

# Ames Tribune

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## **Prairie Rivers of Iowa will use grant to improve water quality and wildlife habitat**

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Prairie Rivers of Iowa was awarded the Conservation Partners grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in December, and they are now going to begin reaching out to farmers and landowners in the Story County area to assist them in improving water quality and wildlife habitat around the area.

Prairie Rivers, located at 2335 230th St., is a non-profit organization that has been working for a few years on projects related to this to improve water quality. The area that this project focuses on includes three sub-watersheds within the South Skunk River Watershed. Employees at Prairie Rivers will be working closely with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to promote the program to farmers and landowners in the coming month.

With this grant, they are now able to add wildlife habitat improvement to their projects, which is something Kayla Bergman, program coordinator of Prairie Rivers of Iowa Watershed and Waterways, said that the organization has wanted to do for a while.

“When we’re working with the landowners and the farm operators in this project, we’re going to be promoting practices that specifically have opportunity to plant native plant species to protect the pollinators,” Bergman said. “So essentially, creating more home and habitat for them. We have a water quality focus and a soil health focus, but we’ve never really had this wildlife component, which is super important and something that the public thinks a lot about.”

After the team at Prairie Rivers reaches out to farmers and landowners, they will do a land visit and discuss the resource concerns and operations with each person.

“Everyone has their priorities with their land, so our team goes out on a land visit

and then we kind of establish the relationship,” Bergman said. “The relationship with the land owner is over one year, minimal, before they actually do a project. It’s a long term relationship.”

Bergman said that continually working to improve the water quality in the area is crucial for Ames and Story County residents.

“We have to be thinking about our daily activities and how they affect our water quality,” Bergman said. “This work is so important because we have an opportunity to improve the water quality in a vital river, the South Skunk River, in Iowa.”

She said that in Ames, the water that runs into the South Skunk River, gets carried to the Mississippi River and then flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

“(In the Gulf of Mexico), there is actually what is called a dead zone. There is an excessive amount of nutrients that have leached off, and pollutants that have leached off of farm fields and in cities, and it’s essentially creating this area where no life can live in the water,” Bergman said. “So all of our actions are affecting that water quality.”

The project will continue until December of 2021. Bergman said that in that time, they will probably work with around 50 farmers, but not all of them will implement a full project. She said that with some of the farmers they talk to, they will focus on the education aspect only.

Prairie Rivers of Iowa is partnering with Story County Conservation, Story County Soil and Water Conservation District/Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Squaw Creek Watershed Management Authority Board.

“Our program really seeks to educate everyone and then help them take steps to affect their water quality in a positive way,” Bergman said. “We can live our lives in a comfortable way like we’ve been doing, but doing it in a smart way so we can protect our environment long term.”