

2023 - 2024
ANNUAL REPORT



BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH USER FEEDBACK

Published July 1, 2024

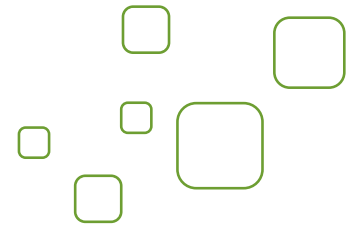
IOWA 
LAND RECORDS

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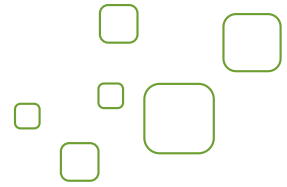


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Message From The ESS Coordinating Committee Chair



We are pleased to present the Iowa Land Records Annual Report for this transformative year. Despite the challenges posed by the national economy, our commitment to user satisfaction and innovation has enabled us to lay the groundwork for significant advancements in the coming years. We reflect on how we have successfully navigated this landscape to improve our services and shape the future of land records in Iowa.

Over the past year, our team has diligently worked to improve and modernize our Search and Electronic Submission systems. This effort was highlighted by a comprehensive survey in which 542 users and other stakeholders shared their insights and experiences. Their feedback will be instrumental in guiding our strategic direction and ensuring that our services align with our users' evolving needs.

By embracing the feedback from our user survey and committing to a future-forward approach, Iowa Land Records is poised to set new benchmarks in our services. We remain dedicated to harnessing the power of technology and innovation to meet the evolving needs of our users.

As we move forward, we are excited to continue this path of innovation and excellence, always with the goal of providing better and more consistent services to our users and stakeholders.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership.

Sincerely,

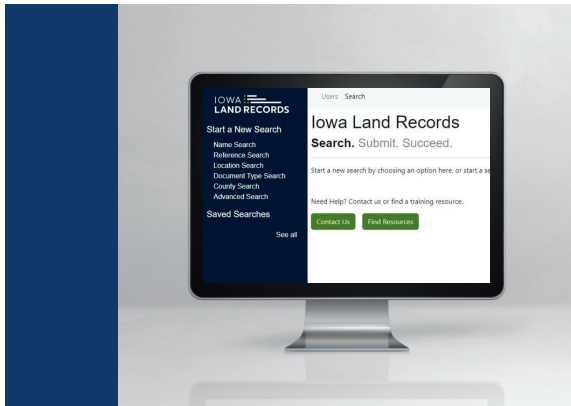
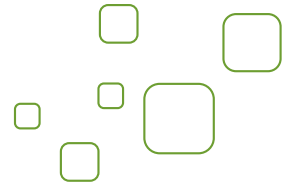
Electronic Services System Coordinating Committee Chair
Wapello County Recorder



LISA KENT
ESS Coordinating
Committee Chair

“
Iowa Land Records stands out as a leading innovator in land record management across the nation, a distinction that Iowans can be proud of.
”

About Iowa Land Records



What is Iowa Land Records?

Established in 2004 through legislation with the Iowa County Recorders Association, Iowa Land Records (ILR) was a groundbreaking initiative to centralize and digitize land records management across the state. In its first decade, the platform expanded significantly, integrating electronic recording capabilities and enhancing user accessibility.

Iowa Land Records (ILR) quickly became an essential resource providing free online public access to real estate records for real estate professionals, government agencies, and the public. Continuously evolving to meet technological advancements and user needs, ILR has embraced feedback from various stakeholder surveys, leading to the adoption of advanced search functionalities and improved system integration.

Despite facing challenges like high inflation and increased operational costs, ILR has remained a stable and reliable platform. We are grateful to our team members, our platform users, and the County Recorders Association for their continued dedication and support.

SEARCH. SUBMIT. SUCCEED.



23 MILLION RECORDS

There are over 23 million public records on Iowa Land Records.



62% ALL DOCUMENTS

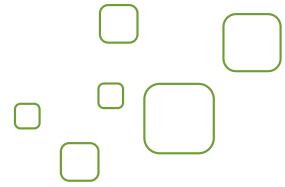
Over 62% of all land records in Iowa in 2023 were recorded electronically.



4 MILLION SEARCHES

There are over 4 million searches on Iowa Land Records each YEAR.

Iowa Land Records Governance



Iowa Land Records was established under **Chapter 28E** to provide Iowa counties with an electronic services system for land record information, electronic recording and other services as amended by 2021 Iowa Acts, Chapter 126, Section 2. See also, https://iowalandrecords.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/SOS-Filing_28E.pdf.

Committees and subcommittees meet regularly and are open to the public. All committee members and the Electronic Services System (ESS) team can be found on the Iowa Land Records website at <https://iowalandrecords.org/meet-our-team/>.



Coordinating Committee

was established to govern ESS and coordinate efforts to deliver services and information and to make policy regarding the operations of ESS. The committee is comprised of recorders and stakeholders.



Subcommittees (Finance & Standards)

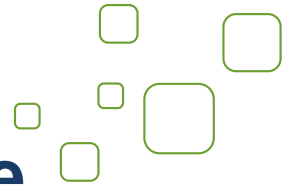
were established for more specific discussions. Each subcommittee is composed of members from the six districts of the statewide Iowa County Recorders Association.

Electronic Services System is governed by Iowa Code 331.604

- Establishing and implementing standards for recording, processing, and archiving electronic documents and records.
- Maintaining the statewide internet site and the county land record information system.
- Integrating information contained in documents and records maintained by the recorder and other land record information from other sources with the county land record information system.
- Implementing and maintaining a process for redacting Personal Identifiable Information contained in electronic documents that are displayed for public access through an internet site or that are transferred to another person.

See Section 331.604, subsection 3b of the Iowa Code and the ESS Policies and Procedures published at <https://iowalandrecords.org/accountability-in-reporting/>. The 28E agreement can be found under filing number: M514302, published at <https://sos.iowa.gov/search/28ESearch.html>.

Iowa Land Records ESS Coordinating Committee & ESS Team



ESS Coordinating Committee

- **Lindsay Laufersweiler**, District 1 - Webster County Recorder
- **Denise Baker**, District 2 - Wright County Recorder
- **Jolynn Goodchild**, District 3 - Plymouth County Recorder
- **Jamie Stargell**, District 4 - Adams County Recorder
- **Natalie Steffener**, District 5 - Des Moines County Recorder
- **Melissa Bahnsen**, District 6 - Cedar County Recorder
- **Julie Haggerty**, Large County Representative - Polk County Recorder
- **Lisa Kent**, ESS Coordinating Committee Chair - Wapello County Recorder

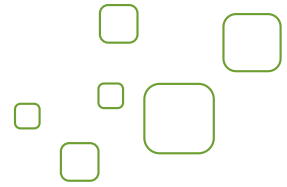


ESS Team

- **Phil Dunshee**, Project Manager
- **Lisa Long**, Customer Service & Account Manager
- **Kelly Wallace**, Technical Lead
- **Merna Addison**, Application Developer & Technical Support Coordinator
- **Mansi Agarwal**, Senior Software Developer
- **Census Lo-Liyong**, Policy Coordinator
- **Samantha McMahon**, Accounting Coordinator
- **Kristen Delaney-Cole**, Marketing & Communications Coordinator
- **Corrie Strasser**, Customer Support Coordinator



Local Service Providers & ILR



The success of Iowa Land Records relies on a unique relationship between county recorders and multiple service providers. Documents recorded are transferred by local service providers to ILR through an application programming interface (API) provided by the Electronic Services System (ESS). Over the past year, many service providers updated their systems to better integrate with Iowa Land Records.

Electronic Services System is updating the two application programming interfaces (APIs) for E-Submission and county upload functions. In building these new assets, we have transformed the Iowa Land Records (Search and E-Submission) site into a more advanced system that will open new opportunities for the future.

Local Service Providers



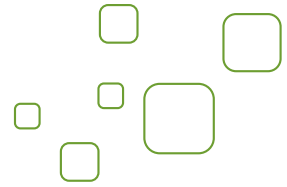
Electronic Filing Workflow



Business & Government Functions Performed Through ESS API:

- ESS makes use of two APIs (county E-Submission and county upload) to communicate with counties through their service providers.
- An API is a mechanism that facilitates communication between two systems, in this case, each county and Iowa Land Records.
- An API allows two programs to talk to each other.
- E-Submission API is used to share online submitted documents with the county recorder for review.
- County upload API is used to transfer correctly formatted data and images of recorded documents from the county recorder site to the ILR website.

Iowa Land Records User Survey



Creating the Survey

Since its creation almost twenty years ago, Iowa Land Records has seen its operations significantly impacted by increasing demand for enhanced services, high inflation, and rising costs. To prepare for these challenges, Iowa Land Records initiated the Stakeholder Modernization survey to measure user opinion on services and to help prioritize updates.

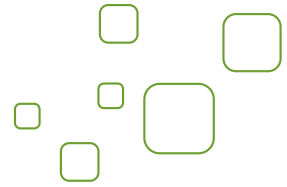
The project, established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Iowa County Recorders Association and Electronic Services System, created working groups and subcommittees to engage with various interest groups.

The plan included a stakeholder survey focusing on:

- Recording Fees.
- Enhancements to the E-Submission Application.
- Enhancements to the Land Record Search Application.
- Policy Changes to Recording Services.
- Concepts for Recording Modernization.



Industries Represented In The Survey



About Survey Participants

A total of 542 users participated in the survey, encompassing a diverse group of professionals including attorneys, abstractors, surveyors, engineers, lenders, bankers, realtors, and many other stakeholders. The complete report offers detailed rankings for modernization ideas and includes an appendix with all of the open-ended comments from survey participants.

Survey Methodology

The survey collected feedback from users of the Iowa Land Records (ILR) system and other stakeholders. Participants ranked the importance of proposed ideas as “not important,” “important,” “very important,” or “no opinion.” Many respondents also answered open-ended questions about the land records search process, search display results, electronic filing, accessibility, fees, and additional comments. All responses were recorded and summarized in a detailed report online at <https://iowalandrecords.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Modernization-Survey-Report-06.05.2024.pdf>.



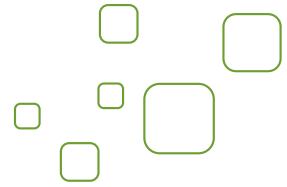
**READ THE
SURVEY REPORT**

MODERNIZATION SURVEY

Search Services – Recording Services – Recording Fees

June 5, 2024
Iowa County Records Association | Electronic Services System

Top 5 Priorities Identified In Survey Results



Note: At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked to identify themselves as a user of Search, E-Submission, or both applications on the Iowa Land Records system. A portion of the survey focused on the functionalities and user experience of the Search Application and another section of the survey focused on services in the E-Submission Application. The top-ranked ideas, or “most important,” are listed below.

Search Application - Top 5 “Most Important” Ideas

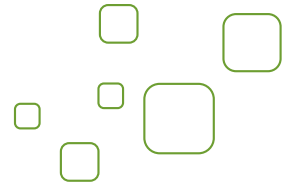


- Normalize records across 99 counties.
- Expand online records to include historical property records dating back to 1980.
- Reconnect Iowa Land Records to other land records systems.
- Digitize and index historical surveys, corner certificates, and other property drawings.
- Expand use of associated document references and improve parsed location data.

E-Submission Application - Top 5 “Most Important” Ideas



- Clear communication between document submitters and county recorders.
- Support efficient and consistent document processing practices.
- Support the law prohibiting Personal Identifiable Information (PII) in documents.
- Policy for documents to be legible.
- Prefer all counties use a standard reference numbering system.



Survey Summary

Feedback Highlights

Key Findings



- **Data Integrity:** Emphasis on the importance of indexed documents and consistency across the state.



- **System Integration and Accessibility:** Strong support for better integration with other property information systems and more records online.



- **User Experience:** Need for improvements in user interface, search functionality, and transparent communication regarding submission status.



- **Consistency Across Counties:** Call for standardized procedures for recording and land records management across the 99 counties.



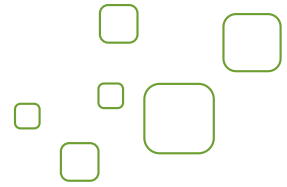
- **Fee Structure:** Broad agreement on the need for fee increases, provided there is clear communication about fund utilization and service enhancements.

User Feedback Summary

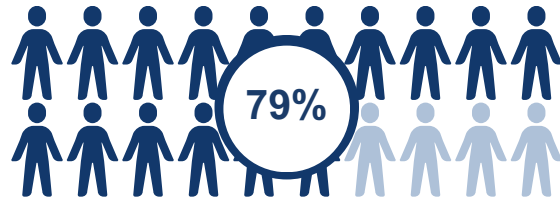
Most respondents appreciated the recent improvements to the ILR website (Search and E-Submission) and strongly supported integrating the ILR system to other property systems. However, there was a noted need for more user training content.



Fee Increase Response & Survey Conclusion



“Would you be willing to support a reasonable increase in the recording fee, if it is less than the inflation amount since 1985?”



Result: Survey participants were asked if they would be “willing to support a reasonable increase in the recording fee, if it is less than the inflation amount since 1985?” 79% of the respondents to this question answered “Yes”.



“Many of the possible improvements mentioned in this survey will require additional resources, a portion of which would be obtained through a reasonable recording fee increase. For the ideas you identified as being Very Important, would you consider a recording fee increase to be a good investment?”



Result: Participants were also asked “would you consider a recording fee increase to be a good investment?” 83% of the respondents to this question answered “Yes”.

Survey Conclusion

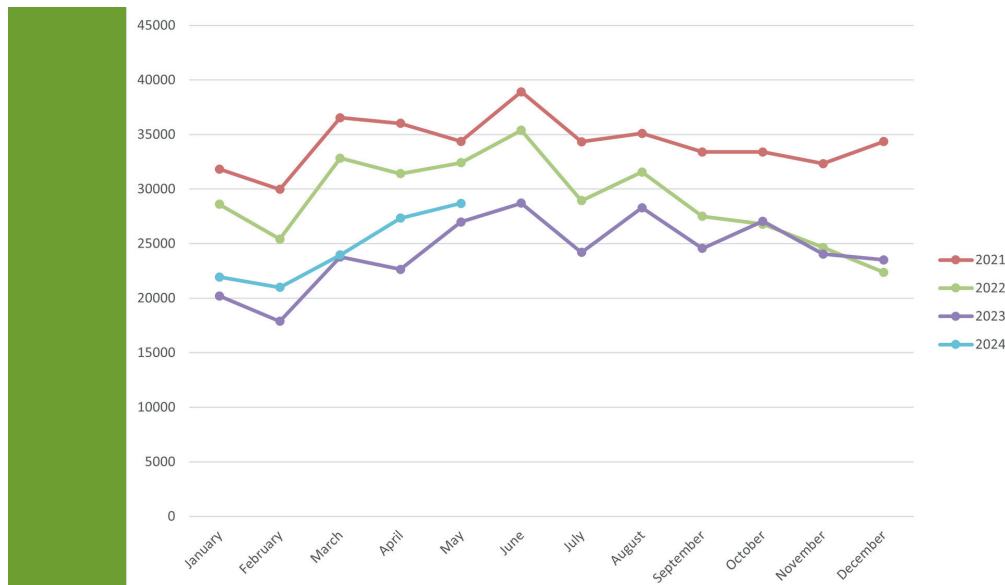
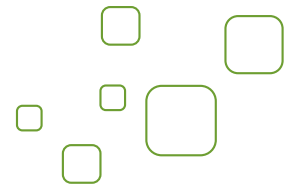


The survey results indicate strong support for various improvements to the Iowa Land Records system, focusing on enhanced data consistency, integration, access, and privacy.

Stakeholders are particularly interested in technological advancements for more efficient and secure recording processes. There is also significant support for a reasonable recording fee increase, provided it is managed with accountability and transparency to improve local recording and Iowa Land Records services.

By The Numbers

E-Submission Trends



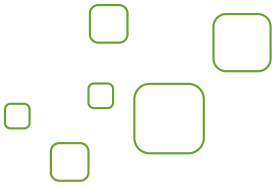
This chart illustrates Electronic Submissions on Iowa land Records and economic trends from January of 2021 through May of 2024.



In 2023, the real estate market experienced significant challenges due to high inflation, rising interest rates, increased housing costs, and a general slowdown in market activity. The Federal Reserve's multiple interest rate hikes aimed at controlling inflation resulted in higher borrowing costs, negatively impacting the profitability of new developments and reducing the volume of real estate investments.

According to the Iowa Realtor Association, the Iowa housing market saw a notable decline in activity, with home sales dropping by 15.2% from the previous year, totaling 32,441 homes sold in 2023 compared to 38,266 in 2022. Despite the slowdown in sales, home prices in Iowa continued to rise, with the median sales price increasing by 6.8% to \$220,000. Low inventory and high interest rates were key factors contributing to the slower market. To ensure the long-term financial stability of the Electronic Services System, fee increases may be considered in 2025 to address these ongoing challenges and maintain service quality.

Audit Report Summary



The Electronic Services System (ESS) is audited by an independent auditor at the end of each fiscal year to provide a comprehensive review of ESS's financial performance and internal controls. The 2023 audit was performed by an independent audit firm in accordance with Generally Accepted Auditing Standards (GAAS) and was successfully concluded.

Annual Audit	Year Ending 12/31/2023	
	2023	2022
Total Revenue	\$33,975,365	\$41,519,072
Total Expense	\$34,066,959	\$41,306,941

In 2023, ESS saw significant declines in financial metrics. Total revenues fell by 18.2% (\$7,543,707) and expenses by 17.5% (\$7,239,982), mainly due to reduced recording activity and distributions. Documents processed decreased by 16.09% (55,991 documents) to 291,909. However, electronic filings statewide increased from 60% in 2022 to 62% in 2023, continuing the trend of increased E-submissions from the previous year.

Several economic factors influenced these results. The decline in revenue and cash position is attributed to inflation and higher mortgage interest rates, which have weakened the economy and significantly impacted the real estate market.

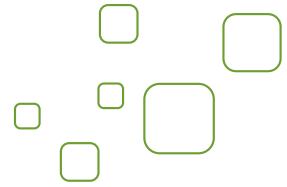
In 2023, ESS received \$28,446,716 in recording fees, an 18% decrease from the previous year. Point-of-Sale (POS) revenue also saw a 17.5% decrease from the previous year.

Additionally, cash balances were impacted by the planned expenditure of resources from a Software Development and Equipment Maintenance Reserve fund. In 2023, more than \$270,000 in reserve funds were invested in software development to enhance services provided through ESS software.

However, these gains were offset by persistent economic challenges, which now seem to be the new normal. Income will fluctuate with market conditions.

The audit report also highlighted ESS's internal control and compliance aspects, which were found to be satisfactory with no significant deficiencies or noncompliance issues. ESS remains committed to adapting to these challenges and exploring avenues for financial stability in the future.

The Future Of Iowa Land Records



Insight To Impact: Building The Future With User Feedback

The cornerstone of Iowa Land Records' success has been its commitment to user-centered development. Feedback from users has driven our continuous improvements. Over the years, Search and E-Submission services have adopted numerous user-suggested enhancements, such as:

- **New E-Submission and Search Interface:** Most recently, we simplified navigation and customized search options based on user recommendations to improve the overall experience while creating a single sign-on for both Search and E-Submission services.
- **Redaction Implementation:** Over a decade ago, a comprehensive redaction system was created so that every document is inspected for Personally Identifiable Information and redacted before posting online.
- **Expanded Support:** Offering comprehensive support resources, including tutorials and customer service, to assist users in maximizing Iowa Land Records.

User feedback has not only shaped the technical evolution of the platform but has also influenced its services. Regular user surveys, feedback forums, and focus group testing for new features have been integral in aligning our services with the needs and expectations of its diverse user base.

As it steps into the future, Iowa Land Records remains dedicated to upholding the values that have defined its journey—transparency, efficiency, and a steadfast focus on serving the needs of Iowans. In the coming year, we look forward to celebrating 20 years of pioneering excellence in land records management with you.

MEETING & FINANCIAL REPORTS

Governance meetings and financial reports are public. Meeting recordings, agendas and packets are available on the ILR website in addition to financial information.
<https://iowalandrecords.org/accountability-in-reporting/>

SIGN UP FOR MEETING NOTIFICATIONS

Individuals may sign up for email notices and reminders about future committee meetings.
<https://iowalandrecords.org/meeting-notice/>

THANK YOU!





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