

IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

Protecting and restoring Iowa's land, water and wildlife.



Heritage in the Hills
A donation in the Loess Hills
instills the heritage of the site. **10**

Looking Back, Looking Forward
Preserving the natural and
archaeological treasures. **14**

Iowa's Snowbirds
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INHF Land Acknowledgement:

As a land trust it is important for us to continuously acknowledge and understand the full scope of history that has brought us to reside on, protect and steward this land. The land between two rivers is home to many indigenous people, historically and today. We acknowledge the value of indigenous communities and work to honor them on the land.



ON THE COVER

A pair of ermine (*Mustela erminea*) peek through the snow in northeast Iowa. Ermine, a member of the weasel family, make their home in bottomland forests. Ermine are dark in warmer months and turn white with a black tip on their tail in the winter.

Photo by John Ford



Protecting and restoring Iowa's land, water and wildlife.

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Planning and partnerships lead to good conservation

Over the years, I've learned from hard experience that getting outdoors to enjoy nature, especially in winter, takes planning and preparation. It helps to have the right clothing, gear, and mindset. This intentionality is also what it takes to make meaningful conservation projects happen in Iowa.

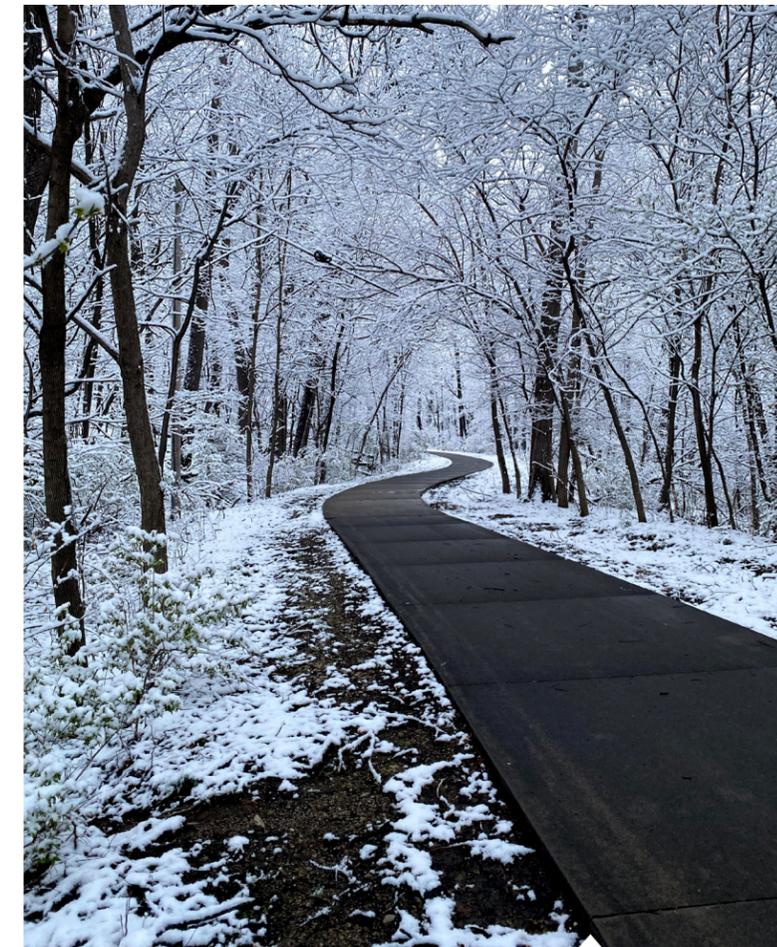


JOHN FISHER
INHF Board Chair

This is my eighth year as a member of the board of INHF, and I am halfway through my term as board chair. I have learned to appreciate the hard work our staff and board do to plan and complete conservation projects that often take years to finish. But we couldn't do it alone.

I value the role partnerships play in making our work possible. Landowners, volunteers and other organizations and donors are all vital partners in our mission to protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife. The results of our work are always rewarding, but the teamwork it takes to get these results and the relationships we build along the way make it even more meaningful.

A great example is a project on which we are currently working; the purchase of the Little Sioux Scout Ranch (LSSR) in the Loess Hills. At almost 1,800 acres, it is the largest land purchase in INHF history. The camp is one of the largest privately owned natural areas in the state and one of the few in Iowa that offers a sense of remote wilderness. When the Mid-America Council of the Boy Scouts of America decided to sell the



property, they quickly reached out to INHF because they trusted us to honor their wish to open the Ranch to the public and ensure its longterm stewardship.

A snowy trail through Des Moines offers the perfect place for a hike on a winter morning.
Photo by Sydney Algreen-Hunter/INHF

It will likely take 3-5 years to complete the project. We will be actively fundraising to purchase the property and secure its permanent protection. We could not do it without the help of donors and organizations who will help us care for and honor the history of the LSSR.

We are grateful to all of you who have helped us accomplish so much together in 2022 for Iowa's land, water, wildlife and people. I'm looking forward to what we'll do together in 2023 and beyond. Thank you for your continued support — your partnership — in making our work possible.

Towering oaks covered in thick coats of leaves, bees zipping from flower to flower, birds tweeting songs that overlap with cicadas buzzing and crickets chirping in a symphony of life: Such liveliness is the hallmark of summer. Winter, by contrast, typically garners far less excitement, yet even in the depths of this underappreciated season, life blooms underneath snow and scurries among trees. Winter may be quieter, but it is by no means dead.

Look, over there! Bright red berries peek out beneath the frost, ready to serve as nutritious food during the winter months. Many mammals and birds don their winter attire, prepping to go about life as usual. Bluejays and cardinals, fluffed with heavier feathers but still popping with color, continue to frequent snow-covered backyards.

Listen, there! Something is rustling in the conifers—perhaps a rabbit, or maybe a mouse. Some organisms decrease their activity, yet ingenious adaptations allow them to continue going about life despite lower food availability. Squirrels and beavers, prepared for the season with stashes of nuts or twigs, venture out of their dens to withdraw food from these vital reserves.

Winter rewards the patient, diligent eye—the eye that recognizes life’s continual movement beneath the snow-covered ground and within the frost-covered trees.

As you observe the Iowa outdoors this winter, think about what life—what color—can be found despite the frigid temperatures. This place is not colorless. This place is not lifeless. Look, and listen.

— MACK SWENSON
Communications Intern



A bird’s beak can often lend clues to where the species may live and what they might eat. Northern cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) use their robust beaks to crack open hard shells and thus are often found at feeders. Photo by Ty Smedes

ON TO CONSTRUCTION

The last parcel in the nine-mile link between two of Iowa's biggest and most popular trails — the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail — has been transferred from INHF to Dallas County Conservation Board.

The needed corridor was secured piece by piece over the last seven years with help from donations, grants and willing landowners. Bridging the gap between Perry and Woodward, this extension of the High Trestle Trail will create a 120-mile continuous loop, transporting trail users between towns throughout central Iowa.

“This connection was a priority even before the ribbon was cut on the High Trestle Trail,” said Andrea Boulton, INHF Trails and Greenways Director. “The support this project received is a testimony to Iowans’ appreciation and desire for a dynamic statewide trail system.”

While Dallas County Conservation Board is still raising funds, most of the connection will be paved in 2023. The final section, just east of Bouton, is slated to be finished in 2024.

ADDITION TO NEAL SMITH NWR

As detailed in last winter's issue, INHF has a long history of working on additions to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge (NSNWR) in Jasper County. The last piece of a 700-acre addition INHF purchased from the Rothinghouse Trust in 2008 with the help of The Friends of NSNWR has finally transferred and is now officially part of the refuge, filling in a key inholding. This restored prairie will provide more of the contiguous habitat that is so critical for grassland birds and other native Iowa species.

2022 SNAPSHOT

 **900** volunteers at **40+** events, both familiar and new faces, gave their time and energy this year

 **325** acres were seeded with native mixes by the stewardship team

 **2,700+** hours were given by volunteers harvesting seeds, removing invasives and more

 **1,872** acres were burned by the stewardship team, helping to restore woodlands and prairies

UPCOMING EVENTS

WINTER WORKDAYS

JANUARY 12
Breen Prairie
Monticello

JANUARY 13
Alpha Fen
Waucoma

JANUARY 28
Perkins Prairie Preserve
Jefferson

FEBRUARY 11
Loess Hills
Turin

FEBRUARY 24
Snyder Heritage Farm
Elkhart

MARCH 1
Plymouth County
Sioux City

MARCH 4
Mathes
Pella

OTHER EVENTS

JANUARY 28
Iowa Bike Expo
Des Moines

MARCH 22
Gift to Iowa's Future Day
Des Moines

JUNE 25-29
North American Prairie Conference
Altoona

For more information, and more upcoming events, visit www.inhf.org/events



QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

A quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between **June-September, 2022.**

Newly protected areas

Allamakee County
47 acres of woodland and grassland near French Creek Wildlife Management Area southwest of New Albin. Having undergone restoration for the last 20 years, the property is home to a documented 104 bird species and 27 species of mammals, reptiles and amphibians. In addition to providing valuable wildlife habitat, protection of this property positively impacts the water quality of neighboring cold-water stream French Creek and the Upper Iowa River. (Conservation easement donated by William and Jean Ann Kern)

Big Marsh WMA Addition
142 acres of riparian woodland in the Big Marsh WMA complex near Dumont in Butler County. This key piece will allow for enhanced management, provide water quality benefits to the West Fork of the Cedar River and protect important floodplain. (Proposed public ownership)

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition
155 acres along the South Skunk River east of Elkhart with significant potential for wetland and prairie restoration. This addition expands on wildlife habitat, flood mitigation and water quality protections. (Proposed public ownership)

RRVT-HTT Connector
Critical trail corridor in Dallas County that will help link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail, two of Iowa's most popular multi-use trails. (Trail easement donated by Doug and Rhonda Volz)

Fremont County
81 acres adjacent to the Riverton Wildlife Management Area. Protects prairie, woodland floodplain and wetlands and adds onto a complex of existing public land. (Donated by Andrew Rasmussen, proposed public ownership)

Worth County
20 acres of grassland and remnant wetland near Northwood. Offers a variety of habitat for wetland species including sora and blue flag iris and builds on existing water quality protections in the area. (Proposed public ownership)

Wendel Prairie Preserve

113 acres nestled in the Loess Hills of Woodbury County. The remnant prairie will serve as a seed source for future restoration projects in the region. (Donated to INHF by Scott and Sandra Wendel. Will be owned and managed by INHF) *Read more about this protection story on page 10.

RRVT-HTT Connector

Nearly four acres of critical trail corridor in Dallas County — the last needed piece to link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail. (Proposed public ownership)

Land transfers to public partners

Woodbury County
109 acres of Little Sioux River bottom, steep uplands and mixed oak woodlands adjacent to Copeland Park and Sioux Bend WMA near Correctionville. Located in the world's second deepest deposit of loess soil, the restored prairie on its steep slopes will have a positive impact on the water quality of the adjacent river. (Owned and managed by Woodbury County Conservation)

Schaefer Wildlife Area
35 acres along Boylan Creek near Aredale. Expands outdoor recreation opportunities in northwest Butler County and provides quality habitat and floodplain protection. (Owned and managed by Butler County Conservation)

Coal Creek Marsh
136 acres adjacent to Red Rock WMA destined to be part of a 700-acre marsh complex. Restoration will provide excellent habitat for migrating waterfowl. (Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)

Prairie Creek Wildlife Area
80 acres of a future 390-acre complex near Renwick. Bisected by Prairie Creek, this wooded floodplain provides important habitat and resting areas for migrating waterfowl. Old oxbow channels offer habitat for Topeka Shiners (*Notropis topeka*), a federally endangered fish species. (Owned and managed by Humboldt County Conservation)

Hawk Valley WMA Addition

A 64-acre expansion of the existing WMA complex near Spencer. Protects a remnant sedge meadow wetland in the Little Sioux River watershed. (Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)

Lake Odessa WMA Addition

A 100-acre addition to a popular duck hunting area at the confluence of the Iowa River and Mississippi. Diamondback watersnakes (*Nerodia rhombifer*), a state-listed threatened species, call this riparian woodland home. (Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)

Goshen WMA Addition

99 acres south of the Chariton River near Derby. Builds on existing public land and outdoor recreation opportunities. An old oxbow channel consistently holds water, providing excellent habitat for a variety of reptiles, amphibians and birds. (Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition

348 acres along the South Skunk River near the north entrance of the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt complex. Floodplain grasslands provide significant water quality benefits and adds onto one of the largest contiguous blocks of habitat in the state. (Owned and managed by Polk County Conservation)

Middle Raccoon River WMA Addition

70 acres of mature and restored oak hickory woodland west of Redfield in Dallas County. Provides wildlife habitat, water quality benefits and improved access to adjacent public land. (Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)

RRVT-HTT Connector

Nearly four acres of critical trail corridor in Dallas County — the last needed piece to link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail. (Owned and managed by Dallas County Conservation)

Two Horse Farm

90 acres of carefully restored prairie and woodland near Coralville Lake with a rich cultural history. Provides water quality benefits, recreational opportunities and valuable wildlife habitat. (83 acres owned and managed by Johnson County Conservation; seven acres rematriated to the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska)

Longtime Fixture of ICCS Retires

BY ERICA PLACE
Communications Specialist | eplace@inhf.org

At the end of this year, Tom Hazelton will retire from his now 47-year career shaping the state's conservation professionals, natural resource legislation and county parks. His departure will leave a noticeable void.

"I would argue that the name "Tom Hazelton" is synonymous with Iowa's County Conservation System of today the way Ding Darling is synonymous with environmental cartoons and Aldo Leopold is synonymous with the concept of a Land Ethic," said Chris Lee, Des Moines County Conservation Executive Director.

Hazelton found leadership roles early on, serving on committees at local and statewide levels during his nearly 35-year stint as a Linn County Conservation Park Ranger and Special Programs Manager. He created the County Conservation Peace Officers Association, a professional development program for park rangers and the resources they protect. After spearheading a strategic planning effort that set the direction for Iowa's County Conservation System (ICCS), he stepped into the role of CEO following in the footsteps of Don Brazelton whose many years of dedication led to the passage of REAP and the Trust Fund.

"I consider myself very fortunate to have come along at a time when most of the original pioneers and leaders of the young county conservation board system were still in place, providing this young lad the privilege to actually engage with and learn from an awesome array of mentors," Hazelton reflected. "It has been a true honor to build upon the incredible work ethic and accomplishments from those who have gone before — cementing our resolve that we don't have to do this by ourselves."

Working behind the scenes to coordinate the state's 99 county conservation boards as one strong organization, it's clear he places strong importance on people and relationships. Hazelton has facilitated connections between Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and local county



Tom Hazelton in his early days as a park ranger with Linn County Conservation. Photos provided by Tom Hazelton

conservation boards, which INHF works with to create more parks, trails and wildlife areas.

Helping to shape and implement ideas like Travel Iowa's 99 Parks campaign(s), mycountyparks.com and county park "selfie stations," there are signs of Hazelton everywhere. Perhaps the greatest contributions are in his advocacy work. "He immediately recognized the [Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation] Trust Fund as the game-changer for outdoor recreation and natural environments in Iowa," said Dan Cohen, Buchanan County Conservation Director.



"It has been a true honor to build upon the incredible work ethic and accomplishments from those who have gone before — cementing our resolve that we don't have to do this by ourselves."

Hazelton built support for the still-unfunded Trust Fund through a variety of initiatives. His creation of an Unmet Needs document, detailing what shovel-ready projects could be completed if the Trust Fund is funded, continues to be an important messaging piece in conversations with community leaders and legislators. He may have retired sooner, but decided to work for "one more year" multiple times because he wanted to see legislation passed to fund the Trust. Along with INHF President Joe McGovern, Hazelton has served as co-chair for the REAP Alliance, a group of organizations advocating for the state's Resource Enhancement and Protection Program.

In reality, much of what makes the county conservation system what it is today is owed to Hazelton. "Tom has been one of the most impactful people I have known associated with county conservation," said Roger Kean, Scott County Conservation Executive Director.

We congratulate Hazelton on this very well-deserved achievement. His steadfast leadership in conservation in Iowa and legacy of connecting people with the outdoors is sure to continue in the new capacity that retirement brings.

Adam Shirley, current Executive Director for Mitchell County Conservation, will take over as CEO for ICCS. Shirley was a land stewardship intern with INHF in the summer of 2009.



No Boundaries for Nature

BY HEATHER JOBST
Senior Land Conservation Director | hjobst@inhf.org

Nature does not adhere to human-created boundaries. What happens on the land in one state can have a direct impact on land and water in another state. That means that sometimes Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) has to work outside the geographic boundaries of our home state to do what's best for the resource.

This is particularly true for the upper end of Iowa's Great Lakes. Big Spirit Lake lies along the northern Iowa border with much of its watershed in Minnesota. Recently, INHF joined forces with Pheasants Forever and other partners to protect land in Minnesota, knowing it has a direct impact on one of Iowa's highest quality lakes.

The 197-acre property drains directly into Big Spirit Lake, transporting soil and nutrients with every rain. The site is also just north of INHF's Wallace & Bowers Nature Area and North Shore Project, where we have restored wetlands, planted prairie buffers and worked with tenant farmers to plant perennial vegetation and cover crops.



"I have watched this property flood almost every spring and it is trying to be the wetland it once was," said Joe Ulman, Spirit Lake Protective Association board member. After long being on the minds of many conservation groups, an opportunity to protect and restore this place presented itself. It would require working together across state lines.

INHF provided financial support for Minnesota Pheasants Forever to acquire the property with additional assistance from many other organizations. "The amount of collaboration on this project is incredible," said Eran Sandquist, project lead and Minnesota Pheasants Forever state coordinator. "Many groups are working across state lines." Following restoration, the property will ultimately be transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

In three to five years, what is now a regularly flooded crop field will be restored to what it once was: a 111-acre wetland surrounded by prairie. It will again offer vital waterfowl habitat and provide important water quality improvements by filtering runoff before it enters Big Spirit Lake.

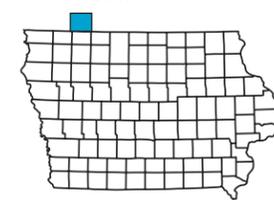
This isn't the first time INHF has worked across state lines. For example, INHF holds a conservation easement on the Sodalis Nature Preserve in Hannibal, Missouri. The site is home to an abandoned mine that houses a large population of endangered Indiana bats, many of whom migrate far into Iowa.

And in a concept that has been proven throughout INHF's history, we're again accomplishing more by working together.

"What is so fun about this project is that every partner truly wants to work together to be successful," said Mark Gulick, Iowa DNR's northwest wildlife district supervisor.

Aerial views looking south toward Big Spirit Lake over the Black Rock project make it clear this land was originally a wetland. Photo by Emily Martin/INHF

Black Rock
Minnesota



LAND: 197-acres just north of Big Spirit Lake

PARTNERS: Minnesota Pheasants Forever, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Spirit Lake Protective Association, INHF

SPECIAL FEATURES: Restoration of a 111-acre wetland and surrounding prairie will provide significant water quality benefits to Big Spirit Lake and habitat for waterfowl

Update on The Narrows Preserve

Opened to the public in 2022, The Narrows Preserve is 50 acres of undeveloped land along the shores of East Okoboji. INHF is committed to restoring these acres in the best interest of the land, water, wildlife and people.

Two grants will fund initial restoration efforts to maximize water quality benefits and create optimal wildlife habitat.

Restoration projects will include removal of undergrowth and non-native trees to promote new oak growth while encouraging diverse prairie plants to bloom in the understorey.

INHF plans to hold an open house to present the restoration plan to the public next summer.

Heritage in the Hills

Loess Hills remnant prairie to be protected forever

BY MACK SWENSON
Communications Intern

Tens of thousands of years ago, winds lifted grains of silt and sand from the Missouri River valley and deposited them on the river's eastern bank. The resulting hills, which have been further shaped by the eroding force of water, are only found to such depth and extent along a 200-mile stretch of the Missouri River in Iowa and in certain regions of China.

Now, these rolling hills along the state's western border contain much of Iowa's remaining remnant prairie—land that has never been plowed or developed—of which there is less than one-tenth of 1 percent left. A piece of that remnant prairie near Sioux City and Sergeant Bluff, on the northern end of the Loess Hills, will now be protected thanks to the generous donation of Scott and Sandra Wendel, of Waterloo, Nebraska.

Their 113 acres of Loess Hills remnant prairie near the Sioux City metro is a gift that will bear fruit—in a literal and figurative sense—throughout the region. Seeds from the Wendels' remnant prairie will be used in future prairie plantings and restoration projects.

The gift property lies off Old Highway 141 along Whiskey Creek near Bronson and spans west for a mile to Carroll Avenue along the front range of the Loess Hills. Recently the Wendel corn crib, built in 1959, a familiar landmark along Old Highway 141, blew down in a storm last December.

Morning sunlight makes the hills glow at Wendel Prairie Preserve
Photo by Erica Place/INHF



“I grew up in these hills, herding cattle on horseback. Those memories are what life is about, and our family is honored to preserve this precious footprint forever through the Foundation.”

– SCOTT WENDEL

the prairie grasses and creatures living there.

When their hills were threatened by unwanted development in the early 2000s, the couple commissioned a biological survey of the land. The botanists and entomologists from Briar Cliff University came back with a phenomenal review, demonstrating to the couple the biological rarity of this land.

“We didn’t realize how rich this hill was in wildlife, rare wildflowers and insects until we had that assessment,” Sandra said.

Consistent with the assessment, a brief hike by INHF staff identified over 58 native prairie plants in one day—a number expected to grow after management efforts like prescribed fire.

“This property will be a great stewardship asset for a seed source, as well as housing a diverse biological community for all of our wildlife,” said Loess Hills Land Stewardship Director Kody Wohlers. The prairie is high quality and features minimal encroachment from undesirable brush or invasive trees like Eastern red cedars.

“Families like the Wendels, that are thinking about what this property will be in 50 or 100 years, are the people that make the work of INHF possible,” said the organization’s president Joe McGovern. “Conservation in Iowa happens when people care about the next generation of people, plants and animals.”

Although the land will not be open to the public, Wohlers said INHF plans to host volunteer events on the property where people can help to harvest native prairie seed. Educational events, nature hikes, bird surveys, and research are also possibilities.

Permanent protection of this property ensures this precious prairie is never developed.

Last but certainly not least, the donation adds to a legacy of protected lands in the Loess Hills that keeps building acre by acre, hill by hill — almost like the way a trillion grains of sand are molded into an awe-inspiring natural mandala by ancient winds. 🌿

Sunrise views at Wendel Prairie Preserve highlight the red-tinted little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) covering the rolling hills that define the property. Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and a small grove of cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) trees also add interest to the fall prairie. Top photo Joe Jayjack/INHF, right photo Sydney Algreen-Hunter/INHF

Prairie enthusiast, conservationist and INHF supporter Glenn Pollock planted a seed when he approached the Wendels about considering protecting the remnant prairie that overshadowed the lower settling basin of corn and bean fields. Prior to that conversation, the couple was unaware of INHF and the possibility of donating their land. But that seed took root four years later when the Wendels were ready to part ways with the land—a testament to the power of advocates like Pollock.

Scott learned about the rarity of the Loess Hills when he was a young adult, and he recalls feeling a sense of pride that his family lived and farmed on this land. Traversing the land mainly by horse, Scott would ride to the top of the ridge and gaze out at Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota. This view, as well as the hills’ unique east-west orientation, distinguishes the property even from other Loess Hills prairie.

Scott’s grandfather purchased large expanses of contiguous farmland clustered around the original homestead that included the Loess Hills front range, starting in 1912. The farm was designated a Century Farm by the State of Iowa in 2012. The original operation once spanned over 2,000 acres where Scott’s grandfather, Vern, and his father, Al, farmed and raised cattle and hogs along with crops to feed the livestock.

The Loess Hills gift property will be known as the Wendel Prairie Preserve.

After attending college at the University of Iowa, Scott and Sandra settled in Omaha. However, even while away, the property held a special place in Scott’s heart.

“I grew up in these hills, herding cattle on horseback. Those memories are what life is about, and our family is honored to preserve this precious footprint forever through the Foundation,” Scott said.

On a recent trip to harvest seed on the hills, he fondly recalled a huge grove of cottonwoods on the west side of the cropland where the cattle that once grazed there would find shade. He recalls not so fondly the many hours baling hay and doing farm chores. Escape into the solemn hills provided boyhood distraction and still today an expansive vista unfolds among

Wendel Prairie Preserve

Woodbury County



LAND: 113 acres of remnant prairie in the Loess Hills

SPECIAL FEATURES: Diverse prairie vegetation, unique east-west orientation of Loess Hills, views of three states



LOOKING *back* looking FORWARD

Buckmaster CE
Allamakee County



LAND: 511 acres of remnant and carefully restored prairie and woodland, archeologically significant site

SPECIAL FEATURES: Offers impressive views of the Mississippi, provides sanctuary for timber rattlesnakes and other sensitive species and preserves a rich and cherished archeological history

BY MACK SWENSON
Communications Intern

What do you see when you look out over a landscape? Structural features like rivers and hills, or perhaps you notice the wildlife and plants that call it home?

What about history? Can you see the impacts of this land's early and recent inhabitants, or how geologic events have shaped its valleys and ridges?

On Capoli Bluff, you can. In fact, you can see a lot of things from Capoli. You can see the Mississippi River stretching off far beyond view, two states, an abundance of restored prairie and—if you know where and how to look—you'll see huge effigy mounds in the shapes of bears and falcons that Native

Americans constructed a thousand years ago. This was sacred land for the generations of people who lived here long before European settlement. Raleigh and Joey Buckmaster, who live here now, feel the same way.

"My father was fond of saying, 'live where you want to—the rest will take care of itself.' That has turned out to be sage advice for our family. Living here has deepened our understanding and respect for this land and it's offerings," said Raleigh. "When we live with the natural world, we are absorbed and become one, as were the Mound Builders."

Recognizing the significance of the property that's been in the family for decades, the Buckmasters protected the riverfront bluffs under a conservation easement with INHF in 2004. Now, after observing accelerated development along the river, the couple feels compelled to place the remainder of the property's sensitive natural areas under a

second conservation easement, safeguarding an additional 365 acres and expanding their 40-year restorative vision to the bluff's southwestern slopes and valley.

These aren't just any bluffs. Capoli rises a startling 420 feet from the river's banks and is one of two distinctive bluffs on the property. The family calls the other bluff "Bonsai," as it features an iconic cedar tree wizened by the region's prevailing winds. The two-mile stretch of protected bluffline on the Buckmaster's property is particularly impressive when viewed from the air. Raleigh, a licensed pilot, enjoyed showing friends and visitors the property from this perspective, but he and Joey also saw encroaching development.

"From the air you can see that it's just big home after big home after big home all across the ridges, especially on the Wisconsin side," Joey said. "But then it started over here on the Minnesota and Iowa side. Then you'd fly over

Capoli, and it's really just a little oasis." Despite numerous offers from developers, the couple refuses to sell their "little piece of heaven."

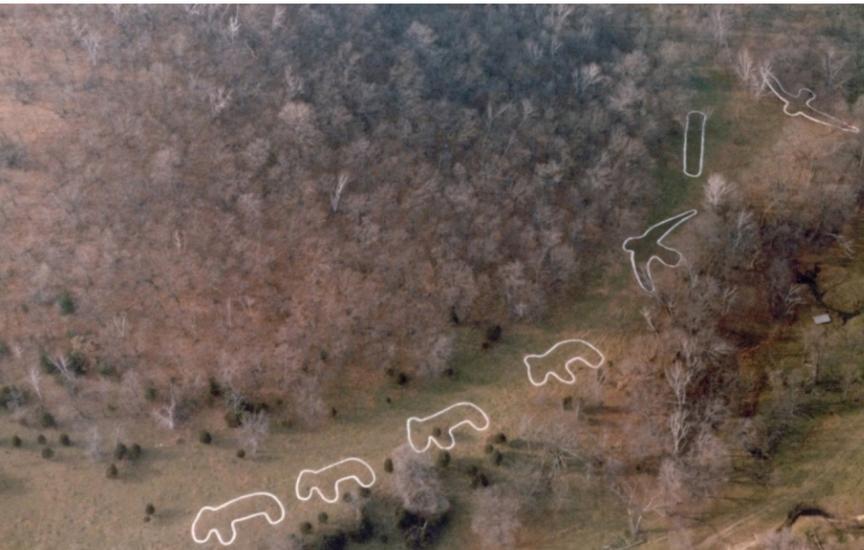
Now, native wildflowers and grasses abound on Capoli Bluff's back slope, but it wasn't always this way. When the couple bought the property from Raleigh's parents in 1976, a modest cattle operation and row crops had occupied portions of the property, and an unsuccessful attempt to create a pond left a massive dike in the valley. One of their first undertakings was to remove internal fencing and sell the cattle, who grazed the land bare. Removing the dike—a significant project—came later.

"I came up here at 11 years old, that was the first time I saw it and saw what it was, and I guess you could say at that point I knew I wanted to live here, raise a family here, and—if the right word is restore—live with the land, and see where it takes you," Raleigh said.

Capoli Bluff looms over the Mississippi River where you can see two different states and beautiful prairie and woodland views. *Photo by Joe Jayjack/INHF*



The effigy mounds on the property are best viewed from above. Outlined in lime, you can clearly see the shape of bear, bird and linear mounds. Below, two timber rattlesnakes seek refuge in rock outcroppings. Aerial photos courtesy Luther College/Clark Mallam, rattlesnake photo INHF.



“Preservation is where it took us.”

These past 40 years, the couple has continued to take an active role in removing invasive woody species like cedar and sumac from the bluffs and conducting prescribed burns. INHF has assisted in these efforts through annual intern workdays, but the Buckmasters take the lead.

“Raleigh and Joey are so active in the stewardship of his property,” Senior Land Stewardship and Blufflands Director Brian Fankhauser said. “I think that it’s impressive when you see private landowners investing so much.”

European explorers noted Capoli in their journals for its distinctive shape and size. But for everything the bluff offers in terms of scenic beauty, it also provides invaluable habitat for wildlife—including nesting and migratory birds, peregrine falcons, bobcats and timber rattlesnakes—and features a range of vegetation rarely seen in Iowa.

“When you look at the scenic beauty, the diverse wildlife habitat, the rattlesnakes, the remoteness and the wildness that you feel when you’re in that place—you don’t get that sense in too many places in Iowa,” Fankhauser said.

As if the property’s natural bounty was not sufficient, it is also archeologically rich. Colin Betts, an archeologist and professor at Luther College, says it represents the 2nd largest grouping of effigy mounds in Iowa, and the largest on private property.

“The mounds continue to be sacred for Native Americans, [but] building the mounds did not make this place a sacred landscape,” Betts said. “They built them here because it already was. In other words, they’re building the mounds here because they were hoping to tap into that power.”

Native Americans residing in the area saw the property’s springs and eagle nests as signs that the forces of the upper world and the lower world are stronger here. The mounds, therefore, represent the idea of movement—the journey that the soul makes to the afterlife—as well as a ritual of spring rebirth. These features generate a sense of spirituality regardless of one’s religious orientation.

The Buckmasters have welcomed many visitors to this property including close friends and guests. Almost everyone comes away with a sense of wonder.

“It is 100% a spiritual place, and if you’re here for very long—or even a short period of time, lots of people realize that and they feel it,” Joey said. “It’s so special that you don’t want it to go away and you don’t want it to ever be developed.”

Even now, after spending nearly a half century looking at the river framed by the bluffs through their living room window, the couple says they continue to be taken aback by its beauty. People ask them, “Do you ever get tired of this view?” Their answer is, of course, no—it changes every moment.

“It’s hard to explain to people because I would never consider living anywhere else,” Joey said.

Consistent with their reason for protecting the land, the Buckmasters view their restoration efforts as “eliminating the encroachment of the modern world.” Raleigh and Joey describe three distinct ‘seasons’ of their usage of the property, the last of which is defined by efforts to remove negative human influence on the land and restore the prairie. They describe the land as a gift for family and friends, a place where visitors can imagine moving back in time.

The various influences of man and nature are apparent: 10,000 years ago, the movements of the Mississippi River carved these bluffs; 1,000 years ago, Native Americans honored this sacred space; 40 years ago, Raleigh and Joey started their restoration journey; and now, the remainder of this invaluable landscape is permanently protected. 🌿

For 40 years, Raleigh and Joey Buckmaster have carefully restored and preserved their property, protecting some of Iowa’s rarest natural and archaeological treasures. You can see the results of their hard work by the leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), an indicator of high quality prairies, that covers Capoli Bluff. Photos courtesy of Raleigh and Joey Buckmaster and INHF.



Hidden gems

Finding public lands in the fields of opportunity

Whiterock Conservancy, a privately managed conservation area in Guthrie County, invites Iowans to experience the convergence of nature and agriculture. Whiterock is known for its dark skies, expansive trail system for both hikers and bikers and a long family history. It encompasses 5,500 acres with 4,200 acres open to the public. *Photo courtesy of Travel Iowa*

BY DAN COHEN
Special to INHF

In the distance, a cluster of trees emerge from the landscape of corn and bean stubble. Pulling off the state highway and travelling down the county blacktop, the cluster of trees takes the form of a forested corridor winding through a small valley. Around the bend, a brown sign with white letters and an arrowhead logo comes into view. A gravel road extends up and over a hill. We park the pickup in a small lot and head off on foot into an exquisite 80-acre woodland, complete with babbling brook – a hidden gem in the altered landscape.

Welcome to the nature of Iowa – an altered state, which is a leader in the percent of original wild landscape converted to farms, towns, and roads. Although some large tracts of wildness do exist, these are the exception rather than rule. Speeding across Iowa interstates, or even state highways, people may see very little evidence of the nature of Iowa. Occasional signs point the way to state parks and other larger recreation areas with amenities, but these are few and far between. However, many public areas are not signed from state highways. Iowa DOT has many rules for sign placement, including a minimum amount of parking and other amenities not available at most of Iowa's small natural areas. It takes a larger commitment, usually requiring getting off the beaten path, to experience hidden gems.

Iowa has some wonderfully unique public lands. Most are leftover pieces of once vast prairies, wetlands, and forests with openings

and edges where trees and shrubs mix with prairie and wetlands. Iowa is a land of rivers, creeks, and streams — more than 17,000 miles of interior waterways. There are fens with organic mounds of peat, marshes, floodplain and upland forests, sand and goat prairies, bits of lush tallgrass prairie, and oak savannahs. These places often only exist because they were difficult to farm and located away from urban sprawl.

Hidden gems often are ours because conservation-minded private landowners wanted the beauty and historic nature of their beloved properties made available to all of us. Most of these public lands are managed locally by county conservation boards or Iowa Department of Natural Resources and allow for various types of public use. There are some federal lands as well, and a few non-governmental groups have hidden gems open to the public.



Where to find Iowa's Hidden Natural Gems:

- **Mycountyparks.com**

This award-winning website provides information about places managed by county conservation boards and how to find them.

- **lowadnr.gov/Places-to-Go**

Find information on state-owned and managed properties.

- **Iowa Sportsman's Atlas**

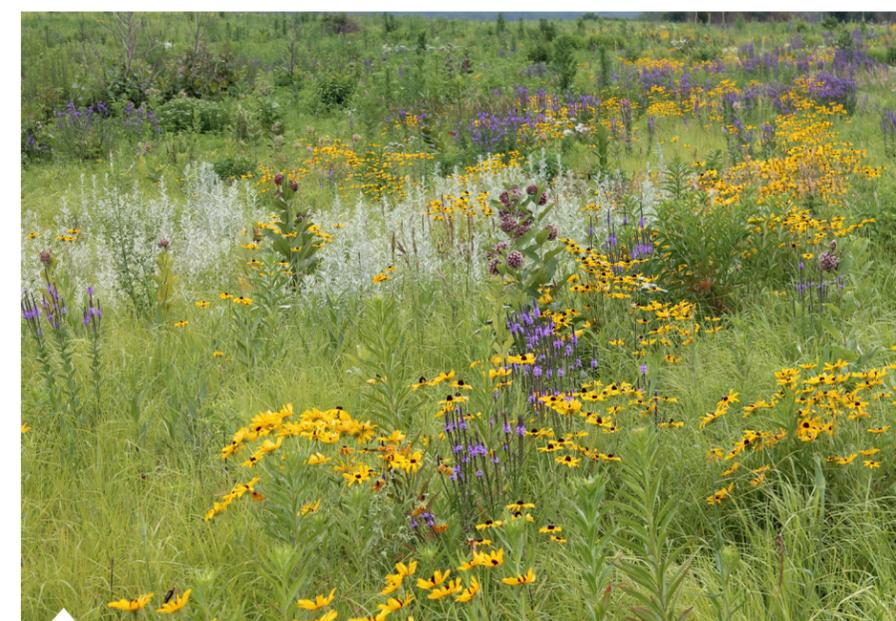
A publication updated every five years (last updated in 2020) that contains locations of county, federal, and state-managed lands.

- **Iowa DNR Water Trails Program**

Iowa's water corridors offer great opportunities to experience the nature of our state and publishes brochures to help guide people.

- **Travel Iowa**

Explore unique attractions and events across the entire state.



Each precious piece of public land has a unique origin story, with colorful characters, conservation champions, successful grant writers, willing donors, and others. In addition to conservation-minded landowners and area residents, several key players and funding sources continually surface in these stories. During recent decades, Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) and Wildlife Habitat with Local Entities (Habitat Stamp) programs have leveraged donations and other funds, and together provided resources for land protection efforts. The state also manages some federal grant dollars that can trickle down to local land projects. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Pheasants Forever, Wild Turkey Federation, and other non-governmental conservation organizations play important roles in many acquisitions.

There likely is a hidden natural gem close to where you live or where you may be traveling. 📍

Find a hidden gem near you like Ciha Fen located in Johnson County, Turin Preserve Wildlife Area in Monona County or Marietta Sand Prairie State Preserve in Marshall County. These special places are all open to the public to visit and enjoy. *Top photo by Sean Reilly, middle photo by Ryan Schmidt/INHF, bottom photo INHF.*



IOWA'S SNOWBIRDS

BY ERICA PLACE
Communications Specialist | eplace@inhf.org

Many birds call Iowa home for at least a portion of the year. Whether one of our wetlands is a brief but critical stop on a bird's annual migration from northern Canada to the southern tip of South America, or one of our open prairies is the perfect summer home to raise young, more than 300 species of birds can regularly be found in our state with a total of 431 individual species being recorded within Iowa's borders. That species list shuffles come winter; while some birds depart for a milder climate, we welcome visitors from the comparatively harsher north.

AT THE FEEDER

While your feeders will have several newcomers, none are as abundant as dark-eyed juncos (*Junco hyemalis*). They arrive suddenly and en masse come mid-October. This medium-sized sparrow hangs in fairly large flocks, hopping in groups looking for food on the ground. Sunflower chips or cracked corn are sure to attract them. While you'll mostly see ones that are slate gray with white bellies, there are a few color morphs with pops of buffy orange. If your view is from the rear, white outer tail feathers are visible in flight.

FROM THE CAR

Especially on the coldest, most blustery days, the shoulders of rural highways are full of snow buntings (*Plectrophenax nivalis*) and Lapland longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*). In mixed flocks with our year-round resident horned larks (*Eremopholia alpestris*), they're forced to the roadsides when snow gets too deep to find seeds in open fields. And on the utility pole above, take an extra second to study that hawk. If it's boasting a thick, dark band across the belly, it's probably a rough-legged hawk (*Buteo lagopus*). So named for its feathered legs, this winter resident often perches on branches that seem way too small for their size.

IN THE WOODS

The cracks and crevices of tree trunks and branches are a great place to look for food in harsh winters. Two new arrivals are searching for snacks but approach their meals from different directions.

Just like the white-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) who can be found in Iowa any time of year, the red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) is often seen foraging down the trunk face first. Their long thin bills are perfectly suited for retrieving morsels between

the tree bark, and their stocky bodies and burnt orange bellies make them especially adorable. They usually give away their location with nasally calls that sound like a miniature horn. Offer suet or peanuts at your feeders and they may show up in your backyard.

Scan the trunks with an extra careful eye, and you might spot a brown creeper (*Certhia americana*) perfectly hidden against the bark. Usually cling to the tree moving upwards with head higher than tail, they also are well-adapted to foraging in trees with their long downcurved bills. Their bright white belly is pressed against the trunk and not usually visible, but they might make their presence known to intent listeners with a thin high-pitched trill.

ON THE WATER

Though many will head south where they can more reliably find water, some waterfowl will stick around as long as they can find at least a little bit of an opening in the ice. The common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) is a diving duck and males stand out with their white cheek patches and yellow eye. In winter they're mostly looking for aquatic invertebrates, fish or submerged vegetation.

Also dining underwater is the common merganser (*Mergus merganser*), oftentimes traveling in small groups. Males and females of this species have different plumage, but both have slender long red bills that are excellent for grabbing fish. Like the goldeneye and other ducks, their bare legs can stay warm in frigid waters with a unique adaptation that transfers heat from warm arteries to cool veins.

There are many others! A great way to learn more about Iowa's winter residents is by tagging along for a Christmas Bird Count. The nation's longest running community science project, Christmas Bird Counts have been held each winter for more than 120 years. With designated counts all over Iowa, there's likely an opportunity to join one near you, providing the perfect learning experience with local experts and the birds spending time in your neighborhood or parks this winter. 📍

Left, a red-breasted nuthatch skillfully hangs from a branch. In winter, it's common to find these birds in flocks with black-capped chickadees (*Parus atricapillus*) and tufted titmice (*Baeolophus bicolor*). Photo by Jacob Pitzenberger

CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES – A GIFT THAT GIVES BACK

“This is about better than anything for current return right now,” said Bob. I was sitting with Bob and Patricia Jester in their living room, holding their donation check and a freshly signed Charitable Gift Annuity agreement. Bob has served on the INHF board of directors and as president of Jester Insurance Services Inc. for many years. “INHF is an organization that has been around for a long time,” he adds. “A charitable gift annuity makes sense for anyone wanting to build on and benefit from a long-term approach.”

What is a Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA)?

A CGA is a cash or securities gift given by you to INHF. You then receive regularly scheduled payouts (usually quarterly or semi-annually) of a percentage of your gift. The return is based on the size of the gift, your age, and the market rate, which INHF sets using the rate suggested by the American Council on Gift Annuities. You can choose to base your annuity on your life or on your life plus another’s. The payment can go to you, or to an individual of your choice. This setup allows you to take a partial tax deduction for your donation, while receiving a fixed income stream for the rest of your life — or lives, if you donate as a couple.

Upon your death, any remainder of your CGA stays with INHF to support our mission or a specific program of your choice.

Is a Charitable Gift Annuity right for you?

INHF will set up a CGA for donors interested in making a gift of \$10,000 or more. The payout rates are higher the older you are, so we recommend this tool for ages 65+, though you may choose to make a gift sooner and defer payment for a more favorable return. INHF recommends you discuss with your financial advisor how a CGA would best fit into your financial planning.

“It’s a good tool for INHF and for donors,” Bob reflects. “It’s a win-win.”

— ABBY HADE TERPSTRA, *Director of Philanthropy*

Leave a legacy for future generations:

If you are interested in exploring a Charitable Gift Annuity or have questions about leaving a legacy gift, contact Director of Philanthropy Abby Hade Terpstra at aterpstra@inhf.org or 515-288-1846, ext. 15.

TRIBUTE GIFTS

IN HONOR OF

Bob & Kim Bredensteiner
Matthew & Jacob Cover
Jay & Mary Cowguill
Ray Hamilton
Brian Hiester & Megan Buckingham
David Hoffman
Bruce Hughes & Randy Hamilton
Dennis & Elberta Huinker
Rod Richmond
Earl & Isabelle Salterberg
Laura Sands

Tylar Samuels

IN MEMORY OF

Emma Blank
Marian A. Conklin
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Selma “Sunny” Duvick
David Erbes
Brenda Eshaum
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Joan Ghrist
Emory Raymond Graffis

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Nancy Sims Hutchinson
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John Ray Taylor

Take a winter hike

BY CJ YOUNGER
Communications Intern

This winter, stay active and enjoy all Iowa’s outdoors have to offer by heading out on a snowshoe trek. What was once an essential mode of transportation in cold climates is becoming an increasingly popular recreational activity that you won’t want to miss out on!

What you’ll need

Snowshoeing is a relatively simple activity. Aside from the snowshoes themselves, many people already have everything they need.

Bundle up in weather-appropriate clothes, but make sure to avoid cotton—it absorbs moisture. Wool, bamboo and polyester are all nice moisture-wicking alternatives. Dress in layers so you can stay comfortable as you walk, and consider sunscreen to protect from UV rays and glare. Finally, wear insulated, waterproof winter boots. Snowshoes can adjust to most shoes, so don’t worry if your boots feel clunky.

Snowshoes are available to rent from many local county conservation boards or outdoor gear stores for a small fee. Poles aren’t necessary, but can provide better balance and an upper body workout.

Last but not least, don’t forget your water bottle and some snacks! Just because it’s cold out doesn’t mean it’s any less important to stay hydrated and energized during outdoor activities.

Snowshoeing techniques

Snowshoes require a wider stance than normal walking, which helps keep your weight evenly distributed. Take more shuffling steps to ‘skate’ over the snow instead

Find more Iowa places to explore at www.inhf.org/blog



of pressing down.

When snowshoeing in groups, walk in a single file line. The first person tamps down the ground with even steps, making it easier for those behind them to follow.

Where to go

The beauty of snowshoeing is that you can go just about anywhere. Many low-to-no elevation traditional hiking trails are suitable for snowshoeing in the winter. Just avoid cross country skiing trails as snowshoe tracks can create accident-causing divots.

Beginners should stick to the trail. Going off the trail is an exciting option, but consider taking a snowshoe class first to learn how to safely navigate trickier terrain.

Visit the website of your county conservation board to find places to get outdoors this winter. 📍



Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation

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A winter sky over Moorehead Lake in Ida County. Winter is a great time to stargaze as the nights are longer and often clearer. *Photo by Don Poggensee*

