

Easement Owner Newsletter

Hello! Iowa has added new staff to assist our you with the stewardship of your easements. In this edition you will be introduced or re-introduced to the Iowa NRCS staff available to assist you. We now have two full-time easement specialist per area. Please read their bios and reach out to them for assistance and information. You can also contact your local NRCS office if you have questions. Every program has a specific purpose; I encourage you to read your easement deed periodically just to refresh your memory.

I also have news to share. After 28 years of public service to Iowa landowners, I will be moving on to the national office to

provide support for NRCS staff nationwide. As you can see by reading the bios you are in excellent hands. A new conservation easement coordinator will be hired soon and I am sure they will continue the legacy of permanent conservation easements in Iowa.

As Always – thank you for deciding to permanently protect your land in an NRCS conservation easement.

Cheers,
Sindra Jensen
Easement Programs Coordinator

Meet Iowa NRCS Area Easement Specialists

Iowa NRCS hired 8 new Easement Specialists across Iowa - two in each area of the state. USDA-NRCS is now fully staffed in all areas of Iowa to support what has become the busiest state for conservation easements in the country. On July 18, the four new Area Easement Specialists and four new Easement Specialists began working out of Iowa NRCS area offices in Sioux City, West Union, Atlantic, and Fairfield to support the easement landowners in their areas. Meet your new easement specialists:

Northwest Area

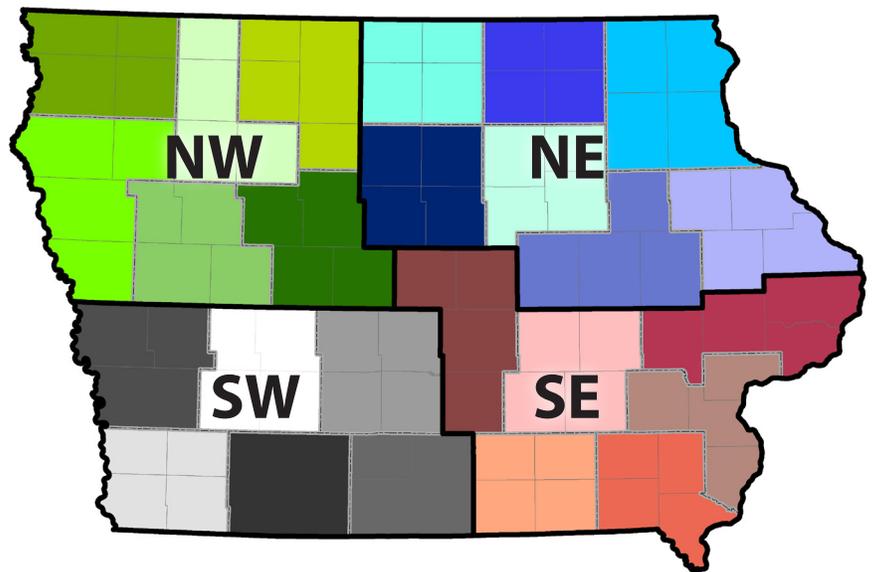
Lee Gravel, Area Easement Specialist, Sioux City
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Greetings! My name is Lee Gravel and I'm the NRCS Easement Specialist for Northwest Iowa. I am originally from Vermont but have lived in Northwest Iowa for more than 8 years. I have degrees from both Northwest Iowa Community College and

Buena Vista University. Much of my career in Iowa has been spent assisting landowners and farmers from the Cherokee and Buena Vista County USDA offices with soil and water conservation programs.

Although some of the easement aspects are new to me, my years assisting landowners and farmers with bioreactors, saturated buffers, and CREP wetlands will allow me to guide landowners through the ACEP-WRE



program and the restoration process. I hope to meet all of Northwest Iowa's easement landowners soon.

Jess Colbaugh, Easement Specialist, Sioux City

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I'm originally from Minnesota, a little north of Minneapolis. I grew up spending my summers looking for frogs, salamanders, and turtles in my family's backyard pond. I have always been interested in wetlands, but I didn't know until I was older that it would be my

career. I attended the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities and graduated with my Bachelor of Science degree in 2016.

Most of my work experience has been research related and included wetland mapping, duck banding, aquatic plant management, hunter surveys, shallow lake monitoring, researching overwater nesting ducks and sharp-tailed grouse management.

After traveling around working on different research projects, I decided to pursue my own research project and started graduate school at Auburn University in Alabama for a Master of Wildlife Sciences Degree. At Auburn, I worked with the National Park Service to assess bird populations, communities, and habitats in parks.

For the past year, I worked for the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) as a partner to NRCS, assisting with wetland easement work. My love of wetlands drew me to the position, where I learned about easements and gained an appreciation for the easement program and the protected private land. I'm excited for my new position as the Easement Specialist with NRCS. I'm looking forward to working in wetlands and watching the program grow and provide benefits to Iowans for cleaner water and better wildlife habitat.

Northeast Area

Matt Wang, Area Easement Specialist, West Union

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I grew up in Hudson, WI, and graduated from Bemidji State University in Bemidji, MN in Fall 2019 with a B.S. in Wildlife Biology and a Minor in Wetland Ecology, as well as a B.S. in Aquatic Biology and a Minor in GIS.

I worked for the Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources, 2018 to 2019, as a Natural Resources Technician. I served as the Waterfowl Banding

Team Lead in Talcot Lake, MN.

I took a position with the Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) from 2020 to 2022 as a Wetland Easement Technician in the New Hampton NRCS field office.

I have been interested in conservation for as long as I can remember. Growing up spending so much time outside in the woods in Wisconsin, visiting the mountain rivers in Montana, and annual trips to lake country of Northwest Ontario captured my admiration for the amazing natural wonder that we enjoy on this continent. I grew up in a very fast growing city, so I saw some of my favorite wild areas disappear from development, wetland drainage, and land clearing. From a very young age, I wanted to do something about it and down the road that translated into wildlife and land conservation.

The thing I most enjoy about working with conservation easements is that it is a perpetual program. The easements that we put in place today are guaranteed conservation in perpetuity. Hopefully in a hundred years or even further, people will look back and be thankful that natural and wild places created by conservation easements are around and be thankful to the landowners who enrolled their ground in such a program.

Michelle Schaefer, Easement Specialist, West Union

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I grew up on an acreage in the rural community of Hamburg, MN, which is in the SW metro.

I graduated from University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point with a B.S. Degree in Water Resources with Soils & Chemistry Minors.

I have worked for NRCS for 21 years in various locations

throughout Iowa and Minnesota. I began working on the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) back in 2001 when I worked as a Soil Conservationist in Garner & Mason City. I have assisted with the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) both at the field office and at the state office level as well as being a point of contact for the ACEP-Agricultural Land Easement Program (ALE).

While working in North Central Iowa in the prairie pothole region, I worked with several landowners who frequently battled having crops get drowned out. Knowing that impacted their bottom line, I enjoyed working with them to pursue their options, whether it was seeding it down through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or through the ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) program. I enjoy looking at a site for its wildlife habitat potential, as well as its ability to filter out nutrients to improve water quality.

I am excited to work with landowners to find long-term protection options for their farm; whether it is taking wet

marginal land and enrolling it into WRE, or protecting an active agricultural operation from developmental pressure using Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE).

Southwest Area

Michelle Biodrowski, Area Easement Specialist, Atlantic
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I grew up in Omaha and graduated with a Master's Degree in Biology.

I worked with and fell in love with easements previously as Private Lands Wetland Easement Team Specialist with the Conservation Districts in southwest Iowa. I have

gained practical experience with habitat management through past partnerships with The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Pottawattamie County Conservation.

Along with the massive loss of prairie in Iowa, wetlands are also an endangered habitat and are one of the most diverse habitats there is! We all know easements are amazing because they provide permanent protection.

I am really looking forward to working with easement owners in southwest Iowa.

Hunter Ziph, Easement Specialist, Atlantic
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I grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri, and went to Central Missouri State University in Fayette, Mo. I have a degree in Biology with an emphasis in wildlife ecology and conservation, and a minor in environmental science.

I started my career working for Western EcoSystems Technology Inc (WEST) doing bird and bat surveys at wind farms in SW Iowa. Next, I worked for Conservation Corps Iowa where I did land stewardship work throughout the Loess Hills. After that, I worked for a private contractor in Kansas, Custom Forestry Applications LLC, where I mainly worked on timber stand improvement and invasive species removal. Lastly, before my current position with NRCS, I worked for Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) as the Private Lands Wetland Easement Specialist in SW Iowa.

I was officially introduced to wetlands when I wrote my senior thesis on wetlands and hydrology management, but I grew up playing in creeks and doing all kinds of

fishing. My interest in easements came while working for CDI and learning how we can conserve habitat forever.

I'm most looking forward to getting to know our easement owners and creating permanent habitat.

Southeast Area

Michael Mahoney, Area Easement Specialist, Fairfield
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Michael's primary duties will include overseeing the development, implementation and maintenance of management plans for easements in southeast Iowa. He will help guide all NRCS staff in southeast Iowa, providing training for easement programs and developing contracts, modifications and payment requests.

He will also be involved in aspects of land ownership changes and help NRCS to maintain an interest in how easement areas are used and managed.

Dan Sears, Easement Specialist, Fairfield
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Hi easement friends! I am Southeast Iowa's new NRCS easement specialist based out of Fairfield. I grew up in Geneseo, IL, and went to college at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale where I earned my Bachelor of Science in wildlife biology and

conservation with a minor in environmental studies. I was certified as an associate wildlife biologist through the Wildlife Society.

After graduation, I worked for the Illinois Natural History Survey where I was a hunter survey coordinator/research assistant and then a Critical Trends Assessment Program assistant botanist/entomology tech. I got my start with Iowa NRCS as a soil conservationist in Tama County in February 2019 and moved up to the Waterloo Resource Team as a soil conservationist in March 2020.

I became interested in easements when I learned they are the only NRCS permanent conservation program. Across the Midwest, we live in an intensely fragmented landscape of permanently protected wildlife habitat. A tiny fraction of Iowa's historic prairie-wetland complex remains to this day. The NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program offers a win-win for Iowa producers and Iowa biodiversity.

I look forward to helping people ease on down the road to permanent land conservation in Southeast Iowa!

Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP)

Iowa received a \$1.5 million grant through USDA's Voluntary Public Access-Habitat Incentive Program. These grant funds are being utilized by the Iowa DNR's Iowa Habitat and Access Program (IHAP) to provide landowners with financial assistance to improve habitat. In turn, participating landowners agree to open those lands for public hunting.

Landowners can make easement improvements such as tree or brush removal, prescribed fire, and seeding upgrades using these funds. Once improvements are completed, landowners will receive their financial incentive from the Department.

Under Iowa law, an IHAP enrollee bears no liability for injuries suffered by the public allowed to access their private property to hunt.

Iowa has about 34,000 acres enrolled in the IHAP program. Recent surveys of enrolled landowners show 95 percent are satisfied with the IHAP program, and 90 percent state that the improvements made have been valuable to their properties.

Additional information about the IHAP program can be found at: www.iowadnr.gov/ihap or contact Nick Baumgarten at 712-330-6932 or nick.baumgarten@dnr.iowa.gov.

IHAP is perfect for...

- » Landowners who want to create or improve habitat on their properties.
- » Landowners who want financial and technical assistance for habitat on their properties.
- » Recreational landowners who want their land improved with practices such as brush removal, prescribed fire, seeding upgrades, or wetland enhancements.