

FALL 2020

# IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

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

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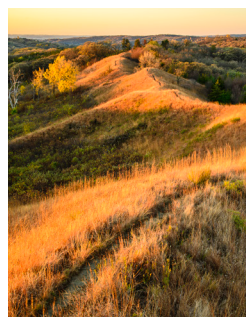
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#### ON THE COVER

Autumn has turned this rolling Loess Hills prairie in Monona County into a golden hilltop.  
*Photo by Josh Meier*



Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation

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

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# Looking ahead with hope

**I** am often reminded to live for today and make the most of every opportunity. However, it would have been hard to imagine a year like this in the not-too-distant past.

A pandemic has threatened our health and upended our lives. Wildfires have raged through the western U.S., and here in Iowa we endured a severe drought punctuated by a derecho that damaged woodlands, crops and buildings in ways we never thought possible. We are in the midst of a national — and needed — reckoning around racism in this country, including in the outdoors. On top of all this, we've been through the most divisive national election I can remember.

Through it all, Iowans have been turning to nature and outdoor recreation in record numbers, and because of you, they had more places to enjoy. Whether a secluded wildlife area, a state or county park or one of 800+ miles of multi-use trails. We've heard countless stories of people finding peace and solitude in nature. In conjunction, we've also heard about crowded parking lots and congested parks. We've always known Iowans need more places to get outdoors, and 2020 has shown why.



JOE MCGOVERN  
President

In this issue, you'll see that our work has remained steady, even while the ways we work and the makeup of our staff continues to evolve. We continue to partner with public agencies and thoughtful landowners to protect special places. We examine the history of land use in Iowa, and consider how it does and should affect our work. And we'll be saying goodbye — and thank you — to our vice president, Anita O'Gara. Preparing for her retirement has been as much about continuing her steadfast, passionate work as it has been about learning what she has been taught by all of you in more than three decades with INHF.

And yet, we know Iowa needs more. Regardless of what comes our way, INHF will continue to work hard to protect and restore more of our bluffs, prairies, wetlands and woodlands. We will work to improve water quality, champion healthy agriculture and partner to create even more outdoor recreation opportunities. We will find new communities that will engage in and benefit from the work of conservation.

We are able to do this because of your support. By sharing your passion, your ideas, your talent and your time, you give us hope, which allows us to imagine a better future. For that, thank you.

**INHF hosted a variety** of outdoor events this fall that allowed people to responsibly gather outdoors while enjoying the land. *Photo by Genna Clemen*



**“He said that’s when everything looks the most beautiful, just before the sun sets. This luminous air turning everything to gold. He said it made him want to paint the whole world.”**

— BEATRIZ WILLIAMS, “*The Golden Hour*”

It’s easy for me to balk at the brisk winds of fall in Iowa as a foreboding of winter. But this season is also like a long and glorious golden hour before sunset. Nature has begun winding down toward a night of rest and reclusivity before the dawn of the next rotation around the sun. But boy does it pack in some beautiful moments to enjoy.

With autumn comes the transition from bees to beastly wind chill. It’s a time for prairie seed harvests and cider, leaf piles and bonfires. A year of preparation and hard work in the fields has led to long-awaited harvest. Trees drop their leaves as we don our sweaters.

An easy season to romanticize, this cooling season also has days of dreary rain, biting chill, and that inevitable hard frost. When I am wishing for sun, calm or warmth, I can try to remind myself to appreciate harsher conditions for their place in nature’s cycle. Although change isn’t always easy, it is inevitable and necessary.

This fall, I resolve to gaze at red oaks in wonder as they glow with fiery glory for a couple weeks – rain or shine – and admire their methodical preparation for harsher conditions, and faith in fairer days ahead. I’ll approach the coming of autumn, not as a dread of winter, but a beautiful space to be cherished on its own with all its variations.

— EMILY FEEKES, *INHF* volunteer



Emily Feekes is a procedure writer and musician. She enjoys biking Iowa’s trails and volunteering for conservation organizations – especially INHF.

*Photo by Emily Feekes*





## A LANDMARK SUMMER

Each summer INHF has the opportunity to teach, learn from and get to know the next generation of conservation leaders. This summer was no different.

Seven statewide and four bluffslands stewardship interns spent their summers learning about land stewardship, restoring and exploring native landscapes across Iowa. Three office interns shaped Iowa's land through grant writing and research, communications and graphic design.

This year's internships looked a little different due to COVID-19. Social distancing practices were in place for field interns and office interns worked from home throughout the summer.

"Our interns, supervisors and staff rose to the challenge, and together we were able to create a meaningful and certainly memorable experience for all involved. This summer was a testament to the interns' determination to make a difference and staff's commitment to creating opportunities for them to do so," said INHF President Joe McGovern.

INHF continues to be proud of its stewardship crews and office interns, grateful to the donors that make the intern program possible, and thankful for the important work they accomplish together.

## New Faces

INHF welcomed Linda Thacker as development and finance assistant this spring. Linda is an essential member of the development team, responsible for entering daily gifts and assisting with tasks related to financial reporting.

Linda grew up in Davenport and cultivated a love for Iowa's outdoors on Sunday afternoons family car rides visiting various cities and towns along the Mississippi River. Living so close to one of the largest rivers in the country skewed her perception of rivers. She was

surprised to later learn that most rivers are small in comparison.

She spent several years in the northeast metro region of Atlanta, where she appreciated the beautiful, tall pine trees and easy access to the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Upon return to Iowa, Linda found she still enjoys car rides in the country. She also loves bicycling on Iowa's trails and meeting other people along the way, enjoying the fresh air and scenery.



## An Advocate for Iowa's Waters

Rick Dietz of Story County has been selected to receive the 2020 INHF Lawrence and Eula Hagie Heritage Award. The annual award recognizes Iowans who have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to conservation and improvement of the natural environment.

Dietz was nominated for his conservation leadership in Story County, particularly his work to protect, improve and help others enjoy outdoor recreation through his involvement as a long-time volunteer with the Story County Conservation Board (SCCB) and the Skunk River Paddlers.

"Rick is a long-time supporter of SCCB and a fierce advocate for Iowa's natural heritage," wrote Erica Place, an outreach coordinator with SCCB and one of Rick's nominators. "He not only spends his time improving natural resources, but connecting people with nature. He has a strong understanding that individuals must know and understand the resource before they can truly appreciate and protect it themselves. His actions show his desire to make natural resources as relatable and accessible as possible."

The Hagie Heritage Award was established by Janice Hagie Shindel of Florida and Ila Jeanne Hagie Logan of Merville, IA in 1990 in honor of their parents, Lawrence and Eula Hagie.



## QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

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

### Newly protected areas

#### Boone County

12 acres of woodland adjacent to the former central Iowa 4-H camp in Boone County. Will increase access to the west side of the former 4-H property via Peach Ave., help buffer and prevent encroachment on the woodland.

#### Big Marsh WMA Addition

49 acres of riparian woodland along the West Fork of the Cedar River in Butler County. Protects wildlife habitat for several species including the wood turtle, an Iowa endangered species, and includes undrained wetlands. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Clay County

425 acres along the Little Sioux River in Clay County. Protects diverse wildlife habitat including upland and riparian woodland, reconstructed prairie, pasture, prairie remnants and 1.8 miles of the Little Sioux River, one of Iowa's five Protected Water Areas. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Davis County

944 acres of woodland and upland habitat in Davis County. The woodland is primarily high quality white oak/shagbark hickory, which provides habitat for the Indiana bat, a federally endangered species.

#### Falcon Springs WMA Addition

104 acres of woodland, trout stream and restored prairie adjacent to Falcon Spring WMA in Winneshiek County. Provides wildlife habitat for several species include Brown trout and the Rusty-patched bumblebee, a federally endangered species. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### George Wylie Phelps Wildlife Area

85 acres of cropland that will be restored to prairie and wetlands along the west side of West Lake Okoboji in Dickinson County. Will protect water quality, reduce runoff and provide wildlife habitat. The property also lies within the DNR's Cayler Prairie Grasslands Bird Conservation Area. *(Donated by Linda Phelps and George Phelps. Will be owned and managed by INHF. Read more about this project on page 10)*

#### Madison County

5 acres of pasture and scattered riparian trees along the north fork of Clanton Creek in southern Madison County. Located a few miles north of Clanton Creek Wildlife Management Area, the property provides an opportunity to expand land protection in the area. *(Donated by Roslea Johnson)*

#### Middle Raccoon River WMA Addition

12 acres of oak woodland one-and-a-half miles south of Panora. Expands access to the adjacent Middle Raccoon River WMA, protects wildlife habitat and protects water quality benefits to the nearby Middle Raccoon River, one of Iowa's five Protected Water Areas. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Palo Alto

8 acres of woodland near DNR's Blue Wing Marsh, Dewey's Pasture and Lost Island Lake County Park in Palo Alto County. Provides wildlife habitat in an otherwise largely agricultural landscape. *(Donated by the family of the late Robert C. Jacobson)*

#### Pocahontas County

104 acres of riparian woodland and grassland along the Des Moines River in Pocahontas County. The property is adjacent to Struthers and Hams Wildlife Area and in the FEMA Flood Hazard Area. Will provide flood plain protection and wildlife habitat. *(Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Raccoon River Valley Trail and High Trestle Trail Link

.16 acres of 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 trails. *(Will be owned and managed by Dallas County Conservation Board)*

#### Story County

127 acres of grassland north of Ames in Story County. The property is adjacent to McFarland Park and along the I-35 corridor. Will protect wildlife habitat, soil health and expand outdoor recreation opportunities in the area. *(Significant portion of land value donated by Bob and Carole Deppe. Will be owned and managed by the Story County Conservation Board)*

#### Thomas Ancestral Acres

40 acres of oak/hickory woodland in Jefferson County. Will preserve spring ephemerals, protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat for many species including redheaded woodpeckers, Baltimore orioles, whitetail deer, wild turkeys and foxes. *(Donated by Shirley Brown)*

#### Winneshiek County

57 acres of bur oak savanna, grassland, riparian woodland and a half-mile of Dry Run Creek in Winneshiek County. Will provide trail corridor for Dry Run Trail, an eight-mile trail that will connect the Trout Run Trail to the Prairie Farmer Recreational Trail. *(Will be owned and managed by Winneshiek County Conservation Board)*

### Land transfers to public partners

#### Bloody Run WMA Addition

165 acres of woodland, agricultural land and 2/3 of a mile of Bloody Run Creek adjacent to Bloody Run Wildlife Management Area in Clayton County. Provides fish and wildlife habitat and an access point on the west end of Bloody Run WMA, a popular area for trout fishing. *(Owned and managed by Iowa DNR)*

#### Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition

156 acres of wetland along the west bank of the Skunk River in Jasper County. Will provide water quality benefits and wildlife habitat for a variety of species including trumpeter swans, wood ducks and sedge wrens. The river corridor also provides critical foraging opportunities for bat species including the Indiana bat and long-eared bat. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

#### Tuttle Lake WMA Addition

182 acres of pasture and grassland in Emmet County. This property is predominately grassland with low-lying pasture which is subject to periodic flooding. *(Owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and managed by Iowa DNR.)*

#### Paris Bridge Natural Area Addition

10 acres of wooded floodplain along the Wapsipinicon River, one of Iowa's five Protected Water Areas, in Linn County. Will protect water quality and wildlife habitat for several species including the Blanding's turtle, an Iowa threatened species, and the Eastern Massassagua rattlesnake, a federal threatened species. This is the last in a series of transfers of this 88-acre property, the other 78 acres of which is owned and managed by the Linn County Conservation Board. *(Owned and managed by the YMCA of the Cedar Rapids Metro Area)*

#### Green Hill Ranch

506 acres of oak savanna, remnant prairie and grassland along the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway in Pottawattamie and Mills counties. Expands recreational opportunities, maintains scenic beauty and provides wildlife habitat for several state threatened and endangered species that live within the Folsom Point Special Landscape Area in which it lies. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*





# A NEW SEASON

BY ANITA O'GARA  
Vice President | [aogara@inhf.org](mailto:aogara@inhf.org)

"One of my fondest memories of working with Anita is from one of those nice long Iowa drives. We were on our way to meet a landowner and talk about land protection together during my first few weeks at INHF. She gave me encouragement and a much deeper understanding of how things worked, but most importantly, we had a chance to get to know each other. I would have never dreamed that over 21 years later I would be saying goodbye. Anita's contribution to our mission and, more importantly, Iowa, is truly immeasurable. I will forever be grateful for Anita, and know that countless other Iowans feel the same way."

– Joe McGovern, INHF President

**W**hen I began a part-time, temporary job here in 1985, I had no idea I would fall in love with this work and these people. I was fascinated, watching a handful of scrappy people invent opportunities and knit together a community of people who were making a permanent difference in Iowa. At the time, it didn't occur to me to consider myself among them.

None of us could have foreseen what would be accomplished over time. It seemed that each person, place and project inspired more people and ideas to come forward. I also didn't foresee how immersing myself at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) would shape me.

I've had the opportunity to be part of amazing projects and programs these past 35 years. I've had the privilege of watching INHF go from an idea to a trusted leader in land protection. But no experience has affected me so profoundly as the daily interactions I've had with the people I've met during my time here.

As vice president and in my previous roles, I have been blessed to meet a steady flow of inspiring

generous people. Imagine being with new people each year who devote their lives to nurturing a special plot of land – and then decide with you how best to entrust it to others. Consider the trust people show as they tell you they are leaving their worldly goods to INHF, so that we might achieve something wonderful on their behalf beyond their lifetimes. Think how exciting it is to know people who selflessly devote themselves year after year to create a trail connecting their community with neighboring towns – and then to celebrate the completion of that trail with them.

These people take my breath away. Being with them has kept me grounded, inspired and hopeful. Their presence has given me a beautiful life.

A lot has changed over the past three-and-a-half decades. People have come and gone. The scope of INHF's work has expanded. But the shared spirit of our people remains the same.

There's our heartfelt concern mingled with hope for our Iowa home. We share in our awe and growing knowledge of this land as we work enthusiastically to protect and restore it.

There's a can-do attitude — a strong combination of boldness, creativity and inviting others in to accomplish important things. The positivity and persistence of our people has often lifted me up. Our people listen well, and are skilled at bringing people and resources together. There's authentic respect for each individual and partner that works through or with us. Encouragement, knowledge and credit are shared generously.

There's our common desire to plant seeds — even when we don't expect to eat the fruit. I've had the deep joy of being present when seeds were planted — then to nurture, watch them grow and bear fruit.

After 35 fulfilling years, I will retire from INHF on Dec. 31. This new season will mean more space for other kinds of joy in my life, including more time with my five precious grandchildren who can enjoy the fruit of what we've all planted.

It is so satisfying to think of the lasting legacy we continue to create together on the land and for one another.

This is my heartfelt letter of thanks to all of you who have been part of my INHF life. I hope to see some of you later at INHF gatherings or volunteer workdays. Please know that you all remain within me and have formed me. I'm feeling more gratitude for our journey together than I can contain. Thank you for the gift. 🍁





*INHF had hoped to host a gathering celebrating Anita's retirement this fall, but that will not be possible due to the ongoing pandemic. If you would like to send words of appreciation and well wishes to Anita, you may do so at [anitaogara@gmail.com](mailto:anitaogara@gmail.com) or by sending a card to INHF at 505 5th Ave., Ste. 444, Des Moines, IA 50309.*

## FUTURE PLANS

INHF will not be hiring a new vice president at this time. Rather, Anita's responsibilities will be redistributed to other staff, creating continuity during this transition and opportunities for growth, development and advancement for existing staff. Contact Abby Hade Terpstra to discuss creating a conservation legacy, a special gift or tribute, land protection options and how to support INHF's mission.

Not sure where to direct other inquiries? Visit our staff page at [inhf.org](http://inhf.org) and review the **"Contact about"** info at the end of each staffer's bio. You may also email [info@inhf.org](mailto:info@inhf.org) or phone 515-288-1846, and we will direct you to the appropriate staff person.

## A LOOK BACK

In her 35 years with INHF, Anita has had the opportunity to be part of shaping countless projects and programs. Below are a few on which she had a particularly notable impact that remain close to her heart.

### Iowa Landowner Options

First published in 1982, Iowa Landowner Options was created to help Iowa landowners explore methods for permanently protecting their land's special natural features. Anita has led revisions and outreach for "the book," now in its 7th print edition and available online at [IowaLandOptions.org](http://IowaLandOptions.org), and marvels at the impact it has had on the landscape. "It's a vital niche: to invite landowners to permanently protect the land they love, and to personally help them connect with people and technical resources that fit their land and their desires," said Anita.

### Internship Program

INHF hired its first intern in 1986. Since then, more than 300 interns have left their mark on Iowa through INHF. Anita coached many early interns and helped expand funding and the program over the years. "I've enjoyed watching this grow from an occasional intern into a year-round force of young adults working alongside staff in the office and on the land," she said. "I'm proud of the experiences and opportunities for personal growth we've provided for them, and thankful for their many contributions to our mission."

### Leaving a legacy

During Anita's tenure, the number of people who have told us of plans to leave a legacy for conservation through INHF has grown from a handful to more than 300. These very devoted people greatly expand INHF's ability to do good in Iowa. "We're proud to offer personal relationships as well as professional systems to ensure we understand and fulfill these donors' wishes," Anita said.

### Giving for trails and land projects

Anita often strategized or led fundraising for INHF land protection projects. "Each project has its own immense satisfaction," she said. "I found a special kind of energy in supporting local volunteers as they raised essential funds, and in celebrating projects that had gained broad support." A few of those projects are noted here:

### Wabash Trace Nature Trail

In the 1990s, INHF supported a bunch of local daring, creative and passionate people who spent years promoting and funding this 63-mile trail from Council Bluffs to the Missouri border.

### Heritage Addition to Effigy Mounds

Completed in 2000, the 1,045 acres of woodland nearly doubled the size of Effigy Mounds National Monument and linked it to Yellow River State Forest. Its outstanding wildlife habitat and cultural significance attracted 1,200 donors.

### Anglers Bay, Dickinson County

Nearly two-thirds of a mile of shoreline and a massive bed of bulrushes in the northeast corner of Big Spirit Lake are protected forever thanks to ambitious local fundraising over three years.

### Turin Prairie, Monona County

Encompassing 467 acres of classic Loess Hills topography, including 200 acres of native prairie stretching out across its dune-like ridges, it's easy to understand why Turin Prairie, pictured above, moved 1,000+ donors to help protect it forever.

### High Trestle Trail

Featuring a 1/2-mile bridge across the Des Moines River Valley, the High Trestle Trail has helped make Iowa a trails destination, though Anita appreciates the connections the trail and its iconic bridge have helped created between communities along the corridor. "Project leaders from Woodward & Madrid told me about their towns' rivalries, and how this project brought them together," she said. "For me, that's a big part of what INHF is all about."

### Heritage Valley

Folded into the far-reaches of northeast Iowa, Heritage Valley encompasses more than three miles of the Upper Iowa River and includes a diverse mix of woodland, prairie and floodplain, all managed primarily for wildness. This 1,200-acre property has become an iconic project for INHF.

### Hickory Ridge Wilderness Camp

On the south shore of Lake Red Rock, INHF and local volunteers helped the US Army Corps of Engineers transform this long-abandoned campground into a 47-acre wooded, paddle-in campsite — the first of its kind on a major Iowa lake.



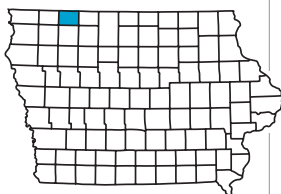


# Generations of love for the lakes

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

▲  
**The George Wylie Phelps Wildlife Area,** now owned and managed by INHF, is part of a 450-acre complex of protected land on the west side of West Okoboji Lake.

**George Wylie Phelps Wildlife Area**  
Dickinson County



**LAND:** 85 acres of cropland, most of which will be restored to wetlands and wildlife habitat

**SPECIAL FEATURES:**

Protects wildlife habitat, soil health and water quality

“**T**his lake was in his family blood, back to his great-grandparents,” Linda Phelps said about her late husband, George’s, connection to West Okoboji Lake.

George’s great-grandfather bought a home on the lake in the early 1900s, and his grandfather, Robert Wylie, was one of the University of Iowa faculty that helped to establish the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory (Lakeside Lab) on the lake’s west shore for “the study of nature in nature.”

George’s mother, Helen, spent every summer of her childhood at the Lakeside Lab. That is where she met her future husband, Floyd, while he was studying there. Helen and Floyd raised George and his siblings in Kingsley, Iowa but each summer, they returned to the lake.

“He grew up at the Great Lakes,” Linda said. “He loved plants and nature. Maybe that love was passed down to him.”

After graduating from Cornell College, being drafted by the Denver Broncos and later earning a masters degree in business administration from the University of Iowa, George returned to Kingsley. There he helped his brother, Bob, reorganize the private Oltmann and Phelps



George Phelps

Bank into a state-chartered bank that later became Kingsley State Bank. George worked as a chief executive officer there until his retirement in October 2018.

While his professional focus was in banking, nature remained close to George’s heart. He served on the Plymouth County Conservation board, and George and Linda owned a home in the same neighborhood as the Lakeside Lab.

When 85 acres of cropland went up for sale not far from their lake house in 2011, George and Linda purchased it with plans to someday restore it for water quality purposes. It was George’s wish that the property be donated to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). Following George’s death in August of 2019, Linda and their son David, also of Kingsley, completed the donation.

“He loved that property. He watched the corn grow, watched the water movement, looked for erosion,” Linda said. “He started visiting native prairies more. George kept most of his thoughts to himself, but I know he was thinking how this land might become his legacy to the Lakes.”

The property will be known as the George Wylie Phelps Wildlife Area, and INHF will be responsible for its protection and restoration. By restoring wetlands and managing the land for wildlife, this land will help improve soil





health and lake water quality.

Directly to the west of the site is the West Okoboji Wetlands Complex, owned by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. INHF partnered with the DNR to protect and restore this complex about 10 years ago. The restoration of this 350-acre complex led to an almost 90 percent reduction in sediment and phosphorus and 70 percent reduction in nitrates going into West Lake Okoboji.

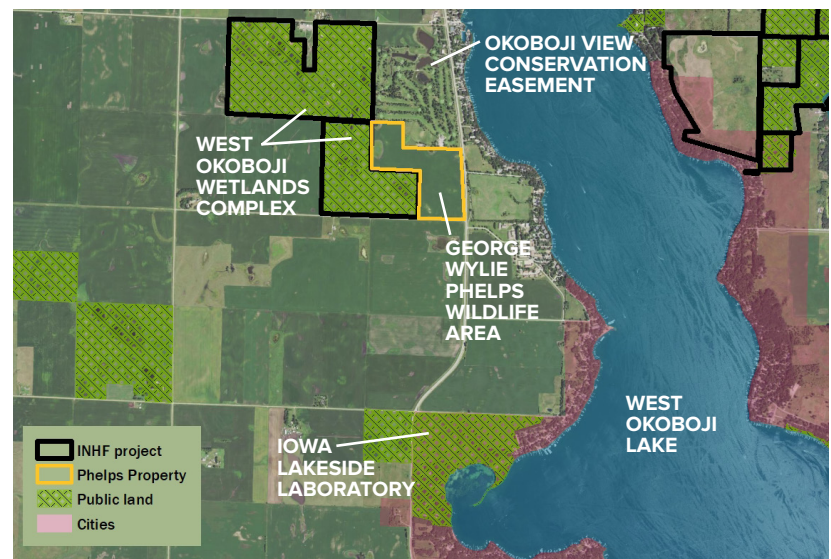
Bordering the Phelps site to the north is Okoboji View Golf Course. In 2012, INHF provided technical assistance for restoration of three wetland basins on the golf course, further improving water quality flowing into the lake and creating more wildlife habitat. DNR also holds a conservation easement on the 17-acre site of the golf course restoration, ensuring its permanent protection.

"The donation shows that the Phelps are truly looking out for their neighbors, and looking out for the lake," said Heather Jobst, INHF senior land conservation director. "Restoration of the natural wetland sites on the Phelps Wildlife Area will help us build on the complex of protected natural land around it. All of these things benefit the water quality of West Okoboji Lake. They also ensure open space and scenic

beauty in an area that could see increased development pressure."

Linda said that George often thought of the well-being of other people in the community, and was generous, often choosing to remain anonymous. Protecting this land is another way he's helping his neighbors and looking out for future generations, similar to the way his grandfather was looking to the future when he helped establish Lakeside Lab all those years ago. 🌿

**Situated in a complex** of protected land that has had a profound effect on the water quality of West Okoboji Lake, the George Wylie Phelps Wildlife Area is critical to the ongoing improvement of water quality in the Iowa Great Lakes.











# LAY OF THE LAND

BY KATY HEGGEN  
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**W**ildness. It's a word that gets thrown around a lot of conversations about conservation, including those at INHF. A desire to help preserve "wild places" is what attracts many to this work – at least at first. But the truth is, by and large, wildness doesn't exist, at least not in the literal sense.

As it relates to land, wildness is defined as: "a tract or region uncultivated and uninhabited by human beings" (Merriam Webster). By that definition, no place is truly wild. Bearing a few exceptions, the lay of the land here in Iowa – and across much of the globe – has been shaped by nature and human hands.

## FORMED LAND

Land can be shifted in many ways. Sometimes these transformations, like the ones brought about by the glaciers that gave form to Iowa's landscape, occur over long periods of time. Others, like the recent derecho that devastated much of central and eastern Iowa this summer, are comparatively short but impactful in their own right.

Derechos, floods, wildfires and other atmospheric events are, in fact, natural. Essential even. It's the frequency with which they now occur that is anything but. These events are capable of wrecking and reinvigorating the landscape, often in the same breath. Some are so powerful that they permanently alter the very lay of the land itself. The people who first stood on this land as well as those who occupy it now have exerted their influence on the land as well.

Indigenous people cared for the land we now know as Iowa long before the arrival of the European settlers. Tribes conducted cultural burning to rejuvenate the landscape and meet human needs. They planted crops attuned to the soil and season. Wildlife populations were kept in balance through sustainable hunting and cultivation practices. When French explorers first looked upon the land and its "wild" prairies, woodlands and waters, they were witnessing thousands of years of stewardship by the approximately 17 tribes that did – and still do – call this place home.\*



The impact of those early settlers and their descendants can be seen in the landscape as well. After the federal government forced many Indigenous people — including members of the Ioway, Sauk, Meskwaki, Sioux, Potawatomi, Ojibwe and Missouri tribes — from their land through a series of coerced treaties and acts of aggression, the early European settlers quickly began reshaping the landscape.

They harvested timber for lumber, fuel, fenceposts, railroad ties and other infrastructure. Prairies were plowed, wetlands drained and rivers channelized to accommodate large-scale agriculture which now covers more than 85% of the state, making Iowa one of the most human-altered landscapes in the country.

In time, others arrived, too. Towns grew into cities, which gave way to suburbs, which are now merging

together as parts of the state become more densely populated. This shift is reshaping the landscape, too, as is a growing interest in land restoration, protection and outdoor recreation. People are still coming. They bring with them their own relationship to the land, rooted in the places they left behind or are returning to.

## LAND FORMS

Just as humans and nature have molded the landscape, people's relationship to land has been shaped by land itself, their practical access — or lack thereof — to it, and the individual and collective events, experiences and interactions they have had on it.

History, religion, politics, race, class, economics and culture are all interwoven into the ways we experience and exist on land. Wars

have been fought on and over it. Civilizations have been built, destroyed and reimagined again and again on its ground. It's served as the backdrop for social movements, an inspiration to artists, and a space for spiritual practice. It is both an embodiment of opportunity and possibility, and a reminder of pain and suffering. Some find a sense of peace, purpose and connection in its stillness, while others feel a sense of unease, anxiety and foreboding in its solitude. Many people experience all of the above, sometimes simultaneously.

Our relationship to the land is inseparable from our own lived and inherited knowledge, experiences and understanding of our place — and others' — outdoors. But thankfully, like the land itself, both have the power to evolve.





## A NEW VIEW

In the coming year, *Iowa Natural Heritage* will explore the lay of Iowa's land. Together, we'll delve into the ways people engage with nature, and learn how their experiences both on and off the land have informed their relationship to it. We'll strive to uplift Iowa voices and organizations, and feature some from out of state, too. Good ideas know no borders. We hope that in doing so we'll expand our individual and collective understanding of what it means to stand in relation to the land, and through it, each other.

Land is a reflection of community. The better able we are to see our self and others in it, the more likely we will feel compelled to protect it together. And that's worth a look. 🌿

*\*The thoughts expressed in this essay relating to wildness and Indigenous influence on the land were inspired and informed in-part by a post on the Indigenous Women Hike Instagram account reflecting on the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Follow them at @indigenouswomenhike.*

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It's a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they're around us. As you all do."

– **Mary Lyons** (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

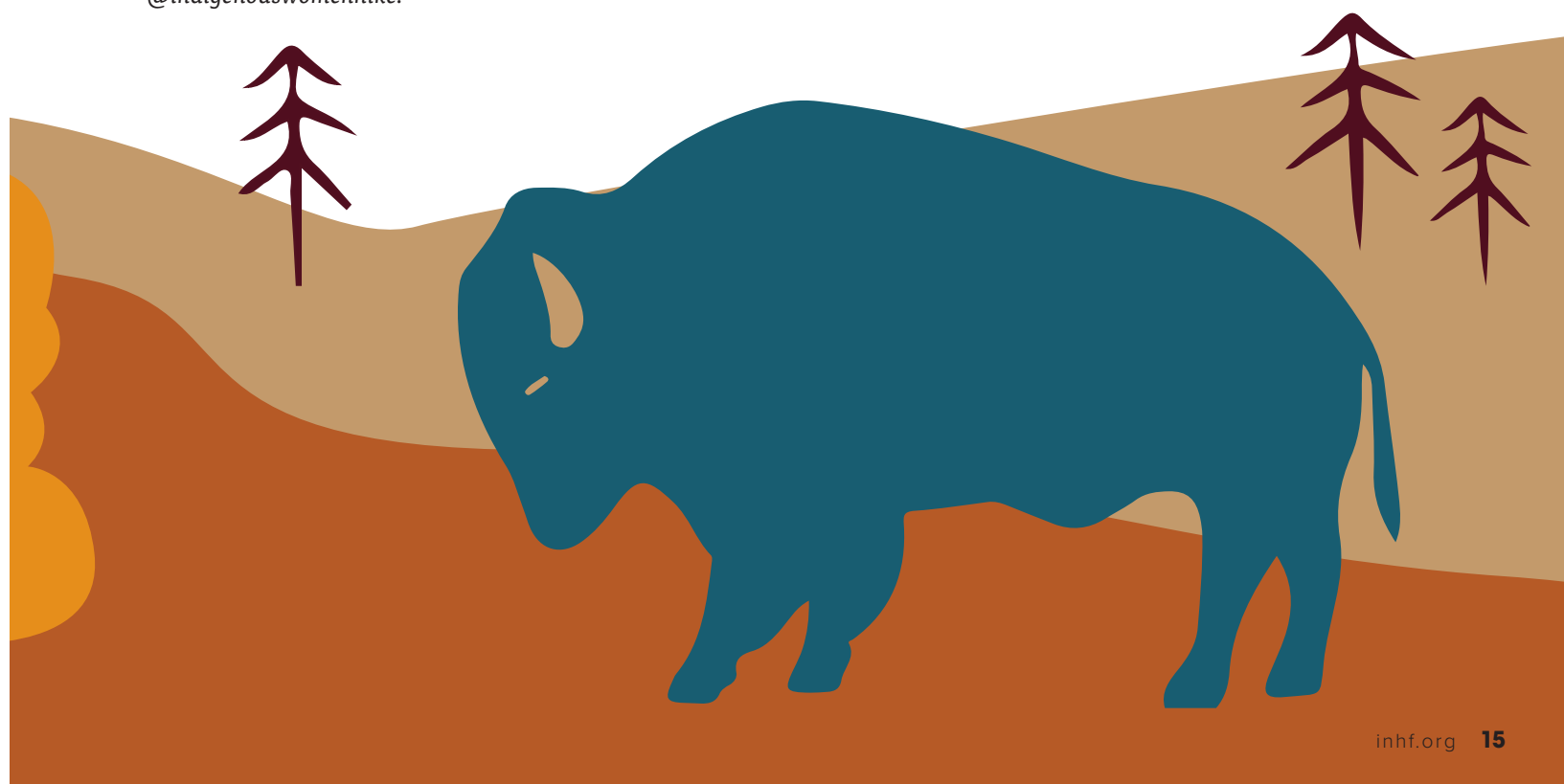
To create a more equitable future, we must acknowledge our past. INHF's process of crafting a land acknowledgement statement started with self-reflection and a commitment to intentional actions. We are committed to taking steps to further learn, make connections and create concrete actions that will affirm and uplift Indigenous voices and communities in ways that go beyond words. We hope to better learn from and about the traditional owners and stewards of this land, historically and today. We have started using this statement throughout the organization (i.e. at the beginning of events, presentations, meetings).

As a starting place, we have crafted a general statement that we will begin to use in appropriate situations. This statement and all the actions around it are living projects and subject to adaptation as we forge ahead in self-education and build deeper relationships.

### INHF Land Acknowledgement:

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

Learn more about land acknowledgement: [nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/](https://nativegov.org/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/)



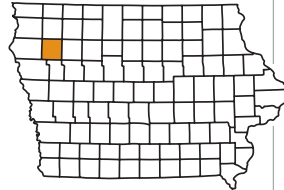




# Big heart on the LITTLE SIOUX RIVER

BY KATY HEGGEN  
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## Nelson Conservation Easement Cherokee County



**LAND:** 60 acres including 1/3 mile of riverfront along the Little Sioux River near Cherokee

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** Provides wildlife habitat, preserves water quality, expands recreational opportunities along the Little Sioux River

The best turkey Karen Nelson ever fixed was cooked on a wood-fueled stove in a cozy cabin on the Little Sioux River. There's no reason to doubt that the bird prepared that day in Cherokee County was anything short of exceptional. There's also no denying that the meal's setting and the people it brought together time and again, rarely disappointed.

## A gathering place

Karen and her late husband, Tom, bought the cabin and surrounding .68 acres in November of 1985. Perched on an embankment overlooking the Little Sioux River, the water is practically within reach. Surrounded by public lands, the spot is idyllic as it is scenic.

"Tom looked at it while I was at work one day, told me about it, and said 'take a look and see what you think,'" Karen recalled. "I saw it and said, 'We can't go wrong. Let's get it.'"

It didn't take long for Tom and Karen, both whom already had an affinity for the river, to fall in love with the place. When the adjacent

property was offered at auction by the county six years later, they didn't hesitate. Tom, an avid outdoorsman who enjoyed hunting, fishing and bird-watching, was especially excited to redevelop the upland part of the land from a gravel pit to a pond.

Karen fondly recalls afternoons the family spent floating there on inner tubes, and the days her children, and later, her seven grandchildren spent fishing and catching frogs.

In the winter, they'd invite family and friends over for parties to watch the ice go out on the river, the cracking ice audible from the embankment. In later years, the couple hosted potlucks and jam sessions on the land, everyone playing music together late into the night.

It was these memories and her love of this place that motivated her to pursue permanently protecting it when Tom passed away.

"My children are grown and have moved away, and I knew I didn't want to go out there and stay at the cabin by myself," Karen said. "It became my dream to preserve it for other people to enjoy."

## Expanding the invitation

Karen reached out to Cherokee County Conservation Board to see if they would be interested in the property. After meeting with Executive Director Chad Brown, who offered ideas of how they could share it with others, she decided to donate it to them.

"We were really excited when Karen reached out," Brown said. "The land is tucked into the middle of all of this public land, and it's right on the river, so it's definitely a good property to protect."

Protection of the property has added to the growing complex of scenic land along the Little Sioux River – including 260 contiguous acres between the Nelsons' land and neighboring natural areas – for the public and paddlers to enjoy.

Encouraged by her daughter, Meg, who had worked in conservation, she also decided to donate a conservation easement on all 60 acres to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). This ensures the land's natural features will be protected in perpetuity, and that the property cannot be subdivided or developed.

"I think that a conservation easement is the best way to really ensure that land is protected as envisioned for as long as possible," Meg said. "It was really the result of my interest in conservation, and my mom's interest in wanting to protect the land and ensure it would always be available for the enjoyment of future generations."

## Around the bend

Karen donated the property to CCCB in February of 2019. In the days since, CCCB staff have slowly begun reshaping the lay of the land, now known as River Road Conservation Area, to realize the shared vision for this place.

An extensive renovation of the cabin, which had been significantly damaged in the 2018 floods, was recently completed and is now available for rent. A trail that loops around the whole property via an old rail-bed has been mowed and leveled off. New prairie plantings are beginning to take root.

CCCB hopes to eventually use the land to provide educational and recreational programming for kids. Tom, who enjoyed instilling "a love of the outdoors and a sense of responsibility for the land and its wildlife" in others, certainly would have appreciated that.

Some things have changed since those early days at the cabin. Karen has moved to Wisconsin to be closer to her children. The old stove where she fixed that bird is long gone. The beauty, pull of this place, and now, the promise that it will always be here, remain much the same.

"That's what I wanted, for people to be able come and experience this place and make their own memories," Karen said. 🌿

**Protection of the** property has added to the growing complex of scenic land along the Little Sioux River – including 260 contiguous acres between the Nelsons' land and neighboring natural areas – for the public and paddlers to enjoy.







# CALL OF THE WILDFIRE

BY JOE JAYJACK  
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**D**erek Miner was on his way home from fighting wildfires in Colorado this past September when he met a fellow wildfire fighter that didn't have a home to return to. A fire had burned through the man's community in Oregon while he was fighting wildfires in Colorado.

"That's when it really hit home," Derek said. "The seriousness of this."

Accelerating climate change has caused wildfires to begin earlier and last longer, turning wildfire season into a year-round reality. This requires more people to help manage fires, and several INHF staff have been able to help while receiving valuable training in fire management.

Derek, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's (INHF) land stewardship associate, is the latest INHF staffer to head west for wildfire duty. Volunteer Coordinator Melanie Schmidt and Land Stewardship Director Ryan Schmidt have also answered the wildfire call. Together, INHF staff have been on six total wildfire assignments since 2015.

"When we think about value to INHF, of course we think about work skills and techniques that we learn," said Ryan, who was called to western Montana for wildfire duty in 2015. "We take these and apply them to a prescribed fire setting here in Iowa."





INHF has been applying prescribed fire more in recent years, both on its own properties and on public land with conservation partners across the state. During the 2020 spring burn season, INHF did prescribed burns on 23 properties in 17 counties, burning 996 acres of prairie and woodland to help manage invasive species and promote growth of native plants.

“There’s no doubt we pick up a lot of good stuff by working with other folks and different landscapes,” Ryan said. “The less obvious — and potentially more valuable — benefits of going on a wildfire detail involve leadership development, communication skills and decision-making capacity.”

Derek agrees, especially when you consider the coordination it takes just to get people out to wildfire duty. “To observe how the whole system works, the logistics, it’s amazing,” he said.

## ON THE LINE

Iowans that help fight fires in western states typically do so with the Missouri-Iowa Interagency Coordinating Center (MOCC). The MOCC, based in Rolla, Mo., is a collaboration of federal and state agencies that help organize people regionally to respond to natural disasters around the country, including wildfires, hurricanes and floods. Iowans that deploy

through MOCC have to complete fire training courses and get certified by the Iowa DNR.

When Derek got the call to head west in late August, he was on a 20-person crew that included six Iowans — three structure firefighters and three conservation professionals. The crews are put together based on qualifications and experience, but the hierarchy usually includes a crew boss, squad bosses and sawyers.

They were first sent to a smaller wildfire outside of Ft. Collins, Colo. They spent two days there before being redirected to the Williams Fork Fire near Fraser in central Colorado, where they spent the remainder of their assignment. The fire was — and is — burning through mostly remote National Forest land.

“We kind of thought we could be on an actual fire line. But the strategy from the top down was to use it for forest management. We protected nearby communities. On the other three sides of the fire, there were no communities to protect, and the forest could really use a burn,” Derek said. “In our National Forests, we’ve been suppressing fire for the last 100 years, and that has been causing the fuel to pile up.”

Using hand tools, Derek’s crew cut three miles of control line (a three-foot wide dirt path, deep enough to get under any organic

▲ From left to right, Derek Miner, Ryan Schmidt and Melanie Schmidt have all gone to western states to help fight wildfires over the last five years.





**Land Stewardship Associate** Derek Miner spent two weeks in Colorado this fall, most of it working to help contain the Williams Fork Fire during what has been a historically destructive wildfire season.

matter) through rugged terrain, trimming low-hanging branches, remove dead material and thinning trees that posed a risk of helping the fire jump along the way.

The goal was to eventually be able to light a fire off of their line that would burn back toward the existing fire when conditions were favorable for controlling the fire, as opposed to waiting until conditions were good for the fire to spread uncontrolled.

As of late October, the Williams Fork Fire has burned more than 14,800 acres and is 75 percent contained, despite fire areas receiving 6-12 inches of snow.

## BLAZING THE WAY

Melanie Schmidt is INHF's most experienced wildfire fighter. In 2016, she was sent to the Deep North Fire in Washington State.

"It wasn't that common for the Iowa DNR to send a female," Melanie said. "There was actually some paperwork that was sent back to me because they thought I made a mistake. They didn't realize I was a woman. I had to write back in the comments 'I am a female.'"

On that first assignment, Melanie's crew hiked an hour-and-a-half every morning just to get to their work site. Melanie and the only other woman on her crew "...didn't take any shortcuts because in our minds we had to justify that we were just as capable. Overall, it was a really positive experience. Some of the guys on our crew told us their daughters would be inspired."

Melanie's 2017 experience working on an engine crew in Montana posed other difficulties. "I had a few people suggest I was less capable than I am due to my gender and cultural norms. I was often the only female on the fire line and wasn't given the respect I deserved. This assignment challenged me in more ways mentally than it did physically but I grew stronger because of it."

In 2018, when Melanie was dispatched to the Sugar Pine Fire complex in Oregon, she was given more responsibility.

"It helped me grow a lot in my ability to be a leader," she said. "It really pushed me outside my comfort zone, which is kind of what you want."

Melanie, Derek and Ryan have brought back technical know-how from their time fighting wildfires, but perhaps more importantly, they returned better members of the conservation community.

"It's about learning how to be a good leader and take care of people, respect others and the land," Ryan said. "You have to communicate and make decisions for the betterment of someone other than yourself and stand strong in the face of discomfort, adversity and difficult times. We have the opportunity to incorporate all of this into every facet of our lives, both personally and professionally." 🐾



# INHF's Kids Art Contest

This summer, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation hosted a young artists contest aimed at engaging kids under the age of 12 in using their creativity to share their love for Iowa's outdoors. We're pleased to share the winning entry from Regina, along with the wonderful submissions from Kit and Elsa. Thank you to everyone who submitted entries!

## WINNER



Regina, 12

## HONORABLE MENTION



Kit, 11



Elsa, 8

Have more nature-themed artwork that your kids would like to share with us? Send it [gcclemen@inhf.org](mailto:gcclemen@inhf.org)



## Help us launch INHF's ACORN CREW

As we prepare to launch a new program in 2021 to engage children and young families with Iowa's outdoors, we want to hear from you. Send answers to [jjayjack@inhf.org](mailto:jjayjack@inhf.org).

- What do your kids like to do most in nature?
- What types of activities would you be interested in doing as a family outdoors?
- Where does your family get outdoors most often?
- What about nature in Iowa do you and your children want to learn more about?

Help us build a program that will get kids outdoors and start to educate the next generation of conservationists!



## LEAVING A **LEGACY**

### A dream realized

The Living Lands Fellowship was established at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) by Jon and Kathy Steege to create an opportunity for recent college graduates to engage in stewardship work while searching for a permanent position in the conservation or natural resource management field.



Jon Steege

Jon was the Integrated Roadside Vegetation Manager for Fayette County for 25 years and a former Fayette County Conservation Board member. He had a particular

passion for creating opportunities for the next generation of professional conservationists. By the time Jon passed away in 2017, his legacy plan was made and the Living Lands Fellowship framework was in place.

This fall, Joe Frieden, a Waukon native, former INHF land stewardship intern and a recent graduate of Upper Iowa University, completed his tenure as the inaugural Living Lands Fellowship fellow.

During his fellowship, Frieden helped INHF and the Fayette County Conservation Board (FCCB) steward public and private lands in northeast Iowa.

“Working for both FCCB and INHF gave me the opportunity to gain experience on both the public and private side of [land] management,” Frieden said. “There is a great need for land management work. I’m thankful for

the opportunity the fellowship gave me and look forward to continuing to do my part.”

Frieden recently started as a Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist based out of the Adair Natural Resources Conservation Service office.

“It was Jon’s dream and my family and I are excited it finally came to fruition.” Kathy said.

*The 2020 fellowship was made possible through a joint partnership between INHF, the Fayette County Conservation Board, Fayette County Pheasants Forever, the Steeges and other anonymous private donors. Contact Donor Relations Director Abby Hade Terpstra at [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org) to discuss contributing to the fund or how you’d like to leave a legacy through INHF.*



**Living Lands Fellow Joe Frieden**, FCCB Director Rod Marlatt, Kathy Steege and INHF President Joe McGovern came together to remember Jon and celebrate the realization of the Living Lands Fellowship on a property near Clermont that Jon was particularly passionate about.

**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

Bill Artis  
Dan Boatwright  
Cathy Stone Boer  
Neil Bohner  
Marlys A. Brown  
Denny Buckendahl  
Dale V. Buehler  
Craig Cave  
Jim Clark  
Rex Davis  
John Feller  
Noel Friday

Mary C. Fritz  
Kent Gearhart  
Arvid K Gilmore  
Luke Haller  
Vincent and Marguerite Harney  
Sunny Hatfield  
Dr Gregory Hicklin  
John Homer  
Tom Hooker  
Larry Kaufman  
David Kessenich  
Lyle Klingman

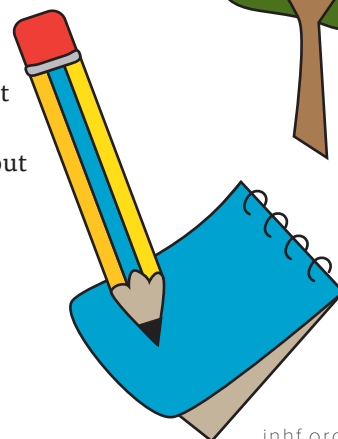
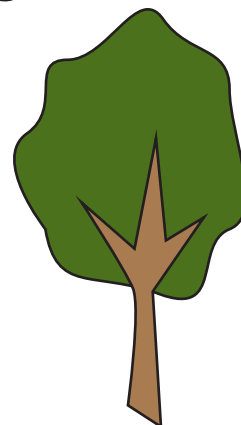
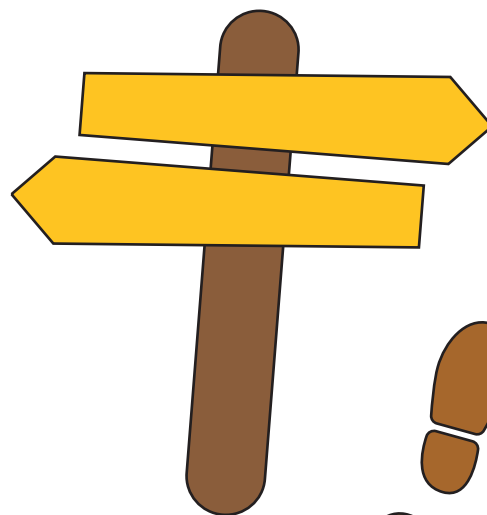
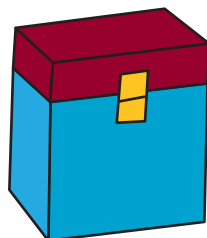
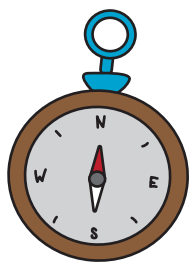
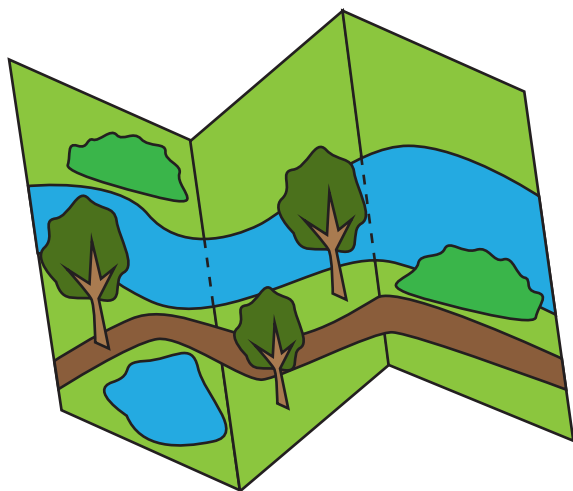
J.O. Kopplin  
Susan Connell-Magee  
Ronald D McGrew  
Neal Mess  
Stan Meyer  
Conrad Mueller  
Ron Munsterman  
Sandra Ostwinkle  
Dan Rasmussen  
Maynard Reece  
John Rhoten  
James A. Rietveld  
Dean Sandstoe

Sawyer  
Brett Schnepf  
DeVere “Oscar” Shelton  
John Smith  
Frank Smith  
Rudy R Jasa Sr  
Catherine A. Stone  
Kenneth Thomsen  
Richard Winter  
Richard (Dick) Woods  
David Zahrt

### IN HONOR OF

Richard J. Ament  
Bill and Sara Blackburn  
Bob Bredensteiner & Kim Bredensteiner  
Dave Dawson  
Michelle Devine  
Karla Kruse Herres  
Brandyn McKibben  
Joe and Molly McGovern  
David C. Neuhaus  
Earl and Isabelle Salterberg  
Tim D. Sproul  
Deb and Travis Young





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

# Iowa's outdoor cache

BY DARIA MATHER  
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**S**ummer may have come to an end, but there are still many ways to discover Iowa's outdoors after the temperature turns cool. Geocaching is a family-friendly activity that can be enjoyed wherever you are, regardless of season.

Geocaching is essentially a scavenger hunt using GPS coordinates. Players follow clues that lead to a container full of treasure — i.e. the cache — hidden by other players in various outdoor locations. Start by creating a free account on [geocaching.com](http://geocaching.com) or downloading the app, which lists local geocaches, directions, hints, places to log your finds and leave comments. Geocaches come in all shapes, sizes and range in difficulty, so check the app to know what you're looking for.

## TIPS & ETIQUETTE

### Be safe and adventurous

Geocaching is a great way to explore natural spaces in your area, including local city, county and state parks. It's also an accessible way to explore as each geocache is labeled for difficulty of terrain and wheelchair accessibility.

### Trade, track and log

If you decide to trade the cache, make sure it's with something of equal or greater value. Look for trackables. These are items with tracking codes that travel from geocache to geocache, but don't take it if you're not going to use it properly. Also, make sure to sign and date the logbook.

### Respect the environment

Geocaches are hidden in outdoor spaces by other players and should never be buried or hid in a way that requires players to disturb nature. In Iowa, geocaches can be hidden in state parks if a permit is obtained from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

### Don't ruin the fun

When you find the cache, do your best to play it cool so you don't give away the geocache's location. That takes the fun out of it for other players. 📌





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**INHF's volunteer program started back up this fall after several months off due to COVID- 19.** Volunteers gathered 6 feet apart and masked up all across the state for fall seed harvests. Volunteers hand harvested seeds that will be used for upcoming prairie restoration in the surrounding areas. It was one of INHF's most active volunteer seasons. *Photo by Genna Clemen*

