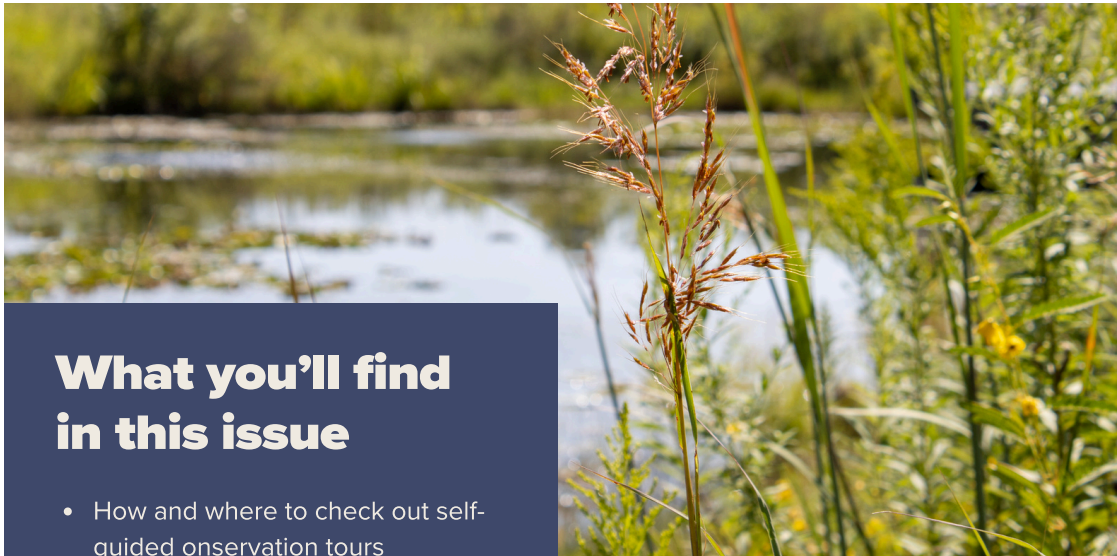


SPRING 2026



AGRICULTURE'S  
CLEAN WATER ALLIANCE

# NEWSLETTER



## What you'll find in this issue

- How and where to check out self-guided onservation tours
- How conservation agronomists are bringing value and ROI - a story featuring Landus.
- Farm to River Batch & Build updates
- Water monitoring insights that have actionable information on how you can help your customers.
- Info on a free soil testing program + a new cost share tool to help farmers find funding.



As we step into spring, we're grateful for the opportunity to help farmers reduce nutrient loading into local waterways, while also helping them to be profitable in their multi-step

conservation journey. ACWA's Conservation Agronomist Network is helping farmers statewide with the tools, resources, and support to make sure they are successful.

This time of year, we're also watching water samples. It's an especially important time for water monitoring, which ACWA has a quarter-century of expertise in. Tony Seeman is keeping an eye on trends and predictions that you should be aware of. Take some time to read through his data and how to interpret it. We think it will be worth it.

Also make sure to read over the upcoming board changes. ACWA President, Dan Dix sent them to your inbox. [You can also find them here.](#)

None of this work would be possible without the dedication, trust, and support of our members and partners. Thank you for being such a vital part of ACWA's journey.

Executive Director, ACWA



# Events & Updates

## Conservation in Action Tours:

Talking about conservation is one thing. Seeing it in the field is another.

ISA Conservation Agronomists are hosting Conservation in Action tours. These are self-guided tour of farms in the area, where you can follow a pre-set route.

The routes feature at least a dozen stops. At each stop, there will be information and videos about the farm and associated practice.

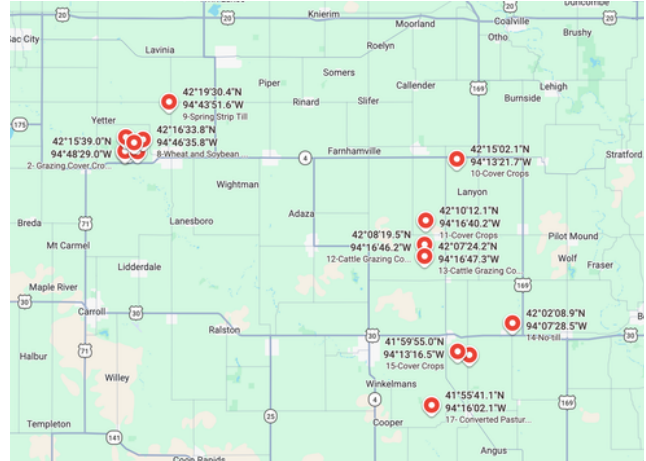
### Why it matters:

By seeing practices in fields that look like their own, farmers can gain confidence in conservation.

### Examples of what tours cover:

- Cover crops with varying species and planting dates
- Drill vs. broadcast applications
- Edge-of-field practices like bioreactors and wetlands

[Click here](#) for information about Alex Logan's tour in Western Iowa and [click here](#) for Evan Brehm's tour in Eastern Iowa.



## Meet Alex Logan



Originally from Warren County, Alex is a proud Iowa State University grad with a degree in agronomy. Her background is in conservation and sustainability. She has a passion for finding practical ways to protect the environment and improve how we interact with the land. Outside of working hours, Alex enjoys biking and training her dog.

## Farm to River Batch and Build Update

ACWA's Farm to River project is off to a strong start in 2026!

The 25 sites for the Farm to River batch and build have been selected and are being surveyed. Construction is planned to start in fall 2026 and will be completed in spring 2027.

The Farm to River cover crop acre goal is set at 14,000 acres. Farmers have already been reaching out to enroll acres.



If you know someone in the watershed who is interested, have them reach out to Alex Logan at [alogan@iasoybeans.com](mailto:alogan@iasoybeans.com).

## Featured

# Farmers See Conservation Agronomy Benefits Through Soil Fertility and Yield

By Carol Brown



The conservation agronomist position may be routine to ACWA members, but it is a rather new concept for farmers who are starting to interact with those in this position. Ag retailers across Iowa are adding the CA position to staff with financial support from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) and ACWA agreement or through their own budgets.

Either way, the CAs are making a difference.

North-central Iowa farmer Kurtis Stockdale grows corn and soybeans on the 700-acre family farm and has begun to work with Landus CA Zach Timm. Stockdale and his dad had previously made some steps to protect soil on their farm near Iowa Falls.

“We want to reduce erosion and make sure the fertility and nutrients stay in the fields,” he comments. “Dad had already done things like adding grassed waterways, reducing tillage, and putting acres in CRP.”

Stockdale began strip-tilling a couple seasons ago. And after meeting with Timm, he’s increasing strip-tilled acres this year and will add more acres next season based on the crop rotation.

“Zach introduced us to the Soil and Water Outcomes Fund, which I had not heard about before,” he says.

“I had heard of other programs like EQIP, but they’re fairly long-term, rigid commitments. When switching practices, things don’t always work out as we’d like the first time. So a one-year commitment was a good option, and if it works, we can continue with the program.”

Winnebago County farmer Ron Main is in a similar camp, but he’s been a strip-tiller for nearly 20 years. He grows corn and soybeans on the 1,400-acre family farm near Buffalo Center and was one of the first to strip-till in the area. He was excited that he could see some financial return for the practice he’s been sold on since he began.

“My dad, who’s 80 years old, was tickled pink to see my work pay off,” Main said.

### Maintaining Good Soil is Important.

Both farmers agree that keeping soil on their land is crucial if they want to be successful. Part of the responsibilities of a conservation agronomist is to help their customers do just that. But growers also need to be profitable. Timm works in tandem with the Landus sales agronomists so farmers get the best recommendations for success.

Both Stockdale and Main farm in the Des Moines lobe, an area of Iowa with dense, black soil, which can be difficult to warm and drain amongst other challenges. But they know the value of its productivity and are working with Landus to maintain and improve soil health.

“Drainage is important in my area,” says Stockdale. “I’m working with Zach on a drainage program that Landus has. I’ve been to several drainage clinics and I’m interested in the batch-and-build programs that are available in other Iowa locations. Hopefully, that can be done here soon.”

## Featured

“My soil organic matter has steadily increased and I’ve reduced my input amounts.”

Main and his brother began soil sampling 18 years ago to monitor the progress from strip-tilling their farmland. Lately he added nutrient scripts on his fields.

“I don’t do variable scripts, or rates, but rather block scripts,” Main explains. “Certain parts of the field get a particular script, like pelletized lime, phosphorus and potassium, and another part of the farm might not get the same treatment. My soil organic matter has steadily increased and I’ve reduced my input amounts.”

Both farmers see the benefits of having the expertise of the CA handy. Main works with Timm and his Landus field agronomist, Jaci Winkelpleck, to ensure everyone’s in agreement. Stockdale has Timm and Landus sales agronomist Steve Massman to help him.

“It is important to work in tandem with the customer and their sales agronomist,”

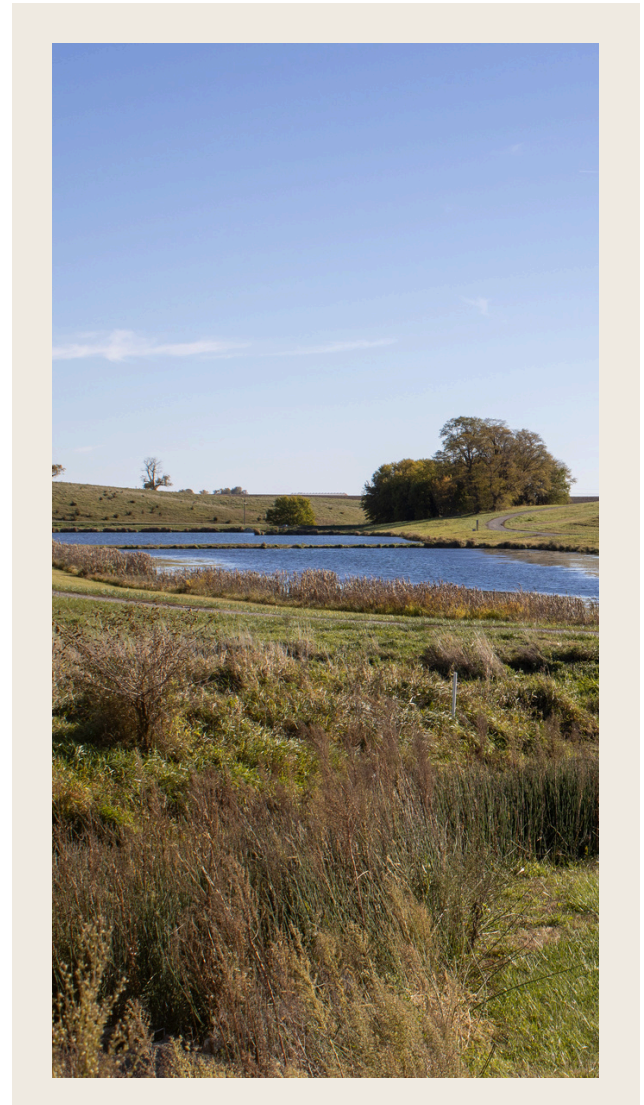
Timm said.

“A customer may want to go down the path of reducing tillage or adding cover crops and having a support network at their local retailer is really key to make everything work.”

Both agronomist positions have expertise to help a farmer with their productivity and the CA has knowledge about cost-share opportunities as well as conservation practices such as strip-tillage and nutrient management, which helps farmers like Main and Stockdale. Timm connects growers with funding through both public and private sources.

“I think positions such as Zach’s are good, because he’s an agronomist too,” says Main. “When I talk with him or Jaci, I know they talk to each other about our conversations and discuss ideas to make sure answers are in my best interest.”

Growers can add conservation practices with a financial safety net along with quick access to advice and troubleshooting solutions when they have the CA and the sales agronomist at the ready — a relationship where everyone wins.



# Conservation Agronomy

## Faces in Conservation



### **Matt Swanson**

Matthew Swanson is a conservation agronomist with nearly 20 years of experience supporting farmers, agronomists, and ag retailers across Iowa. Matthew currently serves as a Conservation Agronomist with Gold Eagle Cooperative. Previously, Matthew has held senior technical and sales leadership roles with the Iowa Soybean Association, Nutrien Ag Solutions, Corteva, and Landus Cooperative. He also owns and operates JSC Stock Farms near Story City, Iowa.



### **Eric Deutmeyer**

Eric Deutmeyer is a Conservation Agronomist for Innovative Ag Services in Northeast Iowa. He feels that the Conservation Agronomist position adds value to the cooperative by building relationships with the customers and helping guide them through their conservation plan while being their one-stop-shop for everything agronomy. He also has expertise on new programs or practices coming about whether that be guidance on carbon programs, 45Z, or implementation of new field practices.



### **Cory Lundgren**

Cory has worked at NEW Cooperative for 24 years, but is taking on more responsibility in conservation agronomy. He oversees the Agronomy Internship Program, hosts training sessions for new agronomy hires and NEW's Sales Tech team. He is the company lead for Climate FieldView and Soilmap programs, as well as for NEW's fertility program, promoting grid soil sampling and variable-rate application. He is currently working on surveying and planning 10 EOF practices in Sac and Calhoun Counties.



### **Courtney Strauser**

Courtney is graduating from Iowa State University in May with a double major in Agronomy and Environmental Science. She began to help the Heartland Conservation Team two years ago when she volunteered at several of their winter supper meetings and summer field days, learning from the team whenever she had the chance. Courtney will be working on the saturated buffer program in Webster County and the Beaver Creek Watershed in Central-West Iowa. Welcome, Courtney!

# Water Monitoring

**Water nitrate levels are expected to be high this spring season due to a continued post-drought flush of nitrogen. We urge farmers to use soil testing to refine applications – improving water quality and their bottom line.**

**By Rebekah Jones and Tony Seeman**

In a rare occasion, nitrate removal pumps at DMWW were turned on in January. Normally, they don't need to run until spring. DMWW and CIWW are already urging customers to consider lowering their lawn watering to make sure the nitrate pumps can keep up with demand.

While there is always some uncertainty as to how much nitrate will be lost to water on a year to year basis, the data tells a fairly clear story this year: We will see more nitrate flushing.

**Here is what we are not saying:**

- **We are not saying that nitrate reduction efforts are fruitless.** In fact, the opposite is true. While precipitation has a large effect on nitrate patterns, we know from tile monitoring that nutrient reduction strategies like rye cover crops, nitrogen management, and EOF practices do reduce nitrate loss to waterways.
- **We are not saying that it's time to be discouraged.** Seeing high nitrate loss due to some things that are out of our control can be discouraging, we know. BUT, keep in mind that when we track patterns in smaller geographic areas like sub-watershes, we are seeing results.

The next three pages are dedicated to water monitoring charts that will help you understand the topic better.

We want to reiterate that data *also shows* this: **on-farm conservation practices work at a field and a watershed level.**

- A rye cover crop reduces N loss by 31%
- Nitrogen management by 4-9%
- Saturated buffers by 50%

**This situation has also taught us a very valuable lesson about soil nitrate testing.**

The data shows us that soil nitrate increases during drought periods, meaning farmers could be applying less to their fields and saving money. As ag retailers, you can help them understand this concept, gaining loyalty long term.

If you have questions, reach out to Tony at [aseeman@iasoybeans.com](mailto:aseeman@iasoybeans.com).

## Current nitrate levels

*\*As of Apr 14, 4 p.m.*

Raccoon at Van Meter

**13.3 mg/L**

North Raccoon at Jefferson

**17.1 mg/L**

South Raccoon at Redfield

**12.5 mg/L**

Des Moines at 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave

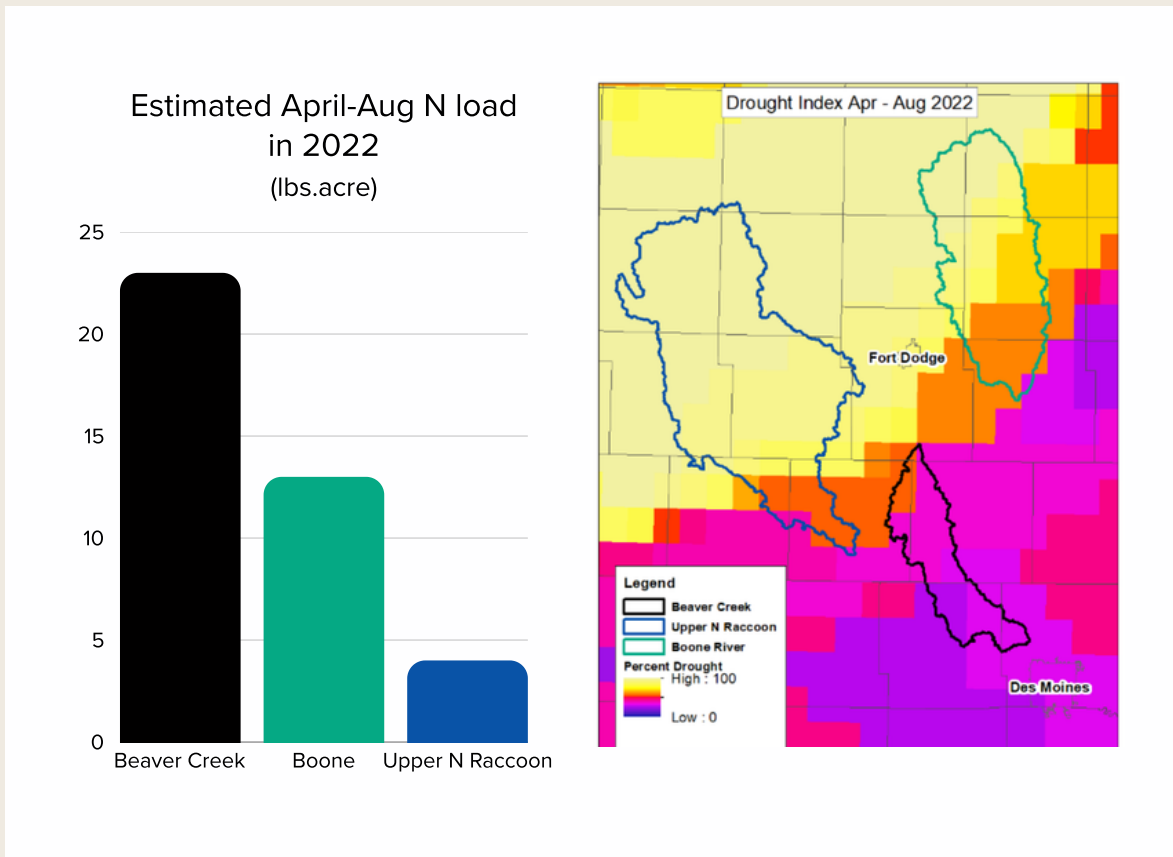
**14.9 mg/L**

Raccoon at DMWW

**17 mg/L**

*Drinking water standards require tap water to be less than 10 mg/L. Data from DMWW and IWQIS*

# Water Monitoring



**What you're looking at:** A comparison of nutrient losses (left) and drought levels (right) in three Iowa watersheds in 2022.

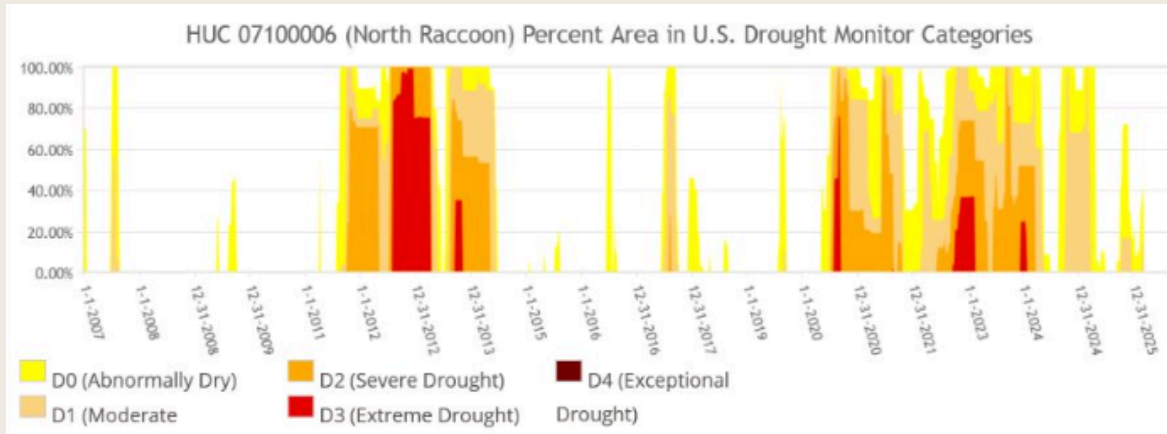
- Beaver Creek (black) had the lowest drought levels and the highest N loading
- The Upper N Raccoon (blue) had the highest drought levels and lowest N loading.

**Why it matters:** Drought conditions mean storage of nitrate in the soil and water table, leading to predictable patterns of weather related nitrate storage and loss.

**What it means:** Two things –

- As we leave drought conditions, expect to see increases in nitrate in water samples.
- There can be a lag time in when we see nitrate leave the system. Dry conditions started in 2020 and the above chart shows nitrate loading in 2022.

# Water Monitoring



**What you're looking at:**

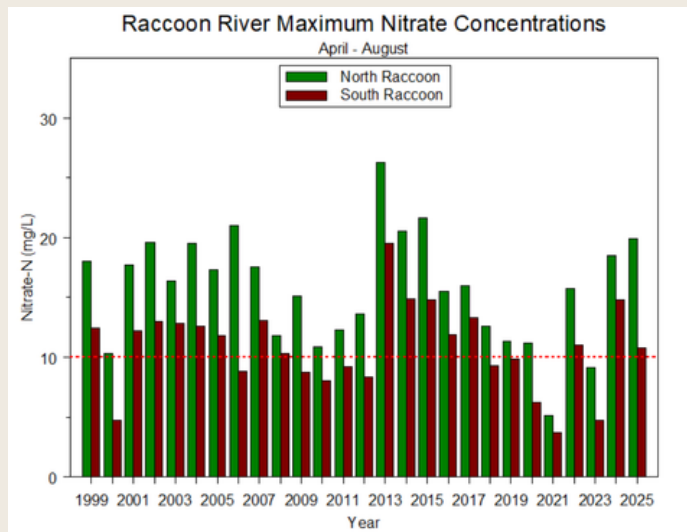
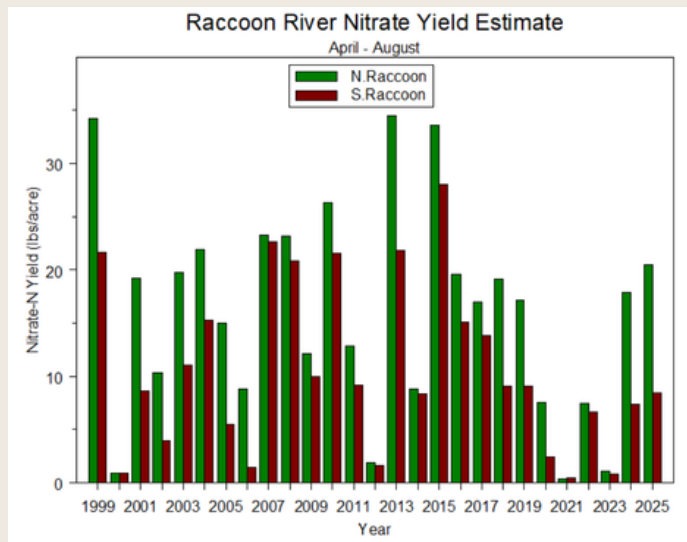
- **Top:** Drought levels in the N Raccoon over two decades.
- **Top Right:** Estimated N loss per acre in Raccoon River Watershed
- **Bottom Right:** Max N levels in water in the Raccoon River.

**What to notice:**

- **Top:** Drought periods in:
  - 2012-2013
  - 2020
  - 2023-2024.
- **Right:** Low nitrate loss in soil and low nitrate concentrations in water corresponding with dry conditions.

**Why it matters:** We can use these historical drought periods as prediction tools. They are not perfect, but can show us generally how impactful drought can be on the movement of nitrate.

Also notice the red line in the bottom graph. It shows the max amount of nitrate allowed in drinking water: 10 mg/L. This is EPA regulation.



# Water Monitoring

## Nitrate storage & loss

### What you're looking at:

- Cumulative N losses or gains (line) in the N Raccoon, and Boone, overlaid on annual precipitation levels (bars).

### How to interpret it:

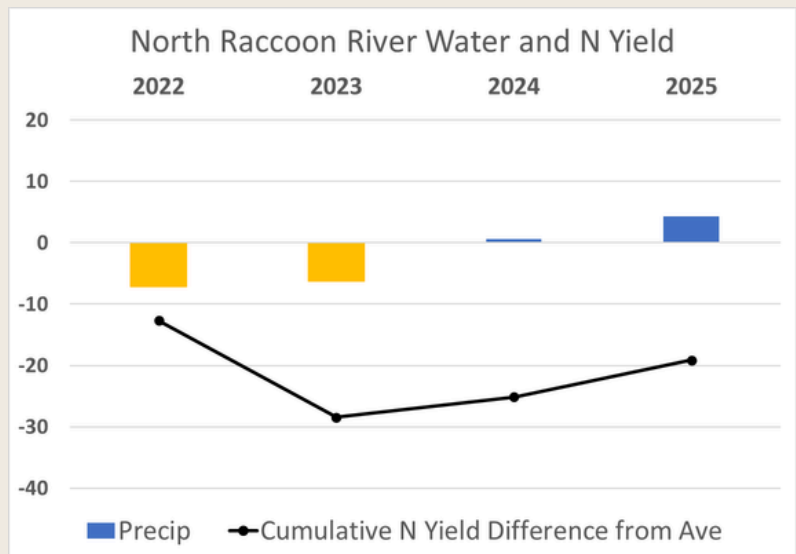
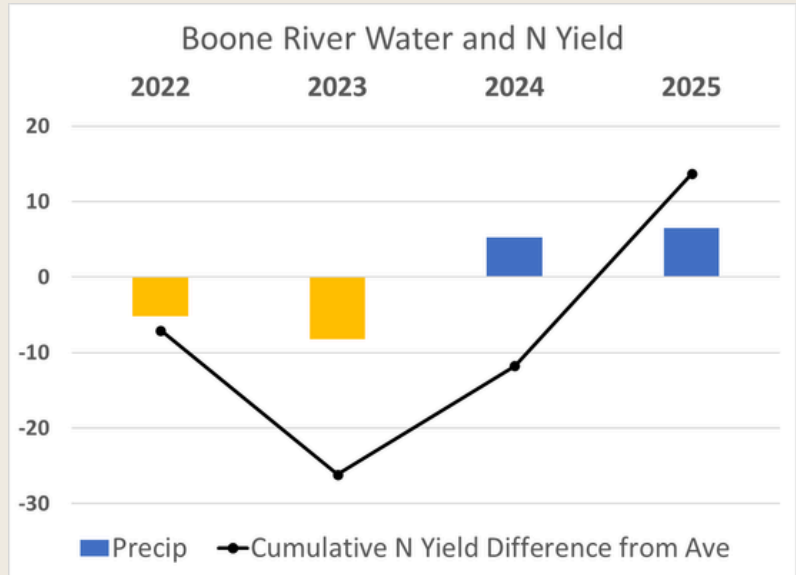
- The flatter the line, the closer it is to average.
- Declining line means losing less N than average.
- Increasing line means losing more N than average.

### What we're paying attention to:

- Top:** As shown by the steep increasing line, the Boone River saw a two-year flush of nitrates. This hopefully means, we'll return to nitrate losses that are closer to average.
- Bottom:** The North Raccoon didn't see as large of a release of nitrate from soil and ground water storage. This likely means we will continue to see higher than average losses in 2026.

### Why it matters:

- This data shows us that if nitrate is not lost in a particular year, it doesn't magically disappear. It's captured in the watershed. We should be prepared for increased N levels in the North Raccoon in 2026.
- This also shows the power of nitrate testing before fertilizer application. During drought periods, the soil holds onto a lot more nitrate so farmers could be saving money by applying less to their fields.



## News

# Water quality news you should know

### Free nitrogen soil sampling available through NREC pilot program

INREC, in partnership with IDALS, is launching a new Nitrogen Soil Sampling Project this spring, offering farmers in central Iowa access to free soil sampling to help guide nitrogen decisions ahead of application. The program is built around one simple idea: better data leads to better decisions. [Read more here.](#)

### Conservation Agronomy featured in new video showing value of on-farm support

ACWA Conservation Agronomist, Evan Brehm, was featured recently in a video about the batch and build model. [Watch it here.](#)

### Saturated buffers cut farm drainage nitrate in half

A review of research finds that saturated buffers can reduce annual nitrate losses by about 46% on average and remove over 80% of nitrate from the water that flows through them. [Read the summary here.](#)

### New resource helps farmers and landowners test nitrate levels

The new resource outlines the importance of nitrate monitoring, provides basic instructions for testing water using nitrate test strips or kits, teaches how to interpret results, and explains the difference between nitrate and nitrate-nitrogen. Download the resource [from ISU.](#)

### New cost share tool helps farmers and water quality professionals find funding

ACWA member, the Iowa Ag Water Alliance, released a new tool called the Conservation Compass. It helps farmers find funding and support. They are directly linking to ACWA's network to help farmers!

Here's what you can do with the Compass:

- **Browse 30+ programs** that pay for cover crops, no-till, nitrogen management, prairie, and more.
- **Compare programs** - up to 3 at a time all on one page. Farmers can even share the results via a unique link.
- **Get support** from a conservation agronomist.
- **Learn** about stacking programs, carbon programs, and more.
- **Find resources** for agronomists - print guides, education, and more.

[Click here to visit TheCompass.ag](#)

