

Report: Resources need more protection

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Iowa has not made a strong enough commitment to protect its natural resources and must look at increasing funding to the Department of Natural Resources and county conservation boards, according to a report released Wednesday by an Eastern Iowa think tank.

"The need for more environmental protection is as clear as the water is dirty," said Teresa Galluzzo, an Iowa Policy Project research associate and author of the report, "Investing in Iowa's Environment."

To meet the need - \$150-million a year for 10 years, according to a DNR sustainable funding advisory panel, Galluzzo recommended in her report that the state dedicate a portion of sales tax

revenue to the environment and look at a variety of funding mechanisms.

Funding for the DNR and county conservation boards has decreased, been stagnant or has not increased enough to keep up with expanded responsibilities, Galluzzo said.

Galluzzo's report found that overall, the DNR's expenditures had a net increase between fiscal years 1997 and 2006. However, expenditures were less from 2003 through 2006 than they were in the previous four years, when adjusted for inflation.

Environmental funds were diverted to unrelated purposes during the state's fiscal crisis following the 2001 recession, and the DNR lost a significant number of employees, she said.

"Iowa has not made protecting its natural resources a priority," she said in a conference call with reporters. Iowa ranks 38th among states in state and local expenditures on the environment, she found.

Galluzzo made it clear she isn't calling for a sales tax increase, but said dedicating a portion of the revenue to the environment would provide long-term, stable funding. By itself, she said, the sales tax revenue would not provide adequate resources to meet the state's need.

The report also recommended charging commercial and industrial water users, such as the growing ethanol industry, water-user fees to encourage conservation. Polluters-pay measures would assure those contaminating the environment are held accountable.

All Iowans, Galluzzo said, have a stake in ensuring long-term, stable funding for natural resources protection and enhancement.

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On the Net - 'Investing in Iowa's Environment': www.iowapolicyproject.org

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