

SUMMER 2020

# IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

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

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A solitary kayaker paddles across Ada Hayden Heritage Park Lake in Ames.

*Photo by Sudhanva Kashyap*



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

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**Feeling welcome in nature**

Recently, I went to one of my favorite stretches of river north of Ames to catch some relief from our typical Iowa summer heat and humidity...and perhaps a fish or two. Ever since I attended Iowa State University, I have sought out this spot along the South Skunk River to be close to nature and find peace and solace.

As I waded in the cool water, listening to the Wood thrush and Cricket frogs, it struck me that it was largely unchanged from three decades earlier. Why? Because thoughtful people before me had the vision to protect the greenbelt and the species that call it home and to make sure it was available to everyone. It felt good knowing INHF has helped permanently protect tens of thousands of acres like this across the state — with partners and supporters like you — resulting in precious public land.

We've done this to benefit wildlife while improving the quality of life for current and

future generations of people. But something is missing. Some people are being left out. Even though many places are technically available to everyone, they may not be accessible or inviting to everyone. In some ways, we are falling short. We need to make sure all people are welcomed and invited to safely enjoy our parks, trails and natural areas and the benefits they offer.

At INHF, we are working to make our organization a more equitable and inclusive place. We are also expanding where we work, with whom we partner and how we provide connections to nature that help break down barriers and get more people outdoors. We want nature to be a place of community and connection.

Rest assured, we will continue to protect Iowa's special natural places statewide. There is much work to do, but we need to make sure a parallel effort exists to include and welcome all Iowans in the benefits nature abundantly provides.



JOE MCGOVERN  
President

**The South Skunk River** winds its way through Story County in central Iowa.  
*Photo by Nathan Houck*

## Slow Curve

It is a turn.  
Not a big one  
Nor steeply banked  
But a turn no less:

When the grandsons  
and granddaughters  
Of those whose sharp  
Pronged plows broke through

The prairie sea  
Now reap the seed  
Of coneflower  
Bluestem and jewel;

Harvest by hand  
Black-eyed Susan  
To be planted  
Along roadsides

And in small plots  
Scattered state-wide  
As once the wing  
And birds did thus.

Now love's labor  
Takes on the task  
To restore a part  
Of that vast sea.

Scarcely noticed  
This tender task,  
But noticed none-  
the less. And will

Be praised, acclaimed  
By generations  
Of great grandsons  
And granddaughters

Yet to be born.

– **Richard J. Ament**



Richard J. Ament, a long-time INHF supporter from Dubuque, penned this poem in 1994 as efforts to restore prairie in Iowa were beginning to take hold. He sent it to INHF in 2016 after reading about local school children in his community having a “hoedown” as they helped seed a 1-acre prairie reconstruction on school grounds. *Photo by Gary Hamer*



**Tim Sproul**, who recently retired after nearly a decade with INHF, leads a talk at a past Loess Hills Prairie Seminar.

## Headed for the Hills

For more than 40 years, Tim Sproul has been making conservation happen in the Loess Hills.

Tim spent the first 33 years of his career as director of the Harrison County Conservation Board. He retired from that role in 2011, but as is often the case with those who seem to be born with a love for the land ingrained in their very being, Tim's hiatus from conservation was short lived. For that, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) will always be thankful.

Tim joined INHF as a Loess Hills land conservation consultant in 2011, bringing with him a wealth of knowledge, experience and understanding of the region that runs as deep as the roots of the prairie. For nearly a decade, he has worked on INHF's behalf with landowners, partners and supporters to find creative solutions to permanently protect Iowa's Loess Hills, one project at a time.

Tim has always led in an understated way. Offer him a compliment on a job well done, and he's quick to respond with one in kind. But his impact on these hills — and the whole state — is undeniable. It can be seen in the relationships he's formed with those who share his love of this unique landscape, in the insight he's provided on INHF's work across the state, and of course, on the land itself.

This spring, Tim announced he would retire

(for the second time) from his position with INHF at the end of June. He shared these words with staff in his announcement:

"It has been an honor to help carry the torch to protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife. To meet every day passionate people who want to preserve a family legacy, share a God given gift with the public or to work and nurture a better condition for the lands they own.

"There is a conservation spirit; a conservation ethic, a passion to leave this land better, more diverse and resilient in Iowa, and INHF is leading those efforts with compassion, integrity and respect."

Tim and his wife, Cindy, who retired from nursing at the beginning of April, are looking forward to spending more time together and with their eight grandchildren, teaching them to love and respect Iowa's natural resources. We thank Tim and wish him and his family all the best as they look ahead to what lies around the next prairie draped hill.

INHF had hoped to host a gathering celebrating Tim's retirement this spring, but given the COVID-19 situation, that was not possible. If you would like to send words of appreciation and well wishes to Tim, you may do so at [tsproul71@gmail.com](mailto:tsproul71@gmail.com). 🍷

## Volunteering apart and together

Earlier this summer, INHF made the decision to cancel events on INHF-owned lands through the end of the summer season in the interest of slowing the spread of COVID-19. However, there are still ways to get involved and volunteer.

Find ideas for ways to lend a hand on the land in your community — like picking up trash along local trails — by following INHF on social media. Interested in learning about independent volunteer opportunities on INHF-owned land in your area? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Melanie Schmidt at [mschmidt@inhf.org](mailto:mschmidt@inhf.org).

While working by yourself to pick up trash on a trail or pull invasive species is great, we know many enjoy the sense of camaraderie that comes from working with a group. INHF hopes to offer opportunities for people to come together on the land on September 26, 2020, for National Public Lands Day.

The first National Public Lands Day was in 1994 and is held every year on the fourth Saturday of September. This day is used to celebrate the connection between people and green space in their community, which is more important than ever right now.

Find additional details at [inhf.org/events](https://inhf.org/events)

## QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

A quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between **March - May 2020**.

### Newly protected areas

#### Adair County

60 acres of restored prairie and oak/hickory draws in eastern Adair County. The property also includes a small creek and a pond that provide habitat for reptiles, amphibians and multiple fish species. *(Will be owned and managed by the Adair County Conservation Board)*

#### Clayton County

14 acres of woodland and grassland within Iowa's only National Audubon Society designated Globally Important Bird Area. The property provides habitat for Bobolinks and Cerulean warblers, both Iowa Species of Greatest Conservation Need. This is the third recent addition to the northwest corner of the Bloody Run WMA. It provides important access from a public road to this large recreational area and its coldwater trout streams. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Polk County

37 acres in Polk County adjacent to Paul Errington Marsh WMA. Provides a buffer for Paul Errington Marsh and permanent protection in an area facing development pressure.

### Land transfers to public partners

#### Clay County

169 acres of grassland and pasture along the Little Sioux River, one of Iowa's designated Protected Water Areas, in Clay County. This property provides critical grassland habitat that benefits wildlife, water quality and soil health. *(Owned and managed by the Clay County Conservation Board)*

**Encompassing 1,031 acres** void of interior roads, Heritage Hills offers a sense of wildness 45 minutes south of the Des Moines metro.

#### Clay County

158 acres of existing and potential grassland near the Little Sioux River within a growing complex of 1,700 acres of protected public land. Supports the goals of the Iowa Wildlife Action Plan and the Little Sioux River, one of Iowa's designated Protected Water Areas. *(Owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)*

#### East Lake Park Addition

5-acre property in Osceola featuring a trail to East Lake Park that enables students to safely access the park from the local school. Prairie restoration adjacent to the trail expands wildlife habitat in the area. *(Owned and managed by the City of Osceola)*

#### Heritage Hills

140 acres of open space near Clanton Creek Natural Resource Area in Madison County. With no interior roads, this tract of land provides a large complex of natural habitat for several state Species of Special Concern and rare native plant species. This property is part of a multi-unit 1,031-acre complex of protected land. *(Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)*

#### South Skunk River Greenbelt Addition

55 acres of prairie restoration in-progress along with riparian woodland and oxbows along the South Skunk River in Story County. Expands protection along the river corridor. *(Owned and managed by Story County Conservation Board)*

#### Tieville Bend WMA Addition

366 acres of Missouri River floodplain that will expand Tieville Bend WMA in Monona County. Restored prairie and wetlands will provide quality floodplain during high river flow events and excellent habitat for migratory waterfowl. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*





# ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

*“Good things take time, as they should.” – John Wooden*

BY KATY HEGGEN  
Communications Specialist | [kheggen@inhf.org](mailto:kheggen@inhf.org)

**W**hen Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) purchased the 1,011-acre former Central Iowa 4-H camp near Madrid late last September, for many, the moment was bittersweet. It marked both an end, but also a new beginning. One that was filled with possibility.

Conversations among staff, with public and private partners and those who know the property intimately about what will become of this isle of wilderness have continued in the days, weeks and months since. As these conversations continue to evolve, a new vision is beginning to take shape. One that affirms this will continue to be a space for people and nature.

The uncertainty brought on by COVID-19 has hindered parts of the process, delaying some definitive decisions. How could it not? But INHF's resolve to permanently protect this place, and its capacity to do so, remains unchanged.

While the pandemic may have added a layer of complexity to the project, it has also provided an opportunity for INHF to come to know

this place in a way that helps us to consider its full potential.

## Wild roots

Encompassing a mix of native and reconstructed habitats including woodland cloaked hills and valleys, pockets of remnant and reconstructed prairie, restored wetlands and a tributary of the Des Moines River, this area is flush with native flora and fauna.

Each spring, ephemeral wildflowers (short-lived blooms that appear in early spring) carpet the forest floor. This year, staff began taking inventory of some of the species present. Dutchman's breeches, wild trout lily, bloodroot, false rue anemone, hepatica and Lady's tresses, a rare species, have all been documented on the property. Many of these blooms were featured in a virtual hike led by Molly McGovern, former Polk County Conservation Board natural resource specialist and long-time friend of INHF, when COVID-19 prevented INHF from inviting people to come experience them in-person.

This year's statewide land

stewardship internship crew will spend a day at the property, removing invasive species from its woodlands so native plants may thrive.

They're part of a long legacy set forth by former 4-H staff, counselors and campers turned conservation professionals, and represent the new beginnings of what INHF anticipates will be a long relationship between the next generation of conservation leaders and this special place.

“Getting these young land stewards connected with such a special place will not only help the land, the experience will also fuel their passion as they continue into their career,” said Derek Miner, INHF land stewardship associate.

Wild creatures have always had their place here. Deer, foxes and the occasional bobcat have made a home or hunted in the valley over the years. But the depth of the diverse bird populations that have been documented here is particularly impressive.

Bruce Ehresman, a renowned Iowa bird expert, has catalogued more than 185 species over the years. Doug Harr,

president of Iowa Audubon, and Karl Jungbluth, both Iowa birding legends in their own right, are hoping to be able to reaffirm and even expand the list to include additional species.

“It’s really important to know what species are using it and which of those species are in decline,” Harr said. “Then we can ask what we can do to stabilize and support those species.”

Harr said they have already catalogued 108 bird species this year, including Wood thrush and Golden-winged warblers, two species in serious decline. Given the location, size and quality of the habitat, they expect to eventually document well over 200 species. Harr also notes the importance of this habitat in the context of the larger protected corridor.

“It’s extremely critical for maintaining the Des Moines River corridor, one of the primary routes of bird migration through the central U.S. In an intensive agricultural state, large complexes of land like this are incredibly important for resident species, too.”

## A new form

INHF’s focus has always been, and continues to be, protecting the land’s natural features. That said, historically, camp conversions involve decisions about existing structures.

Ultimately, what stays and what is removed will be determined both by taking into account the varying conditions of the buildings and how they collectively fit into the long-term vision for this place.

Engineers, master builders and craftsmen specializing in sustainability have helped determine what can be salvaged, both from derelict buildings, and those whose place has yet-to-be-decided.

Some structures, such as the ropes course and climbing wall, have been deemed better suited for another setting. With the assistance of camp alumni, including some that remain active in the camp professionals community, INHF is working with nearby camps and organizations that have expressed interest in the

equipment and structures.

“In short, we’re looking for ways to repurpose materials,” said INHF Donor Relations Director Abby Hade Terpstra. “We recognize that for some, there’s a strong attachment to the infrastructure here. We want to be empathetic to that and celebrate this place’s past by finding new homes for these things, while also embracing its future.”

## Renewed resolve

As the vision for the former 4-H camp continues to take shape, so does INHF’s connection to this place. The generosity with which it continues to reveal itself from season to season is humbling, to say the least. It’s a generosity that we look forward to sharing.

If nothing else, this time has reaffirmed that protecting this place was the right move, and renewed INHF’s resolve to see it through. After all, good things take time, as they should. 🌱

### Former Central Iowa 4-H Camp

Boone County



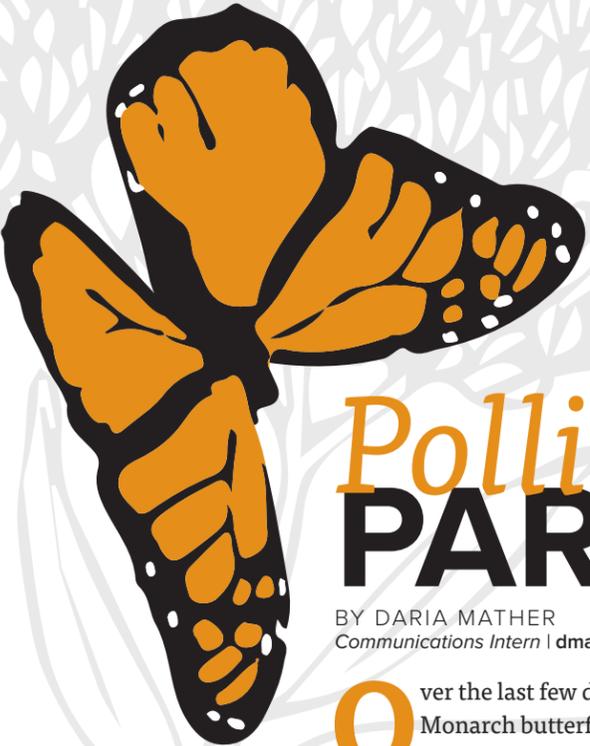
**LAND:** 1,011 acres of woodland cloaked hills and valleys, pockets of remnant and reconstructed prairie and restored wetlands along the Des Moines River

#### SPECIAL FEATURES:

Sacred Indigenous sites, abundant native flora and fauna

*Photos by Emily Martin*





# Pollinating PARTNERSHIP

BY DARIA MATHER  
Communications Intern | dmather@inhf.org

Over the last few decades, the iconic monarch butterfly population has been in peril. Their decline is due largely to loss of habitat, most notably milkweed species from field edges, roadsides, meadows and other sites required for their breeding. The loss of fall flowering nectar plants have also diminished their resilience during their long journey back to Mexico.

As part of a national public/private partnership to address the declining monarch population and avert its listing as an endangered species, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) established the monarch butterfly and pollinators conservation program and fund to help “protect, conserve and increase habitat for the monarch butterfly and other pollinators” across the country.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) has received four “Monarch Grants” since 2015, which have been used to support the expansion and diversification of native prairie habitat on

public lands and wildlife areas. INHF’s primary role has been to work with federal, county and state public land managers in Iowa who are restoring recently acquired public lands, many of which were previously protected by INHF.

Together, INHF, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the county conservation boards have put these funds into action. In the past five years, these groups have planted 5,224 acres of pollinator habitat and helped to restore over 22,000 acres of habitat on 266 different sites across Iowa.

Iowa’s program initially focused on sites in counties along the I-35 corridor. It has since expanded to include restoration on land in the Loess Hills; in the Wetland Management District, which encompasses 35 counties; and along the I-380 corridor in Linn County. This has helped create complexes of pollinator-friendly habitat across the state, which lies in the heart of the monarch’s North American breeding range.

The DNR’s Prairie Resource Center, which was created in 2000 to act as a seed bank for prairie restoration projects on public lands across the state, has been a critical partner. The Prairie Resource Center provides over 65 species of native prairie grasses and wildflowers to public land managers across the state. However, harvests vary from year-to-year, with some years offering more diversity in the seed mix than others.

“One of the great things about this grant is it kind of helps fill in the gaps,” said Bill Johnson, a biologist at the Prairie Resource Center. “One year I may have good production of prairie



clover and then next year I may not have very good seed production. So with this grant, I can utilize the funds to supplement the seeds that I produce here to help increase diversity in our plantings.”

Projects on public lands play an important part in raising awareness about the many benefits of planting prairie on private lands, too.

“There was an initiative to put a pollinator garden in every state park in Iowa,” Johnson said. “Some of those pollinator gardens were one or two acre sites, but several were pretty large sites, 10 or 20 acres. Our state parks are some of the most heavily used public areas of the state. What better place to show our high quality prairie habitat or monarch habitat than at our state parks?”

The monarch grant has also strengthened partnerships and helped diversify natural lands across Iowa for other wildlife.

“I think it’s important to note that we’re doing something very special by working together,” Johnson said. “This collaboration is expanding and creating great resilient prairies across the state of Iowa that are important not just to monarch butterflies but a variety of other wildlife species across the state.”

These partnerships have also proven helpful for each group, and they look to ways to partner beyond the grant funded projects.

The work being accomplished through the monarch grant is part of a larger statewide effort that also includes planting prairie habitat on private land. The Prairie Partners Program, a cooperative effort between the DNR, the Iowa Chapter of Pheasants Forever and the Iowa Native Plant Growers Association;

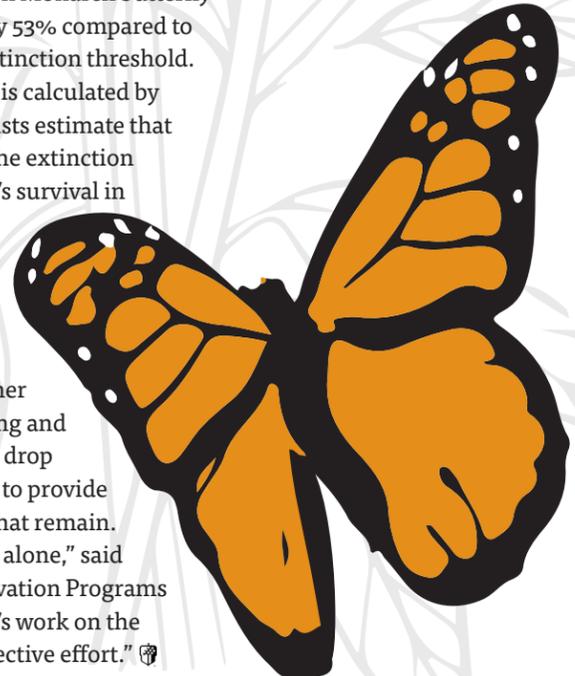
the Iowa monarch consortium, a coalition of organizations led by Iowa State University; the monarch research project; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) and the DNR’s Private Lands Program are among some of the organizations INHF is working alongside.

“The overall effort is about encouraging individual Iowans, landowners and local agencies engaged in creating wildlife habitat,” said Gregg Pattison, a private lands biologist with the Partners Program.

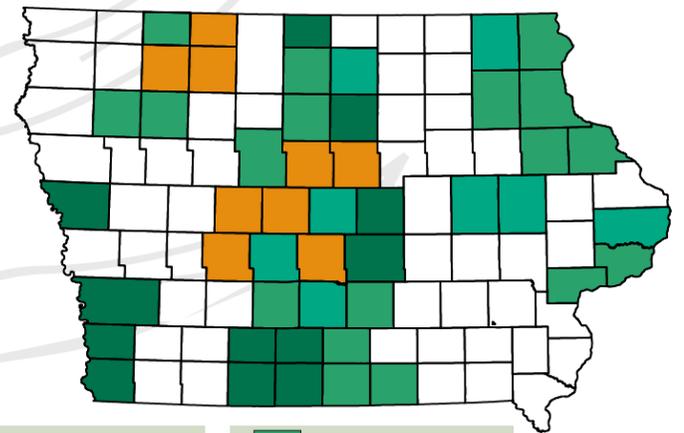
Together, these public/private partnerships are helping to make up lost ground, project by project, but there is still a long way to go.

This spring, the World Wildlife Fund Mexico reported the eastern monarch butterfly population had declined by 53% compared to last year, well below the extinction threshold. The monarch’s population is calculated by acres occupied, and scientists estimate that approximately 15 acres is the extinction threshold for the monarch’s survival in North America. The latest annual count found overwintering monarchs occupying just 7 acres. Scientists attribute the latest plunge to poor weather conditions during the spring and fall migrations. The recent drop only underscores the need to provide habitat for the monarchs that remain.

“No one group can do it alone,” said Senior Director for Conservation Programs Lisa Hein, who leads INHF’s work on the monarch grant. “It’s a collective effort.”



**Iowa lies in the heart** of the monarch’s North American breeding range. Habitat restoration areas currently targeted by the NFWF monarch grant include flyways along the I-35 corridor, the Loess Hills, the I-380 corridor and Iowa’s Wetland Management Districts.



Legend for Monarch Grant periods:  
Orange: Monarch IV 2020-2022  
Light Green: Monarch III 2018-2020  
Medium Green: Monarch II 2017-2019  
Dark Green: Monarch I 2015-2017



Photo by Kristi Hall

# NURTURING A LOVE FOR NATURE

Strengthening connections between kids and Iowa's outdoors

BY JOE JAYJACK  
Communications Director | [jjayjack@inhf.org](mailto:jjayjack@inhf.org)

**T**here is a certain sound kids make when they're outside together. From a distance, it comes across as a giddy murmur. Mixed in is the occasional gasp (they spotted a frog), nervous laughter (they caught the frog) and squeal (the frog jumped out of her hand and got REALLY close to his face).

This sound — the giddy murmur — is a noise that naturally relaxes parents and caregivers. It means the kids are entertaining themselves, using their imagination, burning off some energy and getting some exercise. It signals that nature is helping to take care of the kids. It's a sound we could all benefit from hearing more often.

According to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), children are spending half as much time outdoors as they were 20

years ago. Another NWF study found that kids who play outside are more physically active, focused, creative in their play and less aggressive. It also found that the most direct route to caring for the earth as an adult is participating in "wild nature activities" before the age of 11.

For many kids, there are now more demands on their time, increasingly enticing entertainment options inside and less easy access to safe outdoor spaces. The nature of childhood has changed, but the joy and lasting impact of a childhood spent in nature hasn't.

INHF is taking steps to better engage kids with the outdoors (see page 16). Here, three people with a love for the outdoors write about the ways nature has nurtured their students, their children and themselves.

## Staying grounded in nature

BY ZAC WEDEMEYER

We started Taproot in 2007 with a mission to support and strengthen children's loving connection to the earth.

I'm proud of the name "Taproot." The word is sturdy and melodic. Inspired by an acorn's first endeavor to extend its taproot deep into the earth, it's fitting, too. The taproot becomes the tree's anchor and lifeline, allowing it to survive fire, drought and gnawing rabbits, all the while drawing sustenance from the earth to grow into a magnificent, life-supporting tree. When children play and explore nature, they sink their own metaphorical taproot into the earth. Our hope and intent is for the connection with nature to help them through hard times, and grow into magnificent, life-supporting humans.

Now, the idea is being severely tested. This pandemic is a genuine world shakeup, and a chance to see if a connection to nature really does help us get through hard times. For my own family, and many Taproot families, the answer is a resounding "yes." Hours of free, self-guided outdoor play were preparation and practice for surviving quarantine. The ability and willingness of my children to go outside — to play, work and wander — has felt nearly as important as food. It has kept their bodies

healthy, their interactions kind, their appetites robust and their sleep peaceful. They miss their friends terribly. They miss school. They feel the fear and uncertainty that fills the air. It is still hard for them, but it is so much better because they are grounded in nature.

This experience has made me even more eager to get back to supporting kids' connection to the earth. The recent calls for racial and social justice further clarify the need to make sure every child has this opportunity. The logistics will be different in the post-Coronavirus world, but the basic idea hasn't changed: Nature connection is a delight during easy times, and a life saver when the going gets tough. 🌱

*Zac Wedemeyer is the co-founder and lead teacher of Taproot Nature Experience, an organization dedicated to saving the world by strengthening children's loving connection to the earth. From an early age, nature was Zac's best friend. His work attempts to share this joy with younger generations. He lives in Iowa City with his partner Elesa, their three children Iris, Ani and Gavin, three gigantic dogs, and two cats.*

**"When children play and explore nature, they sink their own metaphorical taproot into the earth."**

— ZAC WEDEMEYER





## The importance of places to explore

BY JEREK WOLCOTT

I grew up in Northwest Montana with wilderness just beyond my back door. I could get off the school bus and walk past my house into hundreds of thousands of acres of publicly accessible land in the Kootenai National Forest.

When I went to college at the University of Montana, outdoor access was available in every direction from our campus, including trails that departed directly from behind our football stadium. Some of the best memories of my childhood are grounded in the forests and mountains of the Northwest.

When my wife and I had children, we continued to realize the value of public lands and wild spaces, getting out as often as we could. When we moved to Iowa in 2018, it was important for us to continue to make sure that our children were connected to the wilderness. We have taken the opportunity to

visit many state, county and city parks around Iowa, but we find ourselves longing for the wide-open spaces of the Mountain West.

99% of Iowa land is in private hands. Farming is key to our economy and our culture here in Iowa. Our farms are more productive than ever, our cities grow larger and more people move out of our rural communities changing the demographics. I hope we find ways to take advantage of these changes to increase our open space, improve our water and air quality and provide our children and their children with more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. 🌲

*Jerek Wolcott is the assistant athletics director for communications at the University of Northern Iowa. He and his wife, Ashley, were raised in Montana and moved to Iowa in 2018. They have two boys, Calvin (6) and Holland (3).*

**"When we moved to Iowa in 2018, it was important for us to continue to make sure that our children were connected to the wilderness."**

— JEREK WOLCOTT

## The land and my best man

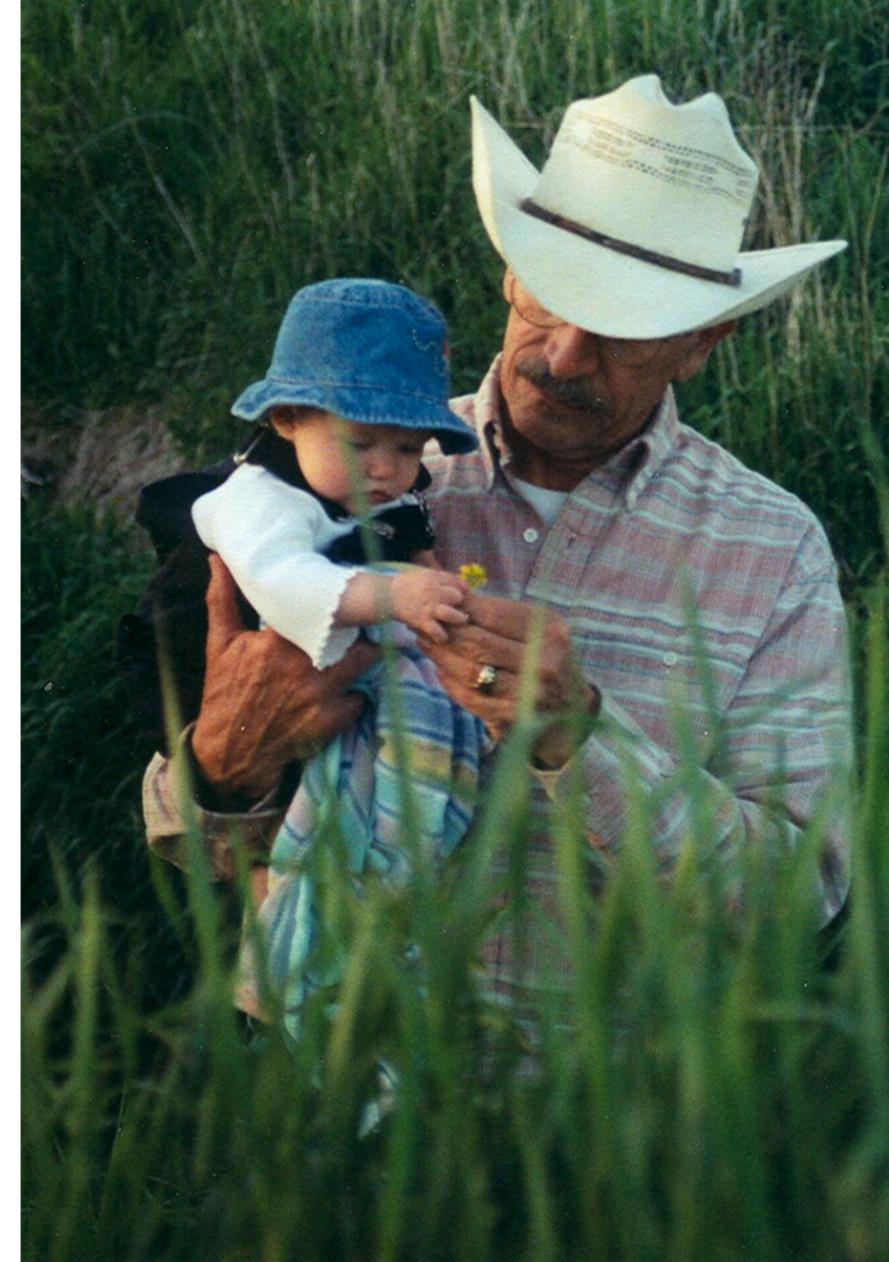
BY LILLY MOFFETT

"C'mon Gramps! Bring me to the creek. I want to catch toads with the new net you bought me," I whined after scarfing down my lunch. Six-years-old and there wasn't anything I loved more than throwing on my muddy, knee-high boots and moseying down to my grandfather's land across the dirt road from his and Granny's big red barn. From the time I learned to walk, my Grandpa has shared his love for nature with me. His connection to our Earth is so powerful — it is his religion.

When I was about seven-years-old, Grandpa let me get behind the wheel of the Rhino, his old four-wheeler. Although my joy ride was confined to a small piece of prairie, at the time I felt the world was mine. From that point on, Grandpa made sure that we had time to go for an adventure on the Rhino every time I visited. I would always surprise him because my introverted personality seemed to float away with the wind as we zoomed through the fields, screaming and giggling; this was pure happiness.

Now, years later, each time I visit I like to drive him to my favorite spots on his land, most of which are atop hills so we can look out on the Iowa plains. I don't just see the wild flowers and rolling landscape. I see my entire childhood. I can almost hear Gramps telling me that he came nose-to-nose with a deer over there or buried his favorite hunting dog just past that tree. When I think about how I learned about "burning the prairie so it will thrive" my nose has a hard time knowing if I am actually smelling burn or if it is a memory because that smell is burned (no pun intended) in my brain.

Henry David Thoreau said, "Heaven is under our feet as well as above our heads." If Gramps had written "Walden," he would likely have said that "Heaven is not above our heads. It is under our feet in the dark, hearty Iowa soil." As my dear Grandpa ages he continues to tell



me not to worry about his life coming to an end because when he passes he will return to the soil, and he will become a part of our sacred earth. I find solace in our favorite places because while Grandpa isn't immortal, our favorite spots are, and for as long as I can sit atop one of those rolling conservancy hills, I can sit with my best man. 🌲

*Lilly Moffett is the granddaughter of Sandy and Betty Moffett. Sandy first fell in love with 650+ acres of prairie, woodland and grassland in Mahaska County over 20 years ago. Together, ten families — including Sandy's — formed Pleasant Grove Land Preservation, Inc. to purchase the land and protect it in conjunction with INHF. All shareholders have remained invested in the property, bound together by a love of the land.*

**"I find solace in our favorite places because while Grandpa isn't immortal, our favorite spots are."**

—LILLY MOFFETT

# Introducing the **ACORN CREW**

At INHF, we are often thinking about the next generation. When we protect a special place, we are happy to know that it will be there for people far into the future. We also know that the relationship between people and nature is reciprocal. People must be there for nature, too.

It is with both these thoughts in mind that INHF is pleased to introduce the Acorn Crew, a new program that will help kids engage with and learn about the natural world around them.

Through the Acorn Crew, INHF will share the beauty of Iowa's outdoors with children, teach kids about nature and support families in creating the next generation of conservationists. Most importantly, we hope that it will encourage children and young families to get outdoors more often.

Kids can start joining the Acorn Crew this fall, and expect a lot of fun in return. But first, we would like to hear from you about what you would like to see in this program. We are planning:

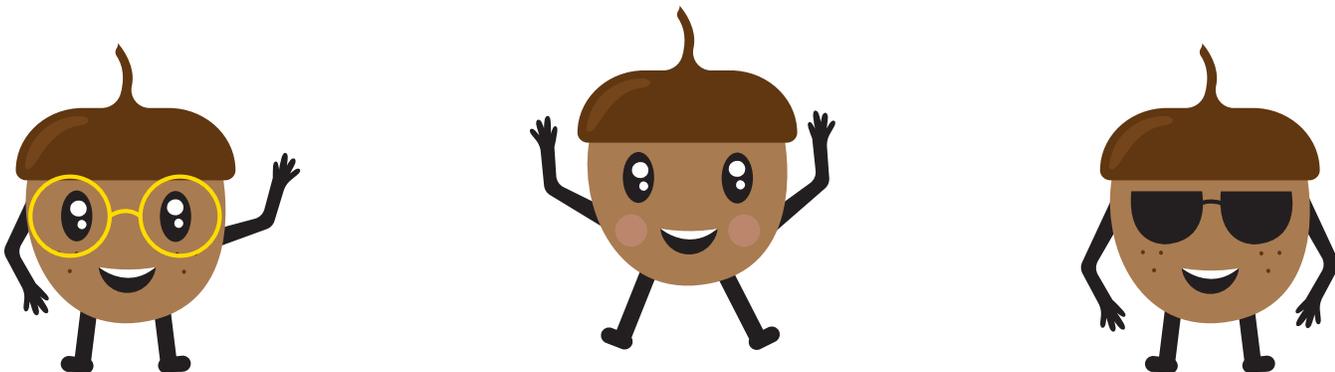
- Periodic publications that are educational and fun
- Activities like scavenger hunts and crafts that focus on native Iowa species
- Contests that encourage kids to explore nature creatively
- Volunteer events on the land geared toward families
- Partnerships with organizations that focus on engaging kids with nature

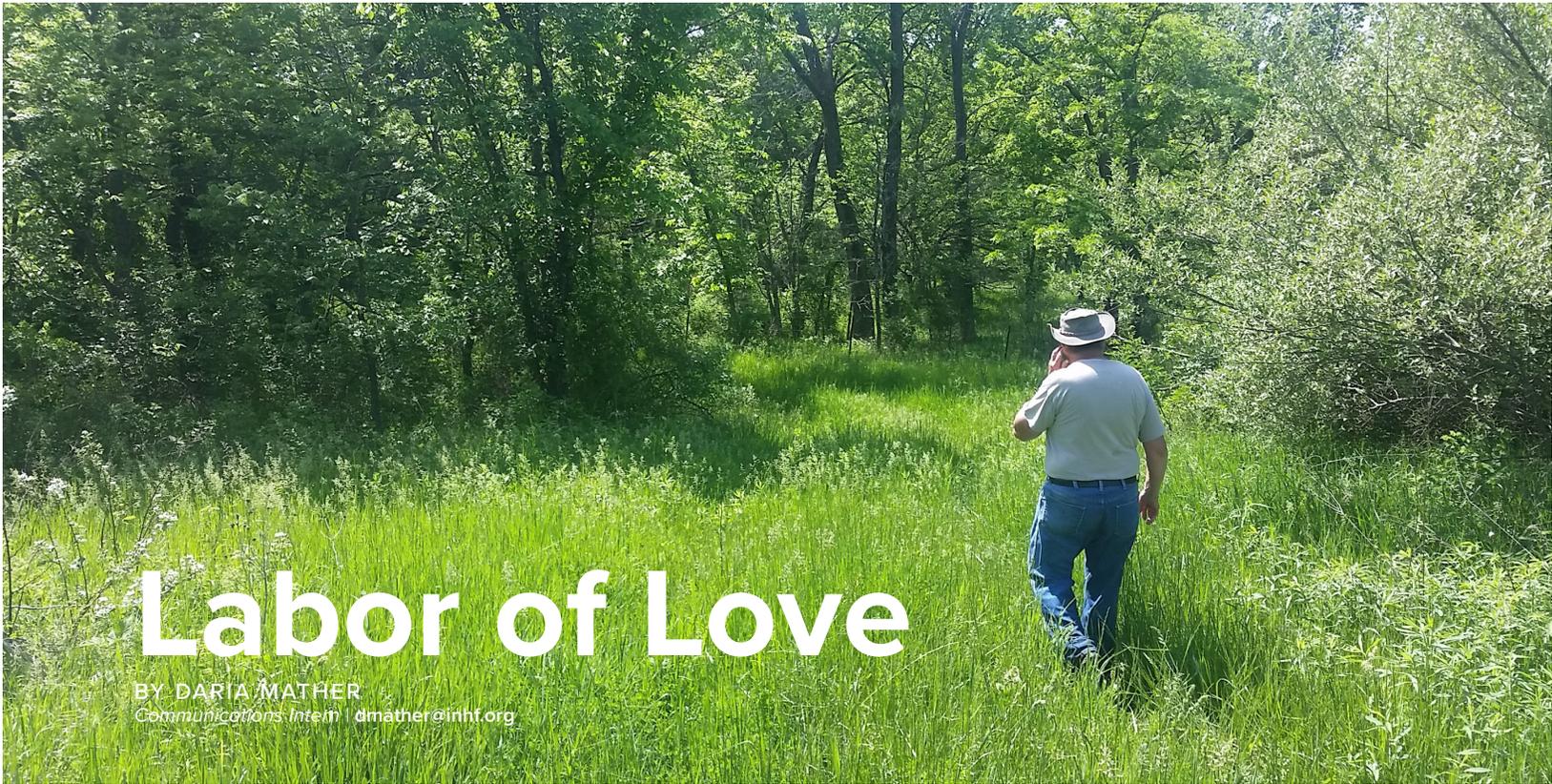
**What else would you like to see in this program?  
Contact Communications Director Joe Jayjack at  
jjayjack@inhf.org or call 515-288-1846, ext. 19.**



**“Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.”**

When we say that, we recognize the enormous potential hidden inside small things. We want to help you tap into that potential in the children in your life, and we are excited to have them be a part of the Acorn Crew.





# Labor of Love

BY DARIA MATHER  
Communications Intern | [dmather@inhf.org](mailto:dmather@inhf.org)

**L**eo Schlunz has been part of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) one way or another for 30 years. In 1990, he became a supporter of INHF. In 2013, he donated a conservation easement to INHF on 95 acres of restored woodland, prairie and wetlands in Lucas County. He donated the same property to INHF in 2016 with a reserved life estate, ensuring that the land will be cared for long-term. For the last six years, he's hosted INHF's intern crew there for a day of learning, stewardship and sharing in his love of the land.

But of his many contributions to INHF, Schlunz is probably best known to the broader INHF community as a frequent and familiar face at INHF volunteer events.

Since 2014, Schlunz has lent a hand at 19 events logging 52 volunteer hours, and that doesn't include time he spends with interns during the summer. Schlunz loves to volunteer, sometimes driving more than 50 miles to help INHF work on a project.

"I've watched a lot of property get overgrown with invasives [species] and I realized the only way you're gonna get rid of invasive [species] is going out there and cutting," Schlunz said. "But it's also the camaraderie of working with other people."

"It's always a pleasure to work alongside him at events, and I always look forward to hearing about his most recent travels," said INHF Volunteer Coordinator Melanie Schmidt. "Leo has dedicated his life to conservation

through his career (Schlunz spent much of his career working as a DNR biologist at Red Haw State Park in Lucas County), the land he has protected, and through the free time he gives to supporting and volunteering for organizations like INHF."

Leo is also an avid birder who has been birding on all seven continents, waded in all five oceans, and traveled to many different countries. He has been all over the world but always ends back at home in Iowa.

Leo really cares for his land and the land of Iowa. Below is an excerpt from "A Place for Nature," an essay he wrote in 2017 about why he decided to permanently protect his land.

"I want the marsh to always be alive with the incessant song of the marsh wren and young ducks swimming around the ever-rising muskrat houses in the cattails in the summer. Where the tree and rough-winged swallows swoop over the marsh feeding on insects by day, replaced at nightfall by bats that are raising their young in the timber under the loose bark of the shagbark hickory. Where the prairie starts to bloom with yellow black-eyed Susan, purple prairie clover and purple coneflowers. Where a Dickcissel sings from a compass plant stalk, and the lightning bug flashes out its Morse code at night."

If anything, his love for the land has only grown since then. Through his many contributions to conservation in Iowa, so does its lasting impact. 🌿



**Each summer, Leo Schlunz** hosts INHF's statewide land stewardship intern crew at his Lucas County property.



# A DELICATE BALANCE

Creating a living legacy in life and on the land.

BY ABBY HADE TERPSTRA  
Donor Relations Director | [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org)

**T**hose who have paddled the South Skunk River know that the river's nature can vary widely. There are sections of straight, channelized waters. And then there are sections where the river has been permitted to stray across the landscape, drifting over time into languid loops and bends.

For many years, Dr. Harold Albers observed the interplay of the river with agricultural lands. His property in Story County, purchased after the floods of 1993, became a study of this interplay.

"Dr. Albers was fascinated by the balance of farming and ecology," said Guy Van Middlesworth, Dr. Albers' accountant, friend and frequent traveling companion on odysseys from St. Petersburg, Fla. back to Iowa, where he grew up. "He felt he had a responsibility to farm, but to farm responsibly."

Dr. Albers was born in Eagle Grove, Iowa, in 1926. A graduate of Iowa State University, he served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and continued traveling and photographing the world until he passed away in 2017. He practiced veterinary medicine for over 50 years and was an avid birder, serving as the expedition vet for renowned naturalist, illustrator and educator Roger Tory Peterson. Dr. Albers was also involved with the

International Crane Foundation, traveling to the nesting grounds of every species of crane in the world. In 1971, Dr. Albers moved to St. Petersburg, Fla.

"Even though he spent most of his life in Florida, Dad always felt a strong connection to his land in Iowa and enjoyed visiting twice a year," said Liz Rutmeyer, Dr. Albers' daughter.

A self-professed "disciple of Aldo Leopold" with a vast interest in conservation, he reached out to and sought to learn from local professionals. In a letter responding to Dr. Albers dated September 2001, former Story County Conservation Board Director Steve Lekwa shared, "You may be aware that the river through your farm land is actually what is left of a ditch dredged by the US Army Corps of Engineers in the early 1900's in an attempt to improve drainage and make the flood plain easier to farm... The bridge and dead-end road were installed in 1916 to serve the needs of farmers cut off from their land by that channelization. The bridge was first installed near Cambridge in 1876, but later moved to that location."

Dr. Albers began experimenting with different types of erosion control along the riverbank, concerned about protecting what he called "Elizabeth's Bridge" in honor of his

daughter, and wanting to prevent soil loss from the nearby fields. In 2005, in a letter to then Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) President Mark Ackelson, he shared that a recent project "included prairie grass restoration, river banks sloped and wings installed... Fish are now present behind the wings. The river and area has been messed with for more than 100 years, but hopefully will return to a somewhat acceptable state for our use."

In his annual Christmas letter in 2010, Dr. Albers wrote, "The Ames farm was flooded at the highest known level in August... As a result of water coming out of the city and flat lands above us, we are planting all of the lower grounds in prairie grass in conjunction with the CRP government program."

This original CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) planting became part of the land along the river that Dr. Albers left to INHF when he passed away in 2017.

"I remember him talking about the beautiful wildflowers and how important nature is," said INHF President Joe McGovern, who assisted with the planting. "He was so passionate about doing the right thing."

"He greatly enjoyed observing the fruits of his conservation efforts," said his son, Bryan Albers.

Albers' will asks INHF to "hold [the] land for the specific purpose of wildlife habitat restoration and protection" for a period of 30 years.

"Dr. Albers' philosophy and passion aligned with the goals of INHF. He trusted the efforts of an organization that he knew was doing the right thing," Van Middlesworth said.

The property's proximity to other protected conservation lands gives a sense of puzzle pieces being locked into place. The north boundary of Dr. Albers' land adjoins what recently became the Ronald "Dick" Jordan Family Wildlife Area, 175 acres of public land along the South Skunk River that INHF transferred to the Story County Conservation Board in 2017.

"This land is part of a greenbelt corridor that extends from Ames all the way to Chichaqua Bottoms and beyond," said INHF Land Projects Director Ross Baxter. "Imagine what protection of this property and others like it would do for wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation."

The land Dr. Albers entrusted to INHF's care, along with his wish that it continue to offer insights into the interplay of conservation and agriculture, speaks volumes about the legacy he leaves; as a contributor to his community, a lifelong learner, a traveler and a naturalist who took great pride in his home state. 🌿

## Albers Bequest Story County



**LAND:** 108 acres of restored prairie, river banks and working land in Story County.

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** Provides wildlife habitat, water quality benefits and soil health protection along the greenbelt.

**PARTNERS:** INHF and Dr. Harold Albers

▲  
**Dr. Harold Albers' land** along the South Skunk River greenbelt offers insights into ways to steward land for conservation and agriculture. *Photos by Genna Clemen*

# Gaining ground

Trail making and momentum in central Iowa

BY KATY HEGGEN  
Communications Specialist | kheggen@inhf.org

Park and trail usage has increased exponentially across the country in recent months as people continue to look for safe spaces to exercise, decompress and connect with nature, and Iowa is no exception.

According to data compiled by Google in its Community Mobility Report released mid-June, natural areas including parks, trails and other outdoor spaces in Iowa are currently experiencing a 175% increase. Trails in particular offer a unique way to get outdoors independently, together.

“Trails give you a feeling of going somewhere,” said INHF Trails and Greenways Director Andrea Boulton. “They also provide a sense of community. That’s so important, especially now.”

## Mile-by-mile

As more people explore Iowa by trail, communities across the state are eager to offer them more routes to take, especially in rural areas. But building trails and creating connections between existing trail networks is no small feat. Most trails take years to complete, their course shaped by a number of contributing factors including planning, funding, navigating corridor negotiations, engineering considerations and construction timelines.

Unlike surrounding states, Iowa’s multi-county trails are managed by local rather than statewide agencies. These agencies, which include county conservation boards, municipalities and trail advocates often rely on INHF for technical expertise and statewide perspective.

“The INHF Trails Program’s goal is to provide resources and support among partners to help them actualize their goals. The amount of time it takes to see success on a project can be daunting. We hope to be the friendly face that pushes people forward and help celebrate even the smallest victories,” Boulton said.

## Up ahead

On average, INHF is engaged in establishing 5-10 trails statewide at any given time, each in various stages of progress. The Red Rock Prairie Trail, the Iowa River’s Edge Trail and the High Trestle Trail/Raccoon River Valley Trail Connector are among INHF’s current projects. All three are slated to extend existing stretches of trail within the next year, expanding opportunities for Iowans to get outdoors.

## Red Rock Prairie Trail

For the past six years, the Jasper County Conservation Board and the cities of Monroe, Prairie City and Mitchellville have been laying the foundation for the Red Rock Prairie Trail, a 16-mile multi-use rail-trail that will wind its way through native prairie and agricultural lands, connecting the three communities.

The project is part of a larger vision that will link the Red Rock Prairie Trail to the Central Iowa Trail Network, creating connections between Saylorville Lake, the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge and Lake Red Rock.

Construction on Phase I of the project, a 9-mile stretch from Monroe through Prairie City to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, is tentatively slated to begin next year. It is expected to open fall of 2021.

Land for the corridor included in Phase II, which will connect Prairie City to Mitchellville, has already been purchased, and fundraising for construction is underway. Mitchellville completed a study with the assistance of Snyder and Associates, Inc. to chart the connection between the Red Rock Prairie Trail and the Chichaqua Valley Trail, which would link the community to Altoona.

“The way people have come together has been really tremendous,” said Jasper County Economic Development Executive Director Jeff Davidson. “There may be aspects of the project that appear to benefit one town more than another, but they all support it, because when it comes to the trail what’s good for one town is good for the other. They really understand that this is something they’re doing together. It’s the creation of the entire trail that creates the benefits for everyone.”

## Iowa River’s Edge Trail

For eight years, those involved in creation of the Iowa River’s Edge Trail have envisioned a trail that will cultivate a deeper sense of connectivity, community and collective appreciation for the cultural and natural resources along the river corridor in east central Iowa.

Once complete, the 34-mile rail-trail between Steamboat Rock and Marshalltown will connect seven communities, two counties and a variety of local, county, regional and state trails and parks. As it weaves its way back and forth along the river, it will take trail users past scenic bluffs, wetlands and wooded areas home to diverse wildlife.

Three miles of trail have already been paved from the trailhead in Marshalltown, and another mile from the opposite trailhead

in Steamboat Rock. Next year, construction commences on the four miles to Eldora. This segment, which is expected to open in fall 2021, will create a ten-mile loop between Eldora, Pine Lake State Park and Steamboat Rock, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities in the area.

“Sometimes it feels like a monumental task, but we keep motivating each other, and it feels like it’s starting to pay off,” said Iowa River’s Edge Trail Committee Member Joe Herring. “Once this next phase is complete, people will be able to have an experience that includes opportunities to camp, bike, paddle, run, walk — all along the trail. It’s not Yellowstone, but it’ll be a local, laidback and awesome little destination for families.”

Seven of the trail’s 19 bridges will also be under construction. The bridges will connect 10 miles of yet-to-be-paved trail, creating safe crossings for hikers, mountain bikers, birders, etc.

The project is currently raising funds to continue construction to extend the trail.

## HTT/RRVT Connector

Once complete, the nine-mile Connector Trail between Perry and Woodward will link two of Iowa’s most popular trails, the High Trestle Trail and the Raccoon River Valley Trail.

Traversing five towns and four counties, the 25-mile High Trestle Trail is one of Iowa’s most beloved trails. Completed in 2011, the trail

features an iconic half-mile bridge across the Des Moines River. The Raccoon River Valley Trail stretches 89 miles spanning 14 towns and four counties, traversing woodlands, prairies, agricultural and urban landscapes. Phase I of the project, one-and-a-half miles from the east edge of Perry city limits to 130th street, is already complete. Phase II, a one-mile section west of Woodward city limits to R Ave., is slated to open in late summer or early fall of 2020. Phase III, which extends one mile westward from the end of Phase II is slated for completion in 2021. This phase may be combined with a Phase IV segment which extends .5 miles eastward from the end of Phase I, but includes building a bridge across Beaver Creek east of Perry. Funding has been secured for Phases I,II,III,IV but additional funds are needed to complete the 9-mile project.

“This (Connector Trail) project is one of the most significant trail projects in years,” said Dallas County Conservation Board Director Mike Wallace. “It connects two of the most popular trails in central Iowa and creates additional networking opportunities for many other trails.”



## LEAVING A LEGACY

This April, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) established a permanent water quality and public fishing access on the Jackson County property bequeathed by Ed Weimerskirk to INHF three years ago.

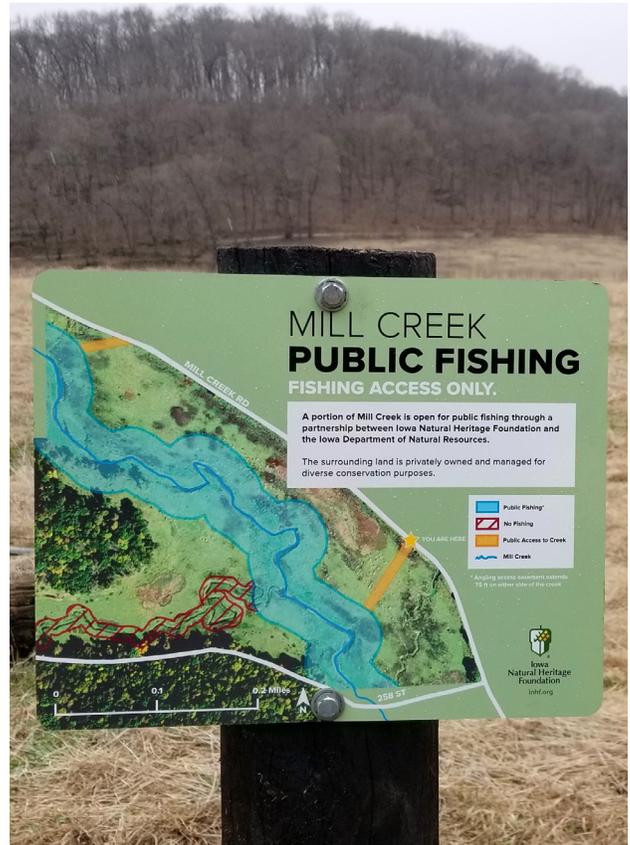
The access, donated to the DNR by INHF for public use, includes a 150-foot strip along 0.6 miles of Mill Creek that is open for public fishing but closed to all other activities.

“There are thousands of miles of small streams in Iowa and each is unique, but only a small fraction of streams have the combination of geology, biology and ecology that allow trout to thrive and reproduce in significant numbers,” said DNR Natural Resources Biologist Dan Kirby. “Mr. Weimerskirk’s gift is now providing Iowa anglers an opportunity to experience and enjoy this exceptional stream fishery.”

Per the wishes stated in Ed’s will, INHF will continue to own and manage the other 400+ acres of surrounding woodland, pasture and agricultural land long-term for diverse conservation purposes that support the naturally reproducing wild Brown trout population and further INHF’s work.

“Eddie was so proud of those Brown trout,” said INHF Senior Land Stewardship and Blufflands Director Brian Fankhauser. “We are honored to be able to share this special area with fellow enthusiasts, and to provide resource protection in a way that aligns with Eddie’s wishes.”

— ABBY HADE TERPSTRA,  
*Donor relations director*



**Leave a legacy of clean water, healthy soil and beautiful outdoor places for future generations.**

To see how including INHF in your will or trust can help make your vision for Iowa a reality, contact Abby Hade Terpstra at [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org) or 515-288-1846, ext 15.

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

### IN MEMORY OF

Edward Angeroth  
Bill Artis  
Faye Ann Barr  
Grant & Brianne Berkland  
Beatrice Bourquin Zinn  
McElhinny  
Marlys A. Brown  
Bud Carpenter  
Carroll Conklin  
Billy E. Croce  
Marguerite “Peggy” Darland  
David Donovan  
Merton Dresser

Dorothy Dykhouse  
David Erusha  
Joel F. Groebner  
Hailey  
Rodney Harms  
Art Heimann  
Joan Hilkemeier  
Keith Howard  
Tracee Kirkpatrick  
Daniel R. Kramer  
Hope E. Kuecker  
Lewis McLaughlin  
Edward (Gene) Metge  
John Northrop

Sandra Ostwinkle  
Opal Pelham  
Roberta Rogge  
Robert Schneberger  
Agnes Steinfeldt  
Ann Steinfeldt  
Nick Strickler  
Kenneth Thomsen  
Bill Tobin  
Beverly Walker  
Douglas N. Wedemeyer  
Alma & George Wedemeyer  
Carol Wilson

### IN HONOR OF

Arloene Brinkmeyer  
Don and Helen Coffin  
Michelle Devine  
Michelle Demeroukas  
Aaron Gassmann  
Janet A. Lovell  
Kate Mendenhall and Zachary Borus and family  
Emily Mendenhall and Adam Koon and family  
Nancy Nollen  
Maynard Reece

Earl and Isabelle Salterberg  
Jim Tredway  
Robert Dean Wilson

Find more Iowa places to explore at [www.inhf.org/blog](http://www.inhf.org/blog)



Photos by Ron Huelse

# Birding for Beginners

BY DARIA MATHER

Communications intern | [dmather@inhf.org](mailto:dmather@inhf.org)

**B**irding has seen an uptick in interest in recent months. Google searches for “birds” reached an all-time high in the U.S. this spring, and it’s easy to understand why. Birding is both a solitary and community-based activity which can be enjoyed by people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, especially now.

“Birding is a great activity during these crazy times for several reasons. First, birds can be found everywhere, from urban settings and backyards to parks and conservation areas, which makes birding a fairly accessible hobby,” said Anna Buckardt Thomas, avian ecologist at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “If you take the time to watch and listen, you will find birds everywhere you go! Second, birding is a good activity to get people outside and can be done while keeping physical distance from others.”

Considering joining the flock? Here are some good things to know before you go:

**Plan ahead.** Know where you’re going, how to be safe and research some of the most common birds in the area. Local birding groups like Iowa Audubon, Iowa Young Birders and the Iowa Ornithologist Union offer maps, bird lists and other resources on their websites.

**Dress for success.** When birding, it’s better to wear clothes that blend in with the landscape so as to not scare the birds off. That said, make sure you incorporate a bit of bright color, preferably orange, during hunting season if you’re birding on public land that allows hunting.

**Bring binoculars.** Borrow or consider purchasing a pair of binoculars. They can be expensive, but if you plan on getting into birding, they are a worthwhile investment.

**Don’t forget your field guide.** Identifying birds can be a bit overwhelming at first. A good field guide is indispensable. There are many different field guides to choose from, and the Iowa Ornithologist Union offers some nice recommendations on their website. There are also some good free apps, but depending on where you’re birding, service may be spotty.

**Pack a notebook.** A weather-proof notebook is useful if you plan on chronicling each bird you see, when and where.

The Code of Birding Ethics created by the American Birding Association has only three rules: Respect and promote birds and their environment; Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members; and Respect and promote the law and the rights of others. 🐦

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Learn more about birding in Iowa and meet other aspiring and advanced birders through these Iowa-based groups.

- Iowa Audubon
- Iowa Young Birders
- Iowa Ornithologist Union

## Places to go:

1. Lacey- Keosauqua State Park

*Birds to look for: Yellow-billed cuckoo, Pileated woodpecker, Indigo bunting*

2. Yellow River State Park

*Birds to look for: Ruffed grouse, Red-shouldered hawk, Yellow-bellied sapsucker*

3. DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge

*Birds to look for: Wood duck, Red-headed woodpecker, Baltimore oriole*

4. Waubonsie State Park

*Birds to look for: Barred owl, Eastern whip-poor-will, Blue-gray gnatcatcher*

5. Walnut Woods/ Brown’s Woods/ Des Moines Water Works

*Birds to look for: Brown creeper, Cooper’s hawk, Wood thrush*

Source: Iowa Audubon



**Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
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**INHF land stewardship intern Renea McNemee enjoys a view of the Mississippi River** atop Capoli bluff on the Buckmaster property in Allamakee County. After a long day clearing trees to open up the oak savanna at the bluff's base, blufflands and statewide stewardship interns hiked to the bluff peak to take in the view. "I recall an American kestrel soaring over the bluffs at the top, the Butterfly milkweed and Leadplant dotting the bluff prairie, and the vast Mississippi that stretched before us," said Savanna Henning, statewide land stewardship intern. *Photo by Savanna Henning*

