

Many species of waterfowl, including Trumpeter Swans, depend on emergent and submergent wetland vegetation for food, cover, and nesting.

THE PROGRAM

The Wetland Wave Program (WWP) utilizes state and private funding so that participating landowners have no out-of-pocket costs and even receive compensation for any land that is taken out of production.

The average cost of a wetland varies depending on the location and style of wetland. Costs include site planning, engineering and design, excavation and construction, tile redirection, and planting. These costs are assumed by the Wetland Wave program and landowners are also provided with easement payments in exchange for maintenance of the wetlands.

A Bespoke Program

The Wetland Wave Program is not open to just anyone; it's a tailored, "bespoke" program, where specific parcels that match the qualifications of a wetland project are targeted in priority areas. If a landowner is contacted by the WWP, it means their property has been identified as an ideal, cost-effective site that treats a maximum drainage area with minimum impact on the cropped landscape. Our ultimate goal is to reduce or eliminate taking cropped acres out of production.

100% State & Private Funded

All the costs for designing and installing wetlands are covered by the program! This program is led by Polk County with state and private donor funding. Unlike traditional federal programs, the WWP can be more flexible and creative with the design and easement process.

Limited Time Window

Because there is no guarantee this program will be re-funded in the future, this is essentially a once-in-a-lifetime window. Landowners who qualify are strongly encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to create a valuable wetland project on their land that will reap benefits for generations.

MAINTENANCE TIPS FOR WETLANDS LANDOWNERS

The structure of a wetland is the most critical component. Regular maintenance will ensure it will last well into the future. Below are recommendations to help ensure the structure is maintained properly.

1 Buffer Establishment

The easement area surrounding the wetland is seeded to a mix of native grasses and forbs. These grasses take some extra care to get started because they focus their early years on root establishment vs. above ground growth.

2 Structure Maintenance

The structure of your wetland is the most critical component of your site. Regular inspections of the dam and general property maintenance will ensure it will last well into the future. Stay on top of issues that may arise, such as fallen trees and destructive rodent activity (muskrats, beavers, raccoons, etc.)

3 Buffer Maintenance

Management can include spraying, inter-seeding, disking, mowing, and burning. Timely burns can help control volunteer trees in the buffer and can invigorate growth of native grasses and forbs. In some cases, spot mowing or spraying can be effective in treating small problem areas as opposed to covering the entire easement.



4 Tree Control

Trees have a tendency to take over a wet site and damage the structure of the dam, reducing habitat potential and eventually reducing longevity of the wetland itself. Willows and cottonwoods especially love water and will frequently dominate a wetland site if not controlled. By actively monitoring for and controlling small trees every few years, you avoid long term issues.

5 Forebay Inclusion and Maintenance

Sediment forebays are meant to catch soil to prevent siltation of the wetland and they will need to be periodically dredged out. This periodic maintenance will greatly extend the life of a wetland.



A well-maintained structure.
Photo credit: SWCS/Conservation Media Library

Photo credit: Conservation Media Library

SIGN UP

Enrollment is on a continuous basis. All WWP eligibility requirements must be met. Established wetlands must be positioned and designed so as to not impact the drainage rights of upstream or downstream landowners.

MORE INFORMATION

Contact:
Water Resources Outreach Coordinator
Polk County Water Resources
waterresources@polkcountyiowa.gov
515-286-3705

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
AGRICULTURE &
LAND STEWARDSHIP



CITY OF DES MOINES



GREAT OUTDOORS
FOUNDATION



POLK COUNTY
Leading the Way



Des Moines
Water Works
Water You Can Trust for Life



DUCKS UNLIMITED



Polk Soil & Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT

©2026. Prepared jointly by Polk County Public Works and Heartland Co-op. While every attempt has been made to provide correct, current and updated information, Heartland Co-op, Polk County Public Works, or any participating Agency is not responsible for errors of omission. The Agencies make no representations or warranties as to the completeness or accuracy of the information.

HT_001B_0626



WETLAND WAVE

AN URBAN / AG PARTNERSHIP

Partnering with local agencies and landowners to improve water quality and reduce flooding.



Photo credit: ICALS

JOIN THE WETLAND WAVE!

Photo credit: SWCS/Conservation Media Library

Wetlands serve as wildlife habitats for amphibian species and **190** and **5,000** plant species

Photo credit: Lynn Belts

On average, wetlands have been found to reduce nitrate-N concentration in water by **52%**

Photo credit: SWCS/Conservation Media Library

100% of the costs for designing and installing wetlands are covered by the program

Photo credit: SWCS/Conservation Media Library

WHEN IT COMES TO THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION IN IOWA, LANDOWNERS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE in our ability to improve our water quality. Wetlands reduce flooding, increase wildlife habitat, and provide numerous ecosystem services to the environment such as cleaner water downstream, carbon sequestration, and preventing soil from leaving our landscape. Moreover, many landowners recognize the recreational and aesthetic value of wetlands, making them valuable assets for personal enjoyment, hunting leases, or family gatherings.

With the Wetland Wave program, participating landowners are both a powerful contributor to the water quality solution in Iowa and the future of Iowa's conservation movement.

What is the Wetland Wave?

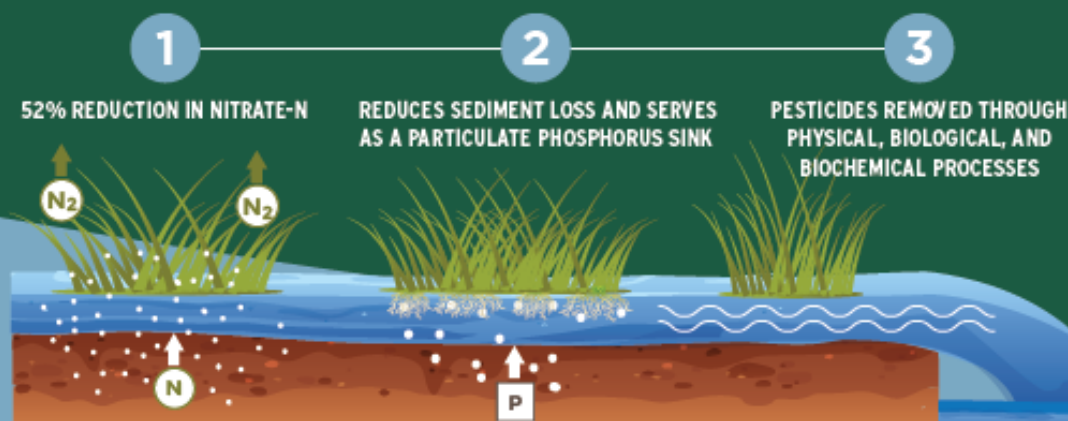
The "Wetland Wave" is an urban-ag partnership program that leverages state and private donor funding to selectively identify ideal parcels of land that could hold a highly effective wetland, those that take the minimum number of acres out of production but treat a large amount of upland drainage acres. The main goal of the partnership is to select several landowners and parcels of land all at once – effectively "batching" or "grouping" several wetland projects in the same "wave." Hence, a Wetland Wave!

The "batching" approach has been used with cover crops and edge of field structures like saturated buffers and bioreactors to great success. The Wetland Wave, a collaborative partnership, is focused on the expansion of the

batching model to wetlands. In this way, we can approach conservation from multiple levels and angles: in-field soil health, edge of field water quality, and landscape-scale nutrient and soil retention.

One goal of the Wetland Wave program is to create awareness of how wetlands provide significant benefit to both water quality and flood control and are mutually beneficial to landowners, the community, and regional wildlife. After building the awareness of their value, another goal is to successfully bring landowners on board with our program and not only assist in the design and construction of the wetlands, but compensate the landowners for any land that is taken out of production as a result of the program.

HOW WETLANDS IMPROVE WATER QUALITY



DENITRIFICATION
Microorganisms convert nitrate to N_2 gas which makes up 78% of the atmosphere. Wetland design is typically shallow to promote denitrification.

Slower moving runoff produces less soil erosion. Excess nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, are absorbed by the roots of the plants. This helps remove the nutrients before they flow into creeks and rivers downstream.

FINANCIAL BENEFITS OF WETLANDS

The WETLAND WAVE program covers **100%** of the costs for designing and installing wetlands.

WETLANDS PROVIDE FINANCIAL BENEFITS TO THE LANDOWNER:

- » Increased field-level ROI by converting wet or low-yielding acres into a wetland
- » Potential to lease land to hunters or other recreational users
- » Potential to improve drainage on upland cropped acres

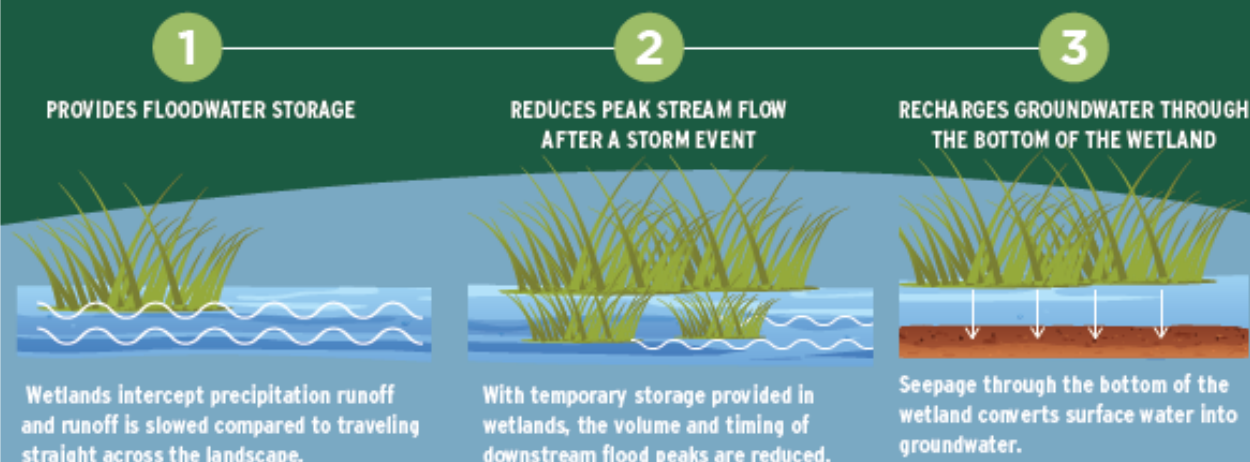
ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF WETLANDS

Wetlands provide many benefits to the landowner, local community, and society, including:

- 1 Low maintenance & long life-span
- 2 Habitat and wildlife benefits
- 3 Recreational opportunities, such as hunting, trapping, and bird watching
- 4 Slow down and store water in the landscape for longer periods of time
- 5 They're beautiful!

WETLANDS AND FLOOD REDUCTION

Wetlands are an edge of field practice, meaning that they do not impact in-field management, but may require that some land is taken out of production.



Wetlands intercept precipitation runoff and runoff is slowed compared to traveling straight across the landscape.

With temporary storage provided in wetlands, the volume and timing of downstream flood peaks are reduced.

Seepage through the bottom of the wetland converts surface water into groundwater.

Illustrations © OGC, LLC