

# Iowa Watershed Approach: Year 5 Activities Report Executive Summary

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As submitted to:

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## Executive Summary

The Iowa Watershed Approach (IWA) is “a collaborative project that brings together local, state, federal, and private organizations to work together to address factors that contribute to floods and nutrient flows.”<sup>1</sup> With funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the National Disaster Resilience (NDR) program, IWA works in rural and urban communities to reduce flood risk; improve water quality; increase resilience and quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations; and build local and state-wide collaboration and outreach in order to create a replicable program for the Midwest and the United States.

IWA was originally contracted to end in September 2021, but in March 2021, The Iowa Economic Development Authority announced that Congress passed legislation which allowed for a 1-year extension of the NDR program. This time-only extension allowed watersheds to continue to utilize IWA funds through June 30, 2022, and for partners through September 2022.

Year 5 brought a combination of ongoing and novel events that have affected IWA directly and indirectly. Directly related to the work of IWA, water quality has continued to be a contentious subject of discussion in Iowa politics, and the state of Iowa maintained their decision not to fund Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy which could fund watershed work at the state level. Year 5 also included local and national disruptions that indirectly impacted work on IWA: the ongoing global pandemic, continued recovery efforts from a derecho storm which devastated urban and rural communities in Iowa in August 2020, and a contentious political environment at the state and federal level.

In addition to these challenges, IWA stakeholders navigated challenges related to:

- Coordinating among consultants, contractors, and landowners while sometimes working through staff turnover
- Time-intensive compensatory mitigation processes required by the US Army Corps of Engineers and federal environmental and archaeological review procedures for rural practices required by HUD
- Securing sustainable funding through member contributions, grants, or both and securing reimbursements

In addition, each watershed community is situated within various geographic, social, and economic contexts and corresponding land topography and social systems have varying impacts on potential practices. Watersheds have had varied success in building landowner interest in practices and board member participation in the work of the WMA. Additionally, some watersheds have struggled to attract sufficient attention from construction contractors to bid on the available work.

### *Rural Collaboration and Practices*

The eight IWA Watershed Management Authorities (WMAs) serve as the focal points for the rural aspects of IWA and are each unique in terms of the local terrain, culture, priorities, strengths, and challenges. Throughout Year 5 of IWA, the WMAs continued to meet, and the following progress was made:

- All eight were actively engaged in the construction of practices

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<sup>1</sup> <http://iowawatershedapproach.iowa.gov/#>

- All eight WMAs reported that they had formally allocated the remainder of their IWA funds or had sufficient landowner interest to expend funds by the June 30, 2022 deadline
- All WMAs began or continued critical discussions about the long-term sustainability and financial viability of their organizations, and several undertook grant application efforts as means of providing the needed funding
- The remaining watershed plans were finalized, and WMAs made progress on Flood Resilience Action Plans

### *Urban Practices and Community Support*

Three cities—Coralville, Storm Lake, and Dubuque—were identified as the focal points for IWA’s urban projects. The projects included infrastructure development in each urban area, as well as the Bee Branch Healthy Homes (BBHH) program in Dubuque.

Each urban infrastructure project was selected for its potential to reduce flooding impacts in low-to-moderate income (LMI) communities in Iowa. In Coralville, stormwater pump stations were constructed as part of an effort to protect the community from flooding, with construction completed in February 2018. In Storm Lake, the infrastructure projects sought to improve resilience through water quality and flood mitigation practices, and nearly all projects were completed by the end of Year 5. In Dubuque, progress was made on outstanding infrastructure projects to improve sewer capacity and complete the restoration of Bee Branch Creek. Based on updates from each city, all urban infrastructure projects should be completed by fall 2021.

The BBHH in Dubuque helps LMI home and property owners and renters increase their flood resilience and the safety of their homes through structural improvements and community resource consultations for families. Structural improvements were made to participants’ homes to mitigate or prevent the damaging effects of water infiltration. Alongside these home improvements, social workers from the Visiting Nurses Association served as home advocates, providing support to program participants and matching them with other community resources based on their needs. At the end of Year 5, work had been completed on 263 units, and the city anticipates that all projects will be out for bid by the end of 2021 with construction work done by May 2022.

### *Flood Resilience Team Efforts*

As part of the IWA, the Flood Resilience Team (FRT) worked to build flood resilience in Iowa through the development of flood resilience planning documents, a process for applying for funding from federal agencies for watershed-scale projects, and enhancing a digital platform for coordinating the care of those affected by flooding in Iowa.

The Flood Resilience Team continued to support local consultants in the development of Flood Resilience Action Plans (FRAPs) for seven Iowa communities, with the aim to increase understanding of flooding and resilience. FRAPs fell into two general categories: social and technical. Social FRAPs focused on narratives from community members and leaders about their physical and social resilience, and technical FRAPs focused on producing technical documentation for use in applications for implementation funding. By the end of Year 5, five FRAPs had been completed and two were in progress.

In addition to the community focused FRAPs, Astig Planning LLC worked with the FRT to develop a Social Resilience How-to Guide, “The Flood Resilience Action Plan: Guidebook for Planners,” which

was designed as a guiding document for planners working to integrate social resilience information into more traditional planning documents. The How-to Guide was completed in Year 5.

In order to develop watershed-scale projects to federal funding agencies, FRT worked with the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMD) to develop a benefit-cost analysis deemed fundable by external agencies, such as FEMA or USDA, and to document best practices for developing these applications. By the end of Year 5, a collaborating partner from HSEMD described having worked on such applications with stakeholders in Dubuque County, Dyersville, Vinton, and Iowa County.

The FRT also contracted with Linn County Public Health (LCPH) to update an online coordinated care system, adding a new tool to an existing online platform utilized by local community care organizations. This new tool allows care providers to identify those at risk of flooding or who have experienced flooding in the past, in order to better understand the needs of vulnerable community members and better coordinate their care. Work on this new tool was completed in Year 5, and LCPH reported that several organizations across the state were making use of them. FRT also contracted with LCPH to develop a “Self-Care Train the Trainer Curriculum,” designed to address the stress experienced by case managers as they work within the midst of traumatic events.

#### *IWA Partner Support and Dissemination*

IWA is supported by many partners whose goals within the scope of the project are both discrete and collaborative. In Year 5, partners provided many types of support including:

- Developing policies for the IWA project teams
- Providing technical assistance to stakeholders in the watersheds
- Conducting outreach and education efforts
- Tracking, modeling, and researching the impacts of IWA practices
- Developing or reviewing guidance documents for WMAs or a wider audience
- Supporting the development of grant proposals complementary with the work of IWA

Alongside the IWA partners, IWA leverage partners are a diverse collection of entities from across the state of Iowa who indicated their willingness to provide assistance to IWA in a way consistent with their unique expertise and mission. Leverage partners supported IWA project partners and local communities through technical support, planning, funding for practices, dissemination, and support and leadership for the WMA. At a different scale, a few leverage partners described how their organizations supported individuals or private landowners through outreach, technical support, funding for practices, and land protection.

One of the overarching goals of IWA is to “develop a program that is scalable and replicable throughout the Midwest and the United States.” In Year 5, stakeholders continued to share outcomes and lessons learned in IWA to broader audiences. The UI IFC and watershed project coordinators conducted many types of outreach efforts throughout the year including presenting at conferences, speaking on podcasts, connecting with stakeholders outside of Iowa, and meeting with elected officials. In addition to outreach efforts, the IWA program itself, as well as IWA stakeholders, received awards in Year 5 from 1000 Friends of Iowa, the American Water Resources Association, and the Iowa Agriculture Water Alliance.