

IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

SPRING 2021

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



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Open Spaces

Recreation and reflection in Iowa's public parks. **12**

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ON THE COVER

A Baltimore Oriole peers through its legs while perched in a tree at Lake Panorama in Guthrie County.

Photo by Deb Shoning



Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation

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

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The Promise of Spring

As we leave winter behind, the promise of spring brings hope and renewal on many levels. The greening of the landscape, return of the warblers, and a full chorus of frogs in the wetlands reminds us that the natural world is ever-changing and resilient. The great outdoors also offers us wonderful opportunities for reuniting with our families, friends and loved ones!

Even though we are seeing light at the end of tunnel, we know many of the environmental challenges we faced pre-pandemic did not take a break. Issues like water quality, flooding (or drought), loss of our precious topsoil and the need to protect biodiversity are still there. While we have endured much together this past year, we need to focus on taking care of Iowa, our home, now more than ever.



JOE McGOVERN
President

At INHF, we made a concerted effort to not let up on the important work of conservation despite trying circumstances. Through your support and great partnerships, we were able to protect and steward thousands of acres of land over the last year. INHF made a commitment to grow our land stewardship staff in the Loess Hills and Eastern Iowa. In this issue, we're excited to introduce you to two new staff members that are helping take care of the land and strengthen connections in these areas. Protecting Iowa's land, water and wildlife has a unique way of bringing people together, and we're looking forward to connecting with more of you in person soon.

Whatever takes you outdoors this spring — whether it is the elusive morel, spring wildflowers, the dappled sunlight of our nature trails — just soak it in. Soon the Monarchs will be returning to the milkweed you made sure was here. Remember to stop and smell the wild roses. After all, you help to make sure they have a home. Most importantly, feel the welcoming sense of community we all share in nature.

Sweet William lines a woodland path at Margo Frankel Woods State Park in Polk County. *Photo by Genna Clemen, INHF*

THROUGH YOUR **LENS**





“Your spark can become a flame and change everything.”

— E.D. Nixon

Ten years ago, the High Trestle Trail opened to the public. Hundreds of trail enthusiasts, community members and elected officials came together to celebrate the dedication of countless individuals that turned a vision into the destination we know today. Yes, the High Trestle Trail — with its international award-winning bridge offering panoramic views of the Des Moines River Valley — is worthy of its place on many bucket lists. But, there’s another magic to the High Trestle Trail.

When the ribbon was cut on the High Trestle Trail, a spark was ignited across the state. Prior to the project, the overwhelming mindset was that trails could only be built if a railroad corridor was discontinued. After, we started seeing communities proactively plotting their own routes to connect to natural areas, local attractions and each other. Public art, natural beauty and branding became an equal component to trail construction. And, community engagement was the thread tying everything together.

Today, I spend a good deal of my time working with communities trying to connect destination trails like the High Trestle Trail, Cedar Valley Nature Trail, Wabash Trace Nature Trail and more. When I meet with people, I can feel their optimism for what a trail could mean for their community. They’ve seen what is possible.

Not every corridor is destined to become the next High Trestle Trail. But every corridor has the potential to create its own spark and be the catalyst that brings communities together to accomplish great things.

— **ANDREA BOULTON**
Trails & Greenways Director

Make new connections: INHF is raising funds during the month of May to make new connections to the High Trestle Trail. Learn more at www.inhf.org/HTT10

Photo by Nathan Houck

BOOK RECOMMENDATION: *THE ROAD I GREW UP ON: REQUIEM FOR A VANISHING ERA*

Helen DeElda Gunderson's recently self-published two-volume anthology, *The Road I Grew Up On: Requiem for a Vanishing Era*, is part memoir, part historical study and part personal introspection. In it, Gunderson, who grew up on a farm in Pocahontas County, honestly examines the peaks and pitfalls of rural life during a time of transition away from rural prosperity as she navigates her own path.

The first volume features Gunderson's research about her community and the culture of her upbringing, and includes a series of interviews completed in 2004. The second volume consists of new chapters written in 2019, as well as an additional chapter about navigating the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both volumes feature photographs depicting rural life, many taken by Gunderson.

Gunderson currently manages her share of the family's northwest Iowa farm and tends her diverse urban farm in Ames. She donated 60

acres of remnant and restored prairie known as DeElda Heritage Area to INHF in 2011. Five years later, she donated the adjoining 180 acres to INHF, subject to a reserved life estate, where Gunderson is working with an area farmer to grow organic black beans and other crops.

Learn more about *The Road I Grew Up On* at gunderfriend.com/book



Photo by Erin Van Waus/INHF

INHF now taking submissions for 2022 calendar photos

Calling all photographers: Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is currently accepting submissions for its annual wall calendar which features some of the most beautiful views in the state, and we want to include your work!

All calendar photos must have been taken in Iowa. Selected photos must be appropriate for the month they illustrate. It's helpful if you note the month each photo was taken, as well the location along with your submissions.

Please submit photos on a flash drive, disk or digital drive to:

Attn: Genna Clemen
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
505 5th Ave, Suite 444
Des Moines, IA 50309
gclemen@inhf.org

Photo submissions are due July 2, 2021.

Call for 2021 Hagie Award nominations

Nominations are now open for the 2021 Hagie Heritage Award. The award recognizes Iowans who demonstrate extraordinary personal service and commitment to improving the quality of Iowa's natural environment and who encourage others to do the same.

Nominations should include at least two letters of recommendation and are judged based on four criteria: personal commitment, scope and longevity of effort, effectiveness of effort and alignment with INHF's mission.

Please submit nominations to Joe Jayjack via email at jjayjack@inhf.org. Or by mail to:

Attn: Joe Jayjack
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
505 Fifth Ave, Suite 444
Des Moines, IA 50309

Nominations are due July 1, 2021.

The Lawrence and Eula Hagie Heritage Award has been awarded annually since 1989.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 22

Spring into Action Fort Des Moines Park Des Moines

Join Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Polk County Conservation and Blank Park Zoo to help hand-pull garlic mustard and other invasive non-native plants from Fort Des Moines Park's woodlands. After the event, organizers will take the recently removed plants to Blank Park Zoo where they will be used as tasty treats for the animals. RSVP required.

RSVP at inhf.org

JUNE 4

Great Race Against Shrubs and Shade (GRASS) Turin

Join Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Nature Conservancy in Iowa in the Loess Hills for one of the largest land restoration days in the state. Together, we'll remove cedars to help keep the Loess Hills hillside prairies healthy and thriving. Make a weekend of it and stay for the annual Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, an annual event aimed at connecting people with this unique landscape. RSVP required.

RSVP at inhf.org

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

QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

An quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between **December 2020 and February 2021.**

*WMA stands for Wildlife Management Area

Newly protected areas

Marshall & Tama Counties

449 acres of woodland along the Iowa River in Marshall and Tama counties. The land was previously protected by Timberland, Inc., a collective of multiple family members who share a common vision for land protection, via two conservation easements. The first on 409 acres in 1996, and another on 40 adjacent acres in 2017. The latest overlay conservation easement combines the two easements to ensure the property will be protected as one tract of land in perpetuity. *(Conservation easement donated by Timberland, Inc.)*

Story County

36 acres of remnant and reconstructed wetland and restored prairie near Ames. The site has long been used by Iowa State University graduate students for research, Story County Conservation for youth programs and as a seed source for other prairie plantings. Protects wildlife habitat, open space and scenic beauty. *(Conservation easement donated by Michael and Linda Meetz)*

Linn County

6 acres including several buildings, outdoor amenities and heirloom gardens in Linn County. The property is adjacent to 80 acres of rolling hills that inspired Grant Wood's "Fall Plowing," which the couple previously protected with INHF. Protects open space and creates opportunities for public recreation and/or education. *(Donated by Cindy and Kevin Burke, subject to a reserved life estate)*

Floyd County

80 acres of agricultural land in southern Floyd County. Several conservation practices including cover crops, buffers and land in CRP have been implemented over the years. Protects soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat, and provides income to benefit stewardship of this and other INHF properties across the state. *(Anonymous donation, subject to a reserved life estate)*

Louisa County

333 acres of wetlands, riverine woodland and floodplain along the Iowa River in Louisa County. Supports a range of species including migratory birds, reptiles and amphibians. Muskrat and beaver make their home in the property's wetlands, which also act as a stopover for greater white-fronted geese and sandhill cranes. Protects wildlife habitat, preserves natural floodplain and expands public recreation opportunities in the area. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Dickinson County

161 acres along the Little Sioux River in Dickinson County. The property encompasses a mix of working lands, oak savanna and

woodland river corridor. It is part of a complex of 325 acres of protected public and private lands along the river. A portion of land value was donated by Susan Hamdorf, Lana Sensenig and Paul Smith. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Lucas County

80 acres of restored grassland in Lucas County. Protects wildlife habitat for deer, turkey, brown thrashers, bobcats and other edge species, and reduces runoff in an area known for highly erodible soils. *(Donated by Daryl Howell and Gaye Wiekierak, subject to a reserved life estate)*

Linn County

22 acres of rolling woodland in Linn County. The property is less than ¼ mile from Indian Creek, the Cedar Rapids Greenbelt and the Sac and Fox Trail. Protects wildlife habitat, including important year-round habitat for migratory birds, and expands protected green space and scenic beauty in a rapidly developing area just outside of Cedar Rapids. *(Donated by Jon Dusek and the late Waldo Morris)*

Scott County

114 acres of agricultural land, riparian creek corridor and restored prairie in Scott County. The land is part of Lark Fields, a 237-acre century farm in eastern Iowa that emphasizes conservation and biodiversity. Protects restored lands that have reduced soil erosion, improved water quality and created wildlife habitat. The western half of Lark Fields was donated to INHF, subject to a reserved life estate, in 2019. *(Donated by Ann Werner, subject to a reserved life estate)*

Green Hollow WMA Addition

99 acres of Loess Hills woodland adjacent to Blackburn WMA in southwest Fremont County. Includes classic peak and saddle topography, burr oak woodland and pockets of remnant prairie. Protects wildlife habitat and preserves scenic beauty. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition

232 acres agricultural land in northeast Polk County. The land is adjacent to Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt and within the Chichaqua-Neal Smith Bird Conservation Area. Restoration of the cropland, which lies in the South Skunk River floodplain, to native vegetation will expand wildlife habitat in the corridor, improve public access to the greenbelt and provide positive water quality benefits to the South Skunk River watershed. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Marshall County

215 acres of agricultural land in Marshall County. The property, known as Hall Farm Prairie, will be restored to prairie, wetlands, woodlands and oak savanna. Will preserve open space, create wildlife habitat and

improve water quality in Minerva Creek. *(Donated by siblings Jane, Christopher and Sarah Nicholas)*

Salsness Conservation Area

240 acres of woodland and grassland in the heart of the Oak Ridge Conservation Area in Woodbury County. This property connects two existing units, creating a complex of more than 2,200 contiguous acres of public land. Protects wildlife habitat and expands protected land in the region. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Iowa County

18.5 acres of riparian woodland within the Iowa River Corridor WMA in Iowa County. The property is also located within the Iowa River Corridor Bird Conservation Area, which provides nesting habitat for Bald eagles, Cerulean warblers and Red-headed woodpeckers among other species. Protects wildlife habitat and preserves natural floodplain. *(Proposed public ownership)*

Land transfers to public partners

Dallas County

.16 acres of trail corridor in Dallas County that will help link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail, two of Iowa's most popular multi-use trails. *(Owned and managed by Dallas County Conservation)*

Eisentrager Wildlife Area

116 acres south of Dumont in Butler County. Protects grassland and wetland along Coon Creek. Uncommon native species such as White turtlehead, marsh marigolds, smooth green snakes and river otter pups have been spotted here. *(Owned and managed by Butler County Conservation)*

Adair County

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

Malinda Reif Reilly Fen & Prairie

100 acres remnant pasture, upland prairie and fen near Solon in Johnson County. Protects unique wildlife habitat, preserves open space and expands public recreation opportunities. *(Owned and managed by Johnson County Conservation)*

Lucas County

40 acres of woodland and grassland adjacent to Stephen's State Forest in Lucas County. The property provides quality wildlife habitat for Long-eared bats, turkey, deer, songbirds and small mammals. Creates a contiguous complex of habitat totaling more than 3,200 acres. *(Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)*



▲
Kody Wohlers (left)
Loess Hills Land
Stewardship Director

Bill Kohler (right) Eastern
Iowa Land Stewardship
Director

*Top: Prairie blankets
the ridgelines of Iowa's
Loess Hills. Photo by
Derek Miner*

NEW NEIGHBORS

BY KATY HULL
Communications Intern | khull@inhf.org

In the past 40 years, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) has helped protect over 180,000 acres across more than 1,300 sites in 96 of Iowa's 99 counties. As INHF continues to grow and take on new projects, our commitment to protecting, restoring and stewarding the lands for which we're already responsible remains strong. It is with that commitment in mind that we are pleased to introduce Loess Hills Land Stewardship Director Kody Wohlers and Eastern Iowa Land Stewardship Director Bill Kohler, who joined INHF in these newly created positions this spring.

Stewarding the Hills

The Loess Hills, with their unique landforms and high quality remnant prairies, have long been a protection priority for INHF. For many years, Loess Hills Land Conservation Specialist Tim Sproul represented INHF in the region. When Tim retired in 2020, INHF decided to expand its local focus to include more land stewardship, as well as continued land protection work.

"Over the last 15 years, we have become responsible for more land [in the Loess Hills], which requires increased stewardship to maintain," INHF Senior Land Stewardship and

Blufflands Director Brian Fankhauser said.

Wohlers, who grew up on his family's farm in Missouri Valley in the heart of the Loess Hills and previously worked for Pottawattamie County Conservation, will be covering 13 counties in and around the Loess Hills in the western part of Iowa. He'll also manage the newly created Loess Hills Land Stewardship Intern Crew. The inaugural crew is slated to start this spring,

"I look forward to being a presence in the Loess Hills to represent the organization, as well as boosting stewardship work on INHF land within the Loess Hills region," Wohlers said.

Increase in the East

Some of INHF's earliest protection projects are located in eastern Iowa. These roots, along with an increasing number of conservation easements and an expanding community of steadfast supporters, has led to an increased focus in the region in recent years.

Eastern Iowa Program Director Carole Teator joined INHF in 2017, and oversees community, donor and landowner relations and outreach in eastern Iowa. Kohler will lead land stewardship in eastern Iowa and expand INHF's presence in those communities. He'll also manage the newly created Eastern Iowa Land Stewardship Intern Crew. The inaugural crew is slated to start this spring,

"I consider the tallgrass prairie to be an imperiled ecosystem that needs cooperation between public and private landowners to preserve and expand critical habitat for both plant and animal species throughout Iowa," said Kohler, who's originally from Spotsylvania County, Virginia and has spent the better part of the past decade working for the Fort Collins Natural Areas Program in Colorado.

Both Kohler and Wohlers will lead land stewardship efforts in their areas, be involved in sustainable agricultural land management, and conduct annual conservation easement monitoring.

"I am excited to join such a dedicated group and look forward

to meeting all those who have a passion for saving and stewarding native habitat[s]," Kohler said.

Budding Relationships

In addition to helping INHF meet existing and expanding stewardship needs, these two new positions will also help create additional opportunities for local community members and organizations to connect with staff. More face-to-face interactions build stronger relationships and foster new ones, and can lead to new and additional land protection.

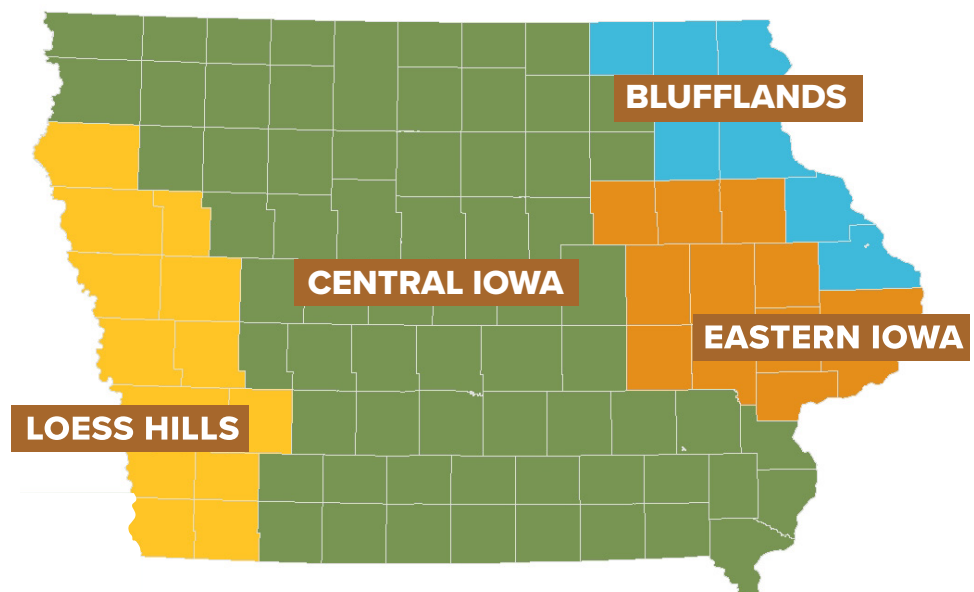
"Regional staff become part of the local community," said Fankhauser. "When people in those communities see us working on local properties, we get the opportunity to share what we're doing and why. As we protect and steward land, we become a neighbor to them."

Vision for the Future

Adding these positions and expanding INHF's presence in the Loess Hills and eastern Iowa will allow all of INHF's stewardship staff to be more efficient and have a greater impact throughout the state.

"I think [Kody and Bill] are a good fit for INHF and those that we serve. Between their knowledge, skills and experience, I have no doubt they'll bring new ideas to the table that'll enhance our work across Iowa," Fankhauser said. 🌱

Together, four regionally focused stewardship teams cover caring for INHF-protected-and-stewarded lands across Iowa.





On Firm Footing

Creating a foundation for conservation

BY JOE JAYJACK
Communications Director | jjayjack@inhf.org

LaMair CE
Clarke County



LAND: 475 acres
of grassland and
woodland

SPECIAL FEATURES:
Mature woodland,
organic hay ground,
prairie

PARTNERS: LaMair
family and INHF

When Mike and Jane LaMair bought a piece of land in southern Iowa in the late 1990s, Jane half-jokingly said to her husband, “You just like doggy land. How come you never buy good farmland?”

The answer probably lies in the fact that the challenge of restoring the landscape is a lot more fun on the “doggy land.”

Jane passed away in 2016, but the Des Moines-based couple spent a lot of time enjoying and caring for that 475 acres of rolling land in Clarke County.

Over the past 25 years, the LaMairs have constructed ponds, filled in and seeded down gullies that had formed due to erosion and planted native grasses and forbs, creating a foundation for restoration. The property now consists of equal parts mature woodland, hay ground and prairie. The timber contains oak, hickory, walnut, hackberry and cottonwood, the hay ground is being raised organically and

the prairie is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The stewardship of this place has been a labor of love, born out of an appreciation for the outdoors that Mike inherited from his father.

Mike first began hunting with his father at the age of five. When he was 12, right at the end of World War II, he went on a hunting trip with his father and uncle to Canada. By then he was hooked, and his love of the outdoors has continued ever since.

Mike has been passing that appreciation on to his large — and growing — family. He has seven children, 19 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The farm has been a gathering place for the family, perfect for swimming, canoeing, hiking and hunting. Mike still spends a few days a week down on the farm, doing a little more playing than working these days.

In 2020, Mike decided to permanently

protect this special place by donating a conservation easement to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF). The easement allows the land to remain in private ownership while protecting the conservation features of the land, which INHF will monitor on a yearly basis. The agreement ensures that this place will forever be a haven for wildlife and help to protect the water quality of nearby Squaw Creek. It will also allow for continued sustainable grazing and haying, and help buffer the adjacent 40-acre Green Pine Wildlife Area, and nearby 704-acre Heritage Hills Wildlife Management Area addition that INHF helped protect in 2018.

“The LaMairs have done an excellent job of stewarding this land and we’re excited to partner with them to make sure it is permanently protected,” said Erin Van Waus, INHF conservation easement director. “Not only does this ensure the wildlife habitat will always be there, it’s also an important link in the patchwork of protected land in the area.”

This isn’t the first time the LaMairs have used a conservation easement to permanently protect a special place. In 2001, they donated an easement to Polk County Conservation on land near Runnells. Later, they protected

family land in Missouri with a conservation easement held by Ozark Regional Land Trust.

“These might not be places that are attractive to development, but you never know what is going to happen in 50 years,” Mike said. “I just always wanted to see it protected.”

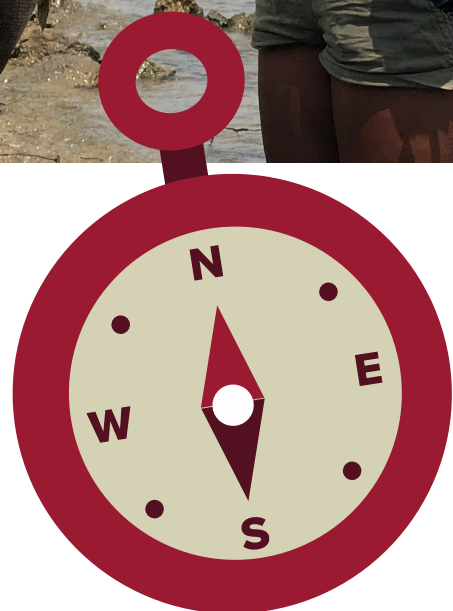
The couple’s connection to INHF dates back decades as well. Mike and Jane started supporting INHF in 1983 — four years after the organization was founded — and Mike served on the board of directors from 1994-2014. 🌿

Below, Mike and Jane LaMair walk the land on their Clarke County farm. Jane passed away in 2016.





Left: Photo provided courtesy of Multicultural Family Center
Center: Photo provided courtesy of Adam Janke
Right: Photo by La Rae Randall



OPEN SPACES

Exploring nature and self-identity in Iowa's public parks

INTRODUCTION BY KATY HEGGEN
Communications Specialist | kheggen@inhf.org

The following introduction and collection of essays and interviews are part of an ongoing series, Lay of the Land, that seeks to explore the different ways people engage with nature, and how those experiences both on and off the land have informed their relationship to it. We believe the more we understand about our own and others' experiences on the land, the better we'll be able to work together to protect and care for it. To view other stories in the series, visit inhf.org/about-us/publications

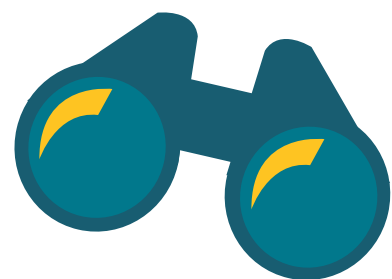
- Iowa Natural Heritage Editorial Team

Iowa is home to 72 state parks and recreation areas, ten state forests, 95 state preserves and 492 wildlife management areas, and hundreds of county and municipal parks. Each of these public natural areas offers opportunities to explore both the subtle and staggering beauty of Iowa's outdoors. And for many, they provide spaces for personal growth, development and an expanded self-identity.

"These lands are by definition available for all people, but we recognize that those outdoor spaces haven't always been safe or welcoming for everybody," said INHF

President Joe McGovern. "We think the protection of Iowa's land, water and wildlife can go hand-in-hand with making sure those places are more welcoming for all."

Many individuals and groups are working to change that, expanding practical access to public spaces for marginalized groups by exposing obstacles, breaking down barriers and rejecting stereotypes. In doing so, they create opportunities for people to connect with themselves, each other and the outdoors. They also make these spaces – which are shaped by nature's own diversity – infinitely richer.





WONT TO WANDER

BY KERRI SORRELL

Co-owner, Wander Women, Special to INHF

The best times in my life have been spent outside with friends in places new to me, and at the same time, deeply familiar. There is a power and sense of wholeness that comes to me when in nature that I haven't found anywhere else, and a connection to the land and the people I'm enjoying it with. To put it simply, for me, to be in nature is to be in community.

I believe there is an intrinsic love for and knowledge of the natural world that we feel as women. It's something that transcends millennia. It's in the wisdom that has been passed down from the world's original people, the experiences of trailblazers in science and conservation, and the information imparted by moms on afternoon hikes with their kids. And yet, often, that connection and community are absent in our lives, lost to the day-to-day or withheld from us due to lack of access, education or perceived ability.

I should introduce myself. I'm Kerri. I co-own Wander Women Iowa, a business founded to empower and bring together women all across the state on all-inclusive camping, paddling and backpacking trips. When my co-owner Jenn started Wander Women in 2018, she knew that women face significant barriers to enjoying the outdoors, but when given the opportunity, can rediscover

their connection to Mother Nature, themselves and others looking for community.

Whether we weren't taught outdoor skills as kids, have spent our lives putting our own adventures on hold to raise families, or simply don't feel safe venturing out alone or to new places, the barriers that keep women from getting outside are real and loom large. Those barriers are even more daunting for LGBTQ+ folks, women of color, women with physical limitations and folks who don't have the time or financial means to get outdoors.

Wander Women aims to help break those barriers down, offering trips full of knowledge sharing, skills workshops, fire circles, deep conversations and opportunities for connection. We also offer financial assistance and scholarships to help make adventure accessible to folks who have historically been excluded from our outdoor spaces.

The need – and the demand – for women-centered outdoor experiences is massive. When we launched our 2021 trips this February, they sold out in 5 hours.

"Wander Women provides a much needed and valued opportunity for women of any age, ability, size or background to gather together and learn about, experience, explore,

unwind and find a centering peace that can often only be found in the quietness of the outdoors," wrote one participant. "Jenn and her guides are masters of fun, education and inclusion and they put their heart and soul into every Wonder Women trip."

Wander Women couldn't be more grateful to be a part of this growing community and expanding outdoor access to women. 🌿

Ready to explore Iowa's state, county and city parks and other public spaces, but lacking or reluctant to go all in on gear? Check out these affordable gear lending and rental resources:

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

ISU, the U of I and UNI all offer extremely affordable outdoor gear rentals for registered students and community members alike. Equipment, pricing and lending policies vary by university

- **Iowa State University:** www.recservices.iastate.edu/outdoors/equipment-rental/
- **University of Iowa:** <https://recserv.uiowa.edu/outdoor-rental-center#!about>
- **University of Northern Iowa:** <https://recreation.uni.edu/gear-rental>

COUNTY CONSERVATION

Many of Iowa's County Conservation systems offer outdoor gear rentals at select parks they own and manage. Offerings vary greatly from county to county and tend to be limited hourly or day rental. www.mycountyparks.com

Left: Photo by Lauren Matisyk. Provided courtesy of Wander Women

Right: Photo by La Rae Randall



Photos provided courtesy of
Jacqueline Hunter

FINDING FREEDOM

BY GENNA CLEMEN
Communications Assistant | gcllemen@inhf.org

Jacqueline Hunter first found peace and healing in the outdoors during her time in the military. In nature, her daily worries and fears seemed to fade away. Years later, she again sought solace in the outdoors, this time with her children who have inherited her love of the outdoors.

“When we’re out there camping, there’s a calmness and peace. It’s the only place where we all unplug,” she said.

When Hunter first moved to the Midwest, she was excited to find an abundance of natural places. Coming from Florida, the rural sites, away from noisy highways and cities, were a welcome surprise. The move also sparked a desire to make sure her children were part of a multicultural community similar to the one they’d been part of in Florida.

Early on, she reached out to the Multicultural Family Center (MFC) in Dubuque, which strives to build unity out of diversity through partnerships, programs and events in the city. Hunter’s passion for youth and education eventually led her to

become the director of MFC. Here, she shares her vision for how the community could better support young people and families. Creating opportunities for area youth to get outdoors is part of that vision.

Many of the young people that the MFC serves have not experienced the outdoors up close. Families in the area are familiar with community parks, but many have yet to experience nature in more immersive ways.

“We serve a large population of people of color as well as children who are living in poverty,” she said. “For whatever reason, parents don’t see the outdoors as affordable or safe.”

To bridge this gap, the center created Nature Nomads, a year-long program that advocates for outdoor education for young people.

For many of the teens participating in Nature Nomads, nature provides more than a chance to explore Iowa’s outdoors. It offers opportunities for growth, development and an expanded sense of self.

“You begin to see a courage build,” Hunter said. “The idea that this isn’t

what they do or that these aren’t experiences they can partake in begin to break down.”

Many of the young people participating in programs through the MFC have experienced trauma. The outdoors provide a space free of the worry and stress many kids face in their daily lives. Here, they can find release, rejuvenation and resilience in new spaces, and explore their capabilities.

“You begin to see a vibrancy that is lost in their day-to-day,” Hunter said. “When they are planning their activities or walking barefoot through a stream you can see that they are absolutely free and they know they’re free.”

Hunter sees a responsibility from the entire community to make sure that opportunities like this are available and attainable for everyone.

“Iowa offers so many amazing outdoor experiences,” Hunter said. “And many times, there are low to no costs associated with them. I think it’s important that we let people know that these are spaces for everybody.” 🌲



Photos provided courtesy of Adam Janke

OUT IN THE OUTDOORS

BY EMILY MARTIN

Conservation Program Coordinator | emartin@inhf.org

For many people, getting outdoors can be meditative. Away from external pressures and expectations, it becomes easier to explore and develop a sense of self. For Adam Janke, public lands have been a particularly important space to explore identity.

“Being different is the defining experience in nature. Differences are what make ecology interesting. Examining those differences can help you accept your own,” said Janke, the statewide wildlife extension specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

An avid hunter originally from Indiana, the outdoors have always been at the core of Janke’s identity. When he moved to South Dakota to pursue his PhD in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Janke had a lot of solitary time outdoors, during which he began to define his own queerness.*

“I spent a lot of time alone in the field for my research. I spent a lot of time hunting. I had time alone with my identity. I came out as a gay man. It was a transformative time in my life,” Janke said.

Janke’s experience echoes that of others in Iowa’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+ (LGBTQ+) community. Time alone outdoors provided Janke with time and literal

space for personal introspection. But being in isolated areas can also make the process of coming out exceptionally challenging. Having places to explore identity and connect with community are invaluable. The outdoors offers opportunities to do both.

An increasing number of queer people are finding community in the outdoors. Groups like Queer Hikers of Iowa, Venture Out Project, Unlikely Hikers, Pattie Gonia and Wild Diversity, among others, provide opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community to connect, get outdoors together and see itself represented in outdoor spaces. They’re also raising awareness about the dangers LGBTQ+ people face outdoors because of continued discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation, and the need for increased advocacy for safer, more accessible and inclusive outdoor spaces in Iowa.

Janke is also committed to increasing visibility, building community and support for LGBTQ+ people in the conservation field. One way he does so is as organizer for Out in the Field (OiTF), a group formed by LGBTQ+ members of The Wildlife Society (TWS) in 2019, to “make LGBTQ+ TWS members more visible so that we can support and mentor each other, and work with our allies

to foster a more inclusive, welcoming culture where diversity of all kinds is clearly embraced.” OiTF also provides education opportunities for other TWS members on topics like gender identity and how to create safe, affirming spaces.

“Diverse experiences among people create diverse voices. Diverse voices yield diverse ideas. Diverse ideas solve challenges and lift others up,” wrote Janke in a recent essay penned for Iowa Learning Farms about the value of diversity in ecology and the conservation community.

Upon moving to Iowa, Janke fell in love with places like Boone Forks Wildlife Management Area in Hamilton County and Central Iowa’s trail system. He continues to enjoy exploring these areas independently as well as with others in Iowa’s LGBTQ+ community.

“It was at the intersection of my two identities, being queer and loving the outdoors, where I found community,” Janke said. 🌿

**In the past, queer was a negative or pejorative term for people who are gay. Today, the term is increasingly being used to describe all identities that go against normative beliefs, including those in the LGBTQ+ community with more fluid identities.*

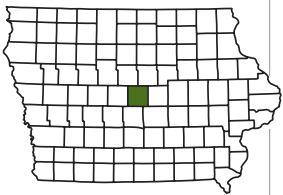


A MORE SCENIC ROUTE

Protecting and connecting land in Story County

BY KATY HEGGEN
Communications specialist | kheggen@inhf.org

Deppe Story County



LAND: 127 acres of restored grassland

SPECIAL FEATURES: Lies across the road from McFarland Park, a popular county park

PARTNERS: Deppe Family, INHF, Story County Conservation

From the Loess Hills to the Great River Road, the Covered Bridges to the Glacial Trail, Iowa is home to over a dozen national and state scenic byways. The I-35 corridor isn't one of them.

However, there are bits of beauty to be found along this well-traveled route that runs north to south through the heart of the state, including a stretch between Ames and Story City that has been stewarded by the same couple for nearly 50 years.

Thanks to a series of game-changing decisions they made early on and in recent years, this stretch of I-35 is on its way to becoming more scenic.

Groundwork

Bob Deppe's agricultural roots run deep, but his path to farming has been anything but predictable. Deppe, who will be 92 in August, grew up on his family's farm. When his family lost that land in the depression of the 1930s, he took all kinds of jobs to help make ends meet. He began working the land again as a farm hand in high school. Bob joined the U.S.

Marine Corps on his 17th birthday, and after two years of active service followed by a season of farm work, he enrolled at Iowa Teachers College (now the University of Northern Iowa), a move he credits to his high school history teacher, who encouraged him to attend college. There, Bob met his wife, Carol. The couple taught public school in Monticello for three years before moving to Ames. There, Bob again found his way back to agriculture managing grain elevators, then others' farmland, and later, his own.

Bob and Carol have bought, sold and managed a fair amount of farmland across several counties over the past 50 years. But the 127 acres near the Deppes' home in Ames have maintained a special hold on them, Bob in particular.

The property, purchased in 1974, has been a labor of love for Deppe. He's spent nearly half his life on the land. Those early years were spent producing corn, building terraces to stop erosion, and implementing other practices to conserve soil – a topic Deppe is passionate about.

"When I began buying farmland, a friend said, 'You don't have to buy the best, just what's available,'" Deppe recalled. "When I bought farms with poor soil conditions, I implemented soil conservation on them. It was rare for folks to focus on at that time. I enjoyed it."

Bob is proud of what he's been able to accomplish at the Ames property. It also holds many fond family memories. When the couple's children were young, the land's timber served as the site of family picnics, bonfires and camp outs. In recent years, Deppe has dedicated himself to planting the property, which is now enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program*, to grassland.

"We had a great time out there," Deppe said. "It hurts to give it up, but it's time."

Digging Deep

A desire to maintain the land in its current state and preserve it for others led Deppe to pursue permanent protection of the property. Deppe was aware that Story County Conservation (SCC) had long been interested in the property due to its proximity to McFarland Park, one of the county's most popular parks and the home of its nature center, so he reached out to them when he was ready to sell it.

"We've always looked across the road to those 120-something acres to the immediate south with a little bit of envy," said SCC Director Mike Cox. "Between the proximity to the existing park, the improvements the Deppes have made and the opportunity for permanent habitat protection, it's just a natural addition to McFarland Park."

Discussions between Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) (whom SCC reached out to for assistance acquiring the property), SCC and Deppe were underway when COVID-19 hit, causing uncertainty about funding for the project. In light of this, Deppe, who was determined to see the property protected in his lifetime, decided to donate a significant portion of the land's value to INHF, thus making the project feasible. Once fundraising is complete, the land will transfer to SCC.

"It was clear how much Bob, Carol and the Deppe family cared for this property, and maintaining the benefits of their stewardship

for the future was paramount," said INHF Land Projects Director Ross Baxter.

At 127 acres, the Deppe addition will increase the size of McFarland Park by more than 50 percent. SCC's long-term management plan for the property continues to take shape. Cox anticipates it will enhance the property's existing open space and wildlife habitat, and allow for light recreation opportunities such as hiking, bird-watching or wildlife observation.

"Every time we come to work we look at that property on the south side of the road and dream a little bit," said Cox. "Bob and Carol were able to make that dream a reality."

On the Horizon

Most of the people that pass Bob and Carol's land along the I-35 corridor won't know the story behind the bit of beauty they're passing by. But those in the greater Ames community will have the opportunity to form their own affinity for and connection to this place, just as the Deppes did all those years ago.

"A couple months ago our kids came down from the Twin Cities and we had the last great family picnic," said Deppe. "They still want to be able to go out there and do that, and they still will." 🌿

**The Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service. In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Learn more at www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/conservation-programs/conservation-reserve-program/*





Photos by Courtney Ball

A NEW ERA OF TRAILS IN EASTERN IOWA

BY COURTNEY BALL
Special to INHF

Ely, Iowa has come full circle. In the past hundred years it's gone from a thriving town in the early 1900s, to a bedroom community for Cedar Rapids commuters, to a destination all its own.

From the highway, Ely, which is a mere ten-mile drive from downtown Cedar Rapids, may not catch the eye of passing motorists. Hop on a bicycle, though, and your view of the town is transformed. One of the first things you encounter when entering Ely by trail is a beautiful, well-maintained city park. A little farther down is Dan and Debbie's Creamery, offering delicious ice cream and other locally produced treats. Another block south along the trail is Ely's historic business district on Dow's Street, featuring the kind of quaint main street scene many associate with rural Iowa. The only difference is the increased number of bicycles.

Ely sits along a heavily used, rapidly growing trail corridor that currently stretches approximately 75 miles from Waterloo to Solon. The recently completed section of the Hoover

Nature Trail from Ely to Solon is a significant marker in the decades-long work of connecting communities in the region by trails.

Good timing

"This past year, we saw trail usage and outdoor activity usage go through the roof," said Brad Freidhof, conservation program manager for Johnson County Conservation.

Since moving into this position in 2014 Freidhof's main focus has been the implementation of Johnson County's trail plan. 2020 was an affirmation of all the work so many people have put into building trails.

"When businesses were closing down [due to the pandemic] and you couldn't find a gym [to exercise in], you were out on the trail. You could spread out, you had six-feet of distance between each other, and there was also just that mental health aspect. People could clear their mind as they walk, get some fresh air and relax," he said.

While there was a spike in 2020, trail usage has been steadily climbing in eastern Iowa

for several years. This is due in large part to the fact that there are simply more trails to explore, the result of decisions made several years ago to create a massive new public amenity for the region.

Groundbreaking decisions

Building trails is no small feat. Most trails take years to complete, their course shaped by a number of contributing factors including planning, funding, navigating corridor negotiations, engineering considerations and construction timelines.

“From the time I bring a trail concept to the public to the time they’re riding on it, it’s at

match funding when applying for state and federal grants.

When it came to Johnson County’s section of the Hoover Nature Trail between Ely and Solon, Freidhof said, “We applied for just about every grant you can think of.”

The Hoover Trail segment between Ely and Solon received State Recreational Trails, Federal Recreational Trails and Federal Lands Access Program funds administered by the Iowa Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. These grants, along with other funding streams, created additional momentum behind the project.



least seven years, and that’s if nothing went wrong,” said Brandon Whyte, multimodal transportation planner for the Corridor Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in Linn County. And often, something goes wrong. “You can have one property owner who doesn’t want to sell, and that can delay a project for years.”

But perhaps the greatest obstacle of any trail project is funding.

In 2008, Johnson County voters passed a conservation bond that would provide \$1 million per year over twenty years for conservation projects, including trails. This local money has been used as crucial

“All those people were great partners,” Freidhof said.

In Linn County, a similar boost in funding came from a 2012 decision made by the Corridor MPO to allocate 80% of the dollars it received from federal gas tax revenue to trails. This was an unprecedented move by the MPO, which would go on to invest \$3-4 million per year for five years into trails throughout the county.

Kesha Billings, an associate planner who now focuses almost exclusively on trails for the City of Marion, recalls the day when the MPO announced their decision.

“I remember they said, ‘You know what, the CeMar Trail [connecting Cedar Rapids

and Marion] has been something that we've been talking about for decades. Let's just put the funding where our mouth is. Marion, you've got the last chunk. You tell us what we need to make to happen.' I was like, 'What!?' she said, recalling her shock, excitement and brief disbelief.

Funding allocations stemming from this decision began in 2016 and will continue through 2021. The trail is slated to open sometime between 2022 and 2023.

Long-term visionaries

While both the Hoover Nature Trail and the CeMar Trail have made significant strides in the past decade, the roots of these projects actually extend several decades.

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) began focusing on trails across the state in the early 1980s. The Cedar Valley Nature Trail, a 52-mile rail-trail that takes trail users through four counties, seven communities and idyllic Iowa countryside on its way from Evansdale to Hiawatha, was one of INHF's first rail-trail projects and one of the state's first linear parks. The project, which follows the Cedar River bottomlands, has served as the inspiration for many of the region's more recent trails that extend through multiple communities and counties.

INHF aided the creation of the original Hoover Nature Trail, a crushed limestone rail-trail following the old Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad route between Burlington, Muscatine and Cedar Rapids, the

vision of a determined group of volunteers in the 1990s.

The full potential of the Hoover Nature Trail has yet to be realized, with some gaps in the route, but the audacity of the dream represented by the Cedar Valley Nature Trail and the Hoover Nature Trail has helped enable other trails in eastern Iowa. Both the CeMar Trail in Cedar Rapids/Marion and the Hoover Nature Trail between Ely and Solon connect to these original rail-trails.

Local organizations, including the Linn County Trails Association (LCTA), have been essential in shepherding a long-term vision for a regional trail system into existence. Diane Handler, a long-time member and former president of LCTA, remembers when she started her advocacy work in the early nineties and trails were a new concept in Iowa.

"It was constant resistance against trails at that point, and now you talk about trails and everybody's like, 'Oh yeah, I want one in my backyard!'"

Thanks to the decades-long work of organizations like LCTA, INHF, county and municipal groups, and the many individual trail advocates in communities across the eastern Iowa corridor that have committed countless hours to recognizing a bold trails vision for the region, more Iowans will soon have more trails in their communities.

"You're going to be surprised in the next two years," said Whyte. "There are going to be a lot more trails" in Linn and Johnson counties. 🍷



Kicking the Dirt

BY KATY HULL
Communications intern | khull@inhf.org

Greg Grupp has been a part of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) for the past 15 years. As a long-time board member, volunteer and friend, Grupp has been instrumental in assisting with expanding INHF's work in Iowa, especially in and around the Iowa Great Lakes, his summer home.

Grupp was initially drawn to INHF's work protecting special places and developing trails across Iowa. In recent years, he has taken on a larger role supporting the work of INHF's land stewardship team as a Land Ambassador* in the Iowa Great Lakes. In the past year alone, he has spent over 200 hours volunteering with various INHF-owned-and-managed projects. Grupp involves himself with a range of activities, such as invasive species removal, mowing, prairie planting and neighborly relations.

"I find purpose and peace while kicking the dirt on INHF watershed projects around Iowa's Great Lakes," Greg said. "I'm happy that I am able to do work for an organization that can make a difference for myself and the land of my friends and neighbors."

In 2020, Grupp dedicated endless hours to Green Pastures, Wallace & Bowers Nature Area, and the Bartels Property, three properties donated to or bought by INHF in the past five years totaling 371 acres. In addition to his hands on work on the land, Grupp donated a mower, sprayer and tractor to INHF to help enhance the work he has already been doing, and has continued to strengthen relationships with existing tenants.

"[Grupp's] down-to-earth presence has accelerated INHF's land stewardship focus in the region. We're thankful to have his knowledge and passion for taking care of these special places," said Ryan Schmidt, INHF's central Iowa land stewardship director.

"The ability to work on this spectacular



Great Lakes landscape is more a gift for me than it is a service for INHF," Greg said.

Not only does Grupp care about preserving and protecting Iowa's natural lands, he works tirelessly to connect others in the community to conservation projects in the area. Teri, his wife, joins him on the land for a few hours each week. It's not uncommon for the couple to invite along friends and other family members as well. For Grupp, sharing this work with others is a reward in and of itself.

"[The work becomes] even more meaningful if our collective efforts lend to water and soil quality, more abundant wildlife and an enhanced outdoor experience for everyone who enjoys Iowa's Great Lakes," Greg said. 🦋

** INHF Land Ambassadors make a minimum one-year volunteer commitment to mostly autonomous land stewardship work, supporting INHF's land stewardship team and efforts by devoting their time, skills and attention to caring for a special INHF-owned property or properties. Together, they expand INHF's stewardship capacity, collectively contributing hundreds of hours on the land each year. To learn more about the program, contact Volunteer Coordinator Melanie Schmidt at mschmidt@inhf.org*



Top: **Teri and Greg Grupp** at one of the many INHF protected lands they help steward in the Iowa Great Lakes.

Bottom: **Greg Grupp** was initially drawn to INHF work protecting special places and developing trails across Iowa.

LEAVING A **LEGACY**

“During his life, Sandy almost exclusively earmarked his donations for ecological restoration and management, and he really liked field teaching,” said Judy Felder. “The intern program covered both of his main foci: land stewardship and teaching.”

The **Richard S. (Sandy) Rhodes II Internship Fund** was established at Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) upon Sandy’s passing in 2005. Sandy co-owned Indiangrass Hills, a 640-acre prairie preserve in Iowa County, with Felder and fellow friend Mary Brown.

“This internship provided me with the perfect opportunity to apply the concepts I learned in college. I feel like it bridged the gap between school and field experience to catapult a young conservationist into the workforce,” said 2014 land stewardship intern Alex Gustafson, who is now the Chehalis River Basin Restoration Project Manager at Trout Unlimited in western Washington state.

This year, INHF anticipates hiring 21 interns; 17 working on the summer Land Stewardship crews based in the Blufflands, Central Iowa, Eastern Iowa and the Loess Hills, and four working with communications, trails and conservation programs.

INHF believes in creating and sustaining meaningful internship opportunities for young people. Since the program began in 1986 it has provided professional opportunities for more than 350 college students. These paid experiences provide high-level skills training and a chance to contribute directly to INHF’s mission.

A seasonal INHF intern position can be endowed with a one-time gift or series of gifts totaling \$120,000. These gifts provide a steady source of funding year after year for a single, three-month internship position. Individual donations of any amount may also be directed to the internship program.

Marlys Svare made annual gifts that supported the intern program during her lifetime, allowing INHF to hire interns for the communications and development programs as well as land stewardship. The **Svare Family Internship Fund** has continued to support the annual funding needs of the internship program beyond Marlys’s passing.

“That experience really helped shape the path I’m on and was probably one of the more pivotal experiences in my life,” said 2007 Svare intern Tim Youngquist, who is now the STRIPS Farmer Liaison and Agricultural Specialist II at Iowa State University in Ames. “The internships that INHF offers produce a great amount of positive ripples throughout the state that aren’t always felt right away but are invaluable nonetheless.”

Contact Director of Philanthropy Abby Hade Terpstra at aterpstra@inhf.org or 515-288-1846, ext. 15 to discuss a gift to INHF’s internship program.

— ABBY HADE TERPSTRA,
Director of Philanthropy

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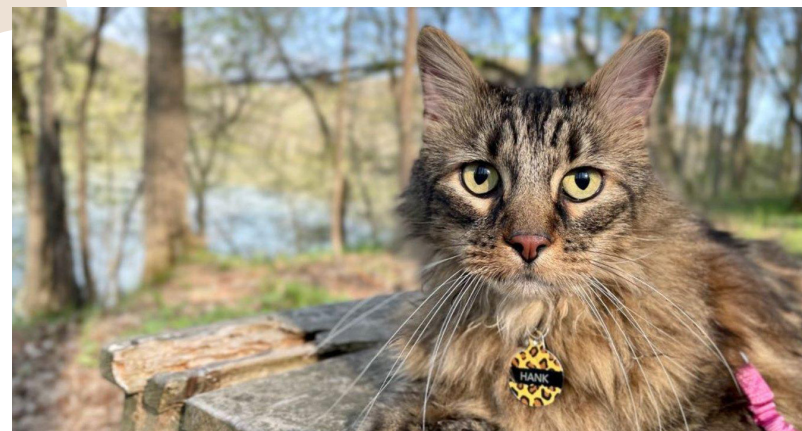
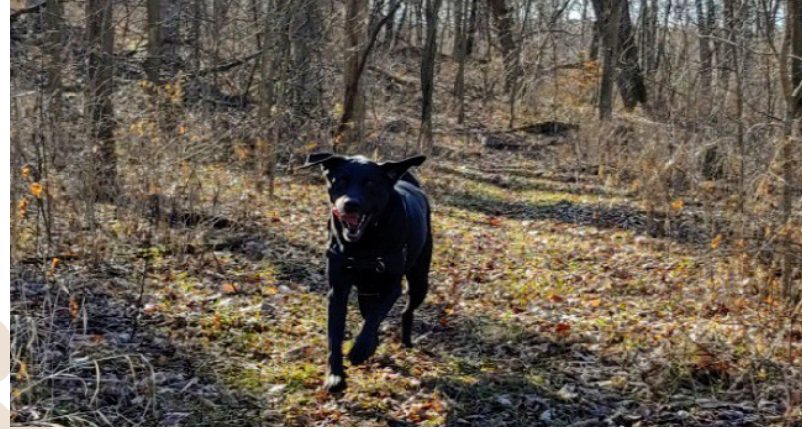
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Leave a legacy of clean water, healthy soil and beautiful outdoor places for future generations.

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.

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



Pets Outdoors

BY KATY HULL
Communications Intern | khull@inhf.org

As winter settles and warm weather arrives, consider bringing your favorite four-legged friend with you on your next outdoor adventure.

Just like humans, pets can also get cabin fever, so it's important to engage them in nature, weather permitting. When choosing where to take your pet, check local rules and regulations. Some parks don't allow pets, many require them to be leashed, and some require a permit that must be purchased ahead of time.

Ensure you have all the supplies you need to take care of your pet outdoors. Waste disposal bags aren't always available at parks, so have some on hand. Pets can become dehydrated easily, so make sure you have enough water to

keep them hydrated. If you go to an area with a beach, pay attention to postings about water quality, as there may be dangerous levels of bacteria that pose health threats to your pet if they swim in or drink the water.

Don't have a pet? Consider reaching out to someone you know that can't get out as easily and offer to walk their pet. You can also reach out to shelters and see if they offer programs that allow you take adoptable pets out for the day.

Pets can be wonderful companions for exploring the outdoors. Just remember that people visit the outdoors for different reasons and enjoy nature in different ways, so always be respectful of others, area wildlife and natural habitat, and do your part to make the outdoors a place where all feel welcome. 🐾