

U.S. buys wetlands under reserve program

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Ninety-two landowners in 37 Iowa counties are selling wetlands to the federal government under the Wetlands Reserve Program, the state ASCS office announced Wednesday.

Nearly 5,100 acres in Iowa were accepted into the pilot program. Landowners in nine states offered to sell 466,000 acres of wet, marshy ground.

Iowa landowners had offered 27,000 acres, but the government's \$46.4 million budget only had room for a total of 50,000 acres.

Tama County and Kossuth County had the highest number of bids accepted, with 10 each.

"We're anxious to find out who they are so we can go to work on (the land)" said Jerry Muff, the Soil Conservation Service director in Fayette County. "We had a lot of really good areas bid in."

None of the nine bids in Black Hawk County were accepted.

"I'm really disappointed," said Bob Boeck, who signed up several acres of land north of Waterloo. "But that's the way it goes."

"I think they missed an opportunity," said John Shephard, who offered his land northwest of Cedar Falls.

Boeck said he'd keep the land in the Conservation Reserve Program and hope money becomes available to fund future wetlands reserve programs.

"I hope some environmental groups will put pressure on the new administration to get the money back," Boeck said.

Money to expand the popular program was cut out of the budget last fall.

The pilot program covers Iowa,

Wetlands accepted

Of the 27,000 acres of wetlands Iowa landowners offered to the federal government, nearly 5,100 acres were accepted by the ASCS for purchase. Landowners can still pull out of the deal.

KEY TO MAP



Over 100 acres per county

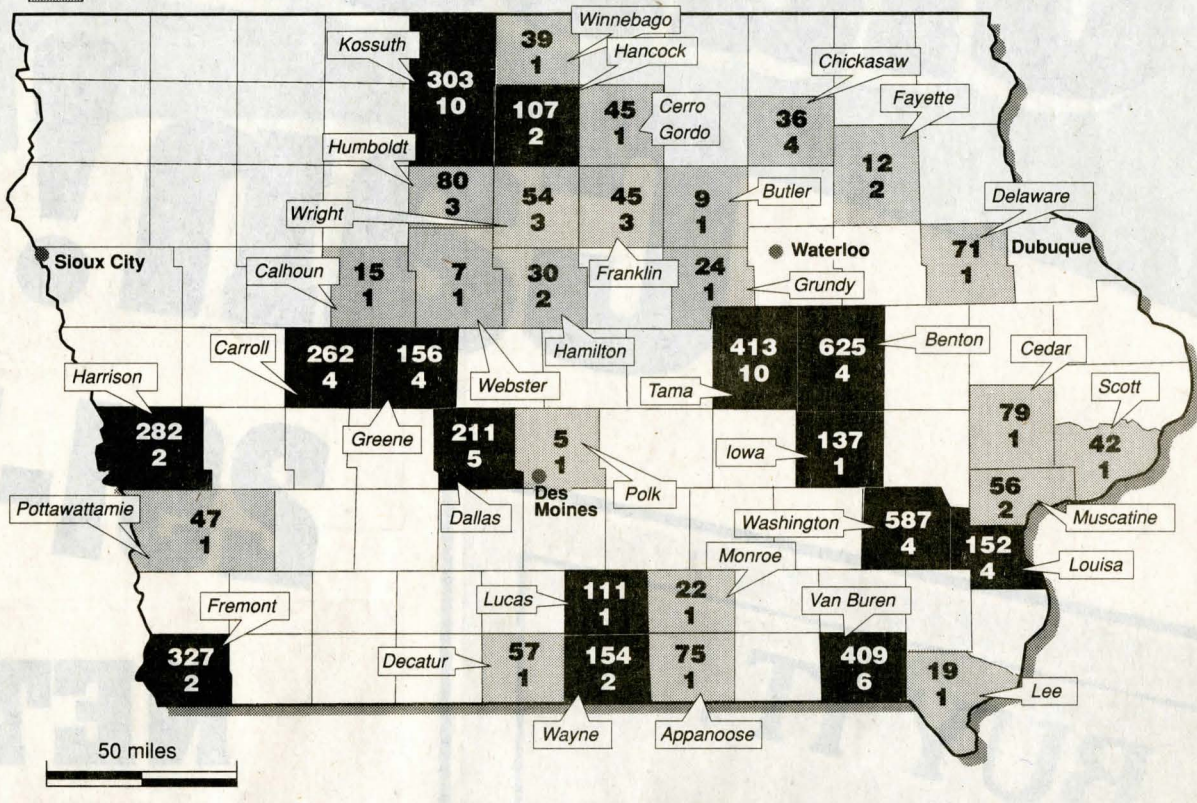
Under 100 acres per county

Top

Number of acres ASCS has offered to buy

Bottom

Number of applications accepted



Source: Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS)

COURIER graphic

Wisconsin, Missouri, Mississippi, Minnesota, California, Louisiana, New York and North Carolina.

Among the factors considered in

accepting bids were how easily and inexpensively the land could be restored to wetland and how much the government would have to pay

for the land itself.

Up to 75 percent of the restoration cost will be picked up by the government.