



The Iowa Policy Project

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FOR RELEASE MONDAY, JULY 27, 2015, 10 A.M.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The Iowa Department of Natural Resources website has a page with a map and resources about REAP projects and funding by county from 1989-2014. This might be helpful to you in localizing a story.

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/REAP/ProjectsbyCounty.aspx>

REAP: An Opportunity for Greater Stewardship

Linn County Projects Show Results of Natural, Cultural Resource Protection

IOWA CITY, Iowa (July 21, 2015) — Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP) has been underfunded for 25 years running, yet projects it funds around the state are proven successes that show greater opportunity to enhance environmental and cultural stewardship.

A new report from the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project (IPP) samples outcomes in REAP with a snapshot of its initiatives in Linn County.

"REAP shows us that legislators, local officials and private organizations can collaborate in ways that assure Iowans can get greater enjoyment from parks, waterways and open spaces, and from well-maintained and restored historic assets," said Katie Gandhi, a University of Iowa graduate student intern for IPP.

Gandhi authored the new paper with IPP researcher and former director David Osterberg, who as a state legislator in 1989 helped to pass the legislation creating REAP. He is pleased with the results.

"Public policy matters. This is an example of how much it matters to nearly everybody in Linn County," Osterberg said.

The authors chose Linn County for the REAP illustration because the county has projects in all eight areas of emphasis for the program, and because the funding is tracked in a way that is easy for the public to access. But there are many examples across the state.

"Our hope is that Iowans around the state will see the impact of REAP more clearly in local projects that have been funded or supported this way," Gandhi said. "It might be that the park you just hiked, the lake you just fished, or the museum you toured on the weekend was enhanced because of REAP."

Excerpt of report:

"A quarter-century of experience offers clear examples of environmental and cultural investments that Iowans could not have expected in the absence of REAP. The economic impact can be hard to quantify, but the Linn County successes noted in this report may raise public awareness of REAP contributions in all 99 counties. In turn, all Iowans may evaluate whether REAP should be underfunded annually, below its \$20 million target, a nearly 25-year trend that keeps REAP well short of its potential."

REAP funding supports conservation education; soil and water enhancement; state, city and county parks and open spaces; roadside planting; state land management and development of historic resources. In its first 25 years, REAP produced 14,535 projects and \$264 million in state investment.

“But Iowa is not supporting the program the way legislators intended or expected when Governor Branstad signed REAP into law over a quarter-century ago,” Osterberg said.

When REAP was approved, it was authorized at \$20 million or more per year, but only once has been funded at that level. For the new fiscal year, lawmakers appropriated \$16 million, same as last year.

“We could do so much more, and so much better,” Osterberg said. “When revenues are strong, as they are now, it’s an opportunity for some one-time investments that could pay off many times over.”

REAP-funded projects reflect citizen interests as citizens from county, regional and statewide assemblies make recommendations to the Governor, Legislature and state agencies. Each year the number of grant applications exceeds available funds.

Iowa lawmakers implemented REAP on the heels of the Iowa Open Space plan of 1988, the report noted. REAP reinforced an ambitious goal to double the acreage of protected open space in Iowa and commit the state to protecting natural and cultural resources long into the future.

“At one time, Iowa thought ‘big,’” Osterberg said. “Now we look back and see a gap of \$220 million between what was projected and what we have actually invested. Each year we fall \$4 million or \$6 million short, we’re taking it out of natural and cultural assets that could be there for our grandchildren.”

The new report, which outlines many Linn County projects in the various project categories of REAP, is available on the Iowa Policy Project website, www.iowapolicyproject.org.

The Iowa Policy Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy research and analysis organization based in Iowa City.

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The report was supported in part by the McKnight Foundation and the Fred and Charlotte Hubbell Foundation. Opinions expressed in the report, this news release or interviews with the authors may not reflect the views of funding organizations and are solely the responsibility of the authors and the Iowa Policy Project.