



**NATURE'S**

**ADVOCATE**

**2020**





The Nature's Advocate guide was developed by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) to help its supporters and partners advocate for Iowa's natural resources.

INHF is a 501(c)3 nonprofit conservation group that protects and restores Iowa's land, water and wildlife.

For more information about INHF's land conservation and advocacy work, visit [www.inhf.org](http://www.inhf.org).

To get involved with INHF's policy team or find more information about the content in this guide, contact Public Policy Director Anna Gray at [agray@inhf.org](mailto:agray@inhf.org) or 515-288-1846.



**W**hat do you love most about Iowa's outdoors? For some, it may be the calming peace and tranquility found in nature. Others relish the thrill of spotting wildlife and exploring new areas. Perhaps your favorite hobbies include biking the multi-use trails, hiking the parks, or spending summer days at Iowa's lakes.

Whatever draws you outside, these experiences are a cornerstone of Iowa's culture and quality of life. Use this guide to learn about key policies and programs that affect Iowa's outdoors, and amplify your voice for nature by sharing your vision for its future with state legislators, local officials and other decision makers.

You will see the solution for addressing many of Iowa's conservation challenges – and seizing opportunities – is the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. This year, Governor Reynolds has made permanent conservation funding a top priority by calling on the Legislature to fund the voter-approved Trust Fund.

Now is the time to speak up for Iowa's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities. Join us in advocating for a lasting conservation legacy.

Yours in conservation,

*Anna L. Gray*  
Anna Gray  
INHF Public Policy Director

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1

### IF YOU CARE ABOUT...

Find the topics you're most passionate about and learn more about the specific policies that impact them.

2



Next to message amplifiers at the bottom of each page, you'll find INHF's 2020 policy recommendations. Use them as a call to action or an ask to policymakers.

3

### ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENTS

Find resources for more information or ideas for how to talk to your elected officials.

IF YOU CARE ABOUT...

# PUBLIC LANDS

Iowa's public lands provide open space for outdoor recreation, protect precious wildlife habitat and create economic opportunity across the state. The quality of life provided by outdoor recreation opportunities plays an important role in stimulating local economies and revitalizing rural Iowa. More than 56 million visits are made to Iowa's parks, trails, lakes and rivers each year. Annually, outdoor recreation in Iowa generates **\$8.7 billion in consumer spending, \$649 million in local state tax revenue and 83,000 jobs.**

**The Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP)** is one of Iowa's most effective conservation programs. Created in 1989, REAP uses funds from Iowa's gaming receipts to support the state's natural and cultural resources in all 99 counties.



Over the past 30 years, **REAP has supported more than 15,000 projects, including:**

- State Parks and Wildlife Management Areas
- County Conservation
- City Parks & Open Spaces
- Soil & Water Quality improvements
- Conservation Education
- Historical and Cultural Preservation

**Despite its success, REAP has never been fully funded. Without renewal from the state legislature, REAP will end in June 2021.**

## ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENT

① Less than 3% of Iowa's land is open for public recreation — among the lowest in the country. Our state has room for more public, open spaces.

② Over the last two decades, Iowa has lost more than 1.6 million acres of habitat suitable for pheasants and other small game. Iowa's wildlife management areas provide much-needed habitat and attract outdoor enthusiasts to all corners of the state.

③ The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is one of the only state agencies to pay property tax, using funds from hunting licenses and gambling receipts. Last year, DNR paid over \$1 million in property taxes.



**INHF recommends that REAP be fully funded at \$20 million and urges the legislature to extend the program's sunset to at least 2050.**

IF YOU CARE ABOUT...

# TRAILS

Multi-use trails help people get outdoors, stay healthy and make communities a more attractive place to work and live.

**Iowa trails see an estimated 2 million visits each year,** supporting nearby businesses. The economic boost is particularly beneficial to rural communities who are looking to attract visitors and new residents.

Iowa Economic Development Authority research shows that **access to natural landscapes and recreational opportunities are among the top factors that motivate individuals to visit and move to Iowa.** In the past decade, 89 of Iowa's rural counties have experienced a decrease in population. Trails provide a quality of life benefit that can help further workforce development and rural revitalization initiatives.

Trails help boost the public health of our state. Studies show that about 25% of Iowans do not engage in any physical activity outside of their regular jobs. Inactivity costs the state over \$5.3 billion through lost worker productivity, increased medical costs and increased worker's compensation. **People that live near trails are 50% more likely to meet physical activity guidelines.**

Iowa's State Recreational Trails Program has leveraged funding from federal and private sources to construct 1,990 miles of trail. Even so, demand for new recreational trails, trail maintenance costs and trail connections has consistently outpaced funding.



## ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENT

① Annual funding requests for trails average 5 times the amount available. There are over \$200 million in unmet trail needs, 75% of which are in rural communities.

② An estimated \$417 million is generated through direct and indirect benefits of cycling.

③ Iowa has an opportunity to be a trail destination through national trails projects such as the Great American Rail Trail and the American Discovery Trail.



**INHF recommends that the State Recreational Trails program receive a significant increase in funding to address the high demand for trail projects across the state.**

IF YOU CARE ABOUT...

# REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE



Creating resilient landscapes and improving water quality starts with land stewardship. With nearly 70% of Iowa land in crop production, conservation must be a priority in agricultural policy in order to protect the state's soils and waterways, and adapt to a changing climate.

**The Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS) – which aims to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loads leaving the state by 45% by 2035 – is Iowa's primary policy for sustainable agriculture and water quality.**

While sustainable agriculture practices are on the rise, more are needed in order to achieve the goals of the NRS. For example, approximately 888,000 acres of cover crops were planted in 2018, a significant increase from years past, but still a far cry from the 12.5 million acres called for in the NRS.

Barriers to widespread adoption and implementation of NRS practices include a lack of farmer and landowner awareness, and a need for technical assistance and infrastructure that support scaling-up conservation efforts.

## ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENT

- 1 Iowa farmers and landowners can access cost-share and loan programs to help make sustainable investments on the land, including:
  - Financial Incentives Program
  - Resource Enhancement and Protection Program (REAP)
  - Water Quality Initiative
  - Conservation Practices Revolving Loan Fund
  - State Revolving Fund

- 2 The Iowa Charitable Conservation Contribution Tax Credit is a tool for landowners seeking to protect their land, which provides tax incentives for permanently protecting agricultural and natural land. The tax credit has helped hundreds of landowners implement sustainable land use practices and ensure the long-term health of their land.

- 3 Iowa loses an average of 5 tons per acre of topsoil each year to erosion. In-field conservation practices such as cover crops, no-till planting, buffer and filter strips provide multiple conservation benefits like building soil health, improving water quality and reducing erosion.



INHF recommends that dependable funding be made available to support adoption of sustainable agriculture practices, including increased capacity for outreach and technical assistance.

IF YOU CARE ABOUT...

# WATER QUALITY



**Natural solutions, such as restored grasslands or wetlands, can help improve water quality and mitigate flood damage** by slowing runoff and increasing filtration. A watershed approach focuses on the relationship between land use and water so that such conservation practices can be strategically implemented on the landscape. For example, **it is estimated that more than 270,000 acres of cropland is located in the 2-year floodplain.**

Retiring these fragile lands and covering them with perennial vegetation will not only help make those fields more resilient, but will also help filter and slow water runoff from surrounding fields. Wetlands act as natural sponges, holding excess water and filtering out nutrients from the watershed. **Over 90% of Iowa's natural wetlands have been drained. The NRS calls for wetlands to treat 5-10 million acres of land.**

Currently, only 104,000 acres are treated by wetlands. Using a watershed approach can help identify areas where wetlands can be most efficient in treating acres within the watershed.



## ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENT

- 1 Each year, 30 million visits are made to Iowa's lakes and rivers, contributing nearly \$2 billion in consumer spending.
- 2 Poor water quality disproportionately impacts rural communities, where the cost of cleaning and processing drinking water is shouldered by a smaller population.
- 3 Recreating in water with bacteria and toxins can cause serious illness, particularly among young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems. In 2019, there were 60 beach advisories for E. coli and 21 advisories for toxic microcystin.



INHF recommends that additional funding be dedicated to watershed protection and lake restoration.

# IOWA'S

# WATER

# & LAND

# LEGACY







**INHF recommends that the legislature raise the sales tax to at least 3/8 cent to fund the Trust and that the allocation formula include support for public open space, trails, sustainable agriculture, and water quality.**

## ADVOCACY ENHANCEMENT

- ① Approximately 16-20% of Trust Fund revenue would be generated by out-of-state visitors, and certain necessities such as food and medication are exempt from sales tax.
- ② Nearby states, including Minnesota, Missouri and Arkansas have passed similar voter-approved sales tax measures that have generated hundreds of millions of dollars for conservation and outdoor recreation.
- ③ Governor Reynolds highlighted funding the **Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund** as a top priority in her 2020 Condition of the State address.

Support for Iowa's land, water and outdoor recreation is dependent on program funding set by the legislature that varies from year-to-year. Reliable funding is necessary to ensure that Iowa's natural resources and communities will be consistently supported.

In 2010, 63% of Iowa voters approved a constitutional amendment to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, a permanent and protected funding source for Iowa's communities and natural places. Ten years later, the Trust Fund sits empty, requiring a sales tax increase of 3/8 of a cent for funding. If funded, the Trust Fund would generate approximately \$200 million annually. The Trust Fund would provide farmers, local communities and state agencies with reliable and accountable funding. Funding would be allocated to the following categories:

Funding category	Policy areas impacted			
				
Natural resources	✓	✓	✓	✓
Soil conservation & water protection	✓		✓	
Watershed protection	✓		✓	
REAP	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local conservation partnerships	✓	✓		✓
Trails		✓		✓
Lake restoration	✓			✓

-  Water quality
-  Multi-use trails
-  Sustainable agriculture
-  Outdoor recreation

## UNDERSTANDING

# LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

Legislative committees play an important role in creating new laws and appropriating funds to enable existing programs.

### NEW POLICY

Each chamber has standing policy committees that focus on a particular subject area. When a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a standing committee to thoroughly review, seek input from stakeholders and hold hearings for public comment. While a bill is in committee, it is often the most important time for the public to advocate for a specific bill. The committee discusses their findings before reporting their conclusions and recommendations to the entire chamber, where the bill is debated and a vote of the whole chamber is held. If the bill is passed, it goes to the other chamber, where the process is repeated.

### APPROPRIATIONS

Joint appropriation subcommittees are also organized by subject matter, but are comprised of members of both the House and Senate. The appropriation subcommittees are tasked with allocating funds to existing departments and programs. They review department funding requests, state revenue estimates and the governor's suggested budget in order to make recommendations to one of the standing appropriations committees. When advocating specifically for funding, joint appropriation subcommittees members are the best legislators to contact.

Committees most relevant to INHF legislative priorities include:

#### POLICY COMMITTEES

- Natural Resources
- Agriculture
- Environmental Protection
- Ways & Means
- Appropriations

#### JOINT APPROPRIATION SUBCOMMITTEES

- Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Transportation, Infrastructure, and Capital



To learn more about committee structure and find full listings of legislative committees, committee members and committee schedules, visit [www.legis.iowa.gov/committees](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees).

If you have questions about ongoing bills, legislative schedules, daily reports and legislative history, you can contact the Legislative Information Office (LIO) at 515-281-3566 or online at [www.legis.iowa.gov](http://www.legis.iowa.gov).

# HOW TO CONNECT

Engaging with decision-makers can be intimidating, but there are many ways you can make your voice heard. Here are some helpful tips:

**Get to know your legislators.** As elected officials, your legislators represent you and your district. Let them know what issues matter most to you.

**Keep it local.** Remember, your legislators live in the same area that you do. Your kids may go to the same school, you may visit the same parks or enjoy the same trails.

**Find where your interests align.** Protecting our natural resources and connecting people with the outdoors has multiple benefits. Find how those benefits align with the interests of your legislators.

**No matter how you choose to contact your legislator, it's important to remember a few things:**

**1) Introduce yourself.** Where do you live, what do you do, what do you want to talk with them about?

**2) Lead with personal experience** and support your position with resources included in this guide. See the next page for examples on personalizing your message.

**3) Make the ask.** Respectfully ask that your legislator support or fund a program that you care about. You may ask for support of more than one program.

**4) Thank them** for their time and service.



## MAKE THE CALL

Calling your legislators can be very effective. Start by saying your name and where you are from. Tell them specifically what issue you are calling about and how it affects you. Telling your story is the best way to make an impact. Finish by thanking them for their service.



## MEET IN-PERSON

Meeting your legislator in-person is the best thing an advocate can do. Whether it's at the Capitol or a legislative forum in your district, meeting face-to-face will help your concerns resonate. Focus on issues; don't dwell on statistics. Be polite, thank them for their service and tell your story.

## FIND YOUR LEGISLATORS

Find your senator and representative here:  
[www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find)

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

①

*"Senator [name], I am a native of Centerville and have owned a small business on the town square for over 10 years. In developing my business, I have found that Lake Rathbun and Honey Creek Resort have fueled our local economic development, and I would like for the state to support the development of a trail between the lake and our historic town square."*

②

*"I respectfully ask that you work with your fellow state leaders to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund so that Appanoose County may benefit from the economic development opportunities. Alternatively, I ask that State Recreational Trails Program receive increased funding to help develop trails throughout rural Iowa."*



## WRITE A LETTER

A simple note, like the postcard below, can help lawmakers register opinions from their constituents, especially when they are hearing from a lot of people. Be clear, concise, personal and polite. Most important, make sure they know exactly what you are asking for.

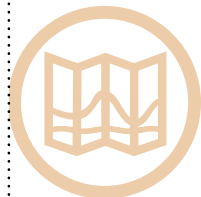
Dear

Vertical lines for writing a letter.



Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation

*Protecting and restoring  
Iowa's land, water  
and wildlife.*



Three vertical lines for writing.

Three vertical lines for writing.