

Wetlands idea to control C.F. floods mulled

By **TOM OWEN**

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WATERLOO

The Black Hawk County Board of Supervisors will consider the idea of creating wetlands — potentially by private developers — to combat flooding north of Cedar Falls.

The supervisors will have a meeting at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the courthouse to discuss wetland creation and other flood-control measures.

Representatives from the Iowa Department of Transportation and city of Cedar Falls and residents of the flooded area will attend. Only two supervisors will attend, so it will not be an official board meeting.

The wetlands idea, advanced by Black Hawk County Conservation Director Steve Finegan, has gained momentum in recent months after the supervisors received a disappointing study from the Army Corps of Engineers in October detailing 10 options for flood control.

A county survey of public agencies, the nearby railroad and area residents revealed the agencies didn't strongly support any of the options.

Finegan said Wednesday the county may have to incorporate some aspects of the 10 proposals, such as more and larger culverts in the flooded area or a ditch. But he said relying solely on the 10 options wouldn't work because they simply move the problem of too much water down the watershed to Cedar Falls residents.

Instead, he said the county could create wetlands that would release the water more slowly, reducing flooding.

He said the project would be expensive, but the county might be able to save money by combining it with a new interchange for Cedar-Wapsi Road at Highway 218.

Finegan noted the county could excavate land to create wetlands and

then use the dirt to form the elevated interchange.

The county also could use the wetlands as a so-called "mitigation bank" for developers. Under Iowa law, developers are required to replace any wetland they destroy.

According to Finegan's scenario, the county — or a farmer — would create the wetland and then sell wetland "credits" to developers who destroy wetlands anywhere in the area.

By taking that approach, the supervisors might be able to recoup the cost to build the wetland, Finegan said. The county also could require that anyone developing the 218 corridor create a wetland north of Cedar Falls.

Finegan said wetlands are only part of the solution to flooding in north Cedar Falls. He said farmers in the area could help by installing buffer strips or planting permanent vegetation rather than doing only row-cropping, which increases runoff in the area.

He also suggested the county build a campground on a flood-free area along Highway 218 — possibly at the abandoned AmeraFarms agricultural museum site at Bennington Road. The grassy camping surface would absorb water, he said. He also noted the county has a shortage of reliably dry campsites — the nearest campground outside a flood plain is Hickory Hills, in Tama County.

Wetlands mitigation banks have been popular in other states for several years, but not in Iowa, said Neal Johnson, a project manager for the Army Corps of Engineers.

Johnson, whose agency issues permits to agencies or companies whose projects destroy wetlands, said Iowa doesn't have many mitigation banks because developers can easily find land to mitigate wetlands.

In addition, a recent U.S. Supreme

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