

Bringing it together



Lamar Valley Buffalo Ranch, Yellowstone National Park
 Photo by Stan Buman
www.fencelinephotos.com

Our Mission:
 Agren, Inc. responds to agricultural and environmental challenges by providing comprehensive, integrated services to groups and individuals to positively impact our natural resources. The Agren team is dedicated to achieving client objectives through a commitment to quality and excellence.

Marketing Land Protection with an Impact Movie™

They call it an Impact Movie™. It's short, to the point, and asks the viewer to take a specific action.

Impact Movie™ consultants from AngelVision Technologies, Inc., say people don't like calls from sales people, and don't like commercials or advertising. "But they love their TV!" AngelVision literature says. "Impact movies take your boring and hard-to-understand printed material and create an informative and engaging multimedia experience. Impact movies are probing messages that help people understand the problems they have and why they need your solutions."

Would a movie catch a landowner's attention, and prompt him or her to ask for more information or follow up on earlier intentions to permanently protect their natural lands?

That is the question the folks at Agren, Inc. and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) are trying to answer in a landowner outreach project funded by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Agren has been working as a consultant on a number of projects for the past several years with absentee landowners,

helping them understand what conservation is, how it might benefit them, and how to go about protecting their land. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, among other things, helps

landowners achieve their land protection goals by helping develop conservation easements and using other natural resource protection options.

Agren asked us to partner in using the movie, to test its effectiveness as an outreach method," says Cathy Engstrom, communications director of INHF. "It was a perfect match for us. Iowa had just passed the new tax break

for people who donate permanent conservation easements on their privately owned land, so we wanted to get that message out to our members, our partners, and other landowners who could benefit from both state and federal tax credits."

Impact Movies™ are designed to take your boring and hard-to-understand printed material and create an informative and engaging multimedia experience. Impact movies are probing messages that help people understand the problems they have and why they need your solutions.

"The result was a three minute video of beautiful pictures

"It was a perfect match for us. They wanted a landowner outreach project, and our strategic plan called for outreach with new technology. It was a gift to us in many ways – we're just getting started using the movie and one or two great land deals is a huge success."

– Cathy Engstrom, INHF Communications Director

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and stories that were meant to appeal to landowners on visual and emotional levels, along with factual information,” Engstrom says. “Our staff and board members were universally impressed with the movie when it went online in May.

Promoting the movie

Making the movie was only half the battle. Getting people to view it was the next challenge. “We put the movie on our Web site and emailed our 5,000 members, encouraging them to watch it. We directed another 400 people to it through our Facebook site, and put an article in our magazine,” Engstrom says.

“We worked closely with Agren along the way, day to day with Jamie Ridgely and Amy Dreith. Their support made this project much easier on our staff. They were great to work with,” Engstrom says. Agren also invited people to view the movie through emails and information posted at the Center for Absentee Landowners’ Web site, www.iowaconservationconnect.org.

I think at least some of them will result in viable land protection projects.”

Those numbers may not seem large, but to INHF, all new viable projects are valuable. “Our work is all about quality rather than quantity,” notes Engstrom. “Even just one completed land protection effort, in a critical location or with threatened resources, is priceless.”

Engstrom says the Impact Movie™ isn’t pushy. It allows people who are happy with their land protection decisions to tell their story in an interesting way, and gives a viewer some options and some things to think about, she says. That means it fits with the philosophy and style of the Foundation, which believes in building relationships with landowners.

Log on to
www.iowaconservationconnect.org
to view the Impact Movie™
A Gift to Iowa's Future

Engstrom says INHF’s future plans for the video include using it at landowner events, using it to train partners and putting it on a CD to share with individual landowners, to name a few.

Strong viewership, viewer feedback

In August, three months after the video went online and emails were sent, INHF had 1,054 visits to the movie on their Web site. Heather Jobst, a land projects coordinator whose job it is to follow up on leads of people interested in protecting their land, collected replies. “We had seven direct requests from the online feedback form, plus two people who called us after watching the video,” she says. “We are pursuing those leads. One is from a soil and water conservation district employee who has three landowners interested. Most are people we have talked with in the past, who were motivated by the movie to contact us to move the discussion forward.

Become a fan of Agren's page on Facebook



Join us for our Absentee Landowner Webinar Series



Dec. 8 *Absentee Landowners – A Tipping Point for Conservation?* 1-3 pm CST

Learn about Agren’s research in the Great Lakes Region along with additional findings that support the idea that absentee landowners may be a significant untapped audience for conservation.

Dec. 15 *Best Practices for Engaging Absentee Landowners in Conservation* 1-3 pm CST

Explore outreach and marketing lessons learned and experiences working one-on-one with absentee landowners.

Log onto www.agreninc.com.
Click on the date(s) to register.

Funding support provided by the Great Lakes Protection Fund and a Conservation Innovation Grant through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Iowa Conservation Districts Can Get New Planning Tools at Reduced Cost



Tom Buman

Iowa's soil and water conservation districts have an opportunity to serve their clients better and reduce staff time in planning and applying often-used conservation practices with new online tools being developed by Agren. And now, thanks to a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), some districts—those who sign on early—will get to use the tools at significant cost savings.

A new 3-year CIG grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Iowa will allow the first 40 soil and water conservation districts to get a 3-year subscription to the online services for \$1,500.

"This is something every conservation district in Iowa that's planning ponds and sediment and water control basins should consider," says Agren President Tom Buman. "The one-of-a-kind PondBuilder program helps a technician quickly plan a pond. In 15 minutes or less, it can help you place a proposed pond in the landscape, generate an aerial photo with the pond's permanent and temporary pool areas clearly drawn, and generate an accurate cost estimate. Depending on the pond site, the program will provide hundreds of options to choose from, with varying pond sizes, pipe sizes, and pipe types."

Buman says that rapid turnaround time compares to several months with current methods, where it takes time for field office personnel to schedule and make a field visit for a preliminary survey, then more time back in the office to calculate the size and cost for only one pond option.

The subscription also includes access to a new BasinBuilder program for sediment and water control basins and a RCNCalculator.

A new Soil Loss Calculator is currently being built that could someday replace RUSLE2. In addition, Agren is drafting procedures for WetlandBuilder and WaterwayBuilder tools, similar to PondBuilder.

The new online programs are possible because of LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) elevation data being made available by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and other agencies. DNR has about 90 percent of the information collected now, and plans to have state-wide coverage by March of 2010.

The tools are Internet-based, Buman says, because upfront costs for GIS software and storage Agren has invested in would be too costly for each district to purchase. He says the first 40 districts will get to use the software at about one-third the cost of a regular subscription.

"Before we awarded the grant, I visited field offices and talked to the people who had used some of the tools on a trial

basis," says NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims. "I was impressed by their enthusiasm for the time savings the PondBuilder offered. Even better, though, was that extensive ground-truthing by field offices showed that cost estimates made in the office from this program were very accurate. It's important to us to be able to rely on original cost estimates, so we don't have to go through contract modifications that take time and create problems for us," Sims says.

Conservation technicians in Ringgold, Union, Fayette and Winneshiek Counties have pilot-tested the pond program, and have been able to get accurate estimates in as little as five minutes. "They say it's easy to use, fast and accurate, and that's what we all want," Buman says.

"I visited field offices and talked to the people who had used some of the tools on a trial basis, I was impressed by their enthusiasm for the time savings the PondBuilder offered."

— Rich Sims, NRCS State Conservationist

"We know field staffs are busy. These programs can be used with individual landowners to show them many options quickly, with the valuable knowledge of expected costs," Buman says. "But they can also help plan and prioritize multiple structures on a watershed basis, locating structures and getting cost estimates in days or weeks rather than months. The accuracy the programs offer will also result in fewer contract modifications and fewer unhappy farmers because of inaccurate cost estimates for conservation work on their farms."

"With the amount of conservation practice requests we get, the grant will be well worth it," Sims says. "We hope to be able to use the programs for larger planning initiatives in the future. We'll watch and see how these other programs develop, and if the results of other programs match the early ones, I'll be very happy."

FREE Demo!

Reserve your spot for a LIVE DEMO via webinar.

Log onto www.agreninc.com.
Click on the date to register.

Thursdays at 1 pm

November 5, 12 or 19



Agren toolshed

Welcome to Agren's newest Vice President



Jamie Ridgely

Congratulations to Jamie Ridgely on her promotion to Agren's Vice President of Planning and Projects. On October 15, President Tom Buman announced, "that in order to keep pace with Agren's growth and changing environment, the Vice President duties at Agren will be divided between Stan Buman and Jamie Ridgely." Stan is now Vice President of Business and Finance.

So how does this change affect Agren's clients and partners? Probably very little. Stan and Jamie will both remain closely involved in the same projects and with the same partners. "The change in titles is a natural fit to what Stan and Jamie each do best", Tom stated. "Splitting the planning and administrative responsibilities allows each to focus attention on the technical and project-oriented work most suited to their abilities."

"I think one of Agren's greatest strengths has always been our team-based approach to problem solving. We work hard to approach issues from all sorts of angles," said Jamie. This same collaboration carries through to the core business partnership. You may never find three people who approach the same issue in such different ways. "But ironically, it works! I'm very proud to be part of Agren, as an employee, a co-owner, and now as an officer. I'm so fortunate for the opportunities Tom and Stan have provided me."

Jamie began her employment with Agren in 1998. She became part owner in 2007. According to Stan, "it was an easy decision to offer Jamie partial ownership of Agren. She offers a set of skills that compliment Tom's and my skills. Jamie has always taken the initiative to improve our quality of services."

Congratulations Jamie!

Sign up today for our e-newsletter
at www.agren-inc.com.



Email amy@agreninc.com to
unsubscribe from the paper copy.

Agren Exhibits and Presentations

Agren is committed to disseminating the results of our projects. Here is a list of the places we have presented and exhibited during the last six months.

The last 6 months...

- Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Conference/Dearborn, MI (Presenter, Technical Workshop and Symposia; Panelist; Exhibitor)
- The FarmLASTS Project National Conference/Denver, CO (Presenter)
- Iowa Farm Bureau Federation Environmental Conference/West Des Moines, IA (Exhibitor)
- Soil and Water Conservation Society Sedimentation Conference/Kansas City, MO (Exhibitor)

Look for us at these upcoming events...

- Conservation Districts of Iowa Annual Conference/Ames, IA (Exhibitor) – Dec. 2-3
- Soil and Water Conservation Society Science to Solutions Conference/Des Moines, IA (Exhibitor) – Dec. 9-11
- National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting/Orlando, FL (Exhibitor) – Jan. 31 - Feb. 3



Bringing it together

Agren, Inc., an Iowa-based consulting firm, provides innovative, unique, client-focused solutions to your ag and natural resources challenges.