



United States Department of Agriculture



NRCS Update: Midwestern Watershed Meeting

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Introduction

- **Technical Tools Update**
- **2018 Farm Bill Highlights**
- **Partner Program & Outreach Opportunities**
- **Private Conservation Financing**
- **2019 Program Accomplishments At-a-Glance**

Technical Tool Update



- **Conservation Desktop**
- **Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)**

Technical Tool Update



- **What is Conservation Desktop?**
 - Replaces Toolkit and much more
 - Follows “9-Steps of Conservation Planning”
 - Documents steps of planning - not just final decision
 - Starts with resource concern identification

Technical Tool Update



- **Conservation Desktop Benefits**
 - Simple - Intuitive - Faster
 - Integrated data
 - Standardized tasking
 - Simplified GIS Tools

Technical Tool Update

- **What is the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART)?**

- Program-neutral application evaluation tool to facilitate conservation delivery.
- It will create an efficient application process
- Conservation planners will utilize CART to assess producers resource concerns, planned practices, and site vulnerability as part of the conservation planning process
- It will rank client applications for all NRCS program funding including easements.
- CART is part of the NRCS of the Future effort to streamline processes, introduce efficiencies, incorporate technology, and improve communication and data availability.

Technical Tool Update



- **Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) Benefits**

- Producers will have less paperwork and fewer burdens in accessing our programs and services
- Field staff will have more time to provide technical assistance.
- CART will reduce time spent managing conservation plans, program applications, and program contracts.
- Less time will be spent on application and ranking processes, allowing more time for conservation planning.
- CART will eliminate duplicate data entry processes and reduce time between program applications and conservation implementation.
- The anticipated deployment for CART will be in 2020.

2018 Farm Bill Highlights



The 2018 Farm Bill requires NRCS to:

- consider and encourage water quality and quantity conservation practices that protect source water while benefitting ag producers.
- collaborate with community water systems to identify priority areas.

2018 Farm Bill Change Highlights



- **Source Water Protection**

- 10% of Farm Bill Program Funds**

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

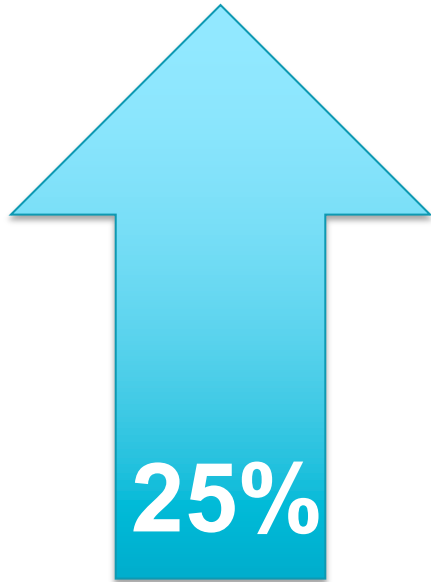
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCCP)

- Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)

- Water quality was previously a high priority resource concern
 - National Water Quality Initiative and Mississippi River Basin Initiative previously had source water projects

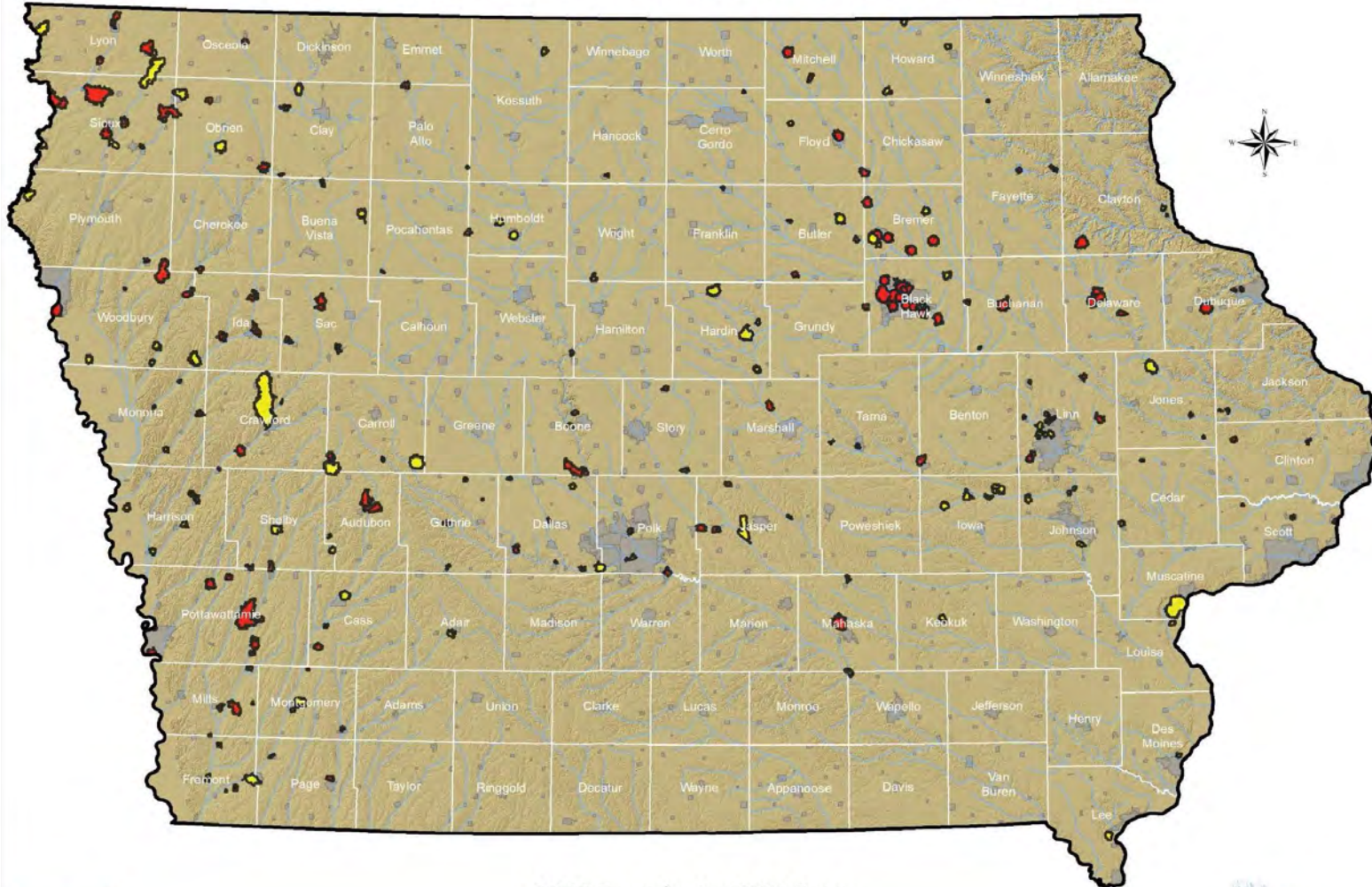
2018 Farm Bill Change Highlights



Iowa NRCS Source Water Financial Assistance Rates

Increased from 50 to 75 percent for key practices in groundwater and surface water protection areas.

Groundwater Priority Areas



NRCs Groundwater SWPA Zones

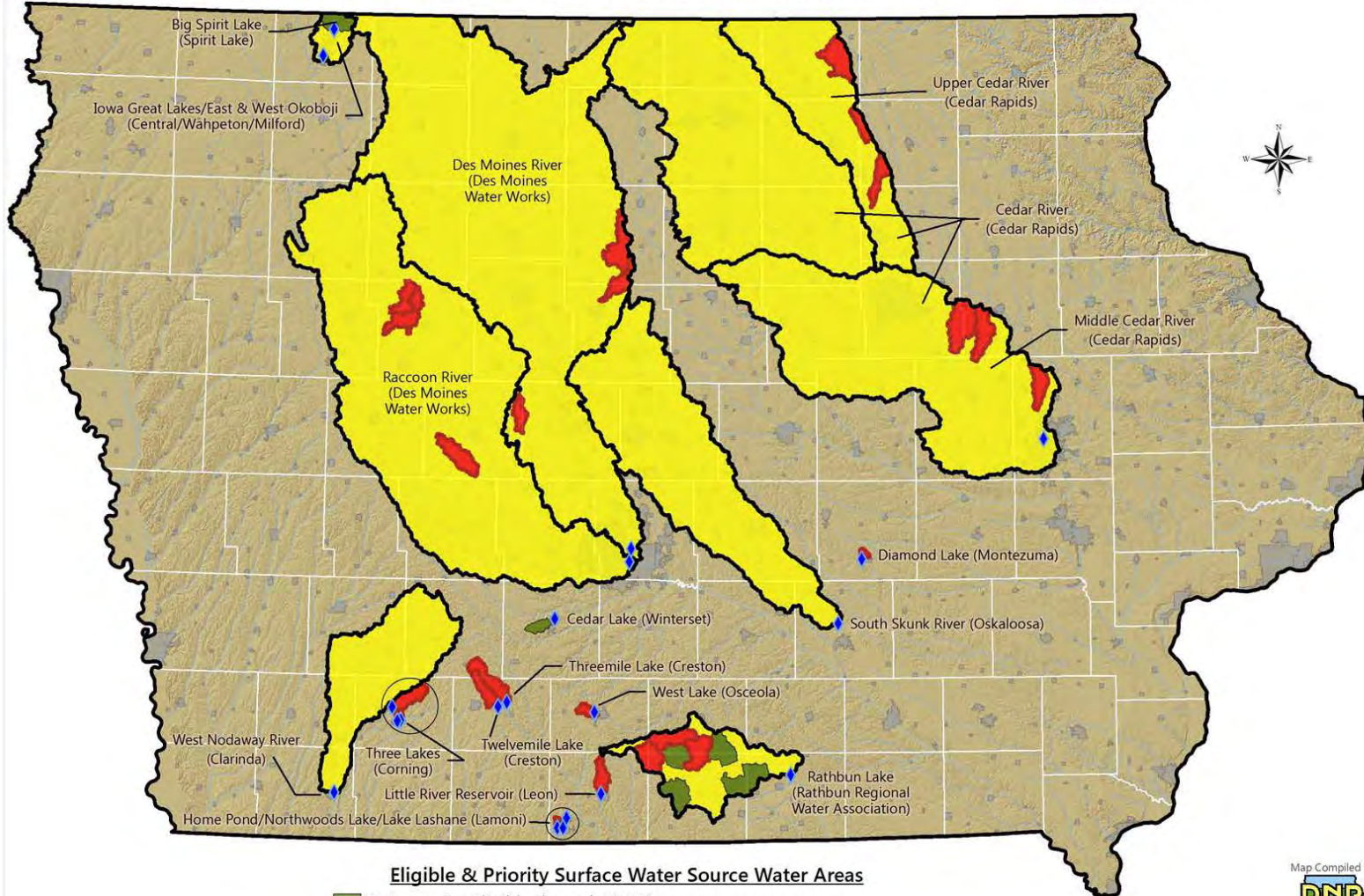
- Priority Area (Approved SWP Plan)
- Eligible Area (SWP Assessment)



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Surface Water Priority Areas



Eligible & Priority Surface Water Source Water Areas

- Category 1 – Eligible through NWQI
- Category 2 – Priority HUC12s in larger basins or entire watershed of smaller systems
- Category 3 – Broader eligible Areas for SWP set-aside
- ◆ Surface Intakes or Wells Influenced by Surface Water

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Map Compiled by

 ABA 8/19/2019

Iowa SOURCE WATER Protection

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2018 Farm Bill Highlights



Source Water Protection Financial Assistance:

- **55%** groundwater source protection
- **45%** surface water source protection



2018 Farm Bill Highlights



- **Wildlife**

(now 10% EQIP - was 5% EQIP)

- **Livestock**

(now 50% - was 60% EQIP)

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (applications due Dec 3)

- Simplified in new Farm Bill; now a stand alone program.
- Assistance provided through regional projects implemented by partners
- Partners must provide matching funds

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (applications due Dec 3)

- National-level of notice of \$300 million available in funding was announced on September 3, 2019.
- Currently, we have 375 active Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) projects with close to 2,000 partners (Nationally).
- Partners are leveraging nearly \$1 billion in NRCS investment, with close to \$2 billion in non-NRCS dollars (Nationally).

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Conservation Innovation Grants

- **NRCS offers both national and state level grant competitions.**
- **National-level notice of funding opportunity of \$12.5 million closed July 30. Applications are undergoing initial vetting and being readied for peer review.**
- **National-level notice of funding opportunity for \$25 million closed July 15 for the new On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials component of CIG, which includes Soil Health Demonstration Trials.**
- **All CIG opportunities are advertised on [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov)**

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Conservation Innovation Grants

- **Competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies.**
- **First authorized by 2002 Farm Bill**
- **State or local governments, federally-recognized American Indian tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals are eligible to apply**

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Conservation Innovation Grants

- **Maximum CIG award is set annually by the NRCS Chief**
- **Between \$1 million or \$2 million.**
- **CIG funding requests must be matched at least 1:1 with non-federal funding.**

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Iowa Conservation Innovation Grants

- A total of up to \$500,000 was available for CIG in FY 2019.
- All non-federal entities (NFE) and individuals were eligible to apply, with the sole exception of federal agencies.
- Projects may be between one and three years in duration.
- Maximum award amount was \$75,000.

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Iowa Conservation Innovation Grants

Iowa NRCS awarded two Iowa Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) projects in FY19.

Women in Watersheds: Beyond One Day Trainings

Partner: Women, Food and Agriculture Network

Project will provide assistance to landowners to help them overcome barriers in implementing conservation practices in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy on their land. (\$70,615)

Demonstrating Conservation on Agricultural Working Lands

Partner: Practical Farmers of Iowa

Project will fund farmer-led field demonstrations of conservation practices and technologies that will stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches in conjunction with agricultural production. (\$58,576)

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Iowa NRCS Partners in Conservation (IPC) Awards

- **Competitive agreements that leverage NRCS and partner resources to address local natural resource concerns.**
- **Eligible applicants include: State governments, county governments, city or township governments, public and state controlled institutions of higher education, Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized), nonprofits, private institutions of higher education.**

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Iowa NRCS Partners in Conservation (IPC) Awards

- No matching funds are required
- Applicants with matching funds may receive additional consideration in the ranking process
- Any combination of cash and in-kind funding can be used to meet the non-federal match.

Program & Outreach Opportunities

Iowa NRCS Partners in Conservation (IPC) Awards

- The IPC emphasizes Iowa-based projects that build technical capacity and leverage non-Federal and non-government resources to achieve positive conservation outcomes.
- Projects may be farm-based, multicounty, small watershed, or Statewide in scope.
- Collaborative projects that provide on-the-ground support for Iowa NRCS Field Offices are highly encouraged. Research proposals will not be funded.

Program Outreach Opportunities

Soil Health

- Social media, field days and demos
- Conservation planning

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

- Local sponsor needed
- Easement holder and manager

Conservation Stewardship Program

- Advocating for producer understanding and engagement
- Helping producers to prepare conservation plans for future application

Private Conservation Financing

Conservation finance seeks new financial vehicles and approaches to attract funding to support conservation on agricultural and forest working lands.

Key success to private conservation investments are:

- developing new revenue streams and sources of capital for agricultural producers
- attracting non-Federal funding to private lands conservation.

Through CIG, NRCS has helped partners pilot several models including:

- Pay-for-Success
- Environmental Market Credits

2019 Farm Bill Accomplishments

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- \$36.6 Million in FY 2019; 1,438 contracts
- Largest financial assistance program for working lands in Iowa
- Ag and forest producers eligible to apply

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

- \$2.4M in Iowa FY19; 96 contracts

2019 Accomplishments

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- **\$16.3 Million in FY2019; 412 contracts**
- **Companion program to EQIP. Builds on existing conservation work and helps eligible producers reach additional conservation goals**

2019 Accomplishments

Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP)

- \$9.4M in FY19, 13 easements (1,666 AC)
- Protects working ag lands and limits non-ag uses
- Helps restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands
- Cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land are all eligible
- Mostly permanent and 30-year easements

Questions?

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- **Websites for additional information:**

- www.usda.gov
- www.nrcs.usda.gov
- www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ia/home/