

# Clean Water Starts with Us

WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT IN IOWA

DNR • DSC • NRCS

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

1  
Planning and partnerships for clean drinking water

2  
Absentee landowners; new ILF watershed program

3  
Projects reduce sediment delivery; online watershed resources; register for SWIM now

4  
SRF for additional funding

5  
History project becomes great outreach tool

6  
WIRB grant recipients announced

## Planning, partnerships help town's drinking water

*Pheasants, nature lovers also benefit from new habitat*

Thanks to some careful planning and collaboration, the residents of Remsen can enjoy safe drinking water and local pheasants can find cover.

A major source water protection project has resulted in a comprehensive plan to protect the town's drinking water by using a number of practices, including planting native grasses in priority areas.

Those grasses will reduce the amount of nitrates entering groundwater and one of the town's wells, and give shelter to wildlife, especially pheasants.

While the DNR contacted Remsen about creating a source water project, it quickly became a local effort, led by a source water community planning team and a supporting cast of federal, state and local partners (see sidebar on page 4).

The planning team worked with the DNR's Source Water Protection Program and Contaminat-



*Native grasses planted around the Remsen well field will help protect drinking water and provide habitat for pheasants.*

ed Sites Section to conduct a groundwater assessment to identify areas of concern.

USDA-NRCS and USDA-Agricultural Research Service assisted in identifying nitrate-reducing practices for those targeted areas.

With this information and 14 months of monitoring data from the DNR, the planning team developed a comprehensive source water protection plan that identified problems in the area around the wellhead and offered solutions to

reduce nitrate in the well water.

The plan – currently being put into action – calls for the city to purchase cropland near the well and convert it to native grasses.

The deep-rooted prairie grasses use the nitrates in the soil before it can seep into groundwater, reducing nitrate levels in the drinking water supply.

"Assessing the groundwater first to provide information to the community planning team was the key to getting this project started in

the right direction.

"This long-term source water plan has made it much easier to gather needed partners and implement a successful project," said Becky Ohrtman, who coordinates the DNR's Source Water Protection Program.

Pheasants Forever stepped in to provide funds for seeding and maintaining the area's native plants. The Remsen Fire Department will keep weeds in

*Continued on page 4*

clean water  
starts with you.

**Find grant applications, assistance and more at:**

<http://watershed.iowadnr.gov> [www.iowaagriculture.gov/soilConservation.asp](http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/soilConservation.asp)

## REMSEN SOURCE WATER PROJECT PARTNERS

- City of Remsen
- Iowa DNR
- Local landowners
- Pheasants Forever
- Plymouth County
- Plymouth Soil and Water Conservation District
- Sioux Rivers Resource Conservation and Development
- USDA-NRCS



## Planning key in source water project

*Continued from page 1*

check by assisting with controlled burns of the native grasses.

The DNR will continue to monitor the quality of the well water, and the community planning team will use nutrient and pest management practices on the plantings.

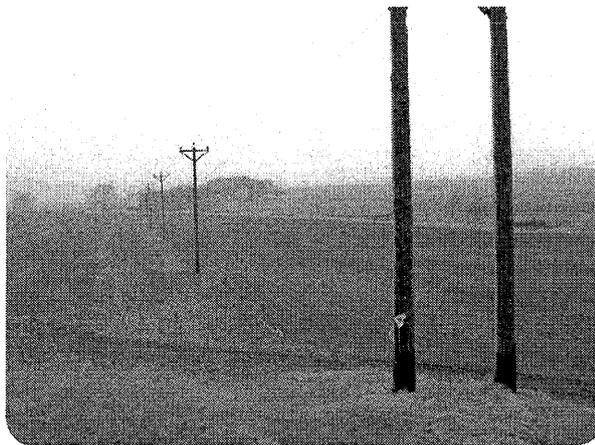
The team will also work to plug abandoned wells to prevent further groundwater contamination, and on outreach projects to keep the community involved.

In addition, the community planning team worked with several part-

ners to secure a Watershed Improvement Review Board grant (see page 8) and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans to offset the costs of getting the source water project up and running.

As a result, the community can look forward to a future 70-acre outdoor classroom and improved drinking water, and pheasants will have a new preserve to call home.

"The source water protection plan offers so many benefits to this community," Ohrtman said. "It all goes back to the groundwater assessment, careful planning and a long-term partnership between local, state and federal groups."



*The area at left will soon be planted to native grasses to protect one of the drinking water wells that serves the town of Remsen.*

Dan Cook photo

## Iowa SRF: Additional funds for watershed projects, practices

The Iowa State Revolving Fund (SRF) provides low-interest loans for a wide variety of water quality projects, including soil and sediment control, manure management, septic system replacement, urban storm water management, wetland restoration and more.

Loans are made through participating local lenders. Eligible applicants include farmers, landowners, livestock producers, rural homeowners and watershed groups, as well as cities and counties. Applications are

accepted year-round. If you have a water quality project, we have a loan for you!

### *Call for "Green Infrastructure"*

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the federal stimulus) presents a unique opportunity for Iowa communities to focus on watershed improvement.

Communities are invited to submit applications for projects that qualify as "green infrastructure." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines

green infrastructure as practices that manage and treat stormwater and restore natural hydrology by infiltrating, evapotranspiring, and capturing and using storm water.

Projects will need to be under construction by February 2010 and must comply with environmental review and other federal requirements.

For more information, visit [www.iowasrf.com](http://www.iowasrf.com) or contact Patti Cale-Finnegan, DNR SRF Coordinator, at (515) 725-0498 or [patti.cale-finnegan@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:patti.cale-finnegan@dnr.iowa.gov)

### 2008 impaired waters data available

Visit the DNR Watershed Atlas interactive mapping site for a graphic look at the impaired waters list. [www.iowadnr.gov/mapping/index.html](http://www.iowadnr.gov/mapping/index.html) — click on "Watershed Atlas"