

318 2nd Ave. N • Mount Vernon, IA 52314

www.iowapolicyproject.org

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CONTACT: Teresa Welsh, (319) 338-0773 or twelsh@iowapolicyproject.org

Defending Water Quality: Options for Iowa Study Shows Examples of Midwest Efforts to Protect Watersheds

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Jan. 4, 2005) – Better stewardship of water resources could boost Iowa's economy with efforts that combine innovative funding, communication and grassroots interest in clean water, according to a new report.

The report, by University of Iowa researcher Peter Weyer for the Iowa Policy Project, outlines watershed protection programs in Iowa and five neighboring states – Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

“States have an important role in assuring protection of watersheds,” said Weyer, associate director of the Center for Health Effects of Environmental Contamination at the UI. “In Iowa, we pride ourselves on being good stewards of the environment.

“As programs throughout the Midwest demonstrate, we need not only a strong financial commitment, but opportunities for public involvement to implement good clean-water policies. Much more can and must be done than what we're doing now.”

Weyer's study showed examples of successful Iowa projects, such as public-private partnerships in Des Moines and Winterset, but also noted examples of efforts in other states from which Iowa could benefit.

The report makes several recommendations for Iowa:

- Funding from federal sources is inadequate and use even of those funds has not always been complete or timely. Intent of programs should be followed, and the commitment honored to programs such as the Resource Enhancement and Protection fund, or REAP, that can be used for water-quality projects and complement private funding sources.

- With the exception of Iowa and possibly Illinois, water protection programs have a strong basis in tourism related to use of surface water. Iowa's economy could benefit from clean-water efforts that could potentially reduce water treatment costs for growing industries such as food processing and biotechnology.

- Coordination is lacking between state agencies and the numerous urban and rural watershed programs that exist in Iowa, and agency jurisdiction is not always clear. Better communication can encourage better public participation.

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■ A clean-water feature in economic development programs could encourage serious public-private efforts to improve and protect watersheds.

“As the Iowa Legislature is preparing to convene, it’s important to encourage a renewed emphasis on protection of Iowa’s environment,” said David Osterberg, executive director of the Iowa Policy Project. “This report illustrates that while Iowa lawmakers often have talked about water protection, they have not followed through with sufficient funding for watershed programs.”

The Iowa Policy Project (IPP) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Mount Vernon. IPP reports are available to the public, free of charge, on the web at www.iowapolicyproject.org <<http://www.iowapolicyproject.org>>.

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