

Funding for Natural Resources Trust Fund

On the November 2, 2010, election ballot there will be a question on whether Iowa should constitutionally protect a Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, for the purpose of protecting and enhancing water quality and natural areas in Iowa. The Legislature is currently working on legislation that would allocate the money in the fund if this amendment is ratified by the voters.

The constitutional amendment says no revenue will be credited to the fund until the Legislature increases the sales tax sometime in the future. If approved by the public, the amendment would dedicate 3/8th of 1 cent of a future state sales tax increase approved by the Legislature. This would generate approximately \$150 million.

It is left to the Legislature to establish the parameters for distribution of the money. House Study Bill 700, which unanimously passed the House Natural Resources Committee, sets the parameters. The legislation would only go into effect if the constitutional amendment on the November 2010 ballot passes.

Allocations of the Fund

The bill allocates the trust fund money as follows:

- 23% to the Natural Resources Account for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to use for the establishment, restoration, enhancement, maintenance, and improvement of state parks, state forests, state preserves, wildlife areas, wildlife habitats, native prairies, and wetlands.
- 20% to the Soil Conservation and Water Protection Account for the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) to use for soil conservation and watershed protection, and soil conservation or crop management practices used on land producing biomass for biorefineries.
- 14% to the Watershed Protection Account to be used cooperatively by DNR and IDALS, for water resource projects to preserve watersheds, and surface water protection projects and practices.
- 13% to the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Fund, which provides moneys for projects that enhance our natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- 13% to the Local Conservation Partnership Account for DNR to allocate to local communities (county conservation boards, cities, or nonprofit nongovernmental organizations) for the maintenance and improvements of parks, preserves, wildlife areas, wildlife habitats, native prairies, and wetlands.
- 10% to the Trails Account for the Department of Transportation (DOT) and DNR to support initiatives related to the design, establishment, maintenance, improvement, and expansion of land and water trails.
- 7% to the Lake Restoration Account for DNR to support their public lake restoration initiatives.

The bill says the trust fund moneys are to supplement, not replace, any moneys appropriated by the general assembly to support the constitutional purposes. House Study Bill 700 is now ready to be debated by the full House.