

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING COALITION

Conserving and enhancing Iowa's natural resources and outdoor recreation.

COALITION MEMBERS

Conservation Districts of Iowa
Ducks Unlimited
Environment Iowa
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards
Iowa Conservation Alliance
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Farmer's Union
The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Iowa Rivers Revival
Izaak Walton League
The Nature Conservancy
Pheasants Forever
Sierra Club, Iowa Chapter

Sustainable Funding Coalition
303 Locust St, Ste 402
Des Moines, IA 50309
515-244-5044

Rosalyn Lehman
Campaign Coordinator
515-202-7720

Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (SJR2002)

The Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund will provide a permanent and protected funding source to improve and protect Iowa's diverse natural environment and outdoor recreational opportunities.

Trust Fund Legislation (SJR 2002)

A proposed constitutional amendment to establish a permanent and protected source of funding dedicated for the purposes of protecting and enhancing water quality and natural areas in Iowa including parks, trails, and fish and wildlife habitat, and conserving agricultural soils.. Moneys in the fund shall be exclusively appropriated by law for these purposes.

- Funding for these programs would be enhanced by allocating 3/8 of one cent from sales tax revenue the *next* time the Iowa Legislature approves a sales tax increase.
- If approved by Iowa voters, and funded by the legislature, the Trust Fund would provide an additional \$150 million per year in a protected fund dedicated to vital needs that sustain our quality of life.

SJR 2002 was approved unanimously by the House Natural Resources Committee and was overwhelmingly approved by the Senate and House in 2007 - more than 90 percent of Iowa legislators voted in favor of SJR 2002.

SJR 2002 is the result of two years of research and study conducted by many of the state's leading conservation, environmental, sportsmen, and agriculture advocates, along with members of the Iowa legislature.

It is important to understand what this legislation does and what it doesn't do.

What it does:

- It ensures that IF the legislature raises the sales tax, 3/8 of a cent must be dedicated to enhancing our state's natural resources.

What it doesn't do:

- This bill does not raise taxes, nor does it give voters the ability to raise the sales tax—only the legislature can do that.
- Even if this constitutional amendment is adopted, only the legislature can approve the sales tax increase that would be needed to provide funding.

All Iowans can benefit from this crucial investment – the quality of our natural resources affects us all. This investment is about the water we drink and play in, the soil we depend on for our food, the air we breathe, and the parks and natural areas that are so important to the vitality of our communities.

Iowans believe it is important to support our state's natural resources. In a recent poll:

- 90% of Iowans believe that protecting the condition of Iowa's land and water is critical to keeping Iowa's economy strong.
- 86% believe that protecting Iowa's fish and wildlife benefits all Iowans.
- 77% of all Iowans support dedicating additional funding to protect Iowa's land, water, and wildlife.

Let Iowans vote on outdoors funding

The Register's Editorial

Year after year, Iowa lawmakers have failed to adequately fund recreation and conservation. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is left crossing its fingers, wondering whether dollars will be there to manage parks, lodges, beaches, trails and camp sites. Communities hope there will be money for green spaces and trails.

Iowans travel to Missouri or Minnesota for better outdoor vacations. And this state ends up ranking an embarrassing 48th in the country for funding recreation.

But things are looking up.

The Iowa Senate overwhelmingly passed Senate Joint Resolution 2002 to amend the state constitution to dedicate a portion of state sales and service tax revenue to the outdoors. The resolution establishes a natural resources and outdoor recreation trust fund, to be financed with money generated by a sales-tax rate of three-eighths of 1 percent.

The House should follow suit. Passing this resolution is only the first step, though. To amend the state constitution, the resolution must be adopted by two consecutive Legislatures. Then the amendment needs approval from a majority of Iowa voters.

Let's be up front about it: This would be a tax increase. The state now collects 5 cents in sales tax, and the tax would go to 5.375 cents.

But this relatively small tax increase for an individual or family would reap great rewards for the state. It would raise \$150 million annually, the amount necessary to meet Iowa's outdoors needs, according to the Legislature's Interim Committee on Sustainable Funding for Natural Resources, which endorsed the sales tax.

"The committee looked at more than 40 alternative strategies," said Mark Ackelson, president of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. "This was the one that was the most secure and gave the public the most opportunity to weigh in."

An investment in recreation is an investment in all of Iowa. Great parks, trails and public lands attract people, who in turn attract businesses. Caring about the preservation of Mother Nature can boost property values and tourism. Studies show Iowans use the outdoors for biking, hunting, fishing and walking. But it takes money to conserve land and water and to build and maintain recreational amenities.

It's rare in Iowa to use the state constitution to specify how funds will be used. Other examples: Motor-vehicle fees and fuel taxes can be used only for public highways. State license fees for hunting, fishing and trapping can be used only for fish and wildlife protection. Constitutionally targeted funds should remain rare, to leave lawmakers budget flexibility in changing economic times.

Establishing dedicated funding for the outdoors is hardly a radical idea, though. Several neighboring states have done so, through their constitutions or state law.

Missouri passed and constitutionally protected a portion of sales tax for the Department of Conservation in 1976. Then in 1984, voters approved a constitutional amendment for soil and water conservation and state parks and have reauthorized it twice since then. In 2006, the measure won approval from 70 percent of voters. Arkansas passed a constitutional amendment in 1996 to secure dollars for conservation, parks, tourism, heritage and beautification.

And now it's Iowa's turn. The Senate took the first step toward creating a reliable funding stream dedicated to the outdoors. There will be a lot more steps and plenty of time for public discussion. It's time, though, to see this job through.