

# Letter to Editor — Des Moines Register

## Joint ACWA/DMWW Letter to Editor printed in the Des Moines Register

One of the predominant issues covered by the Des Moines Register in 2005 has been the issue of water quality, with a focus on the Raccoon River watershed. On October 2, 2005, the Register ran an editorial entitled "Pick up pace on cleaning Iowa's waters" that talked about the Raccoon River and the water quality challenges facing it and charged stakeholders and agencies with stronger action in the watershed. ACWA members chose to add to the information printed in the Register with a letter to the editor. The letter was printed in the paper on November 10th, and is shown here.

Harry Ahrenholtz is an agronomist at West Central Coop — an ACWA member cooperative — and was co-author of the letter. Ahrenholtz says that the more ACWA examines the issue of water quality, the more complicated it becomes. "We ask everyone to understand that water quality in Iowa is a result of many complex factors. It's going to take time, patience and a long-term commitment on everyone's part to move toward the results we all want to see."

ACWA appreciates that the Register printed this letter. The feedback, discussions and relationships that are developing from this publicity are helping ACWA and others gain momentum and work together to find solutions to the water quality challenges

The Register has written a series of editorials calling for stronger action and quicker results on the issue of water quality. We agree with those sentiments, but it's essential that people hear more.

Agriculture's Clean Water Alliance (ACWA) is a group of 10 leading ag retailers in the Raccoon River watershed. For five years now, ACWA has been actively involved in the watershed with on-the-ground research work that includes farmers, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Des Moines Water Works (DMWW), and the National Soil Tilth Laboratory (NSTL).

The perceptions that nothing is being done in the Raccoon River watershed come from the inability of the state to expeditiously implement programs at the local level. Two examples:

- In August 2001, Iowa was presented \$40 million to install wetlands in 37 north-central Iowa counties through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. To date, only six wetlands have been completed.
- Since 1972 Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) have been required by the Clean Water Act (CWA). EPA under court order has delegated the establishment of TMDLs to Iowa. Highest priority waters were to be completed first, but the Raccoon River is not scheduled for completion until the end of 2007, last on Iowa's list.

Investments of tens of thousands of dollars in equipment and water monitoring has allowed ACWA and DMWW to monitor critical points in the watershed to better understand what might be impacting water quality. Up until this partnership was formed, monitoring the Raccoon River upstream from Des Moines was sparse.

After five years of monitoring in the watershed, much has been learned. In response to finding high levels of nitrate in the W. Buttrick Creek sub-watershed, ACWA and others have initiated intensive nutrient management programming within that watershed, and the majority of farmers there now participate.

Along with monitoring water quality, ACWA also supports studies such as the fate of nitrogen in Iowa's soils. The intent of the partnership is to build reliable data about nitrogen in order to fully understand how it is leaking from the system.

DMWW, ACWA and several producers have made a commitment in the Raccoon River Watershed. We would like the State to step up to the plate, and get programs out on the landscape that are targeted at improving water quality in the Raccoon River watershed.

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