

For Immediate Release  
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Contact: Dustin Vande Hoef  
515-281-3375 or 515-326-1616 (cell)

**\$4 MILLION FROM STATE BONDING PLAN TO SUPPORT NEW WATER QUALITY  
WETLAND EFFORT DESIGNED TO ADDRESS GULF OF MEXICO “DEAD ZONE”**

*Northey Announces Investment during Tour of Iowa Agriculture by Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force*

DES MOINES – Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey today announced that the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship will use \$4 million available through the state bonding plan to support the construction of demonstration wetlands for the new Iowa Drainage and Wetland Landscape Systems Initiative. Northey made the announcement during the tour of an existing wetland by the Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force.

“We know these wetlands are very effective in removing nitrates from tile drainage water and are excited about the potential apply these principals to drainage districts in the state, with the goal of having a real impact on the ‘dead zone’ in the Gulf of Mexico,” Northey said. “The legislature directed us to use these funds for water quality projects such as these wetlands and we believe this will have a positive impact on the quality of the water leaving our state.”

The Initiative will work with newly-designed drainage districts to improve existing field tile systems to allow more rainfall to infiltrate into the soil, which reduces rainfall runoff to streams, soil erosion, sediment movement, and phosphorus transport to Iowa streams and ultimately to the Gulf of Mexico. These new drainage systems will outlet into wetlands modeled after that Iowa CREP Program, which have been shown to significantly reduce nitrates. These wetlands also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance wetland function and habitat, as well as improve of crop yield and the productivity of farmland.

Water testing conducted by Iowa State University has confirmed that these types of wetlands remove 40-90% of the nitrate and 90+% of the herbicide in tile drainage water from upper-lying croplands. In addition to reducing nitrate loads to surface waters, the wetlands provide wildlife habitat and increased recreational opportunities.

These newly designed systems will implement the latest technologies developed through research funded by the Department at Iowa State University. The initial pilot demonstration projects will serve as monitoring sites for confirming the expected benefits, through studies conducted by Iowa State University and others. Agencies working to develop and oversee the studies are EPA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS, Farm Service Agency, DNR, ISU, and IDALS.

Currently, 72 of these wetlands have been restored or are under construction or design. These restored and planned wetlands will treat the drainage for 86,000 acres of watershed in Iowa. To this point funds to construct these wetlands have come through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

The effectiveness of these wetlands were recognized by the Gulf of Mexico Program, which is underwritten by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and is dedicated to protecting, restoring and maintaining the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

The Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Task Force is made up of members from five federal agencies and ten state agencies and is working to address the environmental concerns associated with the hypoxia zone, also known as the “dead zone.”

The hypoxic zone in the Gulf of Mexico is a result of nitrogen and phosphorus from the Mississippi watershed flowing into the Gulf and spurring the growth of algae. When the algae decays, it depletes the water of oxygen to levels that cannot support marine life.

The Department had previously announced that it had set aside \$6.5 million of the funding to support conservation efforts. Farmers can apply for \$3 million in funding to repair conservation practices that were damaged by storm events and \$3.5 million for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to address water quality improvement and/or flood and erosion control in targeted watersheds.