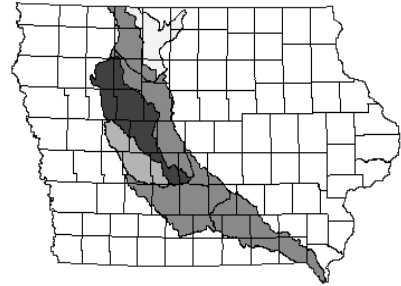


Healthy Watersheds=Healthy Water!

Raccoon and Des Moines River Watersheds

A watershed is an area of land that water flows across or under on its way to a stream, river, or lake. Within each different watershed, the land “sheds,” or gets rid of, water into a common body of water. The Des Moines area is in both the Raccoon and Des Moines River Watersheds. The water that drains off of the land eventually ends up in one of these rivers.



The watershed approach to improving our environment has gained much popularity in this decade. In this integrated approach, things happening on the land as well as in the water are studied. If people are taking good care of the land, there will not be as much soil, chemicals, and other contaminants being washed into bodies of water. Many successful watershed management programs are being carried out in the U.S.

The Raccoon River Watershed Project (RRWP) is an example of a local watershed project. This alliance was started by the Iowa Corn Growers Association, Iowa Soybean Association, Iowa Cattlemen’s Association, Iowa Pork Producers Association, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Agribusiness Association of Iowa, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and Des Moines Water Works. Their goal is to promote voluntary adoption of sound land management practices to protect water quality in the Raccoon River Watershed.

The RRWP provides demonstration services and facilitates programs to help farmers, agribusinesses, and communities. Since a majority of the land in this watershed is used for agriculture, it is the primary focus of the project. Because the Raccoon River is a drinking water source for over 350,000 people, efforts have been focused on reducing the river’s high nutrient levels, particularly nitrate concentrations.

Several programs have been put into action by the RRWP to address this problem:

1. **Water Monitoring** Des Moines Water Works has partnered with RRWP in a year-long study examining surface water. Volunteers from throughout the watershed have been collecting water samples at 42 sites.
2. **Tile Water Testing Program** Farm Bureau has supported a pilot tile-monitoring effort in two counties in the watershed, documenting nitrogen levels of water coming out of the tiles.
3. **Nitrogen-Fertilizer Management** In-field data collection and analysis is being completed to allow farmers to optimize nitrogen management.
4. **Landscape Treatment** Three wetlands have been constructed in the watershed, and water samples are being collected at their inlets and outlets to measure their efficiency in removing nitrate.

	Raccoon Watershed	Des Moines Watershed
# of Counties	23 counties	38 counties
Land (sq. miles)	3639.25	9539.4
Land (acres)	2,329,120	6,105,197
#Rivers and Streams	28	88
Total River Miles	3595.5	10,678.8
Location	Iowa	Iowa and Minnesota