

# IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

SPRING 2025

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

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## INHF Land Acknowledgement:

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



### ON THE COVER

Last spring, Iowans across the state ventured outdoors at all hours of the night to capture a rare glimpse of the northern lights, or aurora borealis. These lights were dancing over Yellow River State Forest. While it's most common to see the lights August-April, this May show was a result of a geomagnetic storm.  
*Photo by Brian Gibbs*



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

505 Fifth Ave., Suite 444 Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
[www.inhf.org](http://www.inhf.org) | 515-288-1846 | [info@inhf.org](mailto:info@inhf.org)

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President

**Sydney Algreen-Hunter**  
Communications Associate

**Ross Baxter**  
Senior Land Protection Director and Counsel

**Maeve Bittle**  
Conservation Easement Assistant

**Andrea Boulton**  
Trails and Community Conservation Director

**Jered Bourquin**  
Blufflands Associate

**Jessica Riebkes Clough**  
Land Conservation Specialist

**Stacie Couvillon**  
Planned Giving & Major Gifts Officer

**Brian Fankhauser**  
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### EDITORIAL

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Managing Editor

**Sydney Algreen-Hunter**  
Design Editor

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## Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors

Early spring is always an up and down time in Iowa. One day it is 70 degrees and the next is a blizzard. INHF had the opportunity to join with hundreds of others at the Capitol for the first ever Celebrate Iowa's Outdoors Day in March, and it felt very similar.

On one hand, we know how much joy the outdoors can bring all of us, and that is something to celebrate. On the other, we know we have much work to do for our water, our soil health and meeting the needs of Iowans. So many people showed up to support not only nature, but each other. It was a humbling and uplifting experience.



JOE MCGOVERN  
President

Growing up in north-central Iowa, I can remember spending time with family at local county parks or floating local rivers. One spot in particular south of Webster City is the Boone River — which I highly recommend — and nearby Briggs Woods Park. Like many special places throughout Iowa, this area truly has something for everyone. From multi-use trails to primitive camping to river and lake fishing, it is a testament to providing amenities and protecting open space to improve everybody's quality of life.

What is so special to me is that I was able to take my young family to these same spots 30 years later and feel even more joy. Joy that comes from being in nature with the ones you

Each summer, Iowans take to our rivers and lakes to cool off and get outdoors. *Photo by Abby Hade Terpstra, INHF*

love is truly a blessing. One we want to make sure all Iowans have access to, regardless of where they live or their situation. In this issue, you'll read about landowners inspired to protect the land they love, new wildlife areas opened to the public and techniques for stewarding our native habitats. Each story is the result of partnerships between people and organizations working to preserve special places across the state. Take a moment to reflect on your favorite place to get outdoors and what it means to you.

Because of your support and advocacy, INHF both continues the hard work preserving the natural areas we have left, and has reason to celebrate the creation of new parks, trails and wildlife areas for people to enjoy now and for decades to come. Thank you!

*Joe McGovern*

Citizens from across the state gathered at the Capitol in March to celebrate Iowa's outdoors. *Photo by Sydney Algreen-Hunter, INHF*





**M**y grandmother raised 10 children and helped to nurture countless grandchildren after. Needless to say, she was a master of keeping kids entertained. She'd often send us outside to explore her large garden or to the nearby creek to dig for rocks that my mother used to polish. When she passed, she left a note for us that said, in part, the small things matter the most.

As life with toddlers, work, friends and family keeps me busy, this year I set out to find more joy in the “everydayness” of my life. And of course, I’ve found much joy in nature. Each hike at a nearby park, bike ride down a trail or time spent in my backyard reveals countless simple treasures for me to discover.

During a walk along a wooded trail, I remove my earbuds and commit to soaking up the trees and plants and sounds surrounding me. I tip my head up to feel the warm sunshine on my face. I see the sparkle in the water of the little creek that runs parallel to the trail. I hear the satisfying crack of an acorn cap snapping under my foot. There’s a deep earthy scent that promises green trees and a carpet of spring ephemerals. I already see the heart-shaped leaves of wild ginger coming along.

As I climb through the oak-heavy woods, I hear a few sharp chips. My eyes go to the trees hoping to catch a glimpse of a Yellow-rumped Warbler. Many birders wouldn’t get their feathers ruffled for this species, but I always enjoy the bright spring plumage and, of course, the yellow rump. I spot the small bird on the edge of the oak savanna, fluttering out and then perching again. The warbler appears as happy as I am about the return of the warmth and insects as it passes through.

I continue on my hike occasionally reaching for acorn caps to whistle from, knowing I’ll be back soon with my kids to visit the little creek. I think of my grandma and know she is right. The smallest, simplest thing can bring joy, if only you pause to really look.

— SYDNEY ALGREEN-HUNTER  
Communications Associate



A Yellow-rumped Warbler perches in between eating midge flies as it migrates through northeast Iowa. Like many other passerines (songbirds), this male has molted and grown in crisp, bright plumage to attract a mate. *Photo by Larry Reis*



Call for calendar photos & Hagie nominations!

Calendar photo submission deadline: June 1  
Find an explanation of the process and some helpful tips at [inhf.org/calendar-photo](http://inhf.org/calendar-photo). Hint: we often have the fewest submissions for the months of November through March!

Hagie Heritage Award nomination deadline: July 1  
Know an outstanding conservationist that goes above and beyond? Nominate them for the 2025 Lawrence and Eula Hagie Heritage Award. Visit [inhf.org/hagieheritageaward](http://inhf.org/hagieheritageaward) to learn more and view a complete list of past honorees.

INHF Welcomes Kayleen Leetch

Kayleen Leetch joins the INHF team as the Volunteer Coordinator, bringing eight years of experience in volunteer management and a certificate in



volunteer administration. Her career has always been driven by a passion for the outdoors and a love for sharing the stories of those who care about it, and she can’t wait to put that into practice at INHF.  
“I’m so thrilled to work with a team of passionate staff and volunteers and use my expertise to further INHF’s mission,” she says.

Progress Update on Brenton Slough

Purchased in 2023, fundraising continues to transfer the 1,114-acre Brenton Slough to Polk County Conservation and open the wetland complex to the public. Through the support of generous donors and the receipt of several grants, 90% of the total project cost has been funded, leaving approximately \$800,000 to go before this unique area becomes a county park. Stay up to date on fundraising progress and learn more about the project at [inhf.org/brenton-slough](http://inhf.org/brenton-slough).

Donors honored at 17th annual Gift to Iowa’s Future Day

In 2024, INHF worked with 16 individuals, families and organizations who chose to permanently protect the land they cherish by donating land, land value or conservation easements. They were recognized at a ceremony at the Iowa State Capitol in early March. Through their generosity, 1,987 acres across 13 counties will forever remain natural spaces, offering respite to Iowa’s wildlife and plants and providing places for Iowans to connect with nature.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**APRIL 22**  
Earth Day Trash Bash at Brenton Slough  
*Grimes*

**MAY 3**  
Into the Wild, Out with the Mustard  
*Waukon*

**MAY 8**  
Mathes Woodland Restoration  
*Pella*

**MAY 24**  
Kothenbeutel Heritage Prairie Workday  
*Sheffield*

**MAY 30**  
Outdoors Day with the Iowa Cubs  
*Des Moines*

**MAY 30-JUNE 1**  
Loess Hills Prairie Seminar  
*Monona County*

**JUNE 3-5**  
Trailblazers Academy  
*Westfield*

**For more information, and more upcoming events, visit [www.inhf.org/events](http://www.inhf.org/events)**

Sweet Marsh Wildlife Management Area  
Photo by Ross Baxter, INHF

QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

A quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between **November 2024 – January 2025**.

Newly protected areas

**Clarke County**  
110 acres of remnant prairie and pasture near Murray in Clarke County. Safeguards natural, historical and cultural resources. Wagon wheel tracks from the Mormon Trail are still visible on the landscape, and protection of the perennial vegetation ensures continued wildlife habitat and water quality benefits to the Sevenmile Creek – Thompson River watershed. *(Conservation easement donated by Michael and Teresa Jackson)*

**Bremer County**  
38 acres of woodland and prairie near Janesville in Bremer County. Builds on a protected corridor of greenspace along the Shell Rock River. Permanent protection guarantees water quality benefits for this popular recreation stream. *(Conservation easement donated by Bob and Liz Petersen)*

**Winnebago County**  
An eight-acre inholding at the Rice Lake Area WMA near Leland in Winnebago County. Protection makes future restoration projects possible and buffers the WMA from future development. *(Proposed public partner ownership)*

**Johnson County**  
346 acres near Solon in Johnson County to be leveraged for future protection projects, with the goal of creating new hunting opportunities for persons with disabilities. *(204 acres donated to INHF by Jack Dvorsky, the remainder in a reserved life estate)*

**Franklin County**  
64 acres of Iowa River floodplain near Popejoy in Franklin County. Features restored prairie and wetlands and connects two separate portions of Whitetail Flats WMA. Builds on outdoor recreation opportunities and provides the option for more cohesive land stewardship. *(Donated by Beverly Evans, Gregory A. Evans, Faith O’Malley share of the Colleen M. Evans Family Trust, Ryan O’Malley share of the Colleen M. Evans Family Trust. Proposed public partner ownership)*

**Floyd County**  
80 acres near Greene in Floyd County to provide income to further INHF’s mission and continued conservation practices benefiting the watershed. *(Reserved life estate donated by White Rock Farm, Inc.)*

**Dickinson County**  
3 acres of prairie near Spirit Lake in Dickinson County. Nestled in the heart of a high development area, permanent protection of this rocky prairie knob preserves precious wildlife habitat and open space while ensuring existing water quality benefits to the Iowa Great Lakes remains intact. *(Donated by Dorothy & Blaine Farms, LLC. To be owned and stewarded by INHF)*

**Monroe County**  
Two parcels — one 152 acres and the other 10 acres — of timber adjacent to Tyrone WMA near Melrose in Monroe County. The diverse oak-hickory woodland offers habitat for wildlife such as Wild Turkey, Eastern Whip-poor-will and the federally endangered Indiana bat. Expands existing recreation land, offering more opportunities for a variety of outdoor activities. *(Proposed public partner ownership)*

**Pocahontas County**  
21 combined acres of mixed habitat south of Pocahontas. Once restored, the area will provide habitat and greenspace in an area with very little existing natural resources. *(Donated by Gail Ewin and John and Sally Pascal. Proposed public partner ownership)*

**Allamakee County**  
21 acres along Bear Creek northeast of Decorah in Allamakee County. Bear Creek is a high quality coldwater trout stream with naturally reproducing brown trout. The property features riparian woodland, prairie and an algific talus slope — an ecologically unique landform. *(Proposed public partner ownership)*



**Palo Alto County**  
15 acres of CRP adjacent to Fallow Marsh WMA near Graettinger in Palo Alto County. Lies within a designated Prairie Pothole Joint Venture priority area and next to Dewey’s Pasture Bird Conservation Area, signifying an important opportunity to protect nesting habitat relied upon by a variety of upland bird species. *(Proposed public partner ownership)*

Land transfers to public partners

**Grannis Creek WMA Addition**  
57 acres of upland woodland adjacent to Grannis Creek, a popular trout stream. Connects two separate blocks of Grannis Creek WMA, building on existing outdoor recreation opportunities, facilitating the needs of forest-dwelling wildlife and protecting valuable habitat. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources)*

**Grant Center WMA**  
200 acres of mixed habitat near Smithland in Woodbury County. Lies in the Grant Center Special Landscape Area, designated for its high-quality ecological resources. This new WMA offers opportunity for nature exploration, hiking, hunting, birding and many other outdoor recreation activities, while preserving a sensitive natural landscape. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources)*

**Klingman Etringer WMA**  
156 acres of mixed habitat near Volga in Clayton County. Features woodland, reconstructed prairie, a coldwater stream and restorable acres that offer food and cover for a variety of wildlife species. The diverse and sizeable habitat will also support simultaneous use by multiple hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources)*

**Shell Rock Bend WMA Addition**  
15 acres surrounded by existing public land near Shell Rock in Butler County. Protection of this inholding enhances the movement of wildlife and people, ensures continued water quality benefits to the Shell Rock River and maintains the riparian woodland habitat. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources)*

**Sweet Marsh WMA Addition**  
40-acre addition to Sweet Marsh WMA in Bremer County. The restored prairie provides habitat for migratory birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians. Located within the historical range of the eastern massasauga, protection of this property combats the loss and fragmentation of the wet prairie habitat these rare rattlesnakes need. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources)*

**Wildcat Bluff Addition**  
183-acre addition comprised of woodland, pasture and grassland. Supports Cedar River water quality and an abundance of native species including grassland birds and provides a scenic entrance to this already popular recreation destination. *(Owned and managed by Benton County Conservation)*

**Brenton Slough**  
A partial transfer (735 acres) of the 1,114-acre wetland complex between Grimes and Granger on the border of Dallas and Polk counties. Includes a portion of Beaver Creek to the north along with grassland, wetland and oak savanna. Protects a diversity of wildlife and critical habitat in a rapidly growing area. *(Owned and managed by Polk County Conservation)*





## LAYERS OF RICHNESS

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

At Paul Willis's 'dream farm' you can find rare bird species like Henslow's Sparrow and 135 species of flowering plants, like the monarda and gray headed coneflower above. Photos courtesy Niman Ranch.

Paul Willis knows about pigs. But really, what it comes down to is he knows about people. He knows how to build connections and relationships, coalitions and communities. He knows how to connect with and learn from people.

Take his friendship with Daryl Kothenbeutel. Daryl ran Iowa Prairie Seed Company and tended what is now known as the Kothenbeutel Heritage Prairie in Franklin County, an important local-ecotype seed source and stunningly diverse 40-acre prairie. Daryl passed the prairie over to INHF's care in 2005 upon his retirement to ensure the protection and stewardship of that special site, and Paul saw it happen.

"I've watched with interest the progress being made to preserve parts of Iowa," Willis said. "I was influenced by what I saw around me in the Clear Lake area."

Add some peer pressure from folks like former director of the Drake Agricultural Law Center, Neil Hamilton, to encourage Paul to join him on the INHF board of directors, and voila — you have Paul Willis, founder of Niman Ranch Pork Company (NRPC), being voted in to further the mission of protecting and restoring Iowa's land, water and wildlife in 2019.

"Serving on INHF's board gives me the opportunity to go to places that have been

preserved — something I think everyone should try to get out to see. It's eye opening to see the uniqueness of different parts of Iowa."

Growing up, Willis spent countless hours exploring his grandparents' crick in Thornton and observing their gardens and bird feeders. "I've always been intrigued by birds and any kind of animals," he said. But as he grew, he noticed changes. The life he remembered in the crick went missing. "It became sterile, reduced in quality and abundance."

"If I could accomplish one thing," Willis mused, "it would be to change the water quality in the state of Iowa. It's a big task but that's where INHF can help."

After graduating from the University of Iowa, Willis served in the Peace Corps in Nigeria. "We started our training in California, and I saw how different the vegetation was there. Then I lived in a west African savanna and every plant, every tree was different. It raised my awareness and made me wonder — what was in Iowa before?"

Returning home to Iowa in 1975, Paul followed the family legacy as a fifth-generation farmer. In addition to the standard corn and beans, Paul began raising hogs outdoors on pasture; a method that was going by the wayside as industrial pork producers moved into Iowa.

In his free time, he started walking along railroad tracks and through ditches looking for native species. Plants that he may have seen before but never noticed.

In the '80s and '90s, Willis saw confinements coming into Iowa and started advocating for a different way of raising hogs, one with high standards for animal welfare and stewardship of the land. In 1994, Willis met with sustainable beef producer Bill Niman, who was part of the growing high food culture scene in California. "I saw free range chicken," said Willis, "and I wondered, what about free range pork?" Niman was looking for a pork producer that met his high standards, and Paul's product and ethic fit the bill.

In 1995, Willis made his first specialty sale, supplying pork to Bay area farm-to-table restaurants like Alice Waters' Chez Panisse.

In 1998, Niman Ranch Pork Company was officially formed. In addition to running his own 700-acre farm, Paul co-wrote the first pork animal welfare certification standards for the ethical raising of hogs in the United States and promoted it to others. He has overseen and inspired the growth of NRPC to a network of 600+ Certified Humane, independent farmers and ranchers across the United States. Today, you can find Niman Ranch products at restaurants and grocers nationwide.

"This method tends to have more diversified farms, and better habitat. The systems are closer by far to what Iowa was than conventional ag is today," said Willis. "Food systems and INHF are linked together. It's about the ecosystems on the land. Clean water, a diversity of plants and animals. It's about more than just one species."

Paul has made time and space in his own life to live these beliefs beyond the farm.

When the Wetland Reserve Program began, Willis purchased a quarter section of hilly pothole land, rebuilt the wetlands and seeded it in 2002. His friend, Daryl Kothenbeutel, helped inventory over 135 species of forbs.

"It's been rewarding since the very first day," said Willis. "We recorded the first nesting Henslow's Sparrow in the county. I knew we'd succeeded in creating a habitat when I saw a Bald Eagle, Sandhill Crane, and Trumpeter

Swan all in one day."

"We need that balance. Diversity of species in an indicator of health. We're supposed to have Bobolinks, meadowlarks, sparrows like Henslow's and Clay."

Willis still hand collects seeds from wild patches of prairie to interseed his own reconstruction, lovingly called The Dream Farm by his family.

"Instead of having a dream home, we have a dream farm. It's absolutely spectacular when it is in full bloom. People are moved by experiencing it. We love having folks come see it."

Asked what inspiration he would share with others, Willis said, "Spend time with people who know what they're doing. Sure, Aldo Leopold is inspiring. But just try to get to know people who know a lot. You pick up knowledge that way. It's great to have experts around, it is really interesting and rewarding."

Paul's standards for raising hogs have set ethical standards for farmers across the United States. Photos courtesy Niman Ranch.



### PAUL'S ACCOLADES:

- 2003 Good Neighbor Harvest Award from the Glynwood Center
- 2012 Pathfinder Sustainability Award from Chefs Collaborative
- 2013 Founders Award from Edible Communities
- 2015 Stewards of Iowa's Land recognition from Drake University's Agricultural Law Center
- 2019 Good Food 100's Farmer of the Year
- 2020 American Food Hero by EatingWell magazine
- 2024 Specialty Food Association Leadership Award for Sustainability
- Co-founder of Food Democracy Now
- Active with Practical Farmers of Iowa



# FOR NATURE'S SAKE

BY ERICA PLACE  
Communications and Outreach Manager | [eplace@inhf.org](mailto:eplace@inhf.org)

**Regal fritillary** (*Speyeria idalia*) is a large, beautiful and rare butterfly. The caterpillars only feed on violets, including one species found at Wildin Heritage Prairie.

It was an early morning trip to Kossuth County for INHF president Joe McGovern, a drive he'd made many times during his tenure at the organization. He was headed to a property near Algona — Wildin Heritage Prairie — to lead a hike alongside Dr. Thomas Rosburg, an ecology and botany professor at Drake University. Dr. Rosburg had just concluded a second floristic inventory at the 80-acre remnant sedge meadow prairie, and it was the perfect time of year to share those results and showcase the prairie's beauty in the height of bloom season.

The new inventory had revealed an impressive 147 native plant species, all making their home in this lush patch of prairie surrounded by farmland. Joe thought back to what this prairie looked like on his first visit when he was INHF's land stewardship director.

He and coworker Bruce Mountain, INHF's land projects director at the time, had driven here more than two decades earlier. A local estate attorney, Thomas Lipps, indicated his client was hoping to sell a property to a conservation-minded buyer and wondered if INHF might like to see it. It had never been plowed, never been drained and never been widely treated with herbicides. But standing there, it wasn't immediately obvious to Joe or Bruce what plants remained. It had a long history of haying and grazing — both relatively low-impact land uses, but enough to disguise its potential. Purchasing it would be a risky gamble for a younger organization with limited resources.

If it weren't for a conversation he'd had just a couple days prior with landowners at Indiangrass Hills, a 640-acre grassland property being restored in Iowa County, Joe might not have pushed for the purchase of Wildin Heritage Prairie. But he'd heard from these landowners that they were seeing great success in letting their land rest after many years of intense grazing. Under the careful stewardship of Judy Felder, Mary Brown, Sandy Rhodes, and Bill and Barby Buss, species at Indiangrass Hills were coming back — lots of species — even though the vegetation had previously been chomped down as short as astroturf. It was a commonly held belief that

land in that state was a lost cause: nothing could possibly come back. That whatever prairie had been there was lost forever. But these landowners had proof it was possible, and Joe had seen it, not three days before stepping foot on this potential purchase.

"We have to give it a try," Joe thought. "Every bit of remnant prairie is worth the risk."

Joe's freshly gained perspective and insistent curiosity, coupled with the board's culture of trying, was what ultimately nudged INHF into taking the risk. INHF purchased Wildin Heritage Prairie in 2002.

And the plants did come back. Dr. Rosburg's initial floristic inventory in 2003 (just a year after it was purchased) documented 125 native plant species, including more than a dozen species that indicate a high-quality site. It was a really good buy.

Today's hike participants had been promised good views of small prairie potholes, unique plant communities and opportunities to see wildlife before the sun got high enough to remind everyone it was the peak of summer. Anxious to do a preliminary walk through and practice his talking points, Joe pulled up to the prairie well before the advertised start time. But an old farm truck was already backed into the field entrance — someone had beaten him there.

It was Dave Wildin.

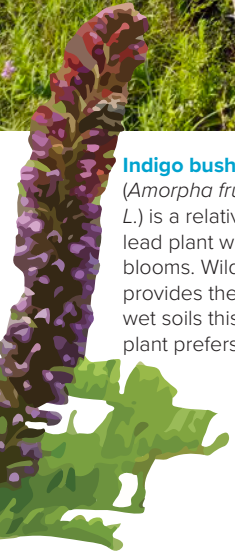
Dave had grown up in Algona, helping his dad, George, and siblings cut and bale hay on what is now known as Wildin Heritage Prairie. The "wild hay" had to be harvested in patchy swaths to avoid the more than dozen wet depressions throughout the property — remnant prairie potholes. Dave and his siblings urged their dad more than once to consider tiling the land to make these chores easier. It could be more profitable in row crops, anyway. But George wouldn't have it. The Wildin family cropped other land, but this hay and pasture ground was too important for their cow-calf operation.

Safely home from a distressing time as a recent high school graduate drafted into the army and stationed in Santo Domingo during the Vietnam War, Dave pursued many interests and business ventures. He earned





Dr. Tom Rosburg shares plant information during a hike at Wildin Heritage Prairie in 2024. Dave Wildin attended the hike and is pictured in the red shirt. Photo by INHF



**Indigo bush** (*Amorpha fruticosa* L.) is a relative of lead plant with similar blooms. Wildin provides the perfect wet soils this vibrant plant prefers.

degrees in Math and Industrial Technology from the University of Northern Iowa, substitute taught at a high school in Mason City, started a

powersports company and farmed in between. The prairie his dad wouldn't allow to be plowed remained through it all, though, all the way up to George's passing in 2002. Dave and his siblings were faced with a decision — keep the land or cash in. While the other siblings were eager to sell, Dave saw the land as an investment. His grandfather, who had immigrated from England and moved to Eagle Grove in the 1920s, had amassed more than 1,000 acres of farmland for the family. Dave tried his best to convince his siblings to keep this piece — but to no avail.

"I told them that if this is what they were sure they wanted, then they needed to let me handle it," Dave remembers. "I'll find someone who wants to buy it."

Even though the land, which was flat and

on some of Iowa's best soil, could have fetched more money being sold for conventional ag, Dave knew he had to find someone willing to honor his dad's legacy. He had to find a buyer who wouldn't plow or drain it.

It was Dave's attorney who had connected with INHF all those years ago. It was Dave who had saved this gem, where a prairie hike was about to take place.

While events had been held at Wildin Heritage Prairie in the years since the sale, this was the first Dave had heard about. Amy Frankl Brandt, who was helping Dave edit a memoir he'd written recounting his time in Santo Domingo, also worked for the Algona Publishing Company and had received a press release inviting locals to attend a hike at Wildin Heritage Prairie. Recognizing the name, she forwarded it to Dave who was curious to see what this was all about.

"I really didn't know it was this special," says Dave. "I was amazed anyone's got so much interest in this that they'd want to come hike around."

There were certainly people who wanted to see it. Dave spent that August morning following Dr. Rosburg, Joe McGovern,

members of the Iowa Prairie Network and others through the prairie as they ood and awed over their observations.

"A trip to Wildin Prairie is a journey backward in time, an opportunity to see and feel a landscape that otherwise can only be vaguely imagined," Dr. Rosburg explains. "Much of the Des Moines Lobe's 12,000 square miles was graced by the prairie-pothole landscape — Wildin Prairie shows us the northern version of that ecosystem. It shows us how 150 native plant species can coexist and thrive in a mosaic of wet-mesic prairie, sedge meadow and shallow marsh communities. Its natural splendor is overwhelming. The plants you see — and their ancestors — have occupied this land for several thousands of years. They and the animals they support have an absolute right to this place. The Wildin family has given Iowans a gift of immeasurable value. A place where time fades away and Nature is all that matters."

"I learned more about that prairie that morning than I'd known my whole life," Dave remarks.

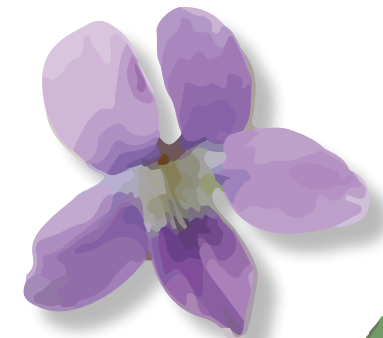
More than twenty years later, Dave is even more confident in his choice to sell his father's beloved land to a conservation buyer.

"It really reinforced my decision," says Dave. "It made me feel good that it amounted to something; I didn't really realize what I'd done at the time. If anybody else has an opportunity to do something like this... what a legacy it can be. A legacy for the whole country."

Wildin Heritage Prairie will forever remain as a wild space. Outside of scheduled events, it doesn't offer outdoor recreation opportunities. These 80 acres might not make a significant economic impact on neighboring communities — but can you really put a price on a smooth green snake, Savanna Sparrow or regal fritillary? It's a legacy for a reason far greater: the inherent value of wild places. This is a story of protecting nature for nature's sake. A story that might have been lost forever if it weren't for the family's conviction, the connection made by the attorney, or the willingness to take a chance.

The hike participants went back to their cars with soggy boots, scribbles in their plant guides and a few bug bites. But none, except for maybe Joe, left with hearts as full as Dave Wildin's:

"I'm sure this would have pleased my dad to no end." 🐢



**Prairie violets** (*Viola pedatifida*) are one of many forbs that can be found at Wildin. It is one of two host plants for the regal fritillary butterfly.



**Smooth green snakes** (*Opheodrys vernalis*) are small, harmless snakes. Populations are threatened in Iowa but prairies like Wildin provide the right habitat and source of insects the species requires.



**Prairie Indian plantain** (*Arnoglossum plantagineum*) and butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) bloom at Wildin Heritage Prairie. Photo by Derek Miner

**Wildin Heritage Prairie** has more than one dozen prairie potholes. The potholes serve as seasonal wetlands, supporting a variety of unique plants and animals. Photo by Derek Miner, INHF



# REAPING THE REWARDS

The Resource Enhancement & Protection Program plays a vital role in connecting Iowans to the outdoors.

BY ANNA GRAY  
Public Policy Director and Counsel | [agray@inhf.org](mailto:agray@inhf.org)



**CONSERVATION EDUCATION**  
REAP funds allowed Adams County Conservation to purchase kayaks and life jackets, complete an outdoor classroom and upgrade playgrounds — all vital in providing residents with a connection to the outdoors.

**CITY PARKS & OPEN SPACE**  
Magnetic Park in Cherokee is a 55-acre linear park and trail corridor connecting citizens and visitors to natural, cultural and historical resources in the area. A REAP grant helped make the park and trail possible.

**OPEN SPACE**  
The White Horse Access Addition in Sac County sits in a priority watershed of the Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The restored prairie buffers the North Raccoon River, improving water quality, protecting habitat and creating hunting and fishing opportunities — all made possible by a REAP grant that provides cost-sharing.

**COUNTY CONSERVATION**  
Thanks to REAP, Scott County Conservation recently refurbished the old dorm building at the Wapsi Education Center, gaining a large educational meeting room, an indoor range for archery programs and new educational displays.



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

When Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation laid out its last 5-year strategic plan in 2019, it was impossible to know what was to come. In early 2020, the way the world worked changed in an instant, and uncertainty ruled the day.

However, the steadfast support of INHF donors and partners — along with a strategic plan providing direction — allowed us to continue to carry out our important work.

Thanks to the thoughtful input of so many stakeholders, our strategic plan charted a course, keeping us on target and allowing us to grow to better meet our mission. Despite a pandemic, economic uncertainty and social upheaval, over the last five years, INHF managed to:

- Protect more than 25,000 acres across Iowa. Our work to preserve private land through conservation easements and help partners create or expand public parks, trails and wildlife areas continued at a rapid pace. We took on some of the largest projects in INHF's history, including the Narrows Preserve on East Okoboji Lake, Little Sioux Scout Ranch in the Loess Hills and Brenton Slough in central Iowa.
- Respond to community needs by helping to protect open space and create trails that improve our quality of life.
- Add regional land stewardship positions in

eastern and western Iowa, allowing us to better manage the land entrusted to INHF and help meet the needs of local partners and landowners.

- Expand our land stewardship intern program, creating four crews that work across the state each summer. This helps INHF to get important work done on the land and cultivates the next generation of conservation leaders.
- Grow our Land Ambassador and Seed Ambassador programs and continue to engage volunteers in meaningful work.
- Advocate for thoughtful, effective conservation policy and fend off attacks on public parks, trails and wildlife areas.
- And so much more.

So, when we began to develop our next 5-year strategic plan, we knew it was important to lay a foundation for mission success. We solicited input from members, partners, legislators, farmers, landowners, business leaders and INHF board and staff. We looked for opportunities for growth, and we doubled down on what has made us an effective organization.

On the next two pages, see a summary of INHF 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, reinforcing the pillars of our work and leaning into transformational initiatives to help us protect and restore more land, water and wildlife.

At left, the sun rises over Brenton Slough in Polk and Dallas counties. Center, an INHF intern collects prairie seed at Heritage Valley in Allamakee County. At right, community leaders cut the ribbon on a new section of the Iowa River's Edge Trail in Eldora. Photos by INHF

See INHF's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan  
See a summary of INHF's recently developed strategic plan on the following pages or at [www.inhf.org](http://www.inhf.org).

For over 35 years, the Resource Enhancement & Protection Program (REAP) has served as Iowa's premier conservation program, investing in the enhancement and protection of the state's diverse natural and cultural resources. REAP has supported over 15,000 projects across the state and in each of Iowa's 99 counties.

Funded by the Iowa legislature using gaming receipts and the sale of natural resource license plates, REAP is authorized to receive \$20 million annually, but despite the program's success, funds are diverted each year and REAP has never been fully funded.

A majority of REAP projects are locally implemented, providing benefits that affect Iowans' everyday life, including better water quality and safe drinking water sources, agricultural soil conservation and productivity, revitalization of rural communities and economic development, and outdoor recreation facilities and amenities. REAP funds are broken down into categories: open space, roadside vegetation, historical resource development, state land management, conservation education, city parks and open space, soil and water enhancement and county conservation. See examples of some recent REAP projects to the right.

## HERE'S HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT REAP

- 1 Urge your legislators to fully fund REAP and eliminate the sunset clause. **Without legislative action, REAP will expire in 2026.**
- 2 Upgrade your license plate. Pick from one of five license plate designs that show your support for Iowa's outdoors.
- 3 Attend a REAP Assembly this fall. Every other year, the DNR hosts regional assemblies to share REAP program updates and collect feedback from the public.





IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

# Strategic Plan

2025-2030

**A**lthough Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's mission is simple, the ways we fulfill it vary greatly. From protecting native prairie to establishing multi-use trails, the work we do is far-reaching. It is bound by the idea that together, we can do more. At the center of INHF's mission are people who are passionate about protecting, restoring and exploring Iowa's outdoors. The strategic focus outlined here will carry us into the next decade — driven by our mission, inspired by our vision and guided by our values. Our work will remain grounded in four core pillars of focus: land protection; land stewardship, operational excellence and capacity; awareness and outreach. Within each pillar, we will undertake transformational initiatives that will strengthen our organization and elevate our mission. Together with thousands of members, supporters and partners, INHF will continue to protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife.

## LAND PROTECTION

It's what INHF was created to do, and we take that responsibility seriously. Since 1979, INHF and its partners have permanently protected more than 200,000 acres across Iowa. INHF protects diverse landscapes including prairies, woodlands, wetlands, agricultural land, lakes and rivers. We will continue to secure land for future parks, trails and wildlife areas; work with private landowners to preserve the land they love with conservation easements; and care for land entrusted to INHF for long-term ownership and stewardship. We will continue to pursue landscape scale conservation initiatives and use land protection as a tool to meet the needs of Iowa communities.

## LAND STEWARDSHIP

INHF's work doesn't stop when a great place is permanently protected. Our land stewardship team actively cares for lands entrusted to INHF and our conservation partners to benefit water quality, soil health, wildlife and Iowans' quality of life. Together with seasonal interns, land ambassadors and volunteers, stewardship staff implement practices to help land remain healthy and vibrant far into the future, creating a more resilient landscape in our changing climate. Being responsible land stewards requires planning and action centered on the health of the land as well as thoughtful consideration of how our properties are enjoyed by people.

## AWARENESS & OUTREACH

INHF will strive to inform, educate and inspire people to take action on behalf of nature and support INHF's work. We will develop and implement a comprehensive outreach plan that will connect INHF with new audiences and broaden our base of conservation supporters. We will create events and opportunities that connect Iowans with the land and each other. Together with coalition partners and individual advocates, INHF will actively advocate for state and federal conservation policies, programs and funding that protect our state's natural resources, expand outdoor recreation and uplift Iowa communities.

## OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE & CAPACITY

INHF will continue to be efficient and effective. We will be thoughtful stewards of the donations from our 10,000+ members, with more than 95 percent of gifts going to land protection and programming. We will seek increased financial autonomy in order to pursue key projects and opportunities, and we will enhance our statewide presence with staff in crucial regional positions. We will continue to cultivate future conservation leaders by investing in our extensive and impactful internship and fellowship programs. INHF will remain an inclusive organization that is committed to ensuring that its policies, practices, and systems are free of barriers and promote full participation to ensure dignity, respect and equal access for all.



IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

# Strategic Plan

2025-2030



## MISSION

To protect and restore Iowa's land, water and wildlife



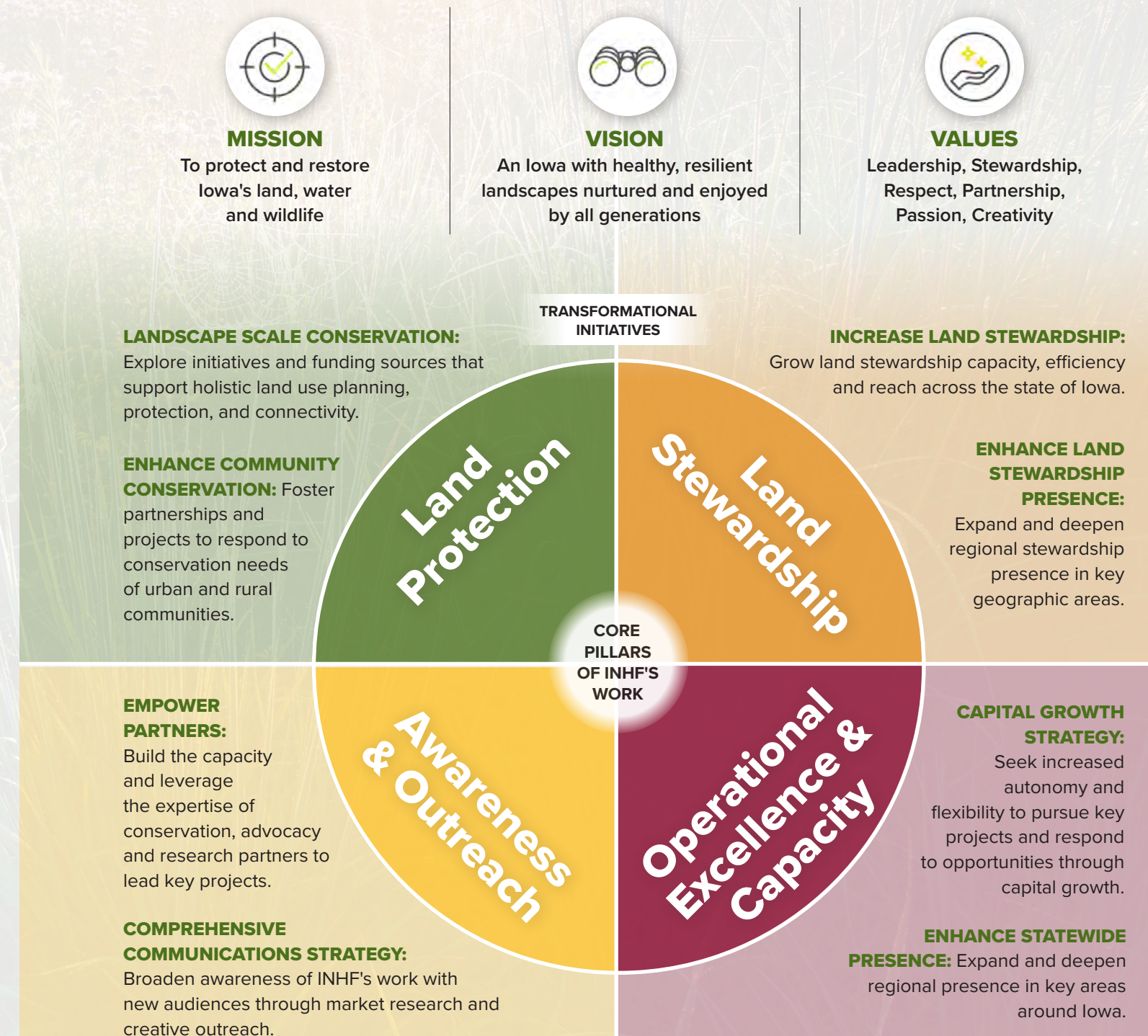
## VISION

An Iowa with healthy, resilient landscapes nurtured and enjoyed by all generations



## VALUES

Leadership, Stewardship, Respect, Partnership, Passion, Creativity





A bird's-eye view shows the meandering Prairie Creek which runs through this oasis in Humboldt County.

# PRESERVING BOONE VALLEY

BY CLARA WODNY  
*Communications Intern*

**H**umboldt County in north central Iowa is not known for an abundance of public land. But, thanks to the combined dedication of individuals and organizations committed to protecting and restoring Iowa's natural spaces, that is changing.

Enter: Boone Valley Wildlife Area, a newly-opened public hunting, recreation and wildlife area that holds just as many opportunities for valuable conservation and restoration as it does public enjoyment.

Spanning over 1 mile and 390 acres, the property's unique features include a natural, winding tract of Prairie Creek — a stream that flows into the Boone River. One of Humboldt County's greatest natural assets, its direct relationship with the Boone River means that Prairie Creek plays an instrumental role in the area's water quality. Protecting and restoring the riverbank and surrounding land to its native vegetation reduces sediment and runoff that would otherwise flow into Prairie Creek and, eventually, be deposited into the Boone River.

This portion of Prairie Creek has never been artificially straightened, allowing for natural course changes and providing unique conservation benefits and valuable habitat. Since the beginning of agricultural development in the Midwest, river and stream straightening has often been used to make waterways flow more quickly and efficiently. Taking out the wiggle and reducing the waterway's surface area increases the amount of usable agricultural land but also has

negative consequences on the local ecology. Because straightened rivers and streams flow faster, many species can no longer use them as spawning grounds, more sediment is picked up and transferred to places where it doesn't belong, and flooding becomes a greater problem.

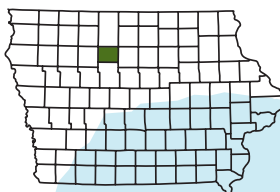
A change in the waterway's course, whether occurring naturally or artificially, often results in the creation of oxbows — curves or meanders of a creek that gradually become cut off from the main flow of water. Over time, erosion will lead to the oxbow filling with sediment and drying up, requiring restoration to maximize ecological benefits.

Humboldt County Conservation Board (HCCB) partnered with INHF, the Iowa Soybean Association and the Nature Conservancy to complete multiple oxbow restorations at Boone Valley Wildlife Area. These newly revitalized oxbows contribute to the maintenance of Prairie Creek's water quality by filtering sediment and nutrients out of the water before it flows back into the nearby creek and eventually deposits in the Boone River. They are also extremely valuable in terms of aquatic wildlife habitat, especially for small fish who need protection from larger predators. The oxbows at Boone Valley have been known to foster several species, including rare Topeka Shiners, a federally endangered fish species.

Another project on the property saw the restoration of 12 wetland basins around the creek, addressing issues related to both water quality and quantity.

## Boone Valley Wildlife Area

Humboldt County



**LAND:** 390 acres of mixed habitat bisected by one mile of Prairie Creek

### SPECIAL FEATURES:

Restored oxbows and prairie and riparian woodlands offering water quality benefits and outdoor recreation opportunities

**PARTNERS:** HCCB, local Pheasants Forever Chapters, Iowa Soybean Association, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, North American Wetland Conservation Act, Iowa Habitat Stamp funds, Iowa DNR, The Nature Conservancy in Iowa, INHF

Now well underway to being restored to its original ecological state, the conservation of this expansive and unique piece of land has been a true group effort, made possible through the dedication and commitment of many.

The property was initially acquired by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) back in 2017. From the project's inception, it was always intended that ownership and management would transfer to the Humboldt County Conservation Board (HCCB). At the time, HCCB only owned and managed around 400 total acres of public land, including just 200 acres of hunting ground, making this an exciting, but challenging, opportunity.

Todd Lee, director of HCCB, says the purchase price of 1.7 million dollars would not have been impossible for Humboldt County to do alone.

"This single property is almost twice as large as the total amount of public hunting land we managed at the time," says Lee. "The prospect was quite daunting, but we were assured by INHF staff that they would help throughout the entire process, and everything would work out."

Despite the looming price tag and logistical challenges, the mission never faltered — the conservation value was simply too great. In addition to the creek and all the ecological benefits that its protection and restoration provides, the surrounding land has become a safe haven for a diverse range of wildlife, particularly migrating waterfowl. When the creek floods, it can produce up to 30 acres of additional water, attracting species such

as Trumpeter Swans, White-fronted Geese, Mallards, Northern Pintails and Blue-winged Teal.

Over the course of nine years, the land was transferred to HCCB in three parcels, with the final transaction being completed in spring of 2025. The unique conservation value of this property caught the eye of many organizations in the area, including local chapters of Pheasants Forever and the National Wild Turkey Federation who have donated to all three phases. Additionally, the county received North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) funding and Habitat Stamp grants for each of the phases. The combination of private fundraising used to leverage grant opportunities made it possible for HCCB to take on this monumental project.

"The highlight for me has been to watch the transformation of this property to an area of native grass and wetland," says Lee.

The land's location offers the public rare access to valuable wildlife habitat in an area where natural spaces and diverse ecosystems are not readily available.

"You feel immersed and 'not in Iowa' in this area," says Heather Jobst, Senior Land Protection Facilitator at INHF. "Streams, like Prairie Creek, that haven't been straightened or improved are exciting to see. You get a picture of how the whole system works."

Now open to the public, Boone Valley Wildlife Area provides free access for bird watching, hiking, and hunting. 🦋

**The winding oxbows of Prairie Creek** house rare fish species, such as Topeka Shiners, and attract a wide variety of waterfowl.







# BEYOND



# THE FLAMES

## UNDERSTANDING PRESCRIBED FIRE



Photo courtesy of Meredith Roemerman



BY KODY WOHLERS  
Loess Hills Land Stewardship Director



Fire is a natural process that invigorates native landscapes like prairies, oak savannas and woodlands.

### FIRE ASSISTS IN PROMOTING A HEALTHY, NATURAL ECOSYSTEM IN A VARIETY OF WAYS:



Discourages invasive and/or non-native species



Returns nutrients to the soil, resulting in increased flowering species for pollinators and other insects and invertebrates



Aids in hazardous fuel reduction in areas of heightened wildfire risk



Serves as a catalyst in establishing prairie reconstructions by removing debris buildup to promote better seed to soil contact



Promotes a higher rate of gain for grazing livestock due to the increased biomass, as well as more lush and palatable plants



MAR – MAY

Spring burns — when vegetation is still dormant — will remove a large amount of the litter, duff and debris from a site.



JUNE – SEPT

A burn during the growing season will set back cool season grasses like smooth brome and have a heavy impact on encroaching woody species like smooth sumac or dogwood.



NOV – DEC

Burning in the fall will benefit spring ephemerals and discourage early successional woodland species like hackberry and ironwood.



Burn timing depends on site conditions and stewardship objectives.



Burning a young prairie early and often will reduce weed competition and stimulate native plants to germinate and grow vigorously.



Prairies with woody encroachment would likely benefit from an increased burning frequency.



Longer burn intervals can be beneficial for certain species like Henslow's Sparrows. And always leave some unburned areas to protect sensitive insects, reptiles and other species.



Oak woodlands seem to benefit from frequent, low intensity fire.



# DON BENEKE: CONSERVATION ENTHUSIAST



Photo of INHF President Joe McGovern, Don Beneke, and INHF board member John Fisher.

INHF recognizes the loss of an influential member of the Iowa conservation community with the recent passing of Don Beneke. Originally from Laurens, Iowa, Don made a living in Pocahontas where he owned his own law firm for 51 years as well as the Pocahontas Title Company. Don believed strongly in serving others and was invested in his community. He found joy in his affiliation with conservation organizations like Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, where he served on the board of directors for 28 years.

His kindness, enjoyment of traveling the state of Iowa and forthright commitment to representing INHF well are among President Joe McGovern’s many fond memories of working with Don over the years.

INHF board member John Fisher recalls Don’s passion for conservation. “Don took great pleasure in watching parts of Iowa being restored to its natural condition. Don was the epitome of so many Iowans who love their home state and have the vision and energy to leave it better than they found it. He will be greatly missed.”

Don was a great champion of the work of INHF staff and committed to the organization’s mission. He didn’t pass up an opportunity to talk about the projects INHF was working on. Erin Van Waus, INHF Conservation Easement Director, remembers Don as a wonderful person who had an innate sense of community and “did the human aspect of conservation so well.” Don was quick to support INHF staff and always offered encouragement. “He made me feel proud of the work I did at INHF,” said Erin.

Thank you, Don, for all your support for conservation in Iowa.

- STACIE COUVILLON, *Planned Giving and Major Gifts Officer*

**Leave a legacy for future generations:** If you are interested in leaving a legacy gift, contact Stacie Couvillon, Planned Giving and Major Gifts Officer, at [scouvillon@inhf.org](mailto:scouvillon@inhf.org) or 515-288-1846, ext. 45.

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

### IN HONOR OF

Glen Adolphs  
Finley & Olivia Brelsford  
My Family & Future Generations  
Waters Cahill  
Joe Cook  
Dutch Dodd and family  
Maddie Fitzgerald  
Erinn Fry  
Gregg Gustafson  
David Heine  
Patrick Henry  
Harley Hett  
Jake Jansen  
Jim Jansen, *In honor of your career dedicated to the conservation of natural resources in Iowa*  
Loren Lown & Janette Diamond  
Abe Lukowicz  
Beth Lynch  
MHR HRCH Mountain’s Top Woody Sage MA QA2

### GMHR Mountain’s Top G.O.A.T QA2

Frank Olsen  
Margery Ann Rink Petzelka  
Dick and Carolyn Ramsay  
Dean A. Rigdon  
The Ritz Family  
Carol Rogers  
William D. “Don” Russell  
Tyler Samuels  
Mr. Pat Schlarbaum  
Jan Schmidt  
Katherine Schnable  
Kent & Glenn Sheeley  
Susan Siev  
Jerry Sloan  
Maddogg the Softballer  
Ross Soifer  
Pat Thomsen  
Joseph H. Zaletel and Linda R.F. Zaletel

### IN MEMORY OF

Paul and Kitty Bartlett  
Donald A. Beneke  
Erica Berrier  
Susan Connell-Magee  
Dave Cook  
Ryan Cookson  
Richard W. Glenn  
Luke Haller  
Donald Hauge  
Thomas R Hoff  
Paul W. Johnson  
Jerrold M. Jung  
Elwood Kleese  
Art Lambe  
Glenn Leggett  
GMHR Mountain’s Top Beggar MH  
MHR HRCH Mountain’s Top G.O.A.T. QA2  
MHR Mountain’s Top Wooden Nickel MH  
Cindy Nelson  
James Neymeiyer  
Walter Ordway  
Lawrence Pritchett  
Vicki Reed  
Arthur C Rich  
Jerrold S. Ross  
James Runge  
Earl and Isabelle Salterberg  
Jan A. Schmidt  
Alvin Snyder III  
Dr. Diane Sorenson, *nature lover*  
Golby Uhler  
Richard L. Voss Jr.  
Joan Walljasper  
Dr. Kent L. Webb  
Shannon Whipp  
Betty Zeman

# CATCH THE BREEZE

BY CLARA WODNY  
*Communications Intern*

Rising temperatures and longer days aren’t the only indication of spring! It’s time to welcome a new weather phenomenon: wind. Due to changes in atmospheric pressure, spring tends to be the windiest season in Iowa.

At this time of year, there is a significant difference in temperature between the northern and southern United States. These temperature contrasts result in air masses with differing pressures and densities. As the atmosphere attempts to create equilibrium, air in high-pressure areas flows to areas of low-pressure, leading to very strong winds.

Another factor that influences wind frequency and speed is the Polar Jet Stream, a fast-moving belt of western winds that traverses the lower layers of the atmosphere. By late March and April, the jet stream moves over Iowa, keeping wind speeds higher and stronger.

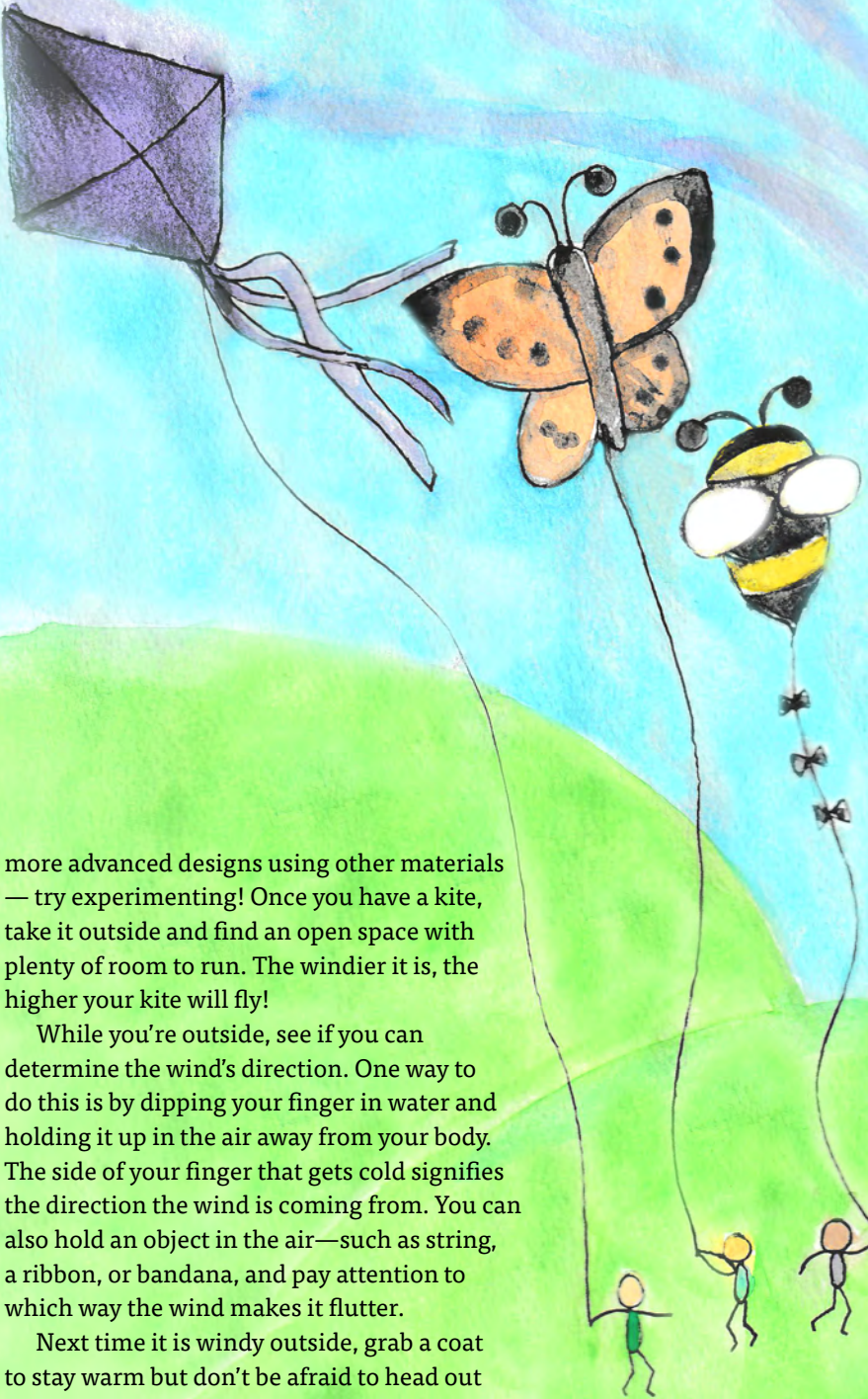
Whether or not you are a fan of wind, there is no doubt that it serves important and valuable roles in the ecosystem. For one, wind is beneficial to migrating birds, as it helps them conserve energy and travel farther distances. It is also an essential component of pollination and seed dispersal, carrying seeds to new locations and improving biodiversity.

And remember, windy weather does not have to be a sentence to go back inside! There are plenty of outdoor activities that are made possible by wind.

Try flying a kite! If you don’t have your own, you can make a simple one with construction paper, tape, a wooden dowel and some string or ribbon. If you’re feeling confident in your kite construction skills, you can upgrade to

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

Illustration by JORDAN McDOWELL  
*Graphic Design Intern*



more advanced designs using other materials — try experimenting! Once you have a kite, take it outside and find an open space with plenty of room to run. The windier it is, the higher your kite will fly!

While you’re outside, see if you can determine the wind’s direction. One way to do this is by dipping your finger in water and holding it up in the air away from your body. The side of your finger that gets cold signifies the direction the wind is coming from. You can also hold an object in the air—such as string, a ribbon, or bandana, and pay attention to which way the wind makes it flutter.

Next time it is windy outside, grab a coat to stay warm but don’t be afraid to head out and explore! No matter the weather, there is always fun and adventure to be had in nature. 🌿





## Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

505 5th Ave., Suite 444  
Des Moines, IA 50309



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### How can funding for outdoor recreation enrich Iowa's landscape?

If it weren't for programs like Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP), the newly opened Mann Wetlands in Marshall County might have remained wet unproductive ground. Now, it's a vibrant wetland to be enjoyed by wildlife and people alike. While state funding programs like REAP or the State Recreational Trails Program (SRT) are vital for local projects, they have been under-funded in recent years. Ask your representatives to fully fund REAP and SRT!

*Photos by INHF*

