

Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance collaborates on new \$25.8M project to increase conservation practices on Iowa farmland

Ankeny, Iowa — Farmers and landowners in the North Raccoon River watershed will soon receive a major boost in establishing more conservation practices on more acres.

Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) and 11 partnering organizations are the recipients of a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) award courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS).

A defining feature of the five-year program totaling \$25,828,730 is the establishment of area conservation agronomists working in cooperation with ag retailers located within the watershed. This localized approach will boost the delivery, efficiency and effectiveness of conservation services to farmers.

"ACWA is eager to join with all the partners to advance and expand new conservation practices made possible by the new North Raccoon RCPP award," says Harry Ahrenholtz, ACWA chairman. "This funding is a critical element that will help bridge the gap to implementation of high-quality projects to make a positive difference in the watershed."

Over the next five years, farmers will be implementing practices that will reduce an estimated 781,000 lb. of nitrogen export from the watershed as well as 33,600 tons of reduced sediment loss.

The North Raccoon River watershed extends roughly 160 miles north and west of Des Moines to Buena Vista County. It touches roughly a dozen counties, with 85 percent of its land area devoted to soybean and corn production.

Funding from the RCPP totals \$9.8 million and will support the following conservation practices:

- Enrolling 150,000 acres of cover crops over 4 years
- Achieving 57,600 acres of reduced or no-till management
- Construction of 22 bioreactors and 25 saturated buffers
- Construction of an additional 5 wetlands in tile drained stream segments
- Restoration of 20 oxbow wetlands for wildlife habitat and water quality improvement.

Partner contributions totaling \$16 million will support conservation practice implementation, program administration, communication and monitoring. ACWA's specific contributions to the RCPP include technical assistance through annual monitoring of rivers, streams, and field-scale tile drains for nitrogen and phosphorus; staff support for targeted implementation activities and best management practices; and more.

NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr says the innovative program deploys conservation practices and systems through collaboration and aligning resources toward a common goal.

"We're excited to be engaging agricultural producers and our partners to implement conservation practices and systems generating positive environmental outcomes for farmers as well as downstream water and recreational users," Lohr says. "In doing so, we'll make an impact for natural resource conservation that could never have been realized on our own."

The NRCS is investing \$206 million in 48 partner-driven conservation projects across 29 states through its Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Partners, like those involved in the North Raccoon Watershed, are making nearly \$300 million in contributions.

"To implement the number of practices involving the number of acres needed to make an impact, resources and partners must be aligned and leveraged," says Roger Wolf, ACWA executive director. "This project does both."

The project's goals are ambitious, as are the expected outcomes.

The RCPP is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. By leveraging collective resources and collaborating on common goals, RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

Partners include:

- Ag Partners LLC

- Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance
- Iowa Soybean Association
- City of Des Moines
- Heartland Co-op
- Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance
- Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- North Raccoon River Watershed Management Authority
- Syngenta LLC
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Upstream Tech

Work is expected to begin later this year with farmers and landowner enrollment occurring around October 2020.

Farmers and stakeholders interested in participating or receiving additional information are encouraged to contact Wolf at rwolf@iasoybeans.com.

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Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) is an association consisting of 11 ag retailers and six associate members that support farmer customers in the Des Moines and Raccoon River basins. The ACWA mission is to help agriculture identify and implement solutions that reduce nutrient loss to Iowa waters.

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The ***Regional Conservation Partnership Program*** is a national USDA-NRCS initiative to co-invest federal funds with partner organizations to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns.