

Nutrient Reduction Strategy Annual Report Shows Record Conservation Engagement by Iowans

DES MOINES, Iowa (July 1, 2020) – The 2018-2019 Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (INRS) annual report was released today by Iowa State University, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The findings reveal increased farmer, landowner and community engagement, use of conservation practices, and funding invested in soil health and water quality projects.

The data also shows that the growing number of installed conservation practices reduced phosphorous losses by an estimated 18.5 percent during the 2006-2010 time period, compared to the 1980-1996 baseline of the INRS. The state has continuously made progress on reducing phosphorous losses from farm fields because of the increased adoption of soil conservation practices, including no-till and conservation tillage, cover crops and terraces, over the last two decades. During the same timeframe, modeled nitrogen loads increased by an estimated 5 percent, characterizing the ongoing challenges related to nutrient reduction.

“Efforts to improve water quality and soil health are happening all over Iowa. We have more partners and landowners engaged in conservation projects than ever before,” said Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. “These efforts are resulting in progress being made, especially towards the state’s phosphorous-reduction goals. We acknowledge more nitrogen-reducing conservation practices are needed. By tracking comprehensively, it helps us better allocate resources, and develop new approaches to guide the implementation of nutrient-reducing practices in priority watersheds around the state.”

“Everyone has a role to play in helping improve Iowa’s water quality. Cities and industries across the state are committing to achieve significant nutrient reductions at their wastewater plants in the coming years and several are already doing so,” said Kayla Lyon, Director of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “These improvements don’t happen overnight and it’s gratifying to see the persistence of Iowans to keep moving forward in difficult times.”

2018-2019 INRS Highlights

- An estimated \$560 million was invested in education and outreach, research, practice implementation and water monitoring during the 2018-2019 reporting period. This is an increase from \$512 million during the 2017-2018 reporting period.
- A total of 540 outreach events were conducted in 98 counties by partner organizations (public, private, and NGO), with a total attendance of 50,800 attendees. Total events increased from 511 in 2018, and total attendance increased from 46,000.
- Iowa is planting at least 973,000 acres of cover crops according to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, which reduces annual nitrogen losses by 4,300 tons and annual phosphorus losses by 330 tons. Estimated cover crop usage is even higher according to survey data collected by the Iowa Nutrient Research and Education Council (INREC).
- There are at least 27 bioreactors and 13 saturated buffers in Iowa, which reduced nitrogen losses by 12 tons in 2018.
- The state has constructed 86 nitrate-removal wetlands. An additional 30 wetlands are under development and are expected to be completed within the next 24 months.
- No-till acreage increased from 6.9 million acres in 2012 to 8.2 million in 2017, according to the USDA Census of Agriculture.
- The NRS establishes a target of reducing total nitrogen and total phosphorus from point sources by 66 percent and 75 percent, respectively. In 2018, 20 municipalities and 22 industries met one or both of these targets.

Additional highlights can be found in the [INRS Executive Summary](#).

Emerging Research and Data

The **Iowa Nutrient Research Center** (INRC) pursues science-based approaches to evaluating the performance of current and emerging conservation practices. INRC also investigates innovative methods to implement and develop new practices. This information is reviewed by the Nutrient Reduction Strategy Science Team, a group of university and public agency researchers, who develop recommendations for including new practices in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. As technology and practices advance, new data is submitted for consideration in the NRS report.

Multi-purpose oxbows are an example of the emerging conservation practices added as a documented practice in the NRS, based on research showing that targeted restoration of oxbows can reduce nitrate levels by 35 to 54 percent. This practice also creates habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.

Getting Involved

All Iowans are encouraged to take an active role in the state's conservation efforts. There are state and federal funding sources available to help farmers, landowners and communities offset the costs of urban and rural water quality improvement projects. Iowans can learn more about grants, cost-share programs, and how to get involved by contacting their local Soil and Water Conservation District office.

To read the 2018-2019 Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy annual report in its entirety, visit nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu.

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About the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy

The Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) is a science and technology-based approach to assess and reduce nutrient losses delivered to Iowa waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. The strategy outlines opportunities for efforts to reduce nutrients in surface water from both point sources, such as municipal wastewater treatment plants and industrial facilities, and nonpoint sources, including agricultural operations and urban areas, in a scientific, reasonable, and cost-effective manner.

The NRS and the annual progress report are collaborations between representatives from the Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship. To learn more about the Nutrient Reduction Strategy, visit nutrientstrategy.iastate.edu.

About the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

Led by Secretary Mike Naig, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship serves the rural and urban residents that call Iowa home. Through its 12 diverse bureaus, the Department ensures animal health, food safety and consumer protection. It also promotes conservation efforts to preserve our land for the next generation. Learn more at iowaagriculture.gov.

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The **DNR** manages fish and wildlife programs, ensures the health of Iowa's forests and prairies, and provides recreational opportunities in Iowa's state parks. Just as importantly, the DNR carries out state and federal laws that protect air, land and water through technical assistance, permitting and compliance programs. The DNR also encourages the enjoyment and stewardship of natural resources among Iowans through outreach and education.

Iowa State University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Iowa State University is home to the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, one of the world's premier institutions for agricultural education, research and extension and outreach. Its diverse portfolio represents people and programs working for the good of Iowa and the world, and the betterment of agriculture. Iowa State's

agricultural researchers and extension staff work across the state to help Iowans more efficiently and sustainably produce food, energy and everyday materials; protect plant, animal and human health; and care for the environment. For more information, visit cals.iastate.edu.

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