

Vol. 2/Issue 4
May 2018

Easement Owner Newsletter

NRCS Celebrates 25 Years of Conservation Easements

NRCS is celebrating 25 years of restoring and safekeeping rural lands and working with landowners to voluntarily enroll them into conservation easements.

Many of the original Farm Bill easement programs have changed, but the programs continue to help protect our natural resources today.

Some programs are intended to protect working lands, such as the Grassland Reserve Program and the Agricultural Land Easements component of the existing ACEP, while many others focus on restoring wetlands.

With that in mind, May is Wetlands Month. Wetlands improve water quality downstream, protect nearby towns from flooding, enhance and protect wildlife habitat, and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities.

Wetland easements provide a critical bridge between private lands and public lands for wildlife that don't care about property lines. About 75 percent of our Nation's wetlands are located on private and tribal lands. We know that working with private landowners and providing them with the support they need is critical to protecting our wetlands – and all the benefits they provide – into the future. You have been stepping up to the plate to be part of the solution for the past 25 years and we want to continue this work into the future.

Although they only cover about five percent of the continental U.S., wetlands are important to protect because one-half of all North American bird species utilize wetlands for feeding or nesting. More than one-third of all threatened or endangered species are dependent on wetland habitat. Wetlands also play host to nearly one-third of our plant species on Earth.

Nationwide, NRCS has enrolled more than 22,000 easements covering more than 4.4 million acres over the past 25 years. Between NRCS and our partners we've collectively invested \$4.3 billion in financial and technical assistance. In Iowa, NRCS has partnered with 1,622 landowners to enroll 186,000 acres of wetlands at an Iowa investment of \$196 million.

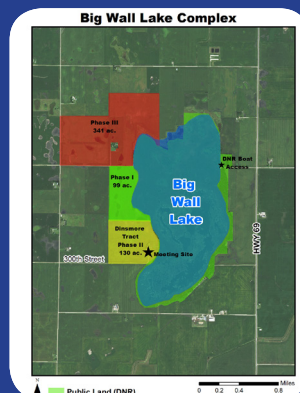
In honor of the 25th anniversary of NRCS conservation easements, we are profiling two Iowa easement owners in this issue, and more in future 2018 newsletters.



Save the Date

NRCS will host a conservation easement program 25th year anniversary celebration on Friday, June 15, 10 a.m. to Noon, at Big Wall Lake Complex in Wright County (see map below).

The program will include easement holders, conservation partners, and NRCS representatives. All Iowa easement holders are welcome!



Easement Owner Profile: Craig & Meghan Black

Clinton County

Craig and Meghan Black purchased their 120-acre conservation easement from Craig's uncle, who enrolled the Clinton County property in the Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP) in 1994. The easement closed in 1996.

"My uncle enrolled the land because he was a non-resident and wanted a place for recreation," said Craig. "He also wanted a way to conserve the property."

"It was also not the best producing ground, so this was a great program to permanently retire the land and still have it in the family," he said.

Recreational & Wildlife Use

Craig says he loves the property, calling it his own "little piece of heaven." The easement is primarily surrounded by agricultural land, so it allows wildlife an escape from the surrounding area.

"We admire all of the wildlife species that come through and make this their home," he said. "We listen to the Trumpeter swans and although I'm not a waterfowl hunter, we appreciate that hundreds of ducks use our wetlands and make themselves at home."

Craig says he wants to enhance the easement so wildlife want to return. "That gives me ample opportunity for projects," he said. Opportunities for improvements include maintaining the native [grass/plant] stand, planting a food plot, and conducting prescribed burns.



Megan Black (left) and her two daughters strike a pose with their pups on the family's Clinton County conservation easement.

"I strive to be the best steward of the land," he said.

With the family cabin nearby, Craig says the easement provides a peaceful, relaxing atmosphere and a breathtaking view from the front porch. "It is nice to have such a beautiful place that is yours, and it really has sentimental value to me and my family," he said.

Easement Future

Craig says he enjoys seeing the changes that occur over time, and how the land has naturally evolved in the quality of wildlife, hydrology and environment.

"I enjoy being out there whenever I can, enjoying the outdoors," said Craig. "I hope to pass it on to my daughters one day."

"It's comforting to know this land is always going to stay protected," he said.



Easement Owner Profile: Jack & Diane Munch

Kossuth County

Jack and Diane Munch from Fenton, Iowa, own two adjacent easements in Kossuth County that total 200 acres of upland prairie and pothole wetlands.

Background

Back in the early 2000's the local NRCS field office staff approached the Munches about the wetland restoration potential on their land. The couple decided to submit an application for the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), and talked with their renter. He told them that "you'd be foolish not to sign up."

They enrolled their first parcel (155 acres) in 2004 and found that they liked the program so well that they enrolled the second parcel (45 acres) in 2012.

The family has owned the land for more than 50 years. It was farmed for generations, but Jack and Diane felt that enrolling the land into a conservation easement would be the best fit for their overall goals, and they could not be happier with their decision.

They live on an acreage adjacent to the easements which enables them to enjoy it daily. Every few days they go out in their UTV and spend time on their property together. "I never imagined what our farmland would look like after putting it into the wetland program. It's beautiful!" said Jack Munch.

Today, native grasses and forbs dominate the vegetation. Their wetlands are teeming with wildlife,



Diane and Jack Munch enrolled the first of their two easements in 2004 into the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP).

of all sorts. Deer, pheasants, waterfowl, songbirds, butterflies and even beavers have moved into the area where there was little wildlife before. They even saw a turkey on the property this year, which they had never seen near their farm before.

Trend Setters

The Munches were the first landowners to seed down permanent habitat and restore wetlands in their small area of Kossuth county. "When we first went into WRP our neighbors thought we were crazy," said Jack.

Many of these people changed their minds once the easement was restored and the native flowers could be seen from the nearby highway. The local NRCS Service Center received phone calls from people driving by the easement asking if their own land would qualify for such an easement.

The couple recently enrolled their remaining cropland into Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pollinator habitat, and are big local supporters of conservation. Jack said he doesn't miss daily coffee at the local elevator, and says that their CRP and WRP conservation decisions are still a common topic of discussion among local farmers.



More Easement Profiles Next Issue...

In the next Easement Owner Newsletter, we will feature two more Iowa families who are enjoying their conservation easements.

The Maas Family (grandkids at right) has enrolled three Fremont County floodplain easements that total 377 acres.

The other profile features the Poeltler Family, who enrolled one easement and purchased another in Muscatine County.



If you would like us to profile your easement success story, contact Sindra Jensen at sindra.jensen@ia.usda.gov.

Iowa NRCS Area Easement Specialists

NE Iowa: Mike Webster

O: 641-394-2513, x 304

C: 641-229-1181

SW Iowa: Kathy Schneider

O: 712-263-4123, x 309

C: 712-253-8979

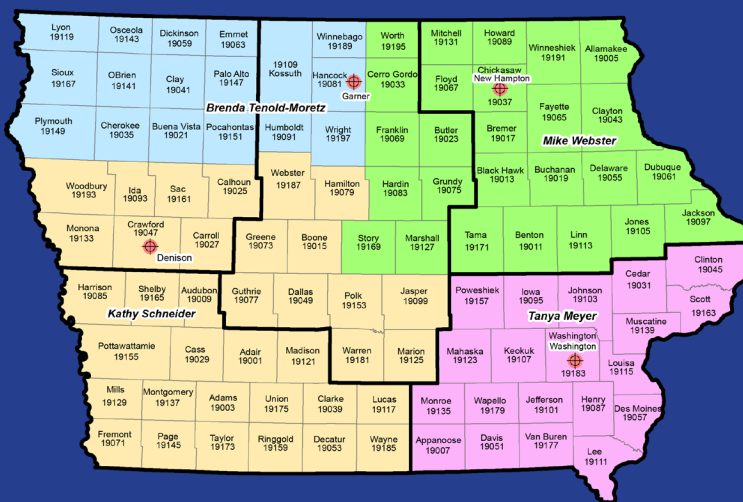
SE Iowa: Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen

O: 319-653-6654, x 307

NW Iowa: Brenda Tenold-Moretz

O: 641-923-2837, x 308

C: 712-660-8604



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