Annual Report

2012 Annual Report on Performance of Iowa CREP Wetlands: Monitoring and Evaluation of Wetland Performance

William Crumpton
Associate Professor

Greg Stenback
Research Associate

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Iowa State University, Ames

Monitoring and Evaluation

A unique aspect of the Iowa CREP is that nitrate reduction is not simply assumed based on wetland acres enrolled, but is calculated based on the measured performance of CREP wetlands. As an integral part of the Iowa CREP, a representative subset of wetlands is monitored and mass balance analyses performed to document nitrate reduction. By design, the wetlands selected for monitoring span the 0.5% to 2.0% wetland/watershed area ratio range approved for Iowa CREP wetlands. The wetlands also span a 2 to 3 fold range in average nitrate concentration. The wetlands thus provide a broad spectrum of those factors most affecting wetland performance: hydraulic loading rate, residence time, nitrate concentration, and nitrate loading rate. In addition to documenting wetland performance, this will allow continued refinement of modeling and analytical tools used in site selection, design, and management of CREP wetlands.

Summary of 2012 Monitoring

Seven wetlands were monitored for the Iowa CREP during 2012 (Figure 1). These include AA, AL, DD65, JM, KS, LICA, and SS wetlands. Wetland monitoring included wetland inflow and outflow measurements, wetland pool elevation and water temperature measurements, and collection of weekly grab samples and automated daily samples. Automated samplers were programmed to collect daily composite water samples composed of four six-hour subsamples collected at wetland inflows and outflows. At the AA, AL, JM and KS sites, which had been monitored previously, daily sample collection was initiated between the last week of March and the first week of April. Daily sampling at the DD65, LICA and SS sites, which had not been historically monitored for daily samples, was initiated during May and early June. With the exception of DD65, grab samples were collected throughout the year during approximately weekly site visits at inflow and outflow locations. Grab samples collection at DD65 was initiated in late March, 2012. Inflow and outflow ceased during July at each wetland. All water samples were assayed for nitrate-N concentration.

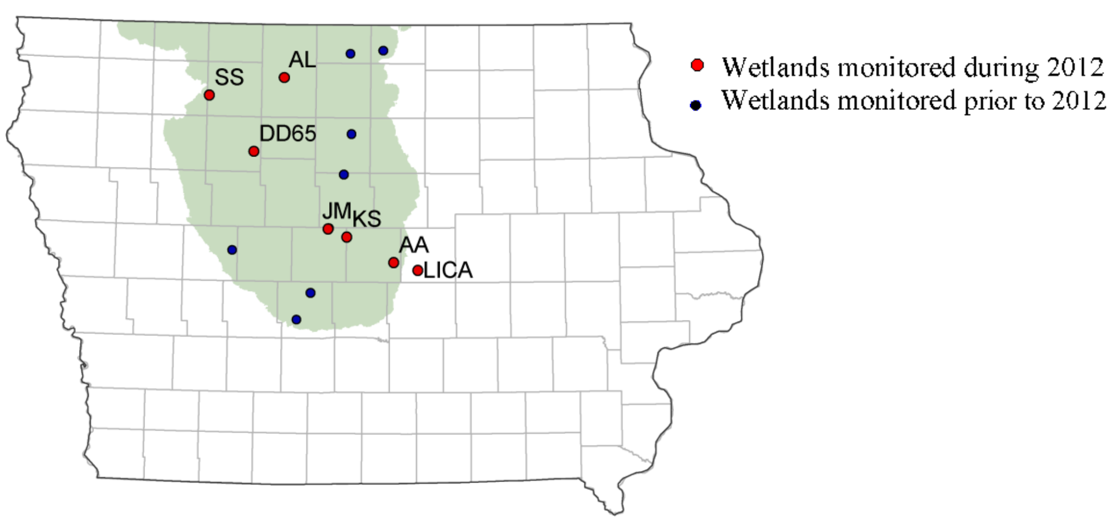

Figure 1. Wetlands monitored during 2012 and wetlands monitored during prior years and utilized for performance evaluation (see Figure 3).

Wetland inflow and/or outflow stations were instrumented with submerged area velocity (SAV) Doppler flow meters for continuous measurement of flow velocity. The SAV measurements were combined with cross-sectional channel profiles and stream depth to calculate discharge as the product of velocity and wetted cross-sectional area. Wetland water levels were monitored continuously using stage recorders in order to calculate pool volume, wetland area, and discharge at outflow structures. The pool discharge equations and SAV based discharge measurements were calibrated using manual velocity-area based discharge measurements collected during weekly site visits during prior monitoring years. Manual velocity-area discharge measurements were determined using the mid-section method whereby the stream depth is determined at 10 cm intervals across the stream and the water velocity is measured at the midpoint of each interval. Velocity was measured with a hand held Sontek Doppler water velocity probe using the 0.6 depth method where the velocity at 0.6 of the depth from the surface is taken as the mean velocity for the interval. The product of the interval velocity and area is summed over intervals to give the discharge.

Wetland bathymetry data were used to characterize wetland volume and area as functions of wetland depth. Because bathymetry data have not been obtained for the DD65, LICA, or SS wetlands, volume and area versus depth relationships generalized from those wetlands having bathymetry data were used for modeling purposes. These bathymetric relationships were used in numeric modeling of water budgets and nitrate mass balances to estimate nitrate loss, hydraulic loading, and residence times. Wetland water temperatures were recorded continuously for numerical modeling of nitrate loss.

Despite significant variation with respect to nitrate concentration and loading rates, the wetlands display similar seasonal patterns. Nitrate concentrations are generally low to moderate during the winter, but flow is generally low so that mass loading is typically low during the winter. The 2011-2012 winter was relatively dry and no winter flow was observed at the AL, JM, and SS wetlands while winter flow was very low at the other wetlands (Figure 2). The spring melt often results in increased flow during late February or March but nitrate concentrations in the melt water and associated surface runoff are typically low to moderate. During 2012, nitrate concentrations increase to their highest levels during increased flow periods in spring and early summer, and generally declined with declining flow in June to July. No flow into or out of any of the wetlands monitored was observed between mid-July and the end of 2012. A nitrate concentration decline is sometimes observed during very high summer flow events and is thought to be associated with surface runoff having low nitrate concentration. In contrast, the spring and summer of 2012 were generally dry, and an increase in concentration was occasionally observed in conjunction with an increase in flow – this is thought to be associated with a flushing of nitrate stored in the soil as water moves through the subsurface to the tile system. These nitrate concentration and flow patterns are consistent with those of CREP wetlands monitored in prior years and represent the likely patterns for future wetlands restored as part of the Iowa CREP.

Nitrate Loss from Wetlands

Mass balance analysis and modeling were used to calculate observed and predicted nitrate removal for each wetland. Inflow and outflow nitrate concentrations for the wetlands are illustrated in Figure 2. In addition, Figure 2 shows the range of outflow concentrations predicted for these wetlands by mass balance modeling using 2012 water budget, wetland water temperature, and nitrate concentration as model inputs.

The monitored wetlands generally performed as expected with respect to nitrate removal efficiency (percent removal) and mass nitrate removal (expressed as kg N ha^{-1} $year^{-1}$). Wetland performance is a function of hydraulic loading rate, hydraulic efficiency, nitrate concentration, temperature, and wetland condition. Of these, hydraulic loading rate and nitrate concentration are especially important for CREP wetlands. The range in hydraulic loading rates expected for CREP wetlands is significantly greater than would be expected based on just the four fold range in wetland/watershed area ratio approved for the Iowa CREP. In addition to spatial variation in precipitation (average precipitation declines from southeast to northwest across Iowa), there is tremendous annual variation in precipitation. The combined effect of these factors means that annual loading rates to CREP wetlands can be expected to vary by more than an order of magnitude, and will to a large extent determine nitrate loss rates for individual wetlands.

Mass balance modeling was used to estimate the variability in performance of CREP wetlands that would be expected due to spatial and temporal variability in temperature and precipitation patterns. The percent nitrate removal expected for CREP wetlands was estimated based on hindcast modeling over the 1980 through 2005 period (Figure 3). For comparison, percent nitrate removal measured for wetlands monitored during 2004 to 2012 illustrates reasonably good correspondence between observed and modeled performance. In Figure 3, the average hydraulic loading rate for observed wetlands was calculated to include only those days having inflow and hence, nitrate loading, to the wetland.

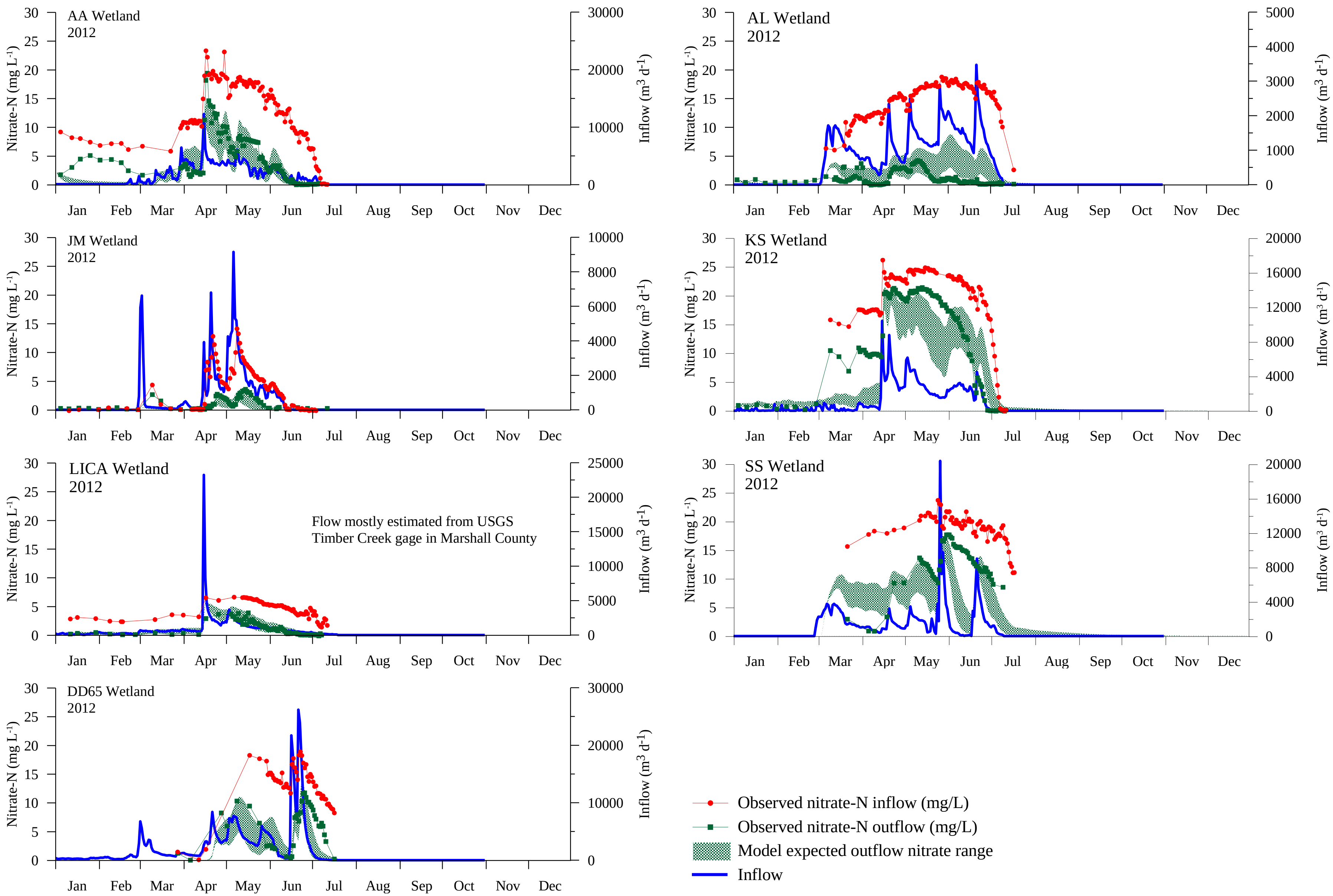

Figure 2. Measured and modeled nitrate concentrations and flows for wetlands monitored during 2012.

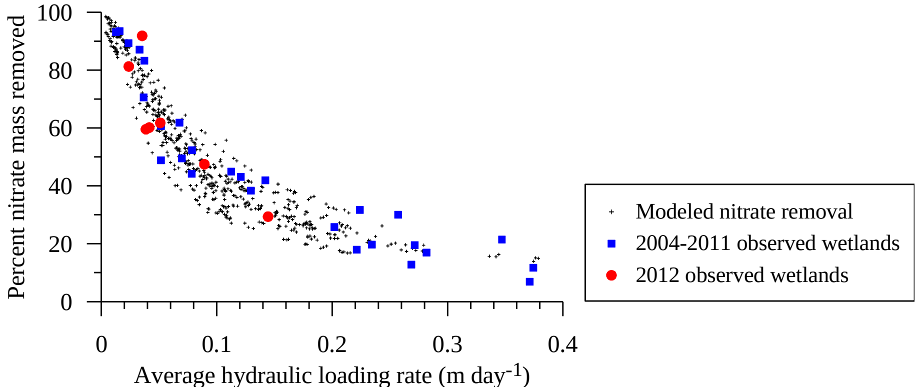

Figure 3. Modeled nitrate removal efficiencies for CREP wetlands based on 1980 to 2005 input conditions and measured nitrate removal efficiencies for CREP wetlands during 2004 to 2012.

Mass nitrate removal rates can vary considerably more than percent nitrate removal among wetlands receiving similar hydraulic loading rates. However, mass removal rates are predictable using models that integrate the effects of hydraulic loading rates, nitrate concentration, temperature, and wetland condition. Crumpton et al. (2006) developed and applied a model that explicitly incorporates hydraulic loading rate, nitrate concentration, and temperature to predict performance of US Corn Belt wetlands receiving nonpoint source nitrate loads. This analysis included comparisons for 38 “wetland years” of available data (12 wetlands with 1-9 years of data each) for sites in Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa, including four IA CREP wetlands (2 low load and 2 high load sites). The analysis demonstrated that the performance of wetlands representing a broad range of loading and loss rates can be reconciled by models explicitly incorporating hydraulic loading rates and nitrate concentrations (Crumpton et al. 2006, 2008). This model will be updated to include the 2004 to 2012 Iowa CREP wetlands and exclude wetlands smaller than the 2.5 acre minimum size required by Iowa CREP criteria.

References

Crumpton, W.G., G.A Stenback, B.A. Miller, and M.J. Helmers. 2006. Potential benefits of wetland filters for tile drainage systems: Impact on nitrate loads to Mississippi River subbasins. US Department of Agriculture, CSREES project completion report. Washington, D.C. USDA CSREES.

Crumpton, W.G., Kovacic, D., Hey, D., and Kostel, J., 2008. Potential of wetlands to reduce agricultural nutrient export to water resources in the Corn Belt. pp. 29-42 in Gulf Hypoxia and Local Water Quality Concerns Workshop, ASABE Pub #913C0308.