



## Iowa DNR County Creek Sign Grant General Information

**Funding Source:** EPA Section 319 funds awarded by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Water Quality Improvement (Section 319) program.

**General Purpose:** To enhance awareness of creeks and watersheds in Iowa.

**Specific Purpose:** To provide funding to Iowa counties to install creek signs, river watershed signs, and related signs at creek bridges or at the entrance to river watersheds on paved county roads or city roads (for more information, see “Specific Information” section below).

**Why?** Naming and labeling things matter. Knowing the names of creeks and watersheds connects those who live, work, and play in them in a stronger way, enabling citizens to take ownership over caring for their land and the water that runs through it. It also serves to connect the community with ongoing research projects, water quality projects, and water monitoring efforts taking place in the watershed to better inform the community. Ultimately, this project will raise people’s awareness of, and more directly connect people to, their waterways.

**Background:** Iowa’s Nonpoint Source Management Program (NPSMP) plan includes an objective (Objective 2.5) to carry out a statewide water quality education campaign. Iowa DNR has worked with the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) since 2014 to install creek signs in priority watersheds to enhance citizen awareness of creeks and streams as part of that education campaign. The new “County Creek Sign Grant” program is intended to expand this educational effort to more Iowans by funding the installation of creek and watershed signs on county and city roads. For more information about Iowa’s NPSMP:

<https://www.iowadnr.gov/environmental-protection/water-quality/watershed-improvement/nonpoint-source-plan>

**Creek Sign Assessment:** A 2021 creek sign assessment conducted by Iowa State University of residents from Iowa watersheds with creek signs and from an Iowa watershed without creek signs concluded that creek signs help reinforce people’s interest in and their connection with local water bodies. In watersheds with creek signs, people surveyed were almost twice as likely to know the name of their local waterbody than in watersheds without creek signs. The assessment results are being used to guide the style of creek signs this grant program will fund (see “Specific Information” section below). The full assessment may be found at:

[https://www.conservationlearninggroup.org/files/page/files/creek\\_sign\\_assessment\\_report.pdf](https://www.conservationlearninggroup.org/files/page/files/creek_sign_assessment_report.pdf)

**Size of Award:** \$5,000-\$10,000 per county.

**Match:** No funding match is required.

**Duration of Award:** 2 years from notification of award to project completion.

**Applicant Eligibility:** Iowa County Conservation Boards (CCBs), Watershed Management Authorities (WMAs), Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) agencies, or Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), or counties (including county engineering departments).

**Awards Per County:** No more than one per county.

**Multiple-County Applications:** An applicant may apply on behalf of more than one county.

**Application Due Date:** July 15, 2022.

**One Application Per County:** DNR will accept only one application per county. Therefore, eligible applicants will need to collaborate to determine which entity will be the designated applicant for each county. Awarded applicants will need to collaborate directly with the county engineer’s office (the entity responsible for county roads) on the construction and installation of all signs.

**Application Materials:** Application materials include: Cover page, short narrative, list (spreadsheet) of proposed creeks and watersheds to be signed, a map showing sign locations, a proposed budget, and a support letter from the county engineer’s office.

Applications must be accompanied by letters of support from the county engineer for creek signs to be installed on county roads or by a city (or town) public works department for creek signs to be installed on city (or town) roads.

**Project Management:** Successful awardees will be required to manage all aspects of the project and complete a final project report to the DNR Water Quality Improvement (Section 319) program. The final report will include photos of all signs installed and a final budget of expenditures.

**Application Review:** Applications will be reviewed by the Iowa DNR Water Quality Improvement (Section 319) program.

**Contracts:** Iowa DNR will contract with approved applicants to complete all project activities.

**Questions may be directed to Steve Hopkins, Iowa DNR** (contact information below):

Steve Hopkins, Nonpoint Source Coordinator  
Iowa DNR Water Quality Improvement program  
Email: [Stephen.hopkins@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Stephen.hopkins@dnr.iowa.gov)  
Work Cell: 515-505-0140

**Applications must be submitted by email to:**

Steve Konrady, Western Iowa Basin Coordinator  
Iowa DNR Water Quality Improvement (Section 319) program  
Email: [Steven.Konrady@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Steven.Konrady@dnr.iowa.gov)  
Work Cell: 515-204-1456

## Specific Information

### **Creek Sign Preferences:**

The ISU Creek Sign Assessment identified two types of creek sign combinations as the favorites among the people surveyed through the assessment. A dual-purpose sign that provides a creek name at the top and a watershed name below was the top preference of survey respondents from the watersheds that already have creek signs and from male survey respondents. This style of sign was also recommended by the watershed coordinators surveyed, as this type of signage can help people associate a geographic land area with water bodies, reinforcing the connectedness of land and water. Due to these results, this type of creek and watershed sign combination will be given a preference through this grant program.

A dual-purpose sign with a creek name at the top and that identifies the water body as a drinking water source below was the top preference of survey respondents from the watershed that does not have creek signs and among female survey respondents from all watersheds. Since creeks are rarely used directly as drinking water sources in Iowa, this type of sign combination is unlikely to be used in this grant program.

**Sign Examples:** Following the sign style preferences identified by Iowans surveyed in the ISU Creek Sign Assessment, this grant program will offer similar style preferences for the installation of the creek and watershed signs, as shown below.

### **Option 1: Creek Signs and River Watershed Signs:**

Preference will be given to applicants that install a top sign--labelling the creek name, and a bottom sign below the creek sign--labelling the river watershed in which the creek is located (see Example 1 below). (Top and bottom signs are termed "dual" signs). Preference is given for this type of dual sign when a creek flows into an interior Iowa river, but not when a creek flows directly into the Mississippi River or Missouri River, which may create confusion since all waters in Iowa eventually flow to these rivers.

**Example #1: Dual signs where the top sign labels the creek (Little Creek) and the bottom sign labels the river watershed (Big River Watershed) in which the creek is located. In this theoretical example, Little Creek flows into Big River.**

### **Creek Sign and River Watershed Sign (dual signs):**



**Option 2: Creek and “Source of Lake” Signs (dual signs):**

A second option for dual signs is for the top sign labelling a creek and a bottom sign saying “Source of \_\_\_ Lake”, when the creek is a tributary of a lake located immediately downstream (see Example 2, below). The “source of lake” sign is especially important when the creek has a different name than the lake, such as Yeader Creek, which is the source of Easter Lake, to enhance awareness of the connection between the creek tributary and the lake.

**Example 2a and 2b.** Example 2a: **Dual signs where the top sign labels the creek (Yeader Creek in this example) and the bottom sign labels the lake that the creek flows into immediately downstream.** In this example, Yeader Creek is a source of water (or tributary) of Easter Lake in the city of Des Moines, in Polk County.

**Example 2a: Creek Sign and “Source of Lake” Sign (dual signs):**



**Example 2b: Creek and “Source of Lake” Signs within a county or city park:**

Another option for dual signs that label a creek and the lake it flows into within a county or city park boundary is to use brown signs with yellow or white lettering, to be consistent with park signage coloring schemes (see Example #2b below). In Example 2b, Cedar Creek is a source (or tributary) of Lake Geode within Geode State Park, located in Henry and Des Moines Counties in southeast Iowa. (Note: new creek signs within state parks are not eligible for this grant at this time, due to an ongoing color change of state park signs in Iowa).

**Example 2b. Dual signs within a park boundary (brown and yellow or white color scheme) where top sign labels the creek (Cedar Creek in this example) and the bottom sign labels the lake that the creek flows into immediately downstream (Lake Geode, in this example):**



**Option 3: Creek Sign only:**

For creeks where it's not practical or advisable to install dual signs, a single creek sign may be installed (See Example #3 below). There may be bridges where it's not practical to install dual signs due to lack of space, or where it's not advisable to install dual signs-such as creeks that flow directly to the Mississippi River or to the Missouri River.

**Example #3. Creek Sign only (single sign), which labels the name of the creek. Example #3 is at the Beaver Creek bridge on Highway 141 in Polk County:**



**Example #4. River Watershed Sign (single sign) installed at the watershed divide at the entrance to a river watershed. The word "Entering" should be included on the sign to help inform people that a watershed is an area of land, not a water body.**

**Example #4 is an example of the South Skunk River Watershed sign in Story County (for this grant, DNR recommends spelling out each entire word on the sign (for clarity), if there is enough space on the sign, rather than abbreviating a word):**



**Option 5: River Sign only:**

Although preference is given for the installation of creek and watershed signs in the County Creek Sign Grant, it may be also used for the installation of river signs or signs labeling branches of rivers. (It is hoped that counties would already have installed river signs on their county road river bridges.)

**Example #5. River Sign only (single sign), which labels the name of the river.**



**Sign Locations:** Wherever possible, creek signs (and dual signs) should be installed in both directions of the road (a sign pair) at a creek bridge, preferably on the right side of the road in front of the bridge guardrail, as approved by the county engineer (on county roads) or by the city public works department (on city roads). Watershed signs should be installed at the river watershed divide at the entrance to the watershed (one direction of the road).

**Priority Creeks and Watersheds:** Since this grant will fund the installation of signs for priority creeks and watersheds, applicants should explain how the proposed creeks and watersheds were selected for the grant. Prioritization criteria could include current and former watershed projects areas, creeks within TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) watersheds, approved Watershed Management Authority watersheds, or state Water Quality Initiative (WQI) watersheds, creeks of special significance - such as trout streams, creeks on Iowa's Outstanding Waters list, or creeks used for recreation, as a drinking water source, or crossed by roads with high traffic volume or high visibility. Gravel roads should not be included in this grant unless they are heavily traveled, or located within a priority watershed, or located near a park or a unique feature.

**Named Creeks Only:** For creek signs, this grant is meant for named creeks only, which means creek names officially recognized by the U.S. Board of Geographic Names. If a creek has more than one locally-recognized name, the applicant should exclude it from this grant program, to avoid confusion. For clarity, DNR recommends that signs spell out the full name of a creek, such as "North Fork Blackhawk Creek".

DNR recommends that applicants use the Iowa Geographic Map server website (below) to check on the approved names and locations of creeks and watersheds:

<https://isugisf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=47acfd9d3b6548d498b0ad2604252a5c>

**River Signs:** Although the primary purpose of this grant is to install creek and watershed signs, consideration may be given for installing river signs at priority county or city road bridges. (It is hoped that counties and cities would already have installed river signs on their river bridges.)

**Sign Specifications:** Applicants must follow Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) specifications for signs, which should be metal signs that include a minimum letter size (for names) of 4 inches high on roads with speed limits of up to 35 mph, minimum letter size of 6 inches on roads with 55 mph speed limits, and a minimum letter size of 8 inches high

on divided, limited access 4-lane highways with 65 mph speed limits. (This allows signs to be easily seen and read at normal highway driving speeds).

**Sign Colors:** Creek signs should be green with white lettering and bordering, to match the standard DOT color scheme for river and creek signs. If signs are to be installed within a county park or city park, then the signs may be brown with yellow or white lettering and bordering, to match park sign color schemes. (New creek signs within state park boundaries are not eligible for this grant at this time, as Iowa DNR is currently undergoing a color change for state park signs). Watershed signs may be green or may be a different color than green. All sign styles and colors must be pre-approved by the county engineer's office.

**Posts and Hardware:** It is recommended that signs be installed onto metal posts, which are less likely to be damaged by vandalism or by fire compared to wooden posts (many counties use fire for roadside management of prairie plants). It's also recommended that anti-theft hardware be used, especially in remote locations, to avoid theft.

**Proposed Budget:** Applicants should prepare a budget request that includes costs per installed sign or per installed dual sign, and the costs should be shown on a spreadsheet of proposed sign installations. Eligible expenses include materials and labor for sign construction and installation, but these costs should be built into the cost per installed sign.

**Selection Criteria:** This grant is meant to fund the installation of as many creek and watershed signs in priority areas as possible, within the award amount of \$5,000-\$10,000 per county. Primary selection criteria will include the number of signs to be installed within priority areas per county.

**Awards and Contracts:** DNR will notify applicants and counties whether their application has been awarded funding. After awards have been announced, DNR will enter into contracts with awarded applicants and/or counties.

**Reimbursement:** DNR will provide funding on a reimbursement basis after a contract has been executed with the responsible entity.