



NATURE'S ADVOCATE

**YOUR GUIDE TO ENGAGING
IN PUBLIC ADVOCACY
FOR NATURE IN IOWA**

WHY ADVOCATE?

Public policy affects us all — it influences where we choose to live, our quality of life and opportunities to grow our communities. It has a lasting impact on future generations and the world where they'll live.

But shaping public policy that reflects our values requires public input. Consistent advocacy and engagement are central to creating a vision for our future and lending a voice to the voiceless: Iowa's land, water, wildlife and future generations.

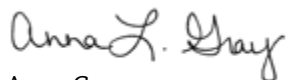
YOU CAN ADVOCATE TO:

INFORM: The issues and opportunities we face are constantly evolving. Elected officials and community leaders rely on dialogue with constituents and advocates to understand issues and inform decision making.

PRESERVE: The framework that enables farmers, landowners, INHF and public partners to implement conservation practices is a matter of public policy and subject to change — we cannot take it for granted. There are programs and policies that support ongoing conservation efforts but are at risk of being terminated without advocates like you.

ADVANCE: Iowa has tremendous opportunity to enhance conservation and outdoor recreation. Advocacy for investing in natural resources is key for helping our communities meet their full potential.

Yours in conservation,



Anna Gray
INHF Public Policy Director & Counsel

Nature's Advocate 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 dedicated to protecting and restoring Iowa's land, water and wildlife.

For more information about INHF's land conservation and advocacy work, visit www.inhf.org.

To get involved with INHF's policy team or find more information about *Nature's Advocate*, contact INHF at **515-288-1846** or policy@inhf.org.



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Recent legislative sessions have held repeated attacks on Iowa's ability to establish or expand parks, trails and wildlife areas. Existing funding measures are not meeting the needs for outdoor recreation, soil health, water quality or habitat availability. **To address these challenges, we must be effective advocates.**

Nature's Advocate is designed to help you develop your own course of action for advocacy. This guide introduces natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, information about specific conservation programs, an overview of the Iowa legislative process and ideas for engaging in advocacy in accordance with your comfort level.



ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



Access to natural landscapes and recreational opportunities are among the top factors that motivate people to visit and move to Iowa. Healthy natural resources and clean water that provides for recreation starts with good land stewardship — which requires support for farmers and landowners, opportunities for public partnership and collaborative community planning. [Learn more about the issues and opportunities facing our land, water and wildlife to understand how public policy can help address concerns and maximize Iowa's potential.](#)



REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

ISSUES:

- Iowa loses an average of more than five tons of soil per acre each year. Conservation is a critical component of ensuring long-term viability of farming and ranching.

- Farmers and landowners need support and options to diversify their operation and manage land holistically.



OPPORTUNITIES:

- To sustain Iowa's tradition as a leading agricultural state, we must empower landowners and tenants to protect and enhance soil, water and fragile lands.
- Regenerative agriculture utilizes a diverse set of practices, such as no-till planting, year-round ground cover and holistic grazing.

- Through restoration, unproductive agricultural land can become highly productive conservation land by providing habitat for wildlife and pollinators, natural water filtration systems and opportunities for outdoor recreation.
- Public policy can support cost-share programs and other options that landowners and farmers have for managing their land, including their choices for how to retire land from production.

PUBLIC PARKS & WILDLIFE AREAS



ISSUES:

- Recent legislative efforts seek to cap Iowa's public land acreage or restrict landowners' ability to contribute land to a public area — even in the case of our most sensitive landscapes.
- Very few of Iowa's native remnant habitats remain — less than 0.01% of prairie, 10% of wetlands and 33% of forests.

- In recent decades, Iowa has lost more than 1.5 million acres of habitat suitable for pheasants and other small game.



photo by Larry Reis

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Wildlife management areas provide much-needed habitat and attract outdoor enthusiasts to all corners of the state.

- Numerous studies show that nature and open space supports our physical and mental health, leading to enriched quality of life and wellbeing.

TRAILS



ISSUES:

- In Iowa, only 30% of children — and only 20% of adults — meet the national recommendations for physical activity.

- There's a greater demand for trails than funding currently supports.



OPPORTUNITIES:

- Multi-use trails engage communities, getting people outdoors and connecting them with their local parks and businesses.
- Trails are locally led projects made possible through thoughtful planning and collaboration and support from state, federal, local and private funding sources.

- Studies show that people that live near trails are 50% more likely to meet physical activity guidelines, leading to healthier lifestyles and reduced public health costs.
- Iowa has an opportunity to be a trail destination through national projects such as the Great American Rail-Trail.

WATER



ISSUES:

- Poor water quality can pose serious health risks and often disproportionately impacts rural areas, where the cost of cleaning drinking water is shouldered by a smaller population.

- Beach closures due to excess bacteria and toxins have a negative impact on economic opportunity.



photo by Kip Ladage

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Iowa's lakes, rivers and streams are important sources for drinking, fishing and recreating. The quality of our water has a direct impact on the economic stability and health of our communities.
- Lakes and rivers support local businesses by attracting visitors and tourists.

- The Nutrient Reduction Strategy (NRS), Iowa's primary water quality and sustainable agriculture policy, identifies effective nutrient management and erosion control practices, such as wetland and grassland restoration, cover crops and extended crop rotations, and perennial buffers and floodplain protection. While implementation of the NRS is underway, public policy and investment can accelerate the adoption of conservation practices.

KEY CONSERVATION PROGRAMS



photo by Brian Gibbs

Though grants and other one-time funding measures can provide a boost, consistent, dependable funding for conservation comes from programs overseen by the Iowa legislature. **Legislators rely on dialogue from constituents to allocate funding appropriately.**

These three programs remain among INHF's top legislative priorities year after year. Learn how each supports conservation in Iowa to aid in your advocacy conversations.

RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT & PROTECTION (REAP)

REAP is Iowa's premier conservation program, investing in the enhancement and protection of the state's diverse natural and cultural resources. REAP has supported over 15,000 projects across the state in each of Iowa's counties, including:

- Parks, trails & wildlife areas
- Soil & water conservation
- Historical resource preservation
- Roadside vegetation

LEARN HOW REAP HAS SUPPORTED YOUR COMMUNITY:
<https://www.iowadnr.gov/Conservation/REAP/Projects-by-County>

QUICK FACTS

Administering Agencies: Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship, Department of Transportation, Economic Development Authority

Funding Source: Environment First Fund (gaming receipts), Natural Resource license plate sales

Average Appropriation: \$12 million per year. REAP is authorized to receive \$20 million annually, but funds are regularly diverted

Unmet Needs: REAP grant requests exceed an average of 3x the amount available

Legislative Request: Fully fund REAP at \$20 million

QUICK FACTS

Administering Agency: Iowa Department of Transportation

Funding Source: Rebuild Iowa's Infrastructure Fund (gaming receipts)

Average Appropriation: \$2 million per year

Unmet Needs: SRT requests average 8x the amount available, approximately \$15-20 million per year

Legislative Request: Increase funding for the State Recreational Trails Program

STATE RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

SRT is a competitive grant program that leverages private and public funding to support trail projects. In addition to helping construct over 2,000 miles of trails, it has supported:

- Trail corridor acquisition
- Surfacing, resurfacing, rehabilitation, construction upgrades
- Bridge construction and repair
- Signs, parking and rest areas, information centers

NATURAL RESOURCES & OUTDOOR RECREATION TRUST FUND

Iowa voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2010 to create the Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, a dedicated funding source to improve water quality, protect our soil, enhance wildlife habitat and increase recreational opportunities. However, the legislature must first pass a statewide sales tax increase of 3/8 of a cent to fund the Trust. Once funded, the Trust Fund would support:

- REAP Program
- State Recreational Trails Program
- Soil & water conservation
- Natural resources
- Watershed protection
- Lake restoration
- Local conservation partnerships

QUICK FACTS

Administering Agencies: Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Department of Transportation

Funding Source: The Trust Fund requires a statewide sales tax increase of 3/8 of a cent

Appropriation: No funds have been credited to the Trust Fund. Once funded, the Trust Fund would generate approximately \$200 million annually

Unmet Needs: The Trust Fund would help meet the outstanding demand for parks, trails, wildlife areas and soil and water conservation practices. Other states, including Minnesota, Missouri and Arkansas have passed similar voter-approved measures to successfully expand conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities

Legislative Request: Fund the Natural Resources & Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund



IOWA LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW



The Iowa legislature has two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each legislative district represents approximately the same number of constituents based on U.S. census data. The Iowa legislature convenes every year in January and works through April or until a budget is adopted.

Legislative committees play an important role in creating new laws and appropriating funds to existing programs. Each chamber has standing committees that focus on a particular subject.

When a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a committee, which appoints a three-person subcommittee. The subcommittee holds public hearings to gather input. The legislature moves at a fast pace — a bill can be introduced and a subcommittee hearing set in as little as 24 hours.

Prompt response and followup throughout the legislative session is important for effective advocacy.

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



LEGISLATIVE WEBSITE:
<https://www.legis.iowa.gov/>

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



A bill can be introduced and a subcommittee hearing set in **as little as 24 hours**.

Subcommittee meetings are often the **only opportunity** for public comment.



To learn more about committee structure and find full listings of legislative committees, committee members and committee schedules, visit 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.



photo by Jason Mrachina via Flickr



TIPS FOR ADVOCACY

Advocacy is an ongoing process. Being a strong advocate starts by building a relationship and understanding.

Help them represent you. Your elected officials represent you and rely on your input to make informed decisions that will impact their constituents and communities. Tell them why natural resources are important to you, share your experiences in the outdoors and the vision you have for Iowa's future.

Get to know them. Ask questions. What motivated them to run for office? What are their top priorities? What do they appreciate about Iowa's outdoors? What do they hear about from other constituents? Listen to their perspective to find where your interests and values align. Look for opportunities to connect, and don't dwell on points of disagreement.

Be respectful. Enter each interaction with a goal of having another conversation in the future.

Follow up. Keep them informed of new opportunities in your community. Ask for updates from their perspective and remind them that they have constituents who care about Iowa's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.

ROLES IN ADVOCACY



ELECTED OFFICIALS: YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Elected officials represent you and their other constituents. They gather input from a variety of stakeholders to advocate on behalf of constituents throughout the legislative process.



INHF: INFO CENTER & CONNECTOR

INHF actively tracks conservation trends and legislation to keep elected officials, partners and grassroots advocates informed. INHF provides background information, facts and research, while working to connect grassroots advocates with their elected officials. Look to INHF for action alerts and opportunities to effectively weigh in on legislative proposals.



YOU: THE CONSTITUENT

Your role as a constituent is essential and irreplaceable. You are the expert in your own experience and community. Real-world, local perspectives provide insight on policy impacts and implementation. While INHF can provide research and information, your voice provides the context that makes our collective advocacy meaningful.

DEVELOP YOUR OWN

ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN



photo by Larry Reis

IDENTIFY YOUR LEGISLATORS and save their contact info so that you can quickly respond to action alerts:

Find your senator and representative here: www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find

SENATOR:

REPRESENTATIVE:

IDENTIFY BENEFITS that natural resources and outdoor recreation personally provide you and your community:

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1 ACTIVELY RESPOND to policy proposals

- SIGN UP** for INHF Action Alerts at innf.org/natures-advocate to be notified of advocacy opportunities
- ASK** your elected official to support or oppose a specific proposal
- VISIT** the capitol to speak at a subcommittee hearing or meet with your legislator to discuss an issue
- URGE OTHERS** to join you in action

2 BUILD CONNECTIONS

- BUILD RELATIONSHIPS** with your elected officials
 - **INTRODUCE YOURSELF** to elected officials
 - **SUBSCRIBE** to your legislators' newsletters
 - **ATTEND** legislative forums
 - **INVITE** them to join you for a visit to a local park, trail or wildlife area
 - **MAINTAIN CONTACT, SHARE UPDATES AND SAY THANK YOU**
- RECRUIT LOCAL LEADERS** to advocate by demonstrating the role of nature in their lives and work.

LOCAL LEADERS WHO SHARE AN INTEREST IN THESE BENEFITS:

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3 CREATE AWARENESS

- INTRODUCE OTHERS TO NATURE'S ADVOCATE**; ask us for additional copies
- SPREAD THE WORD** about the value of nature and need for advocacy
- STAY INFORMED** on local projects and opportunities
- SIGN UP** for INHF newsletters at innf.org/subscribe
- CONNECT** with your local county conservation board to see how you can support their efforts
- WRITE** an op-ed, **SHARE** information on social media
- STAY ENGAGED!** Repeat/continue the process
- CONSIDER WHO YOU WILL RECRUIT TO JOIN IN YOUR EFFORTS:**

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4 YOUR OWN IDEAS:

1.
2.
3.
4.



There are many ways you can advocate for nature. Start at your comfort level and deepen and broaden your advocacy over time.

ADVOCACY CAN LOOK LIKE

- ✓ **SUPPORTING** a cause, proposal, idea, plan or way of doing something
- ✓ **TAKING ACTION** to influence decisions
- ✓ **GETTING SUPPORT** from others to help express your views and stand up for your rights
- ✓ **GIVING A PERSON SUPPORT** to have their voice heard
- ✓ **BUILDING** relationships and partnerships (an ongoing process)
- ✓ **CREATING AWARENESS** about issues and opportunities



photo by AKM Images



CONTACTING LEGISLATORS ABOUT A BILL

- 1 Introduce yourself.** Provide your name, where you live and state that you are a constituent. If you have met your legislator before, provide some context about your meeting to remind them of your existing relationship. If contacting a member of a committee who is not your legislator, explain that you are contacting them because of the committee's consideration of a specific bill.
- 2 Clearly state why you are contacting them.** Provide the bill number if possible. There are several hundred bills introduced each year, so it is important to be as specific as possible.
- 3 State your position** “for” or “against” the bill.
- 4 Use your own words** to explain your position. Avoid templates with a pre-filled message. A short, simple statement in your own words has a much stronger impact.
- 5 Make the ask.** Respectfully ask that they represent you by supporting your position.
- 6 Thank them** for their time and service.



Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation

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

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is a statewide 501 (c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization that works with private landowners and public agencies to protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife. Since our founding in 1979, our supporters and staff have protected more than 195,000 acres of Iowa's natural resources.

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