



Iowa pays a water bill

New law provides more funding to control nutrient runoff into state's waterways, meet 45 percent reduction goal for Mississippi River basin

by Iowa Rep. John Wills (John.Wills@legis.iowa.gov)

Iowa and other states in the Mississippi River basin have been the focus of national attention lately due to soil nutrients that drain to the Gulf of Mexico.

Efforts in Iowa to reduce and limit the amount of nutrients that are delivered to the Gulf have been numerous, and they began with two years of work led by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa State University and others.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2008 Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan calls for our state, along with others along the Mississippi River, to develop strategies to reduce total nitrogen and phosphorus loads to the Gulf of Mexico by at least 45 percent. Guided by that plan, our state leaders and Iowa State University announced in November 2012 the development and release of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy for public input.

The strategy was then, as it is today, a science- and technology-based approach to assess nutrients delivered to Iowa waterways and the Gulf of Mexico. It outlines voluntary efforts to reduce nutrients in surface water from both point sources, such as wastewater treatment plants and industrial facilities, and nonpoint sources, including from farm fields and urban areas.

In 2013, this strategy was officially adopted as the state's plan of action to limit nutrient runoff — in an evidence-based, reasonable and cost-effective manner.

For the past three years, the Iowa Legislature has struggled to find the right pathway to bolster our efforts in support of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. Earlier this year, we took a major step forward.

How to pay for a multi-year effort?

SF 512 was passed at the start of our 2018 legislative session and signed into law by Gov. Kim Reynolds on Jan. 31; it provides significant, long-term funding to support implementation of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

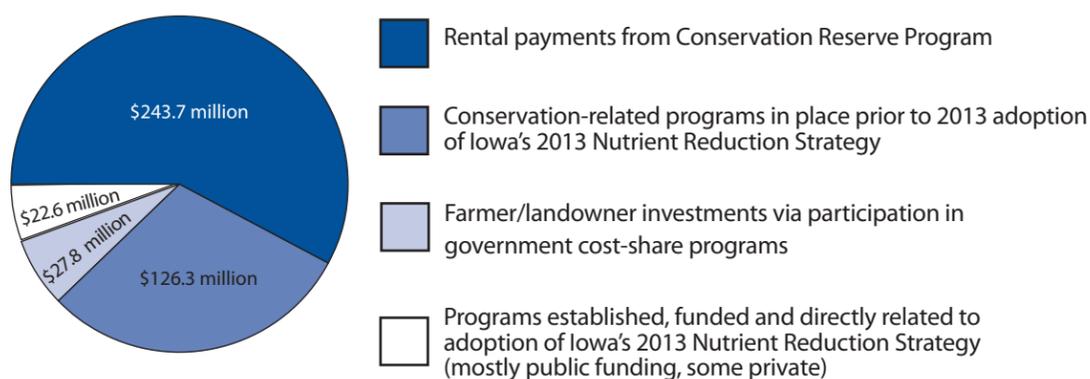
The new law dedicates \$282 million over 12 years for water quality and soil conservation — \$156 million to address point sources of water pollution and \$126 million for nonpoint sources.

SF 512 does not supplant or change any of our state's existing programs; rather, it simply enhances our Nutrient Reduction Strategy. In 2017, \$420 million was spent in Iowa to further the goals of this strategy (see pie chart). We will now be able to add to that amount, with targeted investments leveraged by a mix of public and private dollars.

For example, our state has been providing cost-shares for farmers to move ahead with water quality practices such as no-till and strip till, the planting of cover crops, and the use of nitrification inhibitors when applying fall fertilizer.

In fall of last year, 2,600 farmers invested an estimated \$8.7 million in funding to match \$4.8 mil-

Spending on Iowa's \$420 million Nutrient Reduction Strategy, FY 2017



Source: Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy, "Annual Progress Report"

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lion in Iowa's cost-share funds. SF 512 will allow us to expand the reach of these and other scientific, technology-driven and voluntary approaches to nutrient reduction.

We firmly believe that incentivizing participation is a much better strategy to gain buy-in from those in the field, rather than overly burdensome regulations. This is the same approach that Iowa has taken to address other watershed challenges throughout the state.

In 1980, for example, all but six of Iowa's trout streams needed restocking in order to sustain a trout population. But we worked together, via local watershed projects, to keep excess sediment, nutrients and bacteria out of the water coming into these streams. The result: Today, we have more than 45 naturally reproducing trout streams in Iowa, a great accomplishment.

We can use these smaller watershed examples to inform our work in meeting the goals of our statewide Nutrient Reduction Strategy. This is what SF 512 is designed to do.

It took three years and a lot of effort from various stakeholders to get this legislation across the finish line, but it will make a huge difference in keeping our waterways clean for future generations. But as I stated in my floor comments this year during debate on the bill, this isn't the end of the discussion in our efforts to preserve natural resources.

In fact, within three weeks after SF 512 was passed, a second piece of legislation (HF 2440) was passed and signed into law on May 16 that improved on our measure by giving access to SF 512's money to communities whose water supplies are not affected by nutrients, but, perhaps, by total suspended solids, or whose proposed projects will

improve water quality. It also allows industries listed in the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy to tap that funding for runoff reduction projects.

We are continuing to work together in a bipartisan manner on additional future legislation.

Water quality is a very emotional issue, as everyone knows the importance that water holds in our lives.

While many liked SF 512's various provisions, it was difficult to craft a bill that was "loved by all." For some, the bill went too far; for others, it didn't go far enough. The important thing for many people was that we are able to continue our support for the Nutrient Reduction Strategy — and strengthen it with some much-needed additional funding.

With the passage of SF 512, the future of water quality efforts in Iowa is bright and will continue to be a priority issue for us. We firmly believe that the Nutrient Reduction Strategy and SF 512 are just the beginning of this critically important conversation, not the end of those discussions.

Rep. John Wills was elected to the Iowa House in 2014 and was elected as a House Assistant Majority Leader in 2015.

Submissions welcome

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