

Constitutional Amendment on Natural Resources

Over the past two legislative sessions, the Iowa Legislature adopted an amendment to the state's constitution that creates a Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, for the purpose of providing a sustainable source of funding to protect and enhance water quality and natural areas in Iowa. The question on whether to adopt this amendment will be on the November 2010 ballot.

No revenue will be credited to the fund until the Legislature increases the sales tax in the future, after the public votes on the amendment. If approved by the public, the amendment would dedicate 3/8th of 1¢ of a future sales tax increase raised by the Legislature. This would generate approximately \$150 million.

The advisory committee established by the Legislature to provide recommendations on how to provide sustainable funding for natural resources met last month and discussed where the money would go if the fund is approved by the public in November, 2010, and if the Legislature increases the sales tax.

The following categories were identified by the advisory committee. They are also supported by a 2007 interim legislative committee. These represent increases to baseline funding to meet current needs.

- **REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection).** 13% (\$19.5 million) additional funds to meet the demands on

REAP. This would provide a total of \$39.5 million from current and future sources. This program provides moneys for projects that enhance our natural, cultural, and recreational resources across the state at multiple levels of government and management.

- **Local Conservation Partnership Program.** 13% (\$19.5 million) for habitat protection and conservation, infrastructure needs, conservation education, and nature interpretation at the local level. Funds would be made available to county conservation boards (\$11.5 million), nongovernmental organizations (\$5 million), and cities (\$3 million).

- **Watershed Protection.** 14% (\$21 million) to improve and encourage a watershed approach to solving water quality environmental problems. Watershed protection includes encouragement of watershed groups, targeted projects, wetland restoration, and runoff filtration management techniques.

- **Lakes Restoration.** 7% (\$10.5 million) additional for lake restoration needs. Local involvement and watershed protection are essential components of all successful lake restoration projects.

- **Trails.** 10% (\$15 million) for the addition of new hiking, walking, biking, and water trails, and maintenance of existing trails. These state investments in trails will be able to leverage additional federal, local, and private funds.

- **Natural Resources Management.** 23% (\$34.5 million) additional to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources for identified needs in state parks, state preserves, wildlife areas, state forests, wildlife habitats, wildlife diversity program, access for hunting and other recreational activities, technical assistance, natural resources outreach, and conservation law enforcement and recreational safety programs.

- **Land Stewardship.** 20% (\$30 million) additional to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship to provide additional technical assistance to soil and water conservation districts, develop a stream bank and buffer stabilization project, initiate a state-funded CRP-type program to keep lands in hay and grass, and start a tillage management incentives program to assure adequate crop residue levels in areas impacted by demand for cellulosic ethanol production. This new money would also be used to support environmental agricultural and livestock stewardship.

The advisory committee will meet again in July to discuss oversight and accountability issues, and provide more specific details on each of the funding accounts.