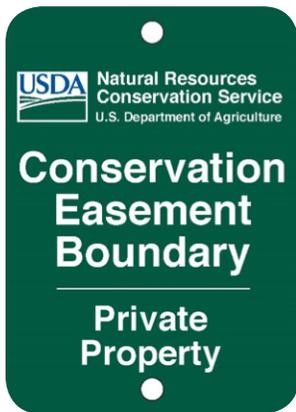


# Easement Owner Newsletter

## Save the Signs

Conservation easements enrolled and recorded after 2000 were described using a legal boundary survey. The survey is recorded with your easement and available at either the county courthouse or at your local NRCS Service Center. These boundaries are posted and signed with conservation easement boundary signs. The posts and signs are a critical component of your easement, representing the boundary that the landowner and NRCS agreed to when the easement was enrolled. Some signs are white and some are green. Some may be faded and some used for target practice. Regardless, NRCS relies on the landowner to protect and preserve these boundary markers.



NRCS staff and partners check for the marked boundary when completing on-site monitoring reviews. A clearly signed easement boundary helps you as the landowner and monitors to identify potential encroachment issues - situations where signs/posts have been removed and neighboring crops planted across the easement boundary. If you feel the need to improve your boundary by installing a fence, please check with your Area Easement Specialist or local NRCS field office to get plans and specifications for a wildlife-friendly fencing system.

Our easements are a partnership, and NRCS appreciates your assistance in defending and protecting the conservation easement boundary.

### Inside this Issue:

[Save the Signs](#)

[Time to Tidy Up](#)

[Western Iowa Easement Owner Spotlight](#)

[Prescribed Burning a Useful Management Tool](#)

[Fiscal Year 2017 Easements In Iowa](#)



## Message from Iowa Easement Program Coordinator Sindra Jensen:

*"In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments; there are only consequences." - Robert G. Ingersoll*

The quote above is one of my favorites as we work together to create positive consequences on our Iowa landscape by protecting and restoring the natural ecosystem here in our state. Although the majority of our conservation easements are protecting wetland habitats, we have others similarly protecting grasslands and floodplains. We hope you enjoy this installment of our newsletter, written and published by the Iowa NRCS staff. We appreciate your commitment to our easements and look forward to many more positive consequences.

# Time to Tidy Up!

Fall is a great time to enjoy your easement, be it for hunting or wildlife watching, but don't overlook the opportunity for management and maintenance activities to make sure the area is in good condition.

Nesting birds are done and their chicks have successfully fledged. Hibernation decisions have been made and critters are beginning their preparations. Now is a great time to get out there and remedy those minor issues that may have been noted on recent monitoring visits and that you have had the best intentions of taking care of.

NRCS wants you to enjoy and appreciate your easement and the wildlife habitat it creates. We understand that "life" happens and tidying-up jobs we anticipated to get done slip through the cracks.

Now is a great time to act! While visiting your easement, take a moment to really look at your vegetation. Is it sparse, does it need some attention and management (see burn article), or are there noxious weeds? NRCS may be able to help. We currently have funding to establish pollinator seedings to create better habitat for butterflies and other pollinators. If you are not satisfied with previous restoration efforts, or if they are in need of repair/maintenance, we have a limited amount of funds available for use on existing WRP and some EWRP easements to address these issues.

NRCS staff may be in contact with you this fall to do on-site monitoring of your easement. This is a good opportunity to discuss your ideas and concerns about our easement and potentially tap into the resources NRCS has available.

## Below are four common and easily to fix situations:

- 1** Your easement has a greater purpose than hay bale storage. Move them closer to your livestock so you will have better access in the winter months.



- 2** Although it may be handy to leave equipment parked on your easement, it is not acceptable. Please move it to your farmstead or sell it for scrap and a little extra spending money.



- 3** Even though you may not have created mess on your easement, you are still responsible for cleaning it up.



- 4** Remember what a hunting or observation blind is and is not. Check with your Area Easement Specialist for authorizations for hunting/observation blinds; there are special requirements.



# Western Iowa Easement Owner Spotlight

Gail and John Shook bought a farm together in 2003. They quickly learned they could only produce a good crop during very dry years. Most other years the fields flooded. Working with their local NRCS office, they enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program to permanently protect their land as a wetland easement.

"We decided it would be a good fit for both us and the environment," Gail said. "I love that it is reverted back to its natural environment, and that it's a haven for wild animals."

In the first few years of establishment they had to work to keep the weeds out. Once the native plants established a resilient community, the easement thrived. "The easement pretty much takes care of itself now," Gail said.

Now, John Shook and their son, Chris, check on the wetland almost every day. Chris hunts and fishes on the land, and Gail enjoys looking at the flowers.

One of Gail's fondest memories of her daughter happened on the way home from her wetland easement. Gail and her daughter, Chelsea, love the cattails that grow around the pond, and they decided to bring some home. They heard that cattails can be preserved for decoration if

they are coated in hairspray. "Unfortunately, we didn't make it in time," Gail said. "They poofed and exploded all over the car. It got in our hair and covered everything."

John and Gail Shook have 3 WRP easements totaling 350 acres in Monona County, within the Missouri River floodplain.



*Gail Shook (left) with her son, Chris, and grandson.*

*-Charlotte Reilly, NRCS Student Pathways Intern, interviewed Gail Shook for this article.*

## Prescribed Burning a Useful Management Tool

Naturally occurring fire was a critical force in the establishment and maintenance of the tallgrass prairie that dominated the Midwestern landscape prior to settlement. Today, prescribed fire is still a useful tool in the practice of managing your conservation easement.

Prescribed burning is not meant to be an annual management practice. Burn only to meet a specific management objective. Generally, it is not necessary to burn more than once every 3-7+ years (i.e. dry sites – longer interval than mesic (wet) sites). One exception is woody vegetation. It may be necessary to burn two or more consecutive years to control undesirable sprouting woody vegetation. Other considerations include:

- Burning should be managed with regard for wildlife needs, such as nesting, feeding and cover.

Large plots of land should usually not be burned at one time. Management plans and compatible use authorizations typically authorize burning 1/3 of your easement in a given year, allowing for refuge acres where wildlife can escape the burn.

- Existing barriers, such as lakes, streams, wetlands, roads and constructed firebreaks are used to control

and confine the burned area.

- Potential impact to cultural resources (structures greater than 50 years old), and threatened or endangered plants and animals.
- Smoke impacts during and after the burn.
- Weather conditions are generally more favorable for burning following the passage of a weather front. Good burning conditions are frequently present 1-3 days following a rain.



### ISU Resources

Iowa State University Forestry Extension has an excellent series of videos and publications on planning and conducting prescribed burns available on their website at <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/>.

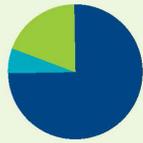
Your Area Easement Specialist can help you write a required

compatible use authorization and a detailed plan for a predetermined area within a prescribed set of conditions, dates and with appropriate safety precautions to achieve specific purposes for your prescribed burn. Local fire departments, habitat organization volunteers, and for-hire firms are available to assist with the actual burning and control.

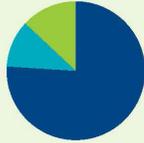
# Fiscal Year 2017 Newly Enrolled Easements in Iowa

## FY17 ACEP- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

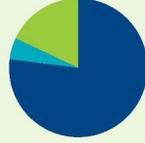
● ACEP-WRE (Wetland Reserve)
 ● ACEP-ALE (Ag Lands)
 ● ACEP-WREP (Wetlands)



**\$12 M**  
**\$412,000**  
**\$2.1 M**



**1,955 AC**  
**295 AC**  
**330 AC**



**17 easements**  
**1 easements**  
**4 easements**

## FY 17 Statewide ACEP Totals

ACEP
\$14.5 M
2,580 AC
22 easements

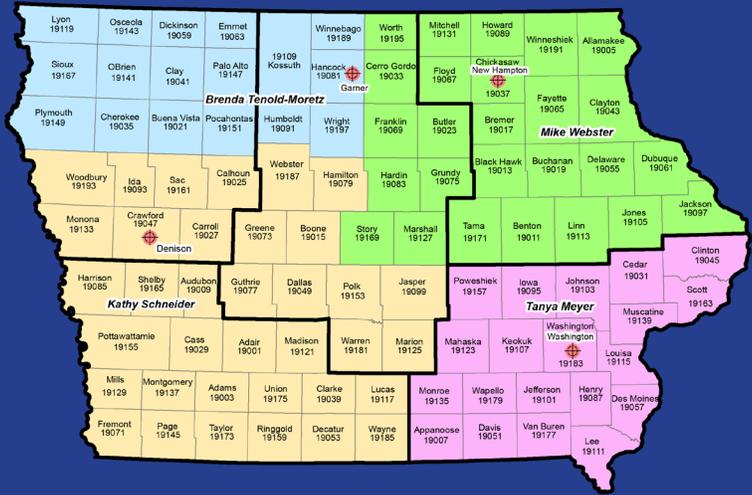
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