

Iowa DNR Ag Leases

Nearly 10% of all IDNR-managed lands are in ag leases.

Total Acreage of land managed by INDR	500,000 acres
Total land owned by IDNR	365,000 acres
Amount of land in ag lease	45,000 acres
Amount of land in row crop	29,406 acres
Amount of ag lease land owned by party other than IDNR (USFWS, USACE)	14,275
Income from leased acres	\$2.9 million from latest crop year
Amount of acres in “food plots”	4,487

Source: emails between Harlan Ratcliff and IDNR representatives Todd Rozendaal and Travis Baker in July, 2014.

How are agricultural leases detrimental to outdoor recreation?

- **Sedimentation:** Cultivation of land results in erosion of topsoil, which ends up in surface waters. Some would argue that modern practices reduce the amount of erosion, but even if the rate is reduced the erosion still exists. Sedimentation into lakes and rivers reduces the quality of fishing and other water recreation.
- **Fertilizers:** Modern agriculture relies heavily on chemical fertilizers. Runoff from those fertilizers enters surface waters and provides nutrients for algae. That turns our waters green and sometimes other colors as well. The water can become smelly from all of the growth, and overgrowth robs the water of oxygen and can cause fish kills. Fertilizers from Iowa agriculture adversely affect water quality as far away as the Gulf of Mexico.
- **Control of Management Decisions:** The Iowa DNR has traditionally managed agricultural leased land to encourage certain game species, such as pheasants and deer. Now, with the “Beginning Farmer” program in Chapter 456A.38 of the Iowa Code, the IDNR is also required to make management decisions based on those guidelines. Will those decisions adversely affect management for the environment or game species?
- **Use of the Land:** Maintaining land in an agricultural lease restricts the options for other outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **Diversion of Resources:** The IDNR must allocate a part of its budget to maintain the infrastructure of its public lands. How much of that money is spent maintaining roads capable of supporting heavy agricultural equipment in areas that might be better served with light duty roads or none at all?
- **Use of Herbicides:** Modern agriculture is heavily reliant on herbicides. The practice of combining a herbicide with a herbicide tolerant crop has resulted in the areas between the rows of row crops being totally devoid of other plants. It would seem that this would be adverse to the use of those areas by ground-dwelling birds such as pheasants. The use of herbicide tolerant crops has been implicated in the drastic reduction of monarch butterfly numbers in North America. Herbicides adversely affect biological diversity, not just in the cropped areas, but in areas adjacent to those crops that might be susceptible to spray drift. Since IDNR ag leases are generally within the boundaries of otherwise natural areas, those wild areas are

especially vulnerable. Herbicides are present in Iowa's surface and ground waters as well, and the effects of those small amounts of herbicides on humans and wildlife are really unknown.

- **Use of Insecticides:** Insecticides have been a part of agriculture for a long time, and have long had adverse effects on the environment. One fairly recent development has been the use of neonicotinoids as components of seed coatings. Neonicotinoid seed coatings are widely used in the United States but are banned in some countries. They have been implicated in the decline of honeybees and pollinators in general, and also in the reduction of numbers of songbirds. Chemicals that reduce the numbers of birds would seem to be a poor choice to be used in habitats managed to increase the number of game birds.
- **Use of Fungicides:** One fairly recent practice that has been promoted is to apply fungicides to crops. There are a handful of fungi that normally grow on crops, and impact yields. While these fungicides do kill the crop-reducing fungi, they are also broad spectrum—they kill a number of species of fungi that do not affect crops. The effect they have on native fungi, including the morel, is undocumented.
- **Value of the Land as Habitat:** Ag lease lands are typically managed with the stated goal of enhancing the survival and growth of game animals—primarily pheasants and deer. While these animals can survive (and historically could thrive) on the highly modified agricultural landscape, a critical part of that habitat has always been the non-farmed parts of the landscape—fencerows, waterways, weed patches, etc. Even with “food patches”, wouldn't you grow more pheasants on land with prairie than on row crop? Would you get more deer per acre on prairie than on corn? At the very least, land in ag leases is underperforming as management for game. And it is detrimental to a host of other uses.

Financial Issues:

The 2014 legislature approved \$25 million in REAP funding in 2014, and Gov. Branstad used the line-item veto to reduce that to \$16 million. \$2.9 million is 32% of the funding approved by the legislature but denied by one individual.

Conservation needs to be fully funded in Iowa. Public land that is not optimally used is money wasted. The money received from ag leases is a fraction of the value lost by managing the land in a method adverse to most forms of outdoor recreation.