ROUGHLY EDITED COPY

**Harkin Institute**

**Iowa Waterways Report: Training Session for Viewing Parties**

October 8, 2025

6:30 p.m. CT

*Captioning Provided By:*

*Steele Captioning*

\* \* \* \* \*

This file is being provided in a rough-draft format. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is provided in order to facilitate communication accessibility and may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings. It is not to be distributed or used in any way that may violate copyright law.

\* \* \* \* \*

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Hey, everyone. I think we'll probably wait just a couple minutes to start just in case we have any additional people joining.

( Silence )

Yes, there should be closed captioning.

>> I'm not seeing it on the bottom of my screen. There it's on. Okay. Thank you.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: How are you?

>> Mary Ellen Miller: Just in from a lot of farm chores. Camera's not on because I'm pretty dusty. The good news is Monday and into Tuesday morning, we got 2.5 inches of rain. So woo‑hoo.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Nice.

>> Mary Ellen Miller: Without that rain, I'd be watering trees today. One day ‑‑ a couple of days of reprieve.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Good, good. Yeah, no worries. I taught some online classes, so I'm used to 90% of the people being off camera. I'm not comfortable with the level of coercion needed to get people to appear on camera, so I think it works well.

>> Mary Ellen Miller: Well, I could show myself, I guess. It's just I'm not in a ‑‑

>> Recording in progress.

>> Mary Ellen Miller: Oh, good. I have a blurred background. Hi, Kerri. Good to see you.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: Good evening.

>> Mary Ellen Miller: Are we going to be a small group, Adam?

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. Very small. A few days ago, we had I think ten registrations. We were kind of thinking, you know, we didn't promote this heavily. We just wanted to give an opportunity for people to ask questions if they want. But we're going to record it and make it available. So basically anyone who wants to see the training can.

>> Mary Ellen Miller: I do have a 7:00, but I can be a little late to that.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Okay. I think I'm recording now and Kerri is recording.

>> MARY ELLEN MILLER: Yeah, I saw the recording thing come on.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Cool. All right. Well, I think I will get started now. So welcome, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us today. I'm Adam Shriver, the Director of Wellness and Nutrition at the Harkin Institute. And I'm joined by Kerri today. I'll let you introduce yourself.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: Thanks, Adam. I'm Kerri Johannsen. I'm the Senior Director of Policy and Programs with the Iowa Environmental Council.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. So today's session is about building off of the incredible momentum that was created from the production of the Central Iowa Source Water Resource Assessment often referred to as the CISWRA Report. It's a lot easier to say.

As I'm sure people on this call remember, Polk County had hired a team of 15 top scientists to look at water quality issues impacting Central Iowa and those scientists put in over 4,000 hours of work to produce a really comprehensive report that touched on everything from the history of the land, the changes in how the Raccoon and Des Moines Rivers flow. And then, of course, most importantly deep dives into different challenges facing our water including things like nitrates harmful algal blooms and E. Coli.

And this past summer despite having one of the most expensive systems in the world, Central Iowa had to issue a lawn watering ban because our water treatment plants couldn't keep up with the amount of nitrates in our water. And we also had numerous advisories not to swim in Iowa waterways. And so with that as the backdrop, the Harkin Institute at Drake volunteered to host a presentation from the scientists behind the CISWRA Report.

And we honestly were just really shocked and amazed in a positive way with the huge response that we got from that. Over 600 people attended the presentation in person and now over 3,000 people have watched it online. And, of course, it was also really exciting to see the audience reaction where people were cheering really loudly and boisterous and they gave us the scientists the standing ovation at the end. Which is, you know, not something I've seen very often in academic context.

So it was a really uplifting event. But that presentation although it was the end of a really intense two‑year project for the scientists, we see that not as the end of something but really as the beginning of something as well. And we know that just talking about Iowa's water quality issues is not going to solve our problems and that it's really important to continue building on the momentum from that presentation.

And so that's what this event is about today. This is the first step of trying to build off of the momentum from that project. And so what we're going to be doing is going over ways in which people can show that video in their own community and facilitate communication or conversation about it based on this really excellent toolkit that Kerri and Iowa Environmental Council have developed to guide discussion.

Before jumping in any more, I want to also highlight a few other ways in which we're building off of the momentum from that presentation. So a few different things that are coming up in the near future, a week ‑‑ or I guess two weeks from today, October 22nd from 4:00 to 5:00 at The Harkin Institute, there's going to be a policy discussion follow‑up to the Central Iowa Water Report.

So we'll have people brainstorm different ways in which policy may address some of the problems we're facing. October 29th, there's going to be a presentation at the Big Grove Brewery in Iowa City from the same group of scientists that presented in Des Moines. So if you're out in the Iowa City area, I would recommend going to see that. Sounds like a fun opportunity.

And then November 15th which is a Saturday from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at Meredith Hall on the Drake University campus, there's going to be a town hall style event talking about the CISWRA Report. So the presentation that was at Drake earlier didn't give a huge amount of opportunity for the audience to talk and sort of share ideas and talk to their neighbors about their thoughts, so this event will really be structured in a way that it's very participatory and gives people a chance to interact and share their ideas about what to do going forward.

So I'm really, really grateful for the Iowa Environmental Council for developing a toolkit that Kerri's going to be talking about in just a second. Before I do that, I want to just show you some resources that I think will be helpful and also can help maybe provide a little bit of a refresher about what was in the CISWRA Report. So I am going to hopefully share my screen. Okay. Share button... Okay.

So are people seeing a Harkin Institute... Web page right now? Oh, wait. Hold on. I didn't press the right button. Now you're seeing a Harkin Institute web page? Okay, great.

So the website for the Harkin Institute is HarkinInstitute.Drake.edu. And if you go to that web page and highlight what we do, it shows the policy areas we work on. And if you scroll down to Wellness and Nutrition, there is an option over here on the right for water quality resources.

And so everything that we're going to talk about today, you can find on this page. Which you can also get to by going to HarkinInstitute.Drake.edu/water‑quality‑resources. And I'll drop it in the chat so don't feel like you need to frantically write this down.

So on this page are a few different things. So first of all, there's a link close to the top that takes you to the actual Central Iowa Source Water Resource Assessment page. So if you click on that, it goes to the Polk County page that is the home of the report. And I'll just click on a couple things from there just to kind of refresh people's memory about what all was in the report.

So there, of course, is this huge 232‑page version of the report which is a lot, but it's really excellently done. And that report starts off with an introduction that provides an overview about what the report is about. Then it talks about some issues that are distinctive to Iowa. That includes a lot of really interesting things about how our land use has changed over the years and what the rivers look like in the state.

And then also some of the unique problems that we're facing. Then it dives into some of the specific issues that different scientists from their team talked about including the river flow and how that can ‑‑ has changed I guess how the land has changed the way the river flows and how that can lead to different challenges. Ecological health and river life. How various things affect the natural world.

Then, of course, drinking water. Which talks about big issues like nitrates, harmful algal blooms, problems with treatment, and many other contaminants. And then the report also talks about river and lake recreation. And then finally, there's a concluding chapter that offers a number of different suggestions for what they recommend could be done to start addressing this issue.

I will also just highlight quickly the Executive Summary which I think is useful since it's hard to read a 232‑page report. And so that has a much ‑‑ you know, the kind of top‑level ideas from the report. And I'll just highlight one thing in particular that I think is ‑‑ you know, will be useful for your discussions which is a section at the end that says "what concerns us the most." Where they highlight the things that, you know, stood out to them as most important.

And those were the livestock manure management, stream channel protection, land use adjacent to rivers, harm after all algal blooms, pathogens, and nutrients. Okay. Then I'll point out a couple more things on this page. So right here is the Currents of Change toolkit that Kerri developed that we're going to be talking about in just a second.

And there's also on the right here, there's the condensed CISWRA Report presentation which is a video of the presentation, but it's shortened so that you can show it in your own community. So it's been shortened to, I think, about 50 minutes. And if you think you need to shorten it further, you might need to figure out which parts you want to cut. But that was the presentation where we cut out the introductions and the Q&A.

Then finally there's a link to the full presentation down at the bottom here as well as a link to the slide deck which is also really helpful if you want to kind of go through what they talked about more slowly.

So I think with that, I will stop there and hand it off to Kerri. And I guess I will also just mention that, you know, I think our plan was to present and then leave some time at the end for any questions that people have. So Kerri, I will hand it over to you.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: Great. Thanks, Adam. So like Adam said at the beginning, some of this will be recorded and posted later as training. But some of this I just want to recognize folks for showing up tonight. I'm really excited to see so many people here. I thought it would be kind of fun if people would be willing to drop in the chat where you are logging in from tonight just so we can see a little bit of where everyone is coming from as we start talking about the toolkit.

And the reason that we developed this toolkit is because as Adam said, we had this presentation in Des Moines, but we know that water quality problems are really hitting people all over the state of Iowa. And both the problems and the solutions often lie up stream of where we're seeing some of the biggest issues including in central Iowa.

So thank you so much for dropping your locations in. It's good to see folks. So I will get started on the toolkit as I share my screen. So this is the toolkit we hope you can use to both educate folks in your community and to start to move people from education into action.

This toolkit can be used with a variety of different sizes and types of groups. So as you're thinking about any kind of group you belong to, any kind of community group, student group, your friends, your book club, whoever it is that you think might be interested in this. Your church. Just keep this in mind as we're going through the toolkit.

So we know based on what happened this summer and increasing coverage in the news, et cetera, that Iowans are really concerned about water quality and that they want and need more information about this topic. We also think it's really important that we find a way to talk to each other about this issue and to really connect with why we care about Iowa's water and how that connects to some of our deepest values and really our earliest memories for many of us. About this state and our connection here.

So we would encourage you to take this toolkit into a space that makes conversation easy. So whether that's a room that has, you know, round tables, whether it's a living room where people can see each other. We recommend a space where you can talk to each other and where people have some kind of a writing surface if possible. Even if that's just, you know, folders to write on or something like that.

We do anticipate that you will need some sort of technology to show the presentation whether it's a TV or a laptop. It's easy to show online. We also recommend bringing several copies of the action steps which are outlined in the Currents of Change Report. And I've got the page numbers on there. We really encourage you to focus on the local solutions listed in that report as these are really local conversations that you're having. Pen or pencil for each participant, two pieces of paper for each person.

One or two envelopes and then one to two postage stamps for each participant. And this is going to depend. There are two different action steps at the end. Those envelopes and postage stamps are necessary if you take the route of looking at how do we actually take action for policy change. That materials list will look a little different if you decide to take the route of having more of a discussion about local solutions.

So you'll see that as we go forward. And once you decide sort of which path you want to take, you can return to the materials list and decide what you need to get to prepare. Adam shared The Harkin Institute website that has all of these same resources on it. Those are also ‑‑ those resources are also linked in the toolkit here so you can refer back to them as you are preparing.

So we recommend opening up with an opportunity for people to introduce themselves. People may already know each other. They may not. But we really encourage you to start with a discussion that opens people up to the question of what is your earliest or most distinct memory around water or what is your favorite Iowa water body and why. Really trying to get people talking about why water matters to them. As an opening part of tapping into some of our values around water.

Once there's a ‑‑ you know, people have time to discuss, we did this yesterday evening in a group and there was a lot of really lively discussion around this question which was really fun to see. And so if you can get everybody quieted back down again, then we suggest that you then move into the video. We've laid out a number of bullet points here that you may want to cover in the run‑up to the video that just give an overview of what is it that happened over the summer.

What is this report? What is it about? Why is it important? And so a number of bullet points here you can look through. I won't go over those in detail. But it basically gives an overview of the problem and why it matters. As well as pointing out that even though this report is about Central Iowa, it's really applicable to problems that we're seeing in the state as a whole.

There are unique landscape features, et cetera, but a lot of this is really going to apply to most of the state of Iowa regardless of your watershed.

We have a link here, again, to the video. So it's easy to find that shortened 50‑minute video. And then we recommend once the video is over ‑‑ we're going to be updating this toolkit a little bit after the trial run last night. So we might add a few things in here including sort of a review of the high points of the video. So some really key takeaways that you might want to repeat back to your group after the video has concluded.

And then really moving into a deeper discussion. So depending on how big your group is, you could consider breaking into smaller discussion groups, no more than eight people per group is what we would suggest in order to allow everyone to be heard. And make sure that each person has a piece of paper and a writing utensil. And ask people to start by taking five minutes to reflect in writing upon these three questions.

What stood out to you from the presentation? When you think about what part really stood out, why did that hit home for you personally? Is there a person, place, value that you hold, or some other reason why that seems particularly important to you? And how do you think this report is relevant to people in your community? How does access to good information from water monitoring connect with these community issues and your own personal values?

And then after five minutes of allowing people to sort of gather their thoughts, bring people back to the group or small groups and ask them to share their answers with one another. And let them discuss that for about 15 minutes.

After that's concluded and you bring folks back together, we recommend this is the part where you could go one of two ways in terms of the taking action section of the event structure that we recommend. So in Option 1, you can go straight into influencing policy making. We know this is an issue that without policy change, we're not going to see a lot of progress.

And so for Option 1, you could suggest that people write letters to their state or local elected official or a letter to the editor about Iowa's water quality crisis. And we recommend that you read those out loud to them that they should include who they are and where they live why water quality matters to them, and the more they can speak to their values, their personal story, their personal connection, the better.

And then a strong urge to act to restore safe and affordable water in our state by ‑‑ for example, the issue that we're really concerned about at the moment is fully funding Iowa's Water Monitoring Network. And so that's one we really highlight here. They don't have to talk about the Water Monitoring Network. They can talk about other policy issues if they want to see, but this is the one that's really critical at this moment.

So we recommend that if you would like to have envelopes and stamps available, being able to help people look up their legislator and get them all ready to go then and there, you have more success in getting those mailed off to the newspaper or the elected official. If you can do that, I think that's great. If not, you know, definitely you can encourage them to mail those themselves. You could ask a co‑host to help you out by providing some of these materials.

Or you could have ‑‑ yeah. Just take them home themselves and mail them or offer to mail them later. The second option, if you have a group that maybe you think is not going to be all the way to the level of writing to policymakers or letters to the editor. Maybe it's a chamber group or something like that where you're trying to introduce people to the topic a little more slowly. We would recommend looking at the local and individual action section of the CISWRA Report.

And another addition we're going to make to the toolkit is to have a standalone one page at the end of the toolkit that will have these recommendations on it so it makes it easier and more accessible for folks to find those and just have them without having to look through the whole report. But we do have those page numbers in here for now.

So based on those local and individual actions, folks can have a discussion about what are three things that they can do to encourage individuals and local policymakers to address water quality problems in Iowa. They can write those down on the paper that they have, you know, have another 15‑minute‑or‑so discussion about what that might look like. Ways that people might want to look together on any of those solutions.

And then wrap up the evening. So we also have included here encouragement to have people really stay in the loop with water quality by signing up for either the CISWRA news and alerts from The Harkin Institute which is really doing a great job at being a central point of contact for people who are interested in continuing to act on the recommendations of this report.

And also an opportunity to sign up for information from the Iowa Environmental Council and keep track of what we are working on. So as I said, we're going to continue to make updates and improvements to this toolkit. We also are very interested in hearing feedback. So if you do have an opportunity to use it and there's something that doesn't work so well or something you feel could be improved, please do let us know.

As I said, we're going to continue to try to make this better, easier to use, more seamless, and more compelling as we go forward. The information itself, it really does ‑‑ it says it all about what we need to know about water quality. But taking that next step to move people into action on water quality is what gets us really excited about sharing this toolkit with you and hoping that you will share the video and the discussion with others in your community as well.

( Silence )

Do we have any questions about the toolkit? About anything else that we're doing? Happy to answer questions.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Mary Ellen, I see your hand.

>> MARY ELLEN MILLER: My first one is: I was thinking about doing this by Zoom. Is that an option? Like, I was thinking about this being a program for the League of Women Voters in Metro Des Moines. I just happen to be the program chair. And that would be via Zoom. So I think it would work. Except for the actual snail mailing letters. Right?

But I mean, they could email letters; right? Okay. So it is possible to make it happen by Zoom.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: That's a great idea. Yeah. Other questions? And I guess I'll just highlight that, you know, you guys are the vanguard and so we're counting on you to ask questions for everyone who might be interested in showing a presentation in their area. So even if you ‑‑ even if there's something you think you know the answer to but you think that someone else might have a question about, feel free to ask us that as well. Yeah, Claire?

>> Claire Baudler: Hi. Thank you so much for putting this on. I just moved back to the Midwest after growing up here. I kind of heard about everything that was progressing from afar and being able to see the report and hear about the work you've been doing has been very exciting and fulfilling to me. So I want to thank you first of all.

And one big interest area for me personally is outreach to farmers and people in the agriculture sector and stuff like that. And, you know, I worked in agriculture. I know a lot of people in it. I've heard a lot of suspicion whenever they hear about these reports and what's happening in Des Moines and Polk County and stuff like that, there seems to be kind of this air of, why is this happening now? What does this mean? Are they just trying to say this to, you know, impact us?

Because that's how it feels to them. And so I was just wondering if there were any tips not only to reach out to them in the first place and kind of pique their interest to come and hear about it. Or if there were tips or advice for using the toolkit in such a way for people who come into it with their own perspective, their own experiences ‑‑ I don't want to say suspicions, but they might just have a different perspective that is not necessarily receptive from the get go and how we can maybe transition them to be receptive to the facts that exist in the report and the impact that has. Thank you.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: Thanks, Claire. I guess I would say I think there are some folks who are ready for the information in this report and there are some folks who maybe need a different entry point for this. And I think it's very ‑‑ I grew up on a farm in Northeast Iowa. My family still farms in Howard County. And I think one of the things that we're focused on doing simultaneously to the education and the conversation is starting at that level of conversation and talking to people about how access to clean water might already be affecting them and their family.

We were out this summer doing listening sessions on cancer in Iowa in 15 different communities around the state. It's something that everywhere we went, people are really feeling a lot of pain around that issue and what's happening. And at the same time we heard a lot of stories about towns with contaminated wells, folks with private well water that they couldn't drink anymore.

I think starting with a conversation that is curious and maybe starts with asking questions more than educating, asking questions about what kinds of things people are concerned about around water in their community is a great place to start.

And I think that especially, you know, if you have a larger group in a small community that having them be able to talk with each other is also a really good way to do it. These are hard conversations, for sure. And we ‑‑ but they're conversations that communities need to have together. I don't know if that's helpful, but it's my perspective.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. I think that's a really great question, Claire. And I love Kerri's answer as well. I think I would just add, I mean, I think groups like Iowa Farmers Union and Practical Farmers of Iowa are groups that are willing to have these conversations too. And so if you have any opportunity to reach out to those groups in your area, I think they might be good to talk to and ask the same question that you asked us.

So I would recommend that. I think Tommy Hexter from Iowa Farmers Union is pretty motivated by this. So if you or anyone else wants connections to Iowa Farmers Union and you don't already have them, reach out to Kerri or myself. There's also a bunch of good questions in the chat. So I will read a couple of those.

So Jodi and Terry ask is there anything in the toolkit for advertising or promoting an event?

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: There is not, but that is such a good idea and it is something we will add. Thank you so much.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. Great idea. I guess kind of I'll skip ahead also because Mary Ellen had another good idea along the same line of is there a press release. That could be another thing that would be developed as a template. If you think the media might be interested in an event, maybe we could include a template in there.

Jan ‑‑ oh. Jan was just telling us she had to go. So Wayne asks: Is there any kind of speaker bureau on this topic? Because he belongs to a number of groups that aren't ready yet to take action but would like to hear more.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: I don't know. Adam, what do you think about that?

>> ADAM SHRIVER: I would say for that, I think just get in touch with myself or Kerri, because we ‑‑ I think we're happy to reach out to some of the people who are the scientists for that report. And if they're not available, then we can look into other people speaking or, you know, maybe one of ‑‑ someone from one of our organizations can speak as well.

So I don't think there's currently an official speakers bureau, but anyone who wants to have an in‑person speaker I would say just reach out to Harkin Institute or Iowa Environmental Council. Let's see. Any other questions that I'm missing?

( Silence )

I was also kind of curious to hear from anyone in the audience if you want to share if you have ideas of locations that you might want to share the presentation or places that you think would be good places to give the presentation? Whether or not you can actually do it yourself, but if you have ideas that might be helpful for people listening to the recording, that would be fun to hear about.

( Silence )

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: I know last night we had a few folks who were talking about different church groups they belong to. There are at least in the Central Iowa area a lot of churches that will have a creation care group or a climate focused group. People are kind of self‑selecting as interested in environment. And that was one that we definitely heard about last night just as an example.

( Silence )

>> Linda Fitzgerald: I can't get my hand to raise. I don't know where my emojis are. I'll jump on. I'm in Cedar Falls and I've been a member of the local chapter of the Iowa Sierra Club which has been kind of moribund for a while since the pandemic. And we were talking about maybe having some kind of meeting with video.

But before the pandemic, we had a person who set up video at a place for us to use. We don't have that person anymore. What do you need sort of at a minimum for sharing this video? Just everybody sit around somebody's laptop and try to see it? Or, you know, what do you recommend?

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: I think a TV at least would be a nice size just because they do get pretty little on the screen. What they're saying ‑‑ you know, being able to hear what they're saying is the most important part of it. So you could do a laptop if you can crank the volume up. But an HDMI cable from your laptop to a medium‑sized TV would also work well.

When we were doing listening sessions this summer, we were in a couple of different, you know, very high school middle school cafeterias. Schools now are often set up with good audio/video systems that they can help you have access to. Community colleges also often have those kinds of facilities that make it a little bit easier.

Somebody mentioned like a community ‑‑ or a theater type space. We were in the theater in Elkader. It was pretty good. It's not the best for a small group discussion. It's a little awkward with people turning around in their chairs, but we managed it and had a good discussion. And it was absolutely beautiful.

So yeah. I think there are a lot of different community centers we were in as well. So often these places are set up with some sort of AV system. People just have to be able to hear what's being said mostly.

>> Linda Fitzgerald: Thanks. That's helpful.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. Kerri mentioned the big screen idea. And then Wayne asked are there any low‑hanging fruit actions that people can take to make a difference? So any favorite actions, Kerri?

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: One thing to me is just nonnegotiable on this moment and something that is talked about in the video is Iowa's Water Monitoring Network. It's a state‑of‑the‑art network and it's used in different ways to see how conservation practices are working to measure how much nitrate is actually in the water. So we can, you know, have more information about whether or not we're meeting health and safety standards. And that Water Monitoring Network was defunded by the Iowa Legislature in 2023.

And so the University of Iowa Hydrological Research Center which is the host of that Water Monitoring Network was able to get a private grant to keep it running for another year. But starting in 2026, they're going to have to start removing that monitoring network down to about 20 monitors and eventually it's going to be eliminated entirely.

And so I think reaching out to state and local elected officials to preserve the Water Monitoring Network to fully fund the Water Monitoring Network is just a baseline low‑hanging fruit item that I would really encourage everyone to do...

( Silence )

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Any other questions?. Well, Kerri, did you have any other information you wanted to present or anything else you wanted to do?

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: I don't think so. I just want to make sure that folks can get ahold of me and get ahold of you. I will... We will probably send a follow‑up email with some more ‑‑ with the information that we're talking about here. But I can drop my email in the chat here for folks who are still on.

So yeah. I think that wraps it up for the toolkit.

>> ADAM SHRIVER: Yeah. Thank you, all, for joining us. And we're really excited to hear back from you and hopefully have meetings around the state. And thank you for like as I said being the vanguard and helping us to think through additional questions that people might have about this. So really appreciate everyone joining us. And look forward to working with you all in the future.

And thanks so much for Kerri for doing an amazing job with the toolkit. I have to say that as well for sure.

>> KERRI JOHANNSEN: Thanks, Adam. And thanks, everyone. It was great to see you all tonight. Bye.

[ Concluded at 7:15 p.m. CT ]