

Watershed Planning

Watershed plans provide a pathway for reaching farmer-established goals that align with the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy and other local priorities. This includes ways to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus losses and soil erosion. The planning process helps watershed stakeholders focus on reaching goals and allows watershed coordinators to visualize the next steps for farmers and landowners.

In 2018 the Iowa Soybean Association’s Environmental Programs and Services (EPS) team led the development of watershed plans for Charles City, Eagle Grove, Swan Lake Branch, Upper Crane Creek, Holland Creek, Howard Creek, and West Fork Crooked Creek (Figure 1). The EPS team also collaborated on three watershed plans with a private contractor.

In addition to developing watershed plans, EPS is working to identify sources of capital to implement the plans. The most common way to fund watershed implementation is through existing state and federal programs and grants. These dollars are limited and most funds for watershed improvement are secured via a competitive review process.

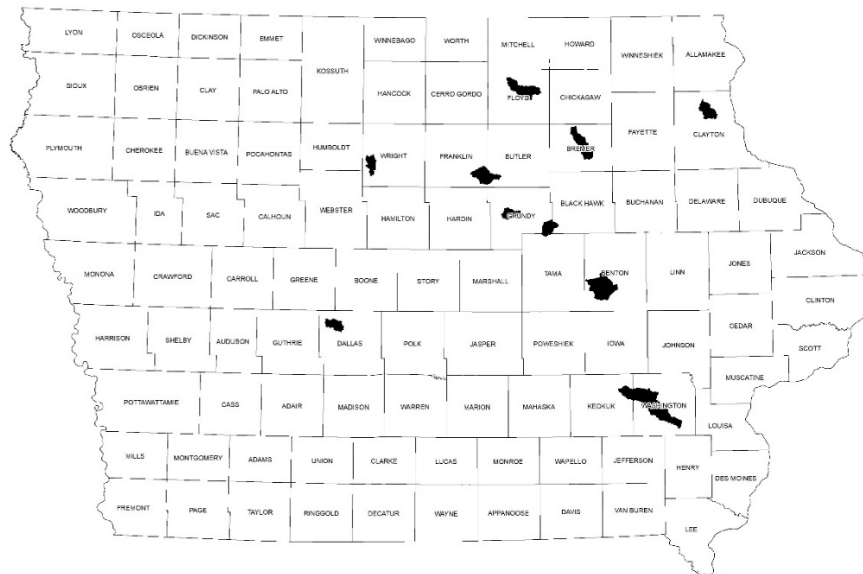


Figure 1. Watershed locations where EPS has led the development of watershed plans in 2018.

In 2017 and 2018, EPS demonstrated the use of State Revolving Fund (SRF) projects to generate capital by linking watershed improvements with municipal water improvement projects and loans. The EPS team was successful in helping the cities of Des Moines, Charles City and Eagle Grove secure funding to support conservation implementation in their upstream watersheds. In the coming years, these municipalities will be working to fund conservation practices on private lands.

EPS has started exploring new ways to fund watershed improvement, namely by building financing partnerships between municipalities and upstream watersheds. While these partnerships will not be an essential factor, they will hopefully bring additional support for watershed implementation, which provides valuable benefits to downstream communities.

Aside from developing a watershed plan and helping to secure funding, EPS believes an important outcome of watershed planning is engaging farmers in a conversation about soil and water. A [recent study by Iowa State University](#) researchers showed that farmers who participate in watershed activities were almost 40 percent more likely to be using cover crops.