USDA
United States Department of Agriculture

Vol. 4/Issue 7
April 2020

Easement Owner Newsletter

Financial Assistance Now Available for Maintenance

In the field of neuroscience, the portion of the human brain responsible for what we'll call "mature decision-making" becomes fully functional between the ages of 25 and 32. What does this have to do with wetland conservation easements in Iowa? Back in 1992, Iowa was one of 10 states chosen to pilot the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), making it 28 years old this year. Historically, the success of WRP (and its successor, ACEP-WRE) was measured by the number of acres enrolled and the dollars spent, but with the 2018 Farm Bill, Congress recognized the "maturity" of the program and took strides to empower NRCS to take a more qualitative approach through the stewardship of all of its wetland conservation easements.

In Iowa, there are just shy of 1,700 wetland easements totaling nearly 190,000 acres. Annually, 12 to 30 new easements are added to that total - the vast majority of which are permanent. The 2018 Farm Bill Committee Report clearly communicated to NRCS that it should prioritize the upkeep of its existing easements, preserving the purposes for which they were taken in the first place - restoration, protection and enhancement of the Nation's wetlands. This directive creates exciting opportunities for you as an easement owner and the land you manage.

When it comes to NRCS conservation easements, it is appropriate to put emphasis on natural resources in the definition of stewardship. Starting in fiscal year 2020, NRCS will allocate 15% of its annual ACEP funding to the enhancement, maintenance and repair of existing wetland conservation easements enrolled through the WRP, EWRP and ACEP-WRE programs. Eligible practices on easements could include, but are not limited to:

- ***Maintenance of existing seedings*** (prescribed burning, spraying, mowing)
- ***Repair of existing wetland restoration practices*** (tile, water control structures, earthworks)
- ***Wetland/vegetation enhancements*** (seeding of diverse native seed mixes, shallow water excavation)

stewardship noun

Save Word

stew·ard·ship | \ ˈstü-ərd-ˌship , ˈstyü-; ˈst(y)ůrd- \

Definition of *stewardship*

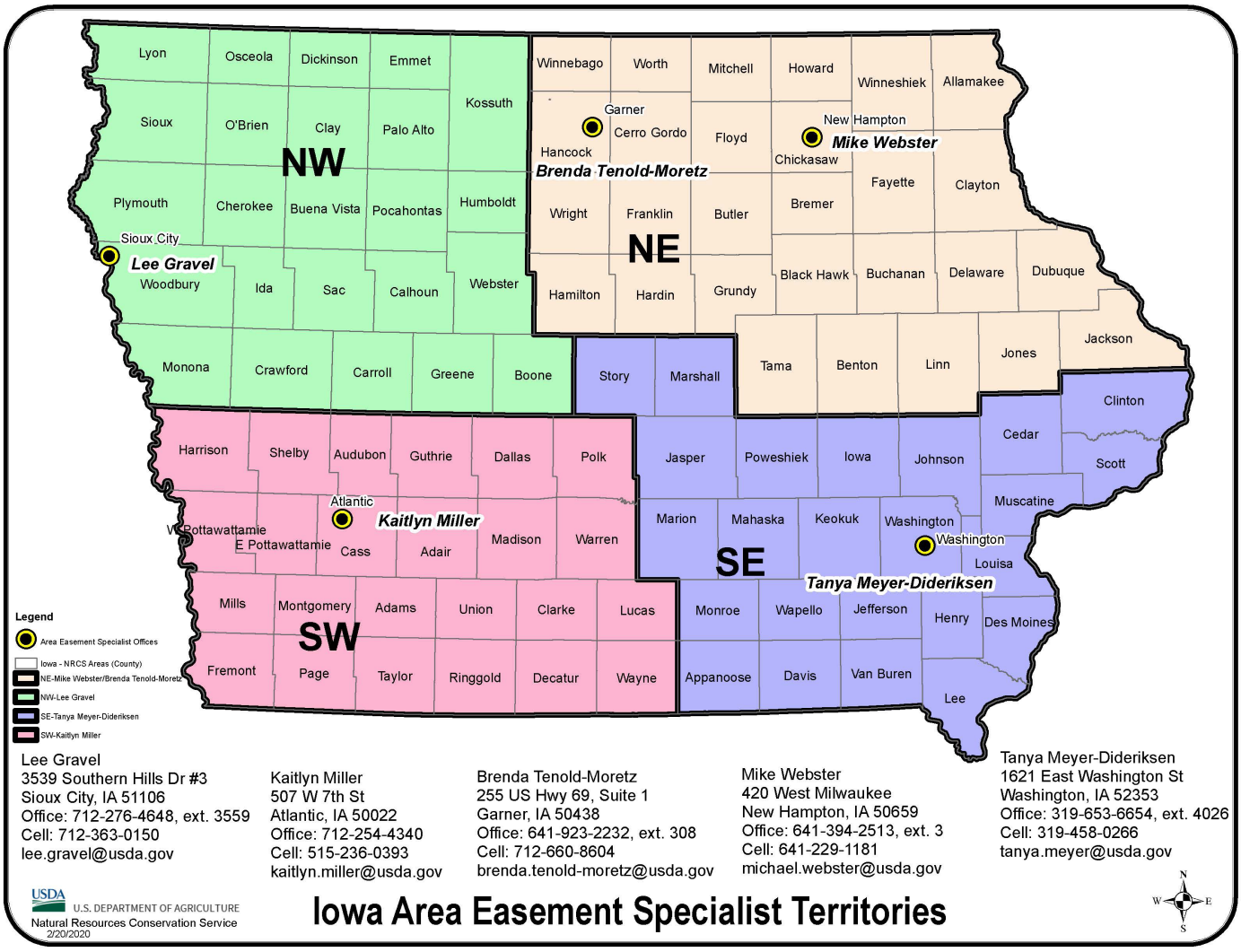
1 : the office, duties, and obligations of a steward

2 : the conducting, supervising, or managing of something
especially : the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care
// *stewardship* of natural resources

Iowa NRCS and you, as a conservation easement owner, have an opportunity to share in the stewardship of Iowa's wetlands, yielding the best of wildlife habitat and water quality.

If you have an interest in pursuing these funds for use on your wetland easement, contact your local Area Easement Specialist to discuss stewardship opportunities.

Meet Iowa's Area Easement Specialists



Lee Gravel,
Northwest Area

My name is Lee Gravel and I am 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.

Kaitlyn Miller,
Southwest Area

I am Kaitlyn Miller, the Area Easement Specialist for Southwest Iowa. I was born and raised in Minneapolis before I moved across the Mississippi River to attend Macalester College, where I majored in Political Science and International Studies. I then attended the University of Wisconsin–Madison where I got my Master's in Environmental Conservation.

I moved around for a couple of years working seasonal positions in the environmental field. I researched the Greater Sage-Grouse in Nevada, worked in conservation policy with the Wildlife Society in Washington, DC, and assisted the Iowa DNR's Diversity Department, with a focus on collecting data on the Rusty Patch Bumble Bee.

Before starting this position, I was the Wetland Easement Specialist with the Conservation Districts of

Kaitlyn Miller cont...

Iowa. During my off time, I enjoy numerous outdoor activities, including hiking, skiing, and camping. My goal is to visit all of Iowa's State Parks with my dog, Birch. When I'm not outside, I enjoy playing with my dog, reading, and knitting. I look forward to working with the landowners of Southwest Iowa who are interested in easement programs. ■

Brenda Tenold-Moretz,
Northeast Area

My name is Brenda Tenold-Moretz. I am the Easement Specialist in Northeast/North Central Iowa. I grew up on a livestock and grain farm in Worth County, where I now share that experience with my own family. I have two boys who love the farm and the outdoors. We have a small livestock and grain operation with CRP filled with wetlands and native prairie.

I graduated from North Iowa Area Community College with an Associates of Science Degree in 1991 and went on to graduate from Iowa State University in 1993. After graduation, I spent a summer working for the Iowa DNR, and then got a job with the Worth Soil & Water Conservation District for a couple of years promoting the WRP and CRP Programs.

I started working for NRCS in 1996 as a Soil Conservation Technician. I designed a variety of conservation practices and wetlands. In 2000, I was given the opportunity to work for Ducks Unlimited, Inc., helping to restore wetlands in Iowa and southern Minnesota while assisting NRCS with the WRP program. In 2003, I came back to NRCS in Iowa as a District Conservationist in Winnebago and Worth counties. In 2014, I became the Easement Specialist for Northwest Iowa implementing the WRP, EWRP, EWP, and ACEP-WRE programs.

I have been working with the wetland easement program since 1993, and it has been an amazing and rewarding experience seeing marginal wet cropland converted back into native prairie and wetlands. I also have been very fortunate to work with some of the best coworkers, agencies, partners, and landowners who share my passion for restoring native prairie and wetlands. I cannot thank them enough for all their efforts! ■

Mike Webster,
Northeast Area

My name is Mike Webster and I am the Area Easement Specialist in Northeast Iowa. I grew up on a farm in Chickasaw County, graduating from high school in 1983 and from Iowa State University in 1987 with a degree in Ag Studies and a Minor in Agronomy.

I started working for the Natural Resources Conservation Service—or, as it was known then, the Soil Conservation Service—in June 1987. I have been with the Agency for more than 32 years, working out of the New Hampton NRCS Office—specifically with Easement Programs since 1999.

My job duties as Easement Specialist include taking new easement applications, completing restoration plans, developing management plans and compatible use agreements (CUAs), and completing annual monitoring of easements. I feel very fortunate to work with the great landowners in Northeast Iowa to restore, manage and improve their easements! ■

Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen,
Southeast Area

I am Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, the Area Easement Specialist for 24 counties in Southeast Iowa, providing easement program assistance to landowners, partner agencies, and NRCS field office staff since 2011. I was involved with NRCS' wetland easement programs in Johnson County in the early 1990s when NRCS first began offering easement programs. My full career with NRCS in Iowa has spanned almost 33 years.

Wetland protection and restoration is important to me and I believe that the permanent protection provided by the various NRCS wetland and floodplain easement programs is some of the most important and valuable work that NRCS is involved in. I feel honored to play a major role in protecting wetlands for eternity!

There are some days, especially those I spend in the field, that it seems amazing to have the opportunity to be surrounded by the beauty of wetlands, wildlife and wonderful native plants! I truly appreciate the landowners who so eagerly work with me and other NRCS staff to enroll their land into a permanent wetland program. I also enjoy and appreciate working with the dedicated local NRCS staff in Iowa, many of whom work hard to promote wetland easement programs. ■

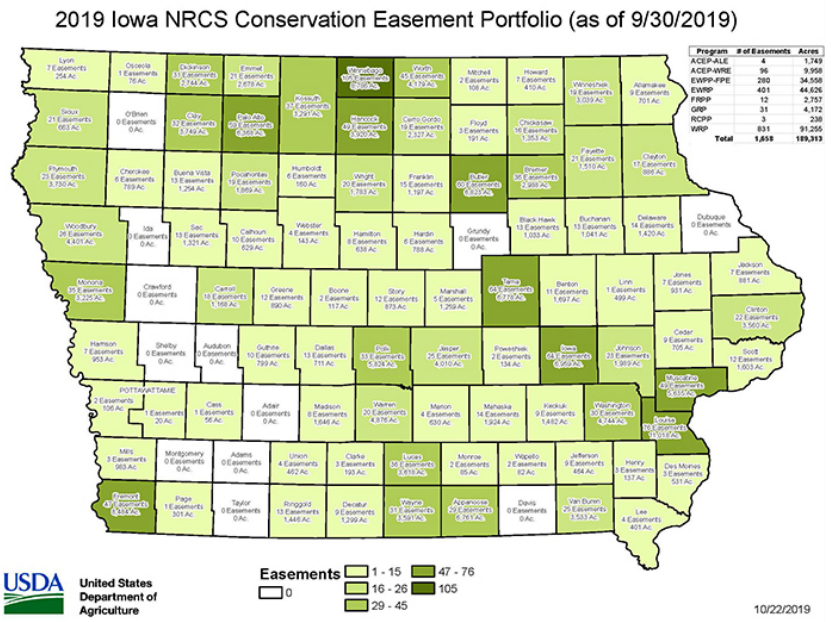
Iowa NRCS Added 13 New Easements in 2019

Iowa NRCS added 13 new easements in fiscal year 2019 that cover 1,666 acres.

Iowa's conservation easement portfolio leads the Nation with 1,658 easements since USDA began offering easement options in 1992. The total Iowa easements cover more than 189,000 acres in 87 counties.

Winnebago County in North Central Iowa has the most easements with 105. Louisa County in Southeast Iowa has 76, followed by Iowa and Tama Counties with 64, and Butler County with 60.

Louisa County easements cover more than 11,000 acres, followed by Winnebago County and Fremont County with more than 8,000 acres.



For a printable conservation portfolio maps, visit: https://bit.ly/2ULCedJ.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

Iowa NRCS Easements
RM 693 Neal Smith Federal Building
210 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

USDA
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources
Conservation Service