



## 6 | Conclusion

Photo: The sun sets on the rolling hills of southeastern Iowa. *Photo courtesy of Steve Berger.*

### *Final Remarks*

Like many other areas in state of Iowa, the English River watershed has been prone to more frequent and more extreme flooding events than before. These events have damaged public and private property, and can impair local economies. Additionally, the rivers of the English River watershed are being scoured (severe erosion) from a lack of protective vegetation along stream corridors, intensive farming, construction, and fast moving high-water events the tributaries are not equipped to handle. As topsoil is lost downstream, it carries phosphorus with it. The English River watershed has exceeded state averages in phosphorus contamination (and thus sediment).

Human health, property-loss risks, and economic hardship associated with severe flood events and water quality issues have increasingly become a concern in Iowa in recent decades. These issues have led state agencies, counties, municipalities, and private landowners to collaborate in efforts to strategically plan watershed improvements together. Watershed-level planning is a relatively new concept in Iowa. Watershed boundaries cross many geopolitical boundaries, and watershed-level coordination requires political jurisdictions to work with one another across political boundaries- a concept that has challenged conventional wisdom, and been met with a fair amount resistance. The bottom line, however, is that the flow of water, and land use impacts, do not stop at political boundaries. Watershed-level collaboration requires individuals, community and county leadership to recognize that their land ethic and land use patterns impact both upstream and downstream neighbors. Collaborative planning for watershed improvement provides opportunities for the entities to work together and espouse a “good neighbor” ethic. It also provides opportunities for all jurisdictions to have a seat at the table in planning and decision-making, regardless of an entity’s size, population, or wealth.

“ Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. ”

— *Aldo Leopold*

The English River Watershed Resiliency and Improvement Plan is a non-regulatory roadmap for individuals and decision makers to use in the years to come. The Plan was informed by a lengthy assessment of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the watershed, stemming from a hydrologic assessment, and inventory of characteristics, water quality testing, a social survey, personal interviews, and a myriad of other research methods. The following project partners were essential in contributing to The Plan: Iowa Flood Center, Iowa Department of Natural Resources Watershed Improvement and IOWATER programs, Iowa Geological Survey, and the Iowa Soybean Association. These partners offer technical assistance and expertise, as well as tools the ERWMA has benefited from in this phase of watershed improvements, and will likely utilize again in future phases.

Concluding recommendations (or goals) for future English River Watershed improvements fall into three categories: water quality improvements, disaster resiliency, and capacity building of the ERWMA. The recommendations called for in this plan, and prioritized subwatersheds should be considered starting points for watershed improvements. Due to the scope of the entire watershed, and the potential for changing local, state, or federal watershed policy, and available resources, it is important that The Plan be viewed as a flexible document, subject to periodic reevaluation for relevancy and reprioritization as needed.

Watershed improvement is the responsibility of both urban and rural individuals and decision-makers. The majority of watershed stakeholder we heard from, both farmers and non-farmers, agree that improvements to water quality and soil are necessary. Flooding is a very real issue for some city and county leaders. It is the hope of this Plan to build momentum for significant improvements to water quality and flood mitigation, and not to become another relic left to collect dust in the archives of landowners and decision-makers. Success of the English River Watershed improvement project ultimately depends on:

- The willingness and capacity of leadership in the watershed to promote and support watershed improvement goals- and work together across political boundaries;
- The willingness of watershed residents to become stewards of the watershed through education and a willingness to employ best management practices as able;
- Federal, state, and local priorities that affirm the importance of Iowa's water and soil resources;
- And the extent of resources available for stakeholders to participate in state soil and water quality initiatives.

Responsibility for protecting this vital resource is that of all watershed stakeholders (both individual and organizational); the English River Watershed Management Authority will facilitate development of partnerships needed to make it happen, as well as providing leadership, and pursuing the resources needed to implement the plan. However, stakeholder participation in, and support of the ERWMA and partner effort to accomplish these tasks, are essential.