

2008 REAP Congress

January 5, 2008

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



Inquiries pertaining to this report may be directed to:

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TO: Governor Chet Culver
Mike Marshall, Secretary of the Senate
Mark Brandsgard, Chief Clerk of the House
Liz Garst, Chair of the Natural Resources Commission

As required by Section 455A.17, Code of Iowa, I present you with the report of the 2008 Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Congress which was conducted January 5 in the chambers of the House of Representatives.

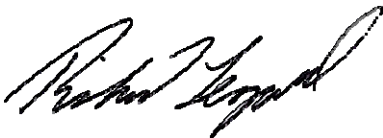
One hundred percent of the 85 delegates to the REAP Congress attended – a first in the 19-year history of REAP. Those delegates were elected by more than 700 Iowans in the fall during the 17 regional assemblies conducted throughout the state.

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 fully fund REAP and to retain the formula for distribution of REAP funds. The delegates were also 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard A. Leopold". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "L".

Richard A. Leopold
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 FY 08, REAP was appropriated \$15.5 million from the Environmental First Program of the state's Infrastructure Fund. Approximately \$650,000 in addition to the appropriation is 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

The 2007 REAP Assemblies

Seventeen regional REAP assemblies were held across the state from September through early November. While the total attendance at 713 was down about 25% from the 2006 assemblies, it did include 37 legislators, far more than had ever before attended. The assemblies were held in the fall instead of the traditional winter months to make it easier for legislators to participate and for safer travel.

As required by the REAP Act, the assemblies provide a forum to voice ideas for REAP improvements. Participants also learn what REAP has accomplished in the preceding two years, and they elect delegates to the REAP Congress.

REAP Improvements

With 369 separately listed ideas for REAP improvement from 17 assemblies, the attempt to combine similar ideas results in the loss of some of the detail of the original idea. The general concepts, however, are worth noting in their relative abundance.

1. Full Funding

Full funding of REAP was supported at all assemblies. In about one-third of them, more than \$20 million was recommended. Most recommendations on full funding suggested that it be sustainable, long-term funding and that it be protected exclusively for REAP.

2. More Public Education About REAP

In addition to recommending that more be done to make the public and legislators aware and supportive of REAP, many specific recommendations suggested how this should be done. Whether at the local level, by the State, or both, there were several strongly voiced opinions that REAP 'marketing' be carried out with professional assistance. It was occasionally suggested that more money be allocated for the purpose, from diverting license plate money or increasing DNR's 1% for administration.

3. More and Better Publicity on REAP Assembly Meetings

Fueled by the value they received from the assemblies, many participants suggested more promotion of the assemblies to increase attendance. A couple of assemblies had more people than the previous year, but many more had fewer.

4. Retaining the Formula vs. Increasing Funding in Specific Categories

In every assembly it was recommended to keep the formula the same as it has been for 18 years. And, in every assembly there were recommendations to change it to increase an allocation in one or more areas. More money for conservation education led the pack, followed by more for open spaces, more for maintenance, more for trails, more for historic sites, more for soil and water enhancement, more for DNR and/or county committees to promote REAP.

Many recommendations referred to allocating more funding, or grant scoring preference for maintenance of REAP developments and land vs. spending more on new projects

Although prevalent at only about one-fourth of the assemblies, there was a strong push by lower population counties and cities to increase their share of REAP funds vs. the larger counties and cities that they said have many other opportunities for funding in addition to REAP. From the county conservation board side, the point was clearly made that residents from large population counties come to low population counties to recreate out of doors, much more so than the reverse, and that per population distribution of funds is not in line with reality.

5. County Committees

Nearly all audiences made recommendations related to county committees. At a couple of assemblies, representatives of the Councils of Government suggested they take the lead in performing county committee duties, taking several counties together to make 'regional' 5-year plans.

6. More Partnerships

Nearly all assemblies had at least one reference to improving partnerships, whether with local or state economic development interests, conservation or historic organizations, schools, farmers and farm organizations and so on. While the partnering aspect is somewhat addressed by the REAP Alliance's representation of many of these groups, audiences, particularly first timers, were unaware of the Alliance or their activities on a local level.

7. More Youth Involvement

As it is with about any 'governmental' meeting in Iowa, the average age of audiences appeared rather old! Frequent inputs from the audiences, particularly for several legislators, was that something needs to be done to involve youth more in the public participation side of REAP.

Stacey Olson, DNR REAP assistant, has been in communication with the organizers of the Governor's Generation Commission, composed of young Iowans who are providing inputs to the Governor for state initiatives to reverse the loss of talented Iowa youth to other states. She is exploring options for a connection between REAP and youth and is expected to have some optional concepts for the REAP Congress.

Evaluation of Assemblies by Participants

Between 30% to 50% of participants at each assembly said this was their first involvement with REAP. 87% of the respondents reported they were able to contribute at the assembly to their satisfaction. 76% thought the assembly was beneficial to their region. Those who reported fair or extensive knowledge of REAP were more than twice as likely to own natural resources license plates as those reporting no or limited knowledge of REAP.

The 2008 REAP Congress January 5, 2008 – House of Representatives

Roll Call

All 85 delegates present (1st time in history of REAP).

Election of Congress Chair

Dan Cohen, Buchanan County was the only nominee for chair and was elected by unanimous ballot.

Recommendations and updates from state departments and REAP Alliance

Department of Natural Resources

DNR director remarks: Richard Leopold thanked the delegates for their dedication to improve REAP challenged them to continued personal commitment. He reported that REAP has been running well that that we all should be grateful for the legislature's \$4.5 million increase in REAP funding in FY 08. Full funding may be achievable in the coming year, depending on priorities within the legislature, but he gave assurances that the Governor's office and legislative leaders are aware of the importance of conservation, outdoor recreation, and improvements in water quality that come from REAP. Local involvement in REAP is important, as is spreading the word about the success REAP has to show.

County committees: DNR asked for support of Code edits to change county committee membership requirements that would allow chairs of county conservation boards, county supervisors, soil and water commissioners, school boards and mayors to designate committee members who were not on those boards, commissions, or councils.

Natural resource license plate report: About 40,000 current natural resource plates are on vehicles in Iowa, more than all other special plates, combined. More could and should be done to increase this number. Depending on agreements between DOT and DNR, additional natural resource license plates may be added in the future. Explanation was provided regarding the Iowa Ducks Unlimited license plate that would increase funds for Iowa wetland projects and pay a percentage back to REAP and to wildlife diversity to help make up for any loss of natural resource plate sales.

Regional assemblies report: Evaluations by participants in the 17 regional assemblies showed a very high level of satisfaction, although attendance was down about 25% to about 713 individuals. However, 37 legislators attended, far more than ever before. REAP Congress input was requested as to whether to retain the fall schedule or return to winter months.

Young adult involvement in REAP: In response to low participation during the assemblies by young Iowa adults, Stacey Olson explained her initiative to generate more involvement by these Iowans.

Department of Cultural Affairs, State Historical Division

No specific recommendations affecting REAP were made, however, Gordon Hendrickson provided an overview of the REAP grant program within DCA and emphasized the importance for full funding of REAP.

Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

No specific recommendations affecting REAP were made, however, David Strom provided an overview of the soil and water enhancement activities of the REAP program, as managed by the division of soil conservation. He also emphasized the importance of additional funding to provide more cost share to landowners to improve soil, water, and wildlife habitat.

REAP Alliance

Don Brazelton, co-chair of the REAP Alliance, explained the supportive role of this 26-member organization and thanked the delegates for their 100% attendance and for giving their time to improve REAP. He also provided information on a planned REAP day at the legislature to help familiarize new legislators on the benefits of REAP.

Sustainable Funding Report

Mark Ackelson, co-chair of the sustainable funding initiative, explained that the \$150 million per year initiative includes \$20 million/yr. for REAP, in addition to fully funding the current REAP program authorized at \$20 million. Precise funding sources and strategies to achieve success will be announced at the next meeting of the legislative subcommittee.

Action Items by Congress

I. REAP Funding: After much discussion and several motions, those below were passed.

REAP should be fully funded by the legislature at \$20 million.

Passed unanimously

Supports the sustainable funding advisory committee's recommendation to include at least \$20 million additional sustainable funding for REAP.

82 aye, 3 nay

II. REAP Formula: After much discussion, the motion below was passed.

Retain the current REAP formula for distribution of funds.

Passed unanimously

III. REAP County Committees: After much discussion and several motions, those below were passed.

Requests the DNR to seek Code edits to Section 455a.20 1a and 1b to allow chairs and mayors to appoint any local designee who is affiliated with their agency.

76 aye, 5 nay, 4 abstain

Requests the DNR, if possible through Code edits, to add a section to recognize the following local organizations as county committee members:

- **City or county historical preservation commissions**
- **Historical or historic preservation organizations**
- **Historic museums or organizations with documentary collections.**

47 aye, 29 nay, 7 abstain

IV. State-sponsored Iowa Ducks Unlimited license plate, with a portion of the proceeds to go for REAP and Wildlife Diversity programs: In response to the informational item provided by the DNR to the Congress, the motion below was passed.

Supports the Iowa Ducks Unlimited license plate.

82 aye, 3 abstain

V. Young Adult Involvement in REAP: In response to the informational item provided by Stacey Olson of the DNR, the motion below was passed.

Supports the effort to obtain more involvement of young adult Iowans in natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation.

84 aye, 1 abstain

VI. Public education about REAP: The following ideas were listed as suggestions from the Congress to improve public awareness and support of REAP.

- REAP lapel pins
- Have REAP become an Ad Pros project
- Improve cost-sharers knowledge of REAP
- Partnership with other NGOs, website links, etc.
- Seek corporate partnerships
- DOT Regional Planning Program on cooperative trail activities, working with COGs
- REAP delegates and county committees should be marketers of REAP
- Lesson plan for students during Earth Day from website incorporating REAP
- Earth Day ads on public tv/radio
- Special trails day sponsored by REAP
- Periodic special information to delegates and county committees for local media
- Full color brochure for delegates to share with public (already available)
- Keep activities simple; focus on 3 simple things
- Presentations to local civic organizations (downloadable PowerPoint is available from www.iowareap.com)

Motions from the Floor

- 1. Retain the schedule to hold assemblies during the fall.**
75 aye, 3 nay, 7 abstain

- 2. Thank you to the House of Representatives for its hospitality and cooperation.**
Passed unanimously

- 3. Thank you to the 2007 session of the legislature for improving REAP appropriation to \$15.5 million.**
Passed unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.