

IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE



SUMMER 2021

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

SEASONS OF CHANGE

Reflection, protection and resilience in eastern Iowa. **8**

Homeward Bound

Iowans return home to help shape the state's landscape. **14**

A Place for People

Coming together for community and conservation in Cherokee, Iowa. **18**



Forever Young

When the 4-H Foundation listed the former 4-H camp near Madrid for sale in the fall of 2019, many worried about what would become of it. A year and a half after INHF purchased the property, the new vision for this special spot in the Des Moines River Valley is well on its ways to being realized.

8

Seasons of Change

Prairiewoods embodies a community's commitment to restoration, revitalization and resilience one year after the derecho.

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Homeward Bound

Three lowans who left the state early in their conservation career reflect on their decision to return to their roots.

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A Place for People

Magic abounds in a small town in northwest Iowa, and thanks to a new linear park and trail, more people will soon be able to experience it.

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

Narrow-leaved purple coneflowers grow in abundance in a prairie in O'Brien County.

Photo by Bruce Morrison



**Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation**

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

505 Fifth Ave., Suite 444 Des Moines, Iowa 50309

www.inhf.org | 515-288-1846 | info@inhf.org

STAFF

Joe McGovern
President

Ross Baxter
Land Projects Director

Andrea Boulton
Trails and Greenways Director

Jered Bourquin
Blufflands Associate

Jessica Riebkes Clough
Land Projects Assistant

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Connection through the land

I have always felt connected to Iowa. Whether it is on the prairies, in the oak savannas or while exploring the multitude of the state's public parks, trails or countryside, I feel grounded in Iowa.

One of my favorite experiences is being on a prairie remnant in full bloom. I love the feeling of being surrounded by centuries-old plant communities with really deep roots, ancient soil and all of the wonderful insects, birds, reptiles and mammals that call it home.

It is even better when I am able to share this experience with the ones I love. Both bring feelings of joy. Sometimes I am not sure which one is the source; the land or the people around me. And I am not sure it matters. What matters is that these places



JOE MCGOVERN
President

remain, for their own sake, and can be visited time and time again.

One of the best parts of working at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) is experiencing that same joy from working with others to protect these special places — now and forever — for everyone. We do this for the land, water and wildlife, but we also do it in the hope that through these places Iowans will deepen their connection to the land and to each other. We forge new relationships with one another as we share our home, Iowa, together.

In this issue you will read about communities coming together to create outdoor spaces for all to enjoy. You will learn about Iowans who were beckoned home and found old connections renewed and transformed. You will see the resilience of nature tested, only to find out it is still there, welcoming all of us to be renewed. Think of the places that speak to you. Now think of the people you care about. I invite you to revisit those places, and share them with others.

We are so grateful to have friends and supporters like you. Together, we continue to protect and restore even more special places, and through them, help keep you connected to the land and to each other.

INHF staff, interns and volunteers spend a summer day walking through the oak savanna, wetlands and prairie at Snyder Heritage Farm to sample and collect information about water quality on the property. Photo by Genna Clemen, INHF

THROUGH YOUR LENS



Photo by Genna Clemen



“Sunsets, like childhood, are viewed with wonder not just because they are beautiful but because they are fleeting.”

— Richard Paul Evans

My favorite months of the year are upon us. The trees are full, the prairies are thriving and butterfly milkweed is in full bloom. The world around us is filled with sunshine and gloriously long days that stretch into warm summer nights.

For me, those summer days and nights are sweetest at the cabin. The ice is long gone and the lake is abuzz with people fishing, swimming and spending time with family and friends making those precious memories at our favorite places. The day has an organized rhythm. We start with breakfast, then head out for a walk in the woods, admiring the large trees and the calm around us. Once we return to the cabin it's time to swim, jump off the dock, search for rocks and throw sticks for the dogs to retrieve from the water.

Best of all is the sunset. The final beautiful moments of a day well spent and, as I like to believe, a sign from those we love above giving us a sky full of splendor to admire and enjoy. This time of the evening we all stop what we're doing and gather together to watch the sun dip below the horizon in farewell — for now.

— ERIN GRIFFIN
Donor Services Coordinator

Fresh Faces

INHF welcomed 21 interns this summer, our largest group yet. They've come from 13 different colleges and universities, and represent majors ranging from environmental science, biology and sustainability to communications, business and community and regional planning.

"It's very cool to be part of a team that understands the land and has a vision for what it should look like and how to get there," said Carter Sergeant, a Blufflands land stewardship intern from LeClaire, Iowa.

"These interns are the next generation of land stewards," said Land Stewardship Associate



Derek Miner. "After the internship, regardless of where their careers take them, they will always have their conservation ethic and will continue to have positive impacts on the land."

2021 PRESCRIBED FIRE STATS

May marked the end of INHF's spring prescribed burn season. With 62 prescribed fires on 31 different properties, stewardship staff burned 3,272 total acres. Together with the Conservation Corps Iowa, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and some select dedicated and experienced volunteers, INHF brought an ecological refresh to prairies and oak savannas throughout Iowa.

Preparation for fire season begins long before the first fire line is lit. INHF stewardship staff complete fire training courses and certification programs for prescribed burns, attend ongoing trainings and seek out educational and applied opportunities to expand their skills throughout the year. Each burn has a detailed fire plan — a prescription that ensures it doesn't spread to undesired locations and meets ecological goals. INHF staff continually monitor wind speed, wind direction and humidity to ensure a safe, predictable and successful prescribed burn.

"This year's spring prescribed fire season proved to be successful on many levels," said Senior Land Stewardship Director Brian Fankhauser. "INHF was able to safely burn an impressive number of acres and had the opportunity to partner with several organizations and volunteers to help restore the landscape."



Green Hill WMA – One Year Later

Less than a five-minute drive from Council Bluffs, Green Hill Wildlife Management Area is a sight for nature-sore eyes. INHF and The Nature Conservancy in Iowa purchased the 506-acre oak savanna and remnant prairie property together in June of 2017. With the support of partners, public agencies and individual donors across Iowa and beyond, the property transferred to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in mid-2020. One year later, the property has become a haven for hikers, hunters and birdwatchers.

A delayed dedication honoring those that helped complete the project was held on June 29, 2021. As the natural area undergoes ongoing restoration, it will continue to offer a unique opportunity for people to experience a classic example of Loess Hills topography.

"Having a natural area close to a large population will provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities for nearby residents," said Heather Jobst, INHF's senior land conservation director.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 19

UpCycle Stewards

Gray's Lake
Des Moines, IA

Get outdoors and help restore some of Des Moines' most popular outdoor areas while helping animals at Blank Park Zoo! Together, volunteers will help restore land for native plants by removing invasive species from the park. After the event, organizers will take the plants to Blank Park Zoo where they will be "upcycled" into food for the zoo animals. **RSVP at inhf.org**

SEPTEMBER 15

SOIL Conference

Drake University
Des Moines, IA

SOIL 2021 brings together farmers, landowners, conservationists, local officials and others interested in the future of Iowa's land and water for a full day of presentations and conversations. INHF's Erin Van Waus and Emily Martin will be among the presenters.

OCTOBER 2

Heritage Valley
Fall Seed Harvest

Heritage Valley
Waukon, IA

Together, we'll hand-harvest native seed from Heritage Valley's hillside prairies. Seed collected will be used to diversify and expand the prairie. We'll kick the day off with conversation and a bit of background about Heritage Valley. **RSVP at inhf.org**

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

QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

An quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between **March and May 2021**.

*WMA stands for Wildlife Management Area

Newly protected areas

Marshall County

Approximately 12 acres of woodland along the Iowa River near Marshalltown. The property is adjacent to a previously protected complex of land held by Timberland, Inc., a collective of family members who share a common vision for land protection. Creates a 500-acre complex of protected land, preserves wildlife habitat and water quality. *(Conservation easement donated by Janey and Thomas Swartz)*

Ventura Marsh WMA Addition

67 acres in Hancock County. Once restored to wetlands and upland prairie, the property will provide wildlife habitat for migratory waterfowl, water quality benefits and outdoor recreation opportunities. *(A portion of the land value was donated anonymously. Proposed public ownership)*

Black Hawk County

145 acres of agricultural land, wooded draws and native prairie pasture north of Waterloo. It was the donor's wish to see her family farm "preserved for environmentally-sound agricultural use and wildlife protection in perpetuity." Protects soil health, water quality and provides opportunities for future prairie restoration. *(Bequeathed by Mary Brandes)*

**Mary Brandes bequest
in Black Hawk County**

Photo by INHF



Lucas County

356 acres of wetland, grassland, remnant prairie, riparian and upland woodland along the Chariton River in Lucas County. The property is rich in habitat diversity and completes a 12-mile river corridor of protected land that extends from Chariton to Lake Rathbun. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Boone County

215 acres of woodland along the Des Moines River northwest of Boone. Purchased at the request of the Five Fires Foundation, a local nonprofit created to protect and operate the YMCA Camp near Boone, which includes this property. Protects wildlife habitat, preserves water quality and provides opportunities for continued environmental education, outdoor recreation and experiential learning in nature. *(Proposed future ownership by the Five Fires Foundation with conservation easement)*

Land transfers to public partners

Rubio Access Addition

88 acres along the South Skunk River in Keokuk County. Includes two tracts of land on either side of the river. The northern tract boasts riparian woodland, wetlands and an oxbow. The southern tract includes wetlands, woodland and grassland. Together they protect wildlife habitat, decrease soil erosion and increase water retention during flood events. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

Winneshiek County

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

Little Sioux River WMA Addition

94 acres along the Little Sioux River in Clay County. Protects diverse wildlife habitat including upland and riparian woodland, pasture, remnant and reconstructed prairie along the Little Sioux River. This is the first in a series of proposed transfers in this 425-acre addition. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

West Fork WMA Addition

135 acres northwest of Emmetsburg in Palo Alto County. Protects wetland habitat between Deer Creek and Five Island Lake and expands protected land around the adjacent Prairie Gold Wildlife Area. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

North Fork WMA Addition

80 acres along the North River in Warren County. Provides public hunting, open space and outdoor recreation opportunities in close proximity to several areas with large populations. This is the second in a series of transfers in the 374-acre addition. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*

Accreditation Notice

INHF, Iowa's first accredited land trust, is applying for renewal of accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission – as required every five years – in 2021. A public comment period is open until September 15, 2021.

To comment visit https://ltac.civicore.com/index.php?action=publicComment_new or email info@landtrustaccreditation.org

To learn more about national Land Trust Accreditation standards and practices visit landtrustaccreditation.org





Seasons of Change

25 years of reflection, protection and resilience at Prairiewoods

BY KATY HEGGEN
Communications specialist | kheggen@inhf.org

Located on 70 acres spread across Hiawatha and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center (Prairiewoods) feels both urban and yet a world apart.

For 25 years, this place has provided people of all beliefs, backgrounds and cultures opportunities to reflect on their relationship to the “Source of All Being,” earth, themselves and each other through experiences that explore the intersection of ecology, spirituality and holistic health.

Many have been refreshed, restored and revitalized by the landscape during that time. This past year, many of those individuals have had the opportunity to return the favor in-kind as the landscape experienced a transformation of its own following the derecho that swept through eastern and parts of central Iowa last August. The events that followed have not only

underscored the resilience of this place, but also the community that has grown out of it.

Beginnings

The land that was to become Prairiewoods was purchased in 1962 by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA), a Catholic community whose motherhouse – i.e. spiritual and administrative center – is located in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Several events led the FSPA community to establish a spirituality center here in 1996. At the center of the decision was a desire to develop a spiritual center that emphasized evolutionary consciousness, connection and care for creation – all tenets of the Franciscan tradition.

“We believe that the earth is sacred. It is the primary source of our reverence for God and a representation of who God is,” said



Sister Nancy Hoffman, one of Prairiewoods' six foundresses, who has been with the center since the beginning. "All land is holy. All land is sacred."

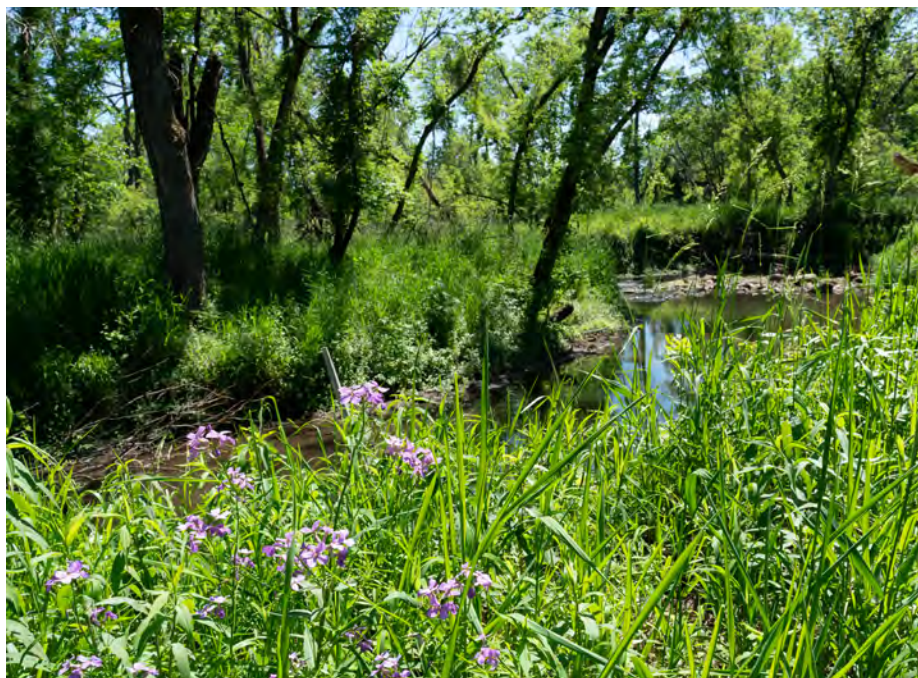
Changes on the landscape, whether seasonal, sporadic or cyclical, are revered and respected here. But nothing could have prepared Prairiewoods' staff and supporters for the transformation that was to come in August 2020.

Winds of change

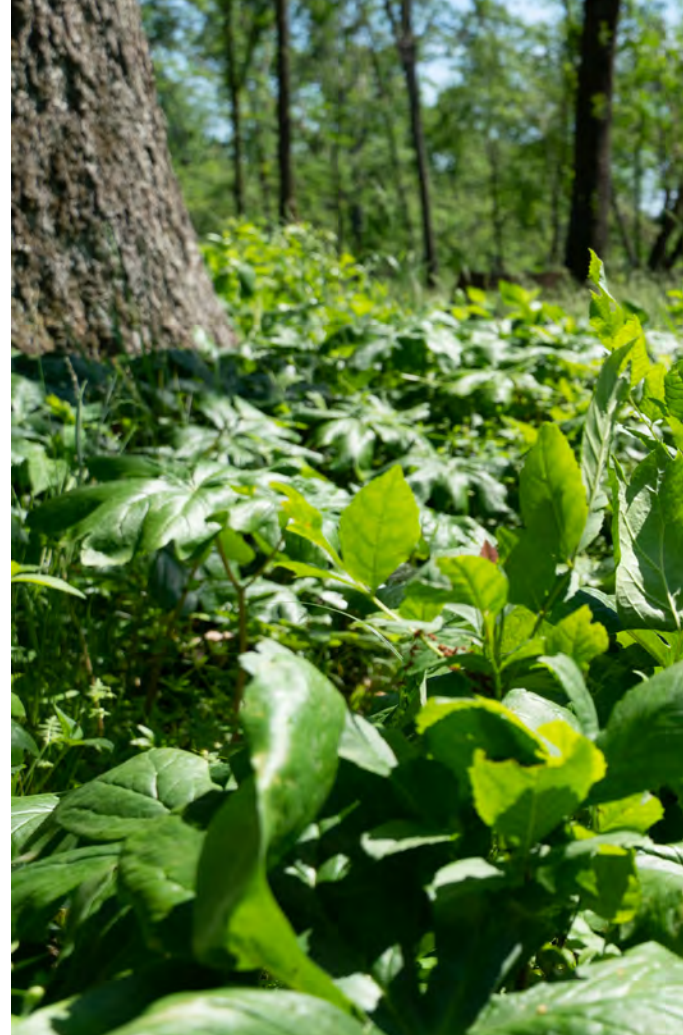
Few green spaces in the greater Cedar Rapids area emerged from last summer's derecho unscathed. Prairiewoods was no exception. Staff estimate approximately 750-1,000 trees, including many of the property's oaks, were lost in the storm, altering the landscape almost beyond recognition.

"It was just devastating," said Prairiewoods Director Jenifer Hanson. "It's hard to put it into words, even now."

Prairiewoods includes approximately 70 acres of prairie, woodland and open space, two-and-a-half miles of walking trails, a labyrinth and several other outdoor spaces designed for personal introspection. In addition to providing space for programming,



INHF Conservation Easement Director Erin Van Waus, far right, joined the Prairiewoods staff to celebrate the conservation easement in 2019. *Photos by Genna Clemen, INHF*



▲ In addition to providing space for programs, **Prairiewoods'** grounds have become an increasingly popular public green space in the greater Cedar Rapids metro, particularly during the pandemic. *Photos by Genna Clemen, INHF*

this land has become an increasingly popular publicly accessible green space in the greater Cedar Rapids metro, particularly during the pandemic. Locals and visitors alike frequent the trails, walking together in conversation and quiet contemplation. As such, restoration of the land itself and the ability to offer opportunities for continued recreation and reflection were front-of-mind for staff following the storm.

"It was super important to us to make the space safe so people could continue to come here," said Land Care and Holistic Ecology Coordinator August Stolba, who leads Prairiewoods' stewardship team.

Staff worked with subcontractors to coordinate much of the initial cleanup. But the response from the Prairiewoods community, locals and disaster relief volunteers from near and far, has been integral to the ongoing restoration of the landscape.

"We were stunned by how many people

came [to help after the storm] and from how far away," said another of Prairiewoods' foundresses Sister Joann Gehling, who has been on staff at the center since it opened. "It was very humbling."

Like all those who come to Prairiewoods, each person has their own reason for lending a hand on the land. Those who hold a special affinity for this place see it as an opportunity to give back to land that has provided so many with so much.

"When things are devastated, you have to have a safe place to go. Prairiewoods is that place for so many people," said Rick Sandstrom, a long-time stewardship volunteer at Prairiewoods. "There's just a power, energy and sense of balance here. People take that with them when they go back to their lives and out into the community. After the storm, this community needed a place to get back in balance."

While Prairiewoods moved swiftly to make its outdoor spaces safe and accessible, trust in the land has continued to guide the approach to stewardship here, both before and after the storm.

"We try to follow nature's lead," said Stolba.



"We use science, sustainable practices and what we know from experience to care for the land, but we don't try to control it."

"The land knows more than we do," Sister Nancy added.

For many, the land's ability to begin again serves as a reminder of their own ability to weather storms, especially now.

"I always thought of myself as a really resilient person," said Hanson. "But for me, the derecho, that was it. I just felt the loss of that personal sense of resiliency so deeply. This past spring at Prairiewoods has been so impactful for me personally. The land is so resilient. It takes people longer."

Peace & protection in perpetuity

The events of the past year have illustrated the character of this place, the people and community it represents. It's also made a decision the sisters made a year prior all that more meaningful.

In 2019, after much internal discussion amongst its members, FSPA made the decision to permanently protect Prairiewoods in perpetuity by donating a conservation easement on approximately 48 acres of prairie,

woodland and open space surrounding the center to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). This easement was in process at the time of the derecho and was completed and recorded in November 2020, a few months after the storm.

"Rather than allowing all the damage from the storm to crush their spirit or lessen their resolve to protect the land, the sisters doubled down in their determination to ensure that it was permanently protected," said Eastern Iowa Program Director Carole Teator. "Now, with the conservation easement in place, Prairiewoods will remain a place in the midst of a quickly developing area available to those seeking renewal and restoration in nature."

"We thank you for coming today and we welcome you to come often, to walk the trails, to admire the strength of the trees, to engage with the residents, the denizens of prairie and woods," said Prairiewoods Foundress Sister Betty Daughtery, now deceased, during her remarks at a ceremony celebrating FSPA's decision to permanently protect the land on Oct. 4, 2019. "We invite you to listen to the wisdom coming from the land itself. It will teach us to be grateful for the gifts of each season." 🌿

FOREVER YOUNG

Former 4-H camp in Central Iowa is beginning a new chapter

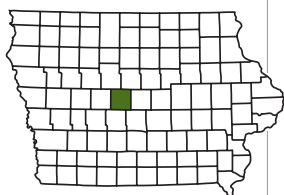
BY JOE JAYJACK

Communications director | jjayjack@inhf.org

Photo by Emily Martin/INHF

Former Central Iowa 4-H Camp

Boone County



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

PARTNERS: INHF, Iowa DNR, numerous nonprofit partners and dozens of donors that care about the future of this place

SPECIAL FEATURES: Sacred indigenous sites, hiking trails, abundant wildlife

When David and Terrie Hoefer worked at the central Iowa 4-H camp in the 1980s and '90s, they formed a deep connection to this place along the Des Moines River in Boone County.

The Hoefers are part of a large group of 4-H camp staff alumni that helped campers learn about the natural world and their place in it. In the process of helping kids connect to the land, many staff developed a close connection to this place – and each other – that has endured, even decades after they stopped working there.

That is why the Hoefers and many other alumni were happy when Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) purchased the camp to protect and keep whole this natural wonder.

"There is no greater honor to the work we did at the 4-H Camp than to preserve this land," David and Terrie wrote to INHF.

A new trail

The camp, first known as the Iowa 4-H Center and more recently as Clover Woods Camp and Retreat Center, was split into 12 parcels and offered for sale by the Iowa 4-H Foundation in the fall of 2019, citing declining

attendance and a desire to support other 4-H programs around the state.

Many worried about what these 1,011 acres would look if they were divided and developed. The steep woodland hills, wildflower-lined hiking trails and native prairie have long-been a refuge for people and wildlife alike. With this in mind, INHF made an offer on the entire camp, which was accepted by the Iowa 4-H Foundation. INHF took possession of the property in early 2020.

As soon as INHF took possession of the property, the organization began envisioning the future of this outstanding natural wonder with public and private partners. A shared commitment to continue to share it with others became evident early on.

That wish – shared by INHF, its partners and countless project supporters – is now coming to fruition. Part of the camp transferred to the Iowa DNR in June 2021 and will soon be open to the public.

"We're envisioning a more welcoming wildlife area," said Todd Bishop, the Iowa DNR wildlife bureau chief. "We understand that our traditional wildlife areas, if you don't hunt or

fish, a lot of people feel like they don't know how to use the area. What's great about this area is we have a lot of partners between the Iowa Arboretum, nearby parks and camps and INHF. It gives us a chance to build a partnership through programming and coordination."

This summer, INHF transferred the first 200-acre section to the Iowa DNR. The two organizations continue to work together on the future of the rest of the property, which will likely include INHF owning a section in the northeast corner long-term for its own programming, stewardship and public engagement. The portions owned by the DNR will be managed as a wildlife area — technically part of the Saylorville Wildlife Management Area (WMA) — but with an emphasis on expanded programming, especially for young people.

"I feel like that's a consistent legacy with the 4-H camp, helping young people connect with the land," Bishop said. "We are very serious in our intent to try to make this more welcoming to users throughout the year. And we're trying not to pre-determine what that means. We're trying to do it in a way that is responsive to new interests, new ways of interacting with natural landscapes."

Less is more

Bishop said he sees the place as a day-use area where nearby campers or park users could come for a more secluded experience. The property already has an extensive system of

hiking trails — something many WMAs don't offer — that could be augmented by minimal interpretation, possibly even through mobile devices.

"Ledges — what a great place. But it's crowded. And that's what it's built for," Bishop said. "What we're trying to accomplish here is a little less density. The experience is different when there is some solitude."

That experience won't include shelters, cabins or camping, a decision solidified, in-part, by nature. Last summer's derecho hit the former camp hard. The storm toppled many mature trees and damaged most of the buildings that supported the former camp. INHF had already begun moving or salvaging derelict buildings, but the storm damage solidified the decision to remove most the built infrastructure on the site and create a more natural experience. INHF continues to work with nearby nonprofits and conservation groups to move or salvage materials, giving them new life elsewhere.

"This is such a special place, not only because of its size and scenery, but because it has brought so many people closer to nature," said Heather Jobst, INHF senior land conservation director. "We're happy to be able to bring more people to this place with the help of great partners."

INHF is tentatively planning an open house and raptor release with Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR) on the site for Oct. 3, 2021. The sections that have already transferred to the DNR should soon be open to the public, paving the way for new generations to connect with this place.

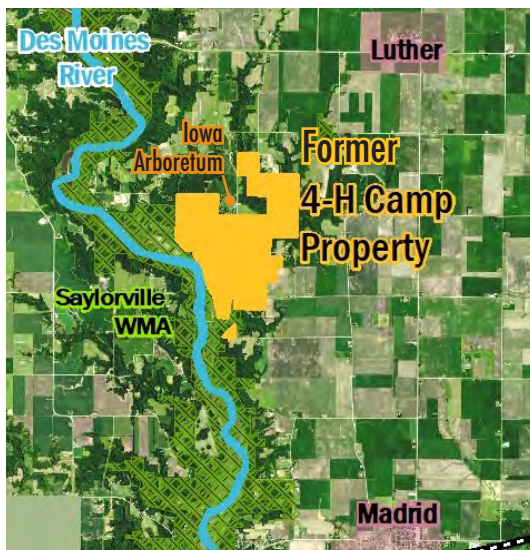
"We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. This place that holds a special place in our hearts is no different," the Hoefers wrote. "It is our wish for this land that has given us so much to keep teaching and touching people's souls, motivating them to act every day to care for the land, the life and the air in all that they do. Not only for us, but for all who work from our shoulders." 🌿

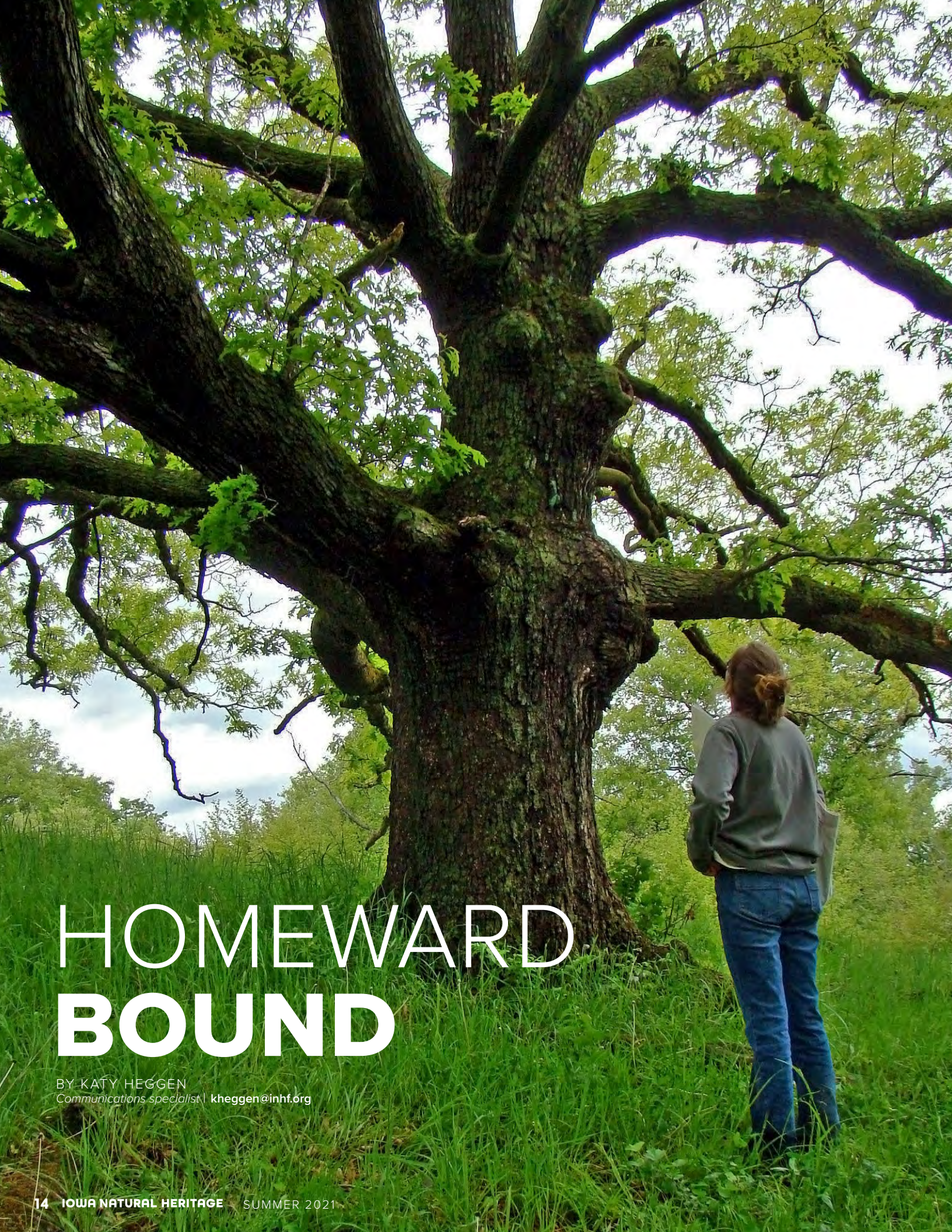


The woodlands at the former 4-H camp are abundant in spring wildflowers, such as this Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*).
Photo by Genna Clemen/ INHF

SAVE THE DATE

INHF is tentatively planning an open house and raptor release with Saving Our Avian Resources (SOAR) on the site of the former 4-H camp for Sunday, Oct. 3, 2021. Check inhf.org/events for updates.





HOMeward BOUND

BY KATY HEGGEN
Communications specialist | kheggen@inhf.org

Eastern Iowa native Tyler Baird built his career against the backdrop of the country's most stunning national parks. But it's not the soaring sandstone cliffs of Zion or Yosemite's cascading waterfalls that have stayed with him over the years.

"Everywhere I went, all my favorite spots in the park were the open spaces," Baird said. "The high, flat elevation points on the plateaus, and low, open spots in the meadows. Those were the ones I really gravitated towards. I think on some level, all along I was drawn to something that resembled Iowa's landscape."

Baird is one of countless young Iowans who left the state early in his conservation career. Like others, he later returned home, bringing with him a depth of knowledge and experience that is helping shape the state's landscape.

Room to grow

Baird developed an affinity for Iowa's outdoors during weekends spent exploring his grandparents' cattle farm on the edge of Tipton, Iowa, where he grew up. But it wasn't until he got to Iowa State University (ISU) and into his studies as a landscape architecture major that his interest in conservation really took off.

During his sophomore year, Baird had the opportunity to study and travel throughout the savanna region that extends from the Boundary Waters to the Rio Grande. Exploring nature on both sides of the border solidified his interest in conservation and led Baird to spend a semester on a national student exchange at the University of Idaho. While there, he applied for a summer internship with the National Park Service (NPS), a move that landed him at Zion National Park in southwest Utah and set him on course for a career with the NPS.

"I really like the public interaction aspect of it all," Baird said. "People

asking questions, excited about seeing something new and getting outdoors. I enjoyed sharing that experience with them."

Baird's time with the National Park Service led him to pursue a master's degree in human dimensions of ecosystem science and management at Utah State University.

After graduation, he headed to Yosemite National Park to evaluate viewsheds, but soon felt the itch to return home. After a brief stint with the Missouri State Parks Division, he came across an opening for a horticulturist with the City of Iowa City in 2015.

"The position included managing plantings downtown and in all the city parks and natural areas – everything within the park system," Baird said. "It covers all the different types of things I've done in past positions. It ended up

being a good fit."

Baird was promoted to superintendent of parks and forestry in 2020. With his new position, he plans to create areas inspired by and in symbiosis with nature in the city's parks and public spaces.

"Iowa doesn't have as many public spaces as some of the other places I've worked, but the ones we do have are well-loved by people," Baird said. "I enjoy seeing people outside enjoying them and being part of that experience."

Finding purpose

Like Baird, Tylar Samuels headed west shortly after graduating from the University of Iowa. Unlike Baird, it was young love, not the outdoors, that led her there.

Volunteer Tyler Baird at Tipton Woods, a 58-acre natural area owned and stewarded by INHF near his home in Lone Tree, Iowa.



"I was engaged at the time, and he had this desire to get out of Iowa, either temporarily or long-term," Samuels said. "We had a friend living in Eureka, California, so away we went. It was beautiful. The ocean, the mountains, giant redwood trees."

They had only been in California for a few months when the couple moved again, this time to the Fort Myers, Florida, to be close to her fiancé's family. There, Samuels, who had a degree in anthropology and minor in Native American studies but had always had a passion for the outdoors, worked odd jobs for a couple of months before reaching out to the local state park to see if they were hiring. They weren't, but referred her to an AmeriCorps crew that did contract work in southwest Florida.

"That is when I found my calling,"

said Samuels. "I loved being part of something bigger and ridding the land of invasive species, doing prescribed burning and traveling around to different parks and preserves around Florida doing restoration. I was absolutely in love with it."

The engagement didn't last, but the newfound career calling did. After completing her service with AmeriCorps, Samuels landed a position at Estero Bay State Buffer Preserve, an 11,000+-acre preserve between Fort Myers and Naples, where she spent three years helping restore the preserve. After, she spent two years with the Lee County 2020 Program in Lee County, Florida, restoring uplands and wetlands on several preserves in and around Lee County before deciding it was time for a change.

"I just decided I wanted to be back home," recalled Samuels, who grew up in Des Moines and St. Charles and spent many weekends exploring the city's parks and other outdoors spaces

as well as natural areas in and around Madison County with family. "But it was also really important to me to find a job in conservation."

She began searching for a job in the natural resources field and interviewed for a position with Pottawattamie County Conservation (PCC), and while she didn't get the job, she certainly left an impression. A PCC staff member forwarded her a position with INHF a few months later.

"I wanted the opportunity to do the type of work I was doing in Florida, but in Iowa," Samuels said. "This is my home. I wanted to make an impact."

Perspective & appreciation

Similar to Samuels, David Brady's passion for conservation may have blossomed elsewhere, but was rooted in his childhood experiences in Iowa.

"I grew up running around my grandparents' farm, catching critters and fishing, but didn't go to national parks, hike, camp or anything like that," said Brady, who grew up in Storm Lake, Iowa.

At ISU, this interest grew into a career path. While there, he joined the Student Conservation Association (SCA), a nonprofit that strives to "build the next generation of conservation leaders and inspire lifelong stewardship of the environment." Through them, Brady had the opportunity to spend a summer in the Boundary Waters, a 1,090,000-acre wilderness area in northern Minnesota popular with paddlers, hikers and anglers.

The experience inspired him to continue to explore, signing on for backpacking trips in Montana, Colorado and other spots out west. After graduating with an ecology degree, he landed a position with SCA in upstate New York doing trail maintenance and management.

From there, Brady became a self-described "wildlife vagabond," pursuing seasonal stewardship and research

INHF Conservation Easement Specialist Tylar Samuels returned to Iowa to help protect and restore the state's native landscape after several years stewarding lands in southwest Florida.





positions throughout the northeast. When his wife landed a job in Austin, Texas, Brady signed on with the state's conservation corps, but it wasn't long before he set off again, this time to Wyoming, where he worked with the state's Fish & Game Department as a herpetology technician.

After several seasons going back and forth between Texas and out west, Brady joined his wife in Austin year-round and led educational, adventure-focused programs for school and public groups at the Austin Nature & Science Center.

When a family member received a serious health diagnosis two years later, the couple decided to move back to Iowa. Brady admits he was not particularly excited about his professional prospects in Iowa.

"I knew it'd be a change, that there wouldn't be as many options as there had been out west or down south," he said. "It was definitely bittersweet."

Shortly after arriving, Brady landed an internship at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, a 6,000+-acre preserve in Prairie City, doing land stewardship, research and environmental education.

"Iowa has such a modified landscape. I didn't really have a lot of exposure to Iowa's wild lands. That experience was eye-opening," he said.

Brady's next move was to the classroom. Brady completed a master's in education from Drake University and will start his first year as an environmental science teacher at North High School in Des Moines this fall.

"Thinking back to my own education, I didn't learn about Iowa's natural heritage," Brady said. "There's so little prairie and other natural lands left in Iowa. It's important to teach people about these places that they may otherwise not have a chance to learn about or get to see. I'm excited to find ways to do that."

Contributions and connection

Baird, Samuels, Brady and others like them offer unique contributions to Iowa's conservation community. Their experiences working within states with different landscapes, approaches to conservation and outdoor cultures, combined with the experiences of their colleagues who have opted to focus their careers in Iowa, arguably make the field and the state's natural resources and outdoor recreation offerings stronger.

INHF has benefited from Baird, Samuels and Brady's decision to reestablish roots in Iowa. Seeking a way to stay connected to the land, both

▲ Volunteer David Brady at the Mathes property, 51 acres of rolling hills, oak savanna and woodland owned and stewarded by INHF. The Pella property is an hour's drive east of his home in Des Moines.

Baird and Brady serve as volunteer land ambassadors for INHF — Baird at Tipton Woods, 58 acres of woodland and oak savanna near Tipton, and Brady at Mathes, 51 acres of rolling hills, oak savanna and woodland near Pella.

As for Samuels, she recently celebrated her 13th anniversary with INHF. As INHF's conservation easement specialist, she travels the state to meet with conservation easement landowners, though she still lends a hand with prescribed burns when she wants to get out on the land.

Each appreciates the home they've found within INHF and the larger conservation community in Iowa.

"The reason I came back was the people in Iowa," Baird said. "Everyone works together and really enjoys the limited area we do have. We value those spaces a lot more because there aren't as many. It really gives you a renewed sense of appreciation both for the places and the other people working to protect them." 🌿



A Place for People

BY CJ YOUNGER
Communications intern | cyounger@inhf.org

There are two types of magic. The first is found in the waving of wands and strings of whimsical words.

The second is more intangible. This magic shows itself when people come together for the betterment of the community, and it's in Cherokee, Iowa.

In 2017, the people of Cherokee came

together to develop Magnetic Park, a 55-acre linear park and trail corridor connecting citizens and visitors to natural, cultural and historical resources in the area. With Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's (INHF's) help, they're well on their way to realizing this vision that will bring magic to their own backyards.



Hope springs

The story of Magnetic Park includes a restorative spring and some entrepreneurial spirit. When visitors to Cherokee started claiming a local spring healed their ailments in the late 1800s, people flocked to the city. Cherokee resident George Satterlee began charging — 25 cents a gallon, 35 for a bath. With help from a local banker, he built a three-story resort and brought economic prosperity, horse racing and Buffalo Bill (twice) to the county seat.

Three luxurious decades later, legal disputes over a poorly-placed well and flooding from the Little Sioux River closed Satterlee's resort in 1910. The land became a

dairy farm and its past was largely forgotten. Only Magnetic Lake remained — a fraction of its former size and glory.

A century later, the land came up for sale in 2017. INHF purchased the property after conversations with the local trails committee and community leaders about the potential of the property.

Neighborly values

The community effort was led by the local trails committee, which includes 20 volunteers committed to improving and expanding Cherokee's existing trails. Once complete, Magnetic Park will link two of the area's largest trail segments for a total of six

Once complete, Magnetic Park will link two of the area's largest trail segments for a total of six miles. *Photography by John R. Snapp*

miles. It's a big moment for a city that values interconnectedness and getting outdoors.

INHF worked closely with the trails committee to acquire the land and prepare grant proposals to support the project. With INHF's help, the committee received \$250,000 in grants, including \$100,000 from the Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP) and \$100,000 from Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield. Independently, the people of Cherokee raised over a million dollars with local fundraising and support from local businesses.

Jason Cook, president of the trails committee, credits their overwhelming success to the community's generosity and city pride.

The people of Cherokee wanted a way to get around their community on foot or by bike, not just by car. With these trails, they will be able to commute to work, a friend's house or local shops, waving at their neighbors as they pass each other on the trail. As of June 2021, a mile and a half has been paved with just

under a mile to go.

Magnetic Park's transformation will be complete this fall, offering opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and ice-skating. An outdoor classroom for use by local schools and the Sanford Museum and Planetarium is also planned. A restored prairie will make for a picturesque view welcoming visitors as they drive into town.

"We have a beautiful town that should be highlighted," Cook said. "Folks here are proud of where we live and [Magnetic Park] is one more thing to be proud of."

"This is how projects happen in Iowa," said INHF Conservation Programs Coordinator Emily Martin, who worked closely with community leaders to help secure support for the project. "With community members who care about their town and want to make it better for each other. They are a shining example of what Iowa communities can do when they come together to better the lives of their fellow citizens."

Slated for completion this fall, Magnetic Park will offer opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, ice-skating and outdoor learning and immersion.



A little more magic

Magnetic Park demonstrates how natural land and recreation can work together. Once fully restored, the park will include a 13-acre prairie, two acres of wetland adjacent to the lake, a 22-acre forest and just over half an acre of pollinator gardens.

“Our goal is to keep the park as natural as possible,” Cook said. The park’s restored prairies and wetlands between the City of Cherokee and the Little Sioux River will also mitigate flooding, improve filtration and reduce runoff from surrounding lands. Experts expect the restored land will hold over 380 tons of soil in place annually that could otherwise end up in the river.

Magnetic Park is a project by and for the community. After four years, they are on track to have a beautiful park that will bring recreation, revenue and a little more magic to their city.

“I want communities to know that they can do this too,” Martin said. “If they come together, if they form a committee, then this is possible for them. They can all have a Magnetic Park in their town.”



LEAVING A **LEGACY**

Edie Sytsma Brown grew up in the Pella area, worked at Meredith Publishing Company in Des Moines for a spell and received her undergraduate degree from the University of Iowa. She and her husband, Richard Brown, settled in Omaha before moving to their log home on ten acres in the Loess Hills near Glenwood. "It was our favorite place on earth," Edie said. And it still is for Edie after all these years.

Edie moved to Colorado thirty years ago to be closer to family after Richard passed away, but she maintains a strong sense of connection to the Loess Hills and to Iowa. "I'm a fourth generation Iowan," she said. "I love my home state and the land. I am and always will be an Iowan."

Edie's affinity for Iowa compels her to make annual gifts to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF), often in memory of her husband; her parents, Murry and Lizzie Sytsma; and her aunt, Mary Sytsma. "It seems a fitting memorial," she said.

Edie let us know that she has also included INHF in her legacy giving plans. "INHF is on the top of my list of charities," Edie said. "I miss being on the hill, overlooking the oak trees and the beautiful valley. I hope I can inspire other people to protect the Loess Hills."

If you would like to make a gift in honor or in memory of someone special, or discuss your legacy giving plans, please contact Abby Hade Terpstra, INHF director of philanthropy, at aterpstra@inhf.org or 515-288-1846.

— ABBY HADE TERPSTRA,
Director of Philanthropy



Photo by Derek Miner

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 or 515-288-1846, ext 15.

TRIBUTE **GIFTS**

IN MEMORY OF

Sigurd Anderson II
Martin Appleton
Bob Arnold
Al Atkinson
Juanita Hahn Bachmann
Larry Benne
Marjorie Berkich
James Bodensteiner
Woodward G Brenton
Richard Brown
John W. Cox Family
Mickey Santi Darrough
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Dennis Finder
Dwayne Fleming
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Robert Shumake
Garnetta Ann Snyder
Rosann Sonka Nolte
Shirley Stahl
Agnes Steinfeldt
Dolores Stessman
Mary Sytsma
Murry and Lizzie Sytsma

Ben Van Gundy
John R. Venenga
Wilbur Wilson
Richard Winter

IN HONOR OF

High Trestle Trail 10th Anniversary
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ames
Bradley Bergman and Family
Larry Berland
Rebecca Bohde
Kevin Cahill
Michelle Devine
Bruce Ecker
Larry and Peg Fletcher

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Cora Jean Tononi McNamara
Katherine Mendenhall
Emily Mendenhall
Frank Olsen
Jim and Katie Owens
Earl and Isabelle Salterberg
Gail Scullin & Shawn Williams
Ian Williams
Joseph and Linda Zaletel

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



Photo by Genna Clemen

Paddles Up!

BY KATY HULL
Communications Intern

Beat the summer heat by getting out on the water to try your hand at paddling. Learn the ins-and-outs of the activity here before hitting the open water.

To start, you'll need a watercraft. Kayaks, canoes and paddleboards are popular choices. Bring a paddle and a lifejacket, too — Iowa state law requires lifejackets on all personal watercraft. It's a good idea to bring along a dry bag for personal items and quick-drying or water-appropriate clothing, such as swimwear.

While you're out adventuring, it's important to be prepared. Make a trail plan before your trip and check the weather to make sure water conditions will be safe. If you find yourself in a body of swift-moving water, stay calm and paddle to a safe location before attempting to stand in the water. Be sure to follow local navigation rules and avoid paddling in floodwater.

Visit iowadnr.gov/things-to-do/canoeing-kayaking to find water trail maps to plan your trip with an interactive paddling map that notes potential hazards, among other resources. John Wenck, Iowa DNR Water Trails Coordinator, recommends heading out in early morning or late afternoon to catch wildlife at its most active.

"If you haven't seen Iowa from a river, you haven't seen Iowa," Wenck said.

Even when having fun, keep the environment in mind. Clean your watercraft and gear between trips to ensure you don't contaminate the ecosystem with non-native species. If you want to go above and beyond, consider volunteering in a river cleanup with a local watershed organization. You can help preserve Iowa's water systems so everyone can continue to enjoy them for years to come. 🌿

WATER TRAILS

SOUTH RACCOON RIVER (CENTRAL IOWA)

- West of Des Moines
- From Earlham Bridge to Pleasant Valley Wildlife Area
- Miles: 3.52
- Recommended skill: Intermediate

MAQUOKETA RIVER (NORTHEAST IOWA)

- Monticello
- From Upper Mon-Maq to Pictured Rocks
- Miles: 7.62
- Recommended skill: Beginner

WEST NISHNABOTNA RIVER (WESTERN IOWA)

- East of Council Bluffs
- From Carson to Oakland
- Miles: 6.72
- Recommended skill: Intermediate



**Iowa
Natural Heritage
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Stretching more than 2,500 acres along the Upper Mississippi River Valley, Effigy Mounds National Monument is considered sacred ground by many of the Monument's culturally associated Indigenous tribes. It's also a space that provides stunning natural beauty, critical wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and education opportunities. When 1,045 acres of woodland along the Yellow River near Effigy Mounds National Monument became available in 2000, INHF leapt at the opportunity to protect it. The Heritage Addition nearly doubled the size of Effigy Mounds and linked it to a unit of the Yellow River State Forest. We're proud to have been part of protecting this special place in perpetuity. *Photo by Josh Meier*

