



IOWA CHAPTER

Wetlands are Valuable

Wetlands

- Reduce flooding by providing storage for water, similar to a sponge
- Maintain and recharge the water table by allowing seeping of the water into the soil
- Create atmospheric moisture when the water evaporates
- Provide safe drinking water by filtering and holding pollutants
- Allow cleaner water to flow into rivers and lakes
- Provide habitat for waterfowl, fish, turtles and other wildlife.

But they don't serve their useful function if they are filled, tiled, dredged, or drained and used for highways, crop fields, and industrial, commercial, and residential development.



A parking lot and building built on a filled wetland next to Indian Creek in Marion, Iowa.

Year after year, Iowans across the state face intense rain storms, flooding, and heartbreak caused by damage to homes, businesses, and farms. The loss of wetlands has contributed to those floods. Following the flooding throughout the Midwest in 1993, the Galloway commission issued a report titled "Sharing The Challenge: Floodplain Management Into The 21st Century"¹ that offered recommendations to ease flooding. The findings included recommendations to increase natural techniques to control flooding, such as restoring wetlands and stream restoration while avoiding levees and artificial flood control measures. Largely that report has sat on a shelf, gathering dust. Year after year, Iowans as well as residents in other Midwestern states have experienced damaging floods. Climate change has brought with it significant changes in rainfall in Iowa. It is time to dust off the report, update it where necessary, and implement its recommended solutions.

Iowans need to aggressively restore wetlands and flood plains by removing structures and fill, by restoring oxbows and sloughs, by undoing channelization of streams, and by building stream buffers. Further, it is time to stop building in the 100-year floodplain. To assist in flood reduction and minimization, urban stormwater should be retained on the land and slowly released.



A house built on filled wetland next to Indian Creek in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

¹"Sharing The Challenge: Floodplain Management Into The 21st Century", Report of the Interagency Floodplain Management Review Committee To the Administration Floodplain Management Task Force, Washington, D.C., June 1994, found at <http://cdm16021.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p266001coll1/id/2471>