

2006 REAP Congress

July 15, 2006

**Report to: Governor Vilsack
Iowa Legislature
Natural Resources Commission**



Inquiries pertaining to this report may be directed to:

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TO: Governor Thomas J. Vilsack
Michael E. Marshall, Secretary of the Senate
Margaret Thompson, Chief Clerk of the House
Kim Francisco, Chair of the Natural Resources Commission

As required by Section 455A.17, Code of Iowa, I present you with the report of the 2006 Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Congress which was conducted July 15 in Des Moines in the State Capitol.

The 79 delegates to the REAP Congress were elected by nearly 1,000 Iowans last winter and spring during the 16 REAP Assemblies conducted throughout the state. While the specific recommendations from this 9th REAP Congress were approved by delegate vote, these recommendations are, in reality, from the voices of those who participated in those assemblies.

These and many additional Iowans strongly believe that REAP can be one of the state's most important tools to stimulate economic development and improve their quality of life. The Congress took a number of actions in this regard.

Chief among these actions are to strengthen the public participation component of REAP and to fully fund REAP. While the REAP delegates realize competition within the state budget is difficult, they believe that investment in REAP returns major economic and quality of life dividends. They are highly supportive of the legislated interim study committee for sustainable natural resources funding.

REAP is recognized as Iowa's primary local funding program for natural and cultural resources. The massive amount of public participation, culminating in actions by the Congress, makes it truly a grassroots led program. The delegates thank you for the support you have given, and urge you to action for improving REAP in the future.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey R. Vonk,
Director

REAP is a citizen-led, state funding program for city, county and state parks; fish and wildlife habitat; soil and water enhancement; historical resource protection; and conservation education. In FY05, 06 and 07 REAP was appropriated \$11 million each year, from the Environmental First Program of the state's Infrastructure Fund. Approximately \$650,000 in addition to the appropriation was available to REAP from sale of natural resource license plates and interest on the REAP account.

The REAP Act establishes the formula for fund distribution and the active citizen participation process.

Leading Up To Congress 2006 REAP Assemblies

Sixteen REAP Assemblies were held in the Council of Government regions throughout the state from February through early April 2006. For an estimated 75% of those attending, this was their first REAP Assembly, very similar to two years ago.

Considering winter weather, an average roundtrip travel time of more than an hour, and 2 ½ hours for each meeting, Iowans demonstrated their strong interest in REAP, with a total attendance of 935 persons. (Two of the meetings were during snowstorms and a third during a tornado warning; one was postponed due to a severe snow/ice storm.)

Assembly participants spent most of their time in small groups to come up with:

- Priorities of REAP projects in their counties.
- How to make county committees work better.
- Recommendations to improve REAP.

Individual assembly reports are available at www.iowareap.com.

Project Priorities from Assemblies

Despite the occasionally different approaches by individuals and small groups, an effort was made to compile project priorities on a statewide basis to compare them with the REAP formula, and with a similar effort two years ago. Totaling the numbers from about 100 small groups, the results for 2006 are followed by a figure that roughly approximates the responses from 2004.

- 30% for recreational facility development, and one-half of them picked trails as the specific development they wanted. **(29%)**
- 24% for water quality soil erosion, watershed management. **(16%)**
- 22% for land acquisition and open spaces. **(22%)**
- 15% more conservation education. **(16%)**
- 9% historic preservation. **(7%)**
- **(2004 10% misc.)**

These data generally support the view that the REAP formula is fairly close to the desires of assembly participants.

How to Make County Committees Work Better

Reporting assembly participant views on this topic proved difficult. With 75% of participants having almost no background on county committees, many were unsure of the issue. However, nearly 95% agreed that active county REAP committees would be good, but wanted help on how to make them work, including establishing a clear purpose and function. Many felt these committees needed at least some funding. Nearly all responses said that the public needs to know more about REAP.

REAP Improvements

REAP Funding

Again, with 75% having little background on REAP, other than the explanation given during the opening 20 minutes of each assembly, there were few suggestions given, other than one that garnered 99% agreement: REAP needs to be fully funded. Numerous suggestions included the Missouri sales tax approach. There were many diverse suggestions to involve the public more in REAP and educating them more about the program. These are best viewed on the website www.iowareap.com, “2006 REAP Assembly Actions.”

Statewide REAP Appreciation Week

Several suggestions centered on a statewide REAP Appreciation Week in October, supported through publicity and materials at the state level. The idea was for each county (county REAP committee, or active citizens) to showcase their completed or in-progress REAP projects in the press, newsletters, through tours, in public meetings and presentations.

REAP Day at the Capitol

Several asked that a REAP Day during the next session of the Legislature be led by the REAP Alliance. In fact, the date has been set for February 21, 2007 and planning has begun.

Change the Assembly Season

While a recommendation was not specifically made to change the time of year when assemblies are held, there were frequent complaints about the weather and the lack of legislator participation, due to the Legislature being in session.

In Cooperation with Citizen Groups and
the Four State Departments

REAP Alliance Provides Guidance and Assistance

More than 30 Iowa conservation and historical-related citizen organizations form the REAP Alliance, co-chaired by Mark Ackelson, president of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and Don Brazelton, Director of the Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards. The REAP Alliance meets monthly with representatives from its dues-paying organizations, receiving input and working with the four REAP stakeholder state agencies -- DNR, DALs, DOT and DCA. The REAP Alliance is active in the citizen participation aspects of REAP.

July 15, 2006 – House of Representative Chambers

2006 REAP Congress

The agenda for the Congress was taken from the composite priorities of the preceding 16 REAP Assemblies, during which delegates to the Congress were elected.

Liz Christiansen, deputy director of the DNR, gaveled the Congress in at 8:30 a.m. The roll call showed 79 delegates attending.

Dave Van Waus of Colo was elected, unopposed, as chair of the Congress.

Upon election, the chair recognized Mark Ackelson, co-chair of the REAP Alliance who addressed the Congress, including an explanation of the legislative interim study committee on sustainable funding for natural resources that will provide recommendations to the legislature by January 10, 2007.

Ackelson introduced representatives of the candidates for Governor, Bob VanderPlaats and John Hedgecoth who presented their campaigns' views on REAP funding and natural resource issues, followed by questions and answers from the delegates.

The chair initiated the discussion of the agenda items: REAP funding, the formula that distributes REAP funding, public education about REAP, REAP county committees and other issues from the floor.

REAP Funding

After considerable discussion four motions were seconded, debated and voted upon:

1. Recommend the Governor and Legislature remove the Environmental First Fund cap of \$35 million and fund REAP at a minimum of \$20 million per year, as authorized in the REAP Act.

Motion passed 65 to 0.

2. Recommend to the Governor and Legislature that it utilize a percentage of the State sales tax and other sources as recommended by the Sustainable Funding Committee to fund REAP.

Motion passed 56 to 10.

3. Recommend to the Governor and Legislature the creation of a stable and dedicated natural resource funding source for REAP.

Motion passed 67 to 0.

4. Recommend to the Governor and Legislature that the Environmental First Fund receives a fixed percentage of the annual gambling revenue.

Motion failed 3 to 76.

REAP Formula

After little discussion, one motion was seconded and debated briefly:

Recommend to the Governor and Legislature that the existing REAP formula be retained.

Motion passed 68 to 0.

Public Education About REAP

Pre-motion discussion centered on the need for local and state partnership to inform citizens about the values and benefits they receive from REAP. The concept of a statewide REAP Appreciation Week in October was presented and the REAP Alliance presented its plans for a REAP Day in the Legislature on February 21, 2007. The potential for REAP funds to aid county committees in this task was discounted due to its potential to change the REAP formula. The DNR presented several new web pages at www.iowareap.com intended to aid development of county committees and provide local resources for education about REAP. One motion was seconded, debated and voted upon:

Recommend to the Natural Resources Commission that the REAP Coordinator explore and implement opportunities to market REAP to the people of Iowa, including a REAP Appreciation Week in October.

Motion passed unanimously.

REAP County Committees

A brief discussion about the importance of ease in starting REAP county committees resulted in no motions on the issue.

Other Issues from the Floor

Discussion included concerns that funding of maintenance activities for REAP land acquisition and construction projects does not compete well in REAP grants. No motion.

Discussion supported that the fall would be a better time of year to conduct the REAP Assemblies and the Congress. This would enable legislators to attend their local REAP Assemblies and weather would be less of a deterrent for all. Congress could then be held in the late fall or winter. The following motion was seconded and debated:

1. Recommend the Legislature accept a ‘housekeeping’ amendment to the REAP Act, 455A.17(1), by striking the wording: “during the summer months.”

Motion passed 78 to 1.

The inability of delegates to clearly follow floor discussion prompted a seconded motion:

2. Recommend the Legislature allow future REAP Congress’ to use the House Chambers microphones and electronic voting system.

Motion passed unanimously.

There being no further discussion or motions, the REAP Congress adjourned at 2:45 p.m. July 15, 2006.