 1 (non-voting member)	Rep. Charles Isenhardt
House of Representatives Seat 2 (non-voting member)	Rep. Lee Hein
Agribusiness Association of Iowa	Joel Brinkmeyer
Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship	Jim Gillespie
Department of Natural Resources	Bill Ehm
Growing Green Communities	Tom Hadden, Chair
Iowa Association of Business and Industry	Scott Ickes
Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities	John Dunn
Iowa Conservation Alliance Seat 1	Jeremy Rosonke
Iowa Conservation Alliance Seat 2	Rich Meyer
Iowa Corn Growers Association	Gary Edwards
Iowa Drainage District Association	Vicki Stoller
Iowa Environmental Council	Linda Kinman
Iowa Farm Bureau Federation	Rick Robinson
Iowa Floodplain and Stormwater Management	Luis Leon
Iowa League of Cities	Dustin Miller
Iowa Pork Producers Association	Cody McKinley
Iowa Rivers Revival	Rosalyn Lehman
Iowa Rural Water Association	Emily Piper
Iowa Soybean Association	Roger Wolf, Vice-Chair
Iowa Water Environmental Association	Jay Brady
Soil and Water Conservation Districts of Iowa	Clare Lindahl

Appendix

Legislative Watershed Policy History (2006-2010)

The [Watershed Quality Planning Task Force](http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WPAC/pdf/finallegislativereport2007.pdf) - <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WPAC/pdf/finallegislativereport2007.pdf> was created by the 2006 Iowa Legislature in Senate File 2363. This legislation called for creation of a committee to discuss a voluntary statewide water quality program. Specifically, the legislature asked the Watershed Quality Planning Task Force to develop a report containing recommendations on the following issues:

- Improving water quality
- Creating economic incentives for environmental compliance
- Facilitating implementation efforts
- Developing quantifiable protocols and procedures
- Providing greater flexibility through community-based, non-regulatory, performance-driven watershed management planning.

Watershed Quality Planning Task Force Recommendations

In their Watershed Planning Quality Task Force (WQPTF) final report published in November 2007 (see <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WPAC/pdf/finallegislativereport2007.pdf>) made the following recommendations:

Creation of a Water Resource Coordinating Council. The Water Resource Coordinating Council (WRCC) under the direction of the Governor is recommended with a common goal to develop an integrated approach to water resource management, and which recognizes the insufficiency of current approaches, programs, practices, funding and utilization of current funding programs. This approach seeks to overcome old polarities such as quantity versus quality, land versus water, the chemical versus the physical and biological, supply versus demand, political boundaries versus hydrological boundaries, and point versus non-point. This approach seeks to manage water comprehensively rather than compartmentally. The purpose of this recommendation is to coordinate programs, not to duplicate or supersede agency authorities and responsibilities. Funding Recommendation: None.

Conduct a Water Quality Research & Marketing Campaign. The task force recommends a marketing campaign be undertaken by public agencies and other organizations to rekindle the conservation ethic in all Iowans. Surveys indicate citizens' desire for improvement in water quality. Other surveys show that citizens don't understand the problems with local water quality. Funding Recommendation: \$1 million for year one development.

Larger (Regional) Watershed Assessment, Planning & Prioritization. The state should support creating, publishing and updating periodically a Regional Watershed Assessment (RWA) program at a larger watershed scale, such as the Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC – a federal term that delineates watersheds) 8 scale. There are approximately 56 HUC 8 size watershed units delineated in Iowa. A goal is to assess 11 HUC 8 size watersheds per year for five years to eventually cover the entire state. The Rapid Watershed Assessment tool used by Iowa NRCS, for example, is one assessment process that may be used. A regular review and update of these assessments should also be planned. Funding Recommendation: \$5 million annually.

Smaller (Community-Based) Watershed Assessment, Planning, Prioritization & Implementation. Once a regional watershed assessment is completed at the HUC 8 scale, planned projects of a manageable scope can be implemented. Priority sub-watersheds at a HUC 12 or smaller scale can reasonably be recruited and provided more resources for planning. A sub-watershed plan should include objectives, a thorough local assessment of the physical, social, and financial resources of the watershed, an analysis of the alternatives, and an implementation plan that includes an evaluation process to measure results. Funding Recommendation: \$5 million annually.

Support for Smaller (Community-Based) Watershed Monitoring and Measurement. In addition to current support for water monitoring, the state should provide technical and financial support for locally-based watershed monitoring and measurement. This monitoring would be custom designed to provide information on essential water resource questions facing the local community. Local communities would first be able to use this information to support enhanced planning, local data collection, and thus helping them identify priority areas to target limited resources. Funding Recommendation: \$ 2.5 million annually.

Wastewater and Stormwater Treatment Infrastructure. We all live in a watershed. Impacts to water quality come from a variety of sources, including both rural and urban, nonpoint and point sources. Challenges for point sources and communities can have a significant impact on watershed conditions from stormwater and wastewater. Aging wastewater and combined sewer/stormwater infrastructure issues are having negative impacts on water quality. Also, compliance with current and future water quality standards may be cost-prohibitive for many communities. Additional funding mechanisms should be identified and funding should be prioritized for communities that present the greatest water quality and health risks within the watershed. This will include sewered and unsewered communities.

The task force also said there were eight additional considerations for which there were no final recommendations. It is recommended, however, that the WQPTF continue to work on these issues into the future, the task force said.

Watershed Resource Coordinating Council

In 2008, the Iowa Legislature received this report and passed House File 2400, which sought to continue this work, as recommended, through the creation of the [Water Resources Coordinating Council](http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WRCC.asp) (WRCC) - <http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/WRCC.asp>. The purpose of the council is to preserve and protect Iowa's water resources, and to coordinate the management of those resources in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner. In the pursuit of this purpose, the council shall use an integrated approach to water resource management, recognizing that insufficiencies exist in current approaches and practices, as well as in funding sources and the utilization of funds. The integrated approach used by the council shall attempt to overcome old categories, labels, and obstacles with the primary goal of managing the state's water resources comprehensively rather than compartmentally.

Floods of 2008 Recovery Efforts

The state and federal agencies outlined in HF 2400 began to meet and discuss common watershed issues and needs under the umbrella of the WRCC in the summer of 2008, under the chairmanship of Governor Chet Culver's office and staff. The "floods of 2008" resulted in a refocusing of much of the WRCC's efforts, primarily to flood recovery issues.

As a result of the floods of 2008, the Iowa Legislature approved HF 756, which required the WRCC to submit policy and funding recommendations that promote "a watershed management approach to reduce the adverse impact of future flooding on this state's residents, businesses, communities, and soil and water quality." The original WRCC floodplain recommendations were filed in November 2009.

Two bills passed in the 2010 legislative session address five of the recommendations. HF 2531 (Standing Appropriations Bill) requires the WRCC and others to extent feasible to: 1) work on establishing an Iowa chapter of State Floodplain Managers Association, 2) education and 3) marketing for flood risks and floodplain awareness (signed into law 4/29/10). HF 2459 (Watershed Bill) 4) authorizes that funding be sought for pilot watershed projects involving IDALS, DNR and the Iowa Flood Center, and 5) outlines potential watershed governance via Watershed Management Authorities (Signed 4/7/10) HF 2459 also formally establishes a Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC), comprised primarily of stakeholders that encouraged establishment of the Water Resources Coordinating Council in 2008.

In addition, the 2010 General Assembly passed and the Governor signed into law Senate File 2389, which provided guidance for Smart Planning in Iowa and established the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force, building on the watershed planning principles of the WQPTF and the WRCC. This Task Force was charged with recommending policies and strategies for creating a stronger planning culture in Iowa, producing more resilient and sustainable communities. In particular, the Task Force was asked to consider how best to:

- Integrate the Iowa Smart Planning Principles into appropriate state policies and programs.
- Determine an effective and efficient coordination and information sharing system to support local and regional planning.
- Suggest appropriate technical and financial incentives to support local and regional planning.
- Develop a framework for regional planning.

The group addressed each of those directives by November 15, 2010. The Smart Planning Task Force Report can be found at this link: http://publications.iowa.gov/10062/1/2010-11-5_Smart_Planning_Task_Force_Report.pdf