

IDALS Update Meeting  
May 29, 2019

There was a presentation on Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) funding for water quality initiatives, specifically with regard to drainage districts, in the Public Meeting Room at the Story County Administration Building on May 29 at 11:30 a.m. This was an informational meeting only and was presented by Kent Rode and Tyler Conley of Bolton & Menk, Inc. and Jon Rosengren from Iowa State University. Present at the presentation were Story County Supervisor Linda Murken, Engineer Darren Moon, Planning & Development Director Jerry Moore, Sanitarian Margaret Jaynes, Outreach and Special Projects Manager Leanne Harter, Drainage Clerk Scott Wall, and landowner Cynthia Hildebrand.

Rode said some of the proposals to improve water quality in drainage districts can be district driven while some will have to be landowner driven.

Rosengren said the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) began in 2001 and has achieved some success in improving water quality but increasing government regulation has made it more difficult to construct wetlands along waterways. A couple of years ago IDALS began looking for alternatives to wetlands near the mouths of waterways. They've found that improving water quality upstream, closer to the source, requires a smaller area of wetland to achieve the same results. They've been focusing on drainage districts because they are exempt from some of the regulations that apply outside drainage districts.

In 2020 IDALS will have \$4,000,000 for water quality improvement and that amount will increase to \$15,000,000 in 2021. They are looking for "shovel-ready" projects that can begin as soon as funding is approved. There are demonstration projects already planned or being planned in 7 counties, including Boone and Story. These seven counties were selected because they have a lot of drainage districts.

IDALS projects done in drainage districts may be done on privately owned land at the landowner's request but many of them may end up being owned by the drainage districts. This has the benefit of the district trustees having to keep the project's infrastructure in repair but the district also has to justify taking private land out of production to create the wetlands that districts were created to drain. One possible solution would be selling mitigation credits to developments that have to mitigate their impacts on wetlands.

Rode said when Bolton & Menk prepares reports on drainage districts they include a section on water quality and what districts and landowner can do to improve it. Most of these recommendations would fall on the backs of the landowners but the IDALS funding could make water quality initiatives more inviting. There are landowners who are interested in improving the water that runs off their lands but they can't justify the costs.

Moore asked who would pay for all of this.

Rosengren said the hows of funding water quality projects are not fully known at this time but he expects IDALS funding to cover 100% of construction. Ongoing maintenance could be by landowners, by the drainage district, or, ideally, by continued funding through CREP.

Hildebrand said at drainage district meetings she's attended landowners haven't expressed any interest in water quality initiatives.

Rode agreed but said that is why it is important to keep bringing water quality up at meetings. Eventually landowners will realize they can have an impact and some of them will want to get involved. It just takes time.

Rosengren said they are looking for watersheds of at least 450 acres and created wetlands should comprise at least 1.5% of the area of the watershed.

In July there should be a meeting that includes the supervisors of all seven counties in the projects area to address county issues and concerns. This first meeting will likely be held in Fort Dodge.

Conley said as an incentive some of the IDALS funding could be used to scan original documents. Many drainage district records are fragile and should be scanned while they still exist. Bolton & Menk has a flat-bed scanner and they've also taken digital photos of especially fragile documents and stitched them together digitally.

The presentation ended at 12:40 p.m.

Scott Wall  
Story County Drainage Clerk