

# IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

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



---

## **ON SACRED GROUND**

Spirituality, connection and conservation **12**

## **Natural solutions**

Working toward an answer to Iowa's flooding problems **10**

## **Nature gets local**

Protecting special areas in overlooked places **16**





12

**On Sacred Ground**

What compels people to nature, or protecting their beloved land? For some, it's a connection to a higher power. For others, it comes from a connection to the land itself.

**8 In good company**

Over the last five years, INHF has partnered with corporate volunteers across the state to restore areas close to home.

**10 Natural solutions**

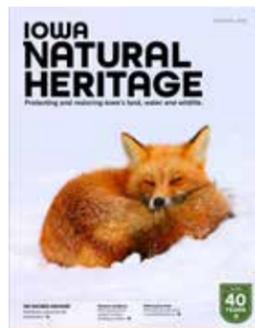
With increased major flooding events across the state, how can Iowa prevent devastation? The answer lies in the land.

**16 Local level conservation**

County conservation boards create natural experiences at the most local level, with the help of Iowa's REAP program.

**DEPARTMENTS**

- 3 Opening Thoughts
- 4 Through Your Lens
- 6 Field Notes
- 18 Looking Out for Iowa
- 19 Get Outdoors



**ON THE COVER**

A red fox, North America's largest species of fox, is spotted napping. Photo by John Ford

**NEW YEAR, NEW LOOK**

In conjunction with INHF's 40th anniversary, we're rolling out a new cover for *Iowa Natural Heritage*. Thank you to our partners at The Side Garage for our fresh new look!



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
- Jodi Baker**  
Finance Director
- Ross Baxter**  
Land Projects Director
- Andrea Boulton**  
Trails and Greenways Director
- Jered Bourquin**  
Blufflands Associate
- Jessica Riebkes Clough**  
Land Projects Assistant
- Brian Fankhauser**  
Blufflands Director
- Diane Graves**  
Administrative Assistant and Receptionist
- Anna Gray**  
Public Policy Director
- Erin Griffin**  
Donor Services Coordinator
- Katy Heggen**  
Communications Associate
- Lisa Hein**  
Senior Director for Conservation Programs
- Joe Jayjack**  
Communications Director
- Heather Jobst**  
Senior Land Conservation Director
- Melanie Louis**  
Volunteer Coordinator
- Emily Martin**  
Conservation Programs Coordinator
- Derek Miner**  
Land Stewardship Associate
- Anita O'Gara**  
Vice President
- Tylar Samuels**  
Conservation Easement Specialist
- Ryan Schmidt**  
Land Stewardship Director
- Kerri Sorrell**  
Communications Specialist
- Tim Sproul**  
Loess Hills Land Conservation Specialist
- Carole Teator**  
Eastern Iowa Program Manager
- Abby Hade Terpstra**  
Donor Relations Director
- Erin Van Waus**  
Conservation Easement Director
- Kari Walker**  
Administration Director

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- Chair**  
Susan Shullaw, *Iowa City*
- 1st Vice Chair**  
Garth Adams, *Des Moines*
- 2nd Vice Chair**  
Michael Daugherty, *Dunkerton*
- Secretary**  
Donald Beneke, *Pocahontas*
- Treasurer**  
Wendy Wiedner, *West Des Moines*
- Will Anderson, *Des Moines*
- Peg Armstrong-Gustafson, *Waukee*
- Woodward G. Brenton, *Des Moines*
- David Brown, *Des Moines*
- Cindy Burke, *Central City*
- Ed Cox, *Centerville*
- Mike DeCook, *Lovilia*
- Paul Easter, *Des Moines*
- Vern Fish, *Waterloo*
- John Fisher, *Des Moines*
- John Gray, *Sioux City*
- Greg Grupp, *Spirit Lake*
- Rob Hall, *Harlan*
- Neil Hamilton, *Waukee*
- Kirsten Heine, *Decorah*
- Thomas Hoff, *Iowa City*
- Robert Jester, *Des Moines*
- Christopher Lindell, *Marion*
- Jeff Lockwood, *Bettendorf*
- Jan Lovell, *Clear Lake*
- David Mackaman, *Des Moines*
- Paul Morf, *Cedar Rapids*
- Liz Neumann, *Des Moines*
- Richard Ramsay, *Des Moines*
- Carole Reichardt, *Clive*
- Susan Salterberg, *Iowa City*
- Travis Young, *Waterloo*

**EDITORIAL**

- Joe Jayjack** Editor/Publisher
  - Kerri Sorrell** Managing Editor
- Iowa Natural Heritage* is published quarterly by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation for its members and friends.
- Circulation** 10,000
- Articles appearing in *Iowa Natural Heritage* may be reprinted with permission of the publisher.



**Protecting what we love**

If you ask someone if they think protecting nature is important, you are likely to get a quick "Yes." But if you ask them why, everybody's answer is different. We may feel a connection to nature — the land, the water, the wide open sky — but we can have a difficult time explaining exactly why.



JOE MCGOVERN  
President

Personally, I have felt this connection as long as I can remember. Sure, there are moments that stand out, like my first experience on Doolittle Prairie State Preserve in Story County, but the truth is that I have always felt connected. I know many of INHF's members and partners feel the same.

INHF exists to serve nature, to serve the public and to serve future generations that have a right to connect to our natural landscape. Your support makes our mission possible. Equally important is the desire of Iowa's landowners to protect and restore their land. Without their motivation and foresight, it would be equally challenging to do our work.

The reasons that people protect and steward their land may be as diverse as the landscape itself, but we are grateful it is happening. In this issue, we'll dive into the "Why?" For some, it's a spiritual connection. For others, it's a duty to preserve creation. For a lot of people, it's just the right thing to do. We don't have to agree on why someone values nature, but we can all be glad for it.

I appreciate the words of native Iowan Aldo Leopold, encouraging us to save all the pieces. "If the land mechanism as a whole is good then every part is good, whether we understand it or not...To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

Together, for a variety of reasons, Iowans are making a difference. Whether it's a working farm in the Loess Hills, a native oak savanna in central Iowa or a scenic piece of the Mississippi Blufflands, they are protecting the land they love for themselves, for nature and for future generations. INHF is working hard to help make it happen. Thank you to these landowners for the opportunity to help preserve something we all value — nature — no matter the reason.

**INHF President Joe McGovern's children**, pictured here in 2008 at Sylvan Runkel State Preserve in the Loess Hills of Monona County, have been making connections with nature their entire lives. Iowa landowners and INHF are working to make sure future generations have the same opportunity. Photo by Joe McGovern, INHF

**“I want you to be my eyes into the future.”**

- Daisy Iowa Whitham

In 1980, Daisy Iowa Whitham donated 130 acres of woodland just outside of Fairfield to Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. It was one year after INHF was founded, and Whitham Woods became the first land protection project completed by the young organization. Along with the gift came a responsibility that INHF has been striving to live up to ever since.

Daisy, who taught biology for more than four decades, wanted to protect the natural beauty of the former Whitham Fairfield Nursery, which was founded by her father, Charles, in 1889. In entrusting the land to INHF, Daisy asked the newly formed land trust to be her “eyes into the future.”

The site is still owned by INHF and enjoyed by the public through a 99-year management lease with the Jefferson County Conservation Board. Many of the original trees from the nursery have matured and created an interesting and diverse habitat.

As we begin to celebrate our 40th anniversary in 2019, we remember Daisy and the many Iowans who have made our state better through INHF. Because of them, we can continue to work to preserve our landscape’s natural beauty for the next generation.

— JOE JAYJACK,  
Communications director



IN MEMORY OF  
LLOYD A. WHITHAM  
1911 - 1983  
SUMMER OR WINTER, DAY OR NIGHT,  
THE WOODS ARE AN EVER NEW DELIGHT;  
THEY GIVE US PEACE, AND THEY MAKE US  
STRONG,  
SUCH WONDERFUL BALMS TO THEM BELONG;  
SO, LIVING OR DYING, I'LL TAKE MY EASE  
UNDER THE TREES, UNDER THE TREES  
STODDARD

Daisy Whitham’s nephew, Lloyd, is commemorated on a plaque at Whitham Woods in Fairfield. The 130-acre former nursery was donated to INHF in 1980, becoming INHF’s first protection project. Lloyd followed in the family line of work, founding and running the Whitham Nursery in Agency for more than 45 years. Photo by Erin Van Waus, INHF

## Addition comes to south bank of Polk County's Chichaqua complex

An 82-acre triangle of land along the South Skunk River was recently added to the Chichaqua Bottoms Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Polk County. INHF purchased the land in summer 2018 and transferred it to the Polk County Conservation Board (PCCB) in November.

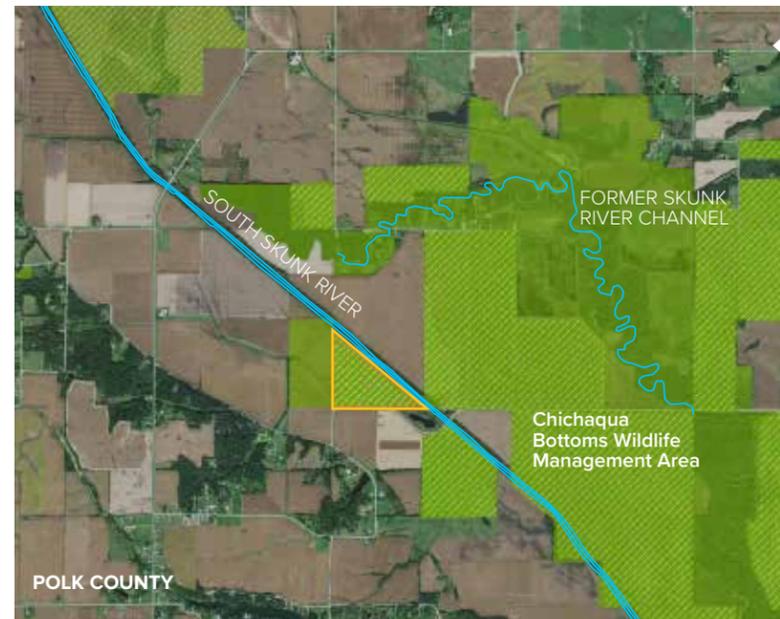
Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt covers more than 9,000 acres, making it one of the largest public natural areas in Iowa. The greenbelt boasts remnant prairies, woodlands, marshes and oxbows stretching about 10 miles down the Skunk River. INHF started working in the Chichaqua Bottoms WMA after the 1993 flood events and has helped protect more than two-thirds its total acreage since then.

This addition provides significant wetland



habitat. The wetland basin and surrounding native vegetation are critical habitat for more than 70 bird species and several endangered species in Iowa, such as the Sandhill crane, Henslow's sparrow and the Ornate box turtle.

The land benefits wildlife by connecting more natural areas and waterways, creating more habitat and migration corridors. Once restoration is complete, the addition will improve water quality by filtering surface runoff through native vegetation, trapping sediment before it merges into the Skunk River and underground aquifers. 🌿



**An addition to the Chichaqua Bottoms WMA** in Polk County provides vital protection along the South Skunk River corridor. The addition also protects important wetland and river habitat for a variety of bird and animal species. INHF has completed three more additions to the Chichaqua complex since 2016. *Photo by Ross Baxter, INHF, map by INHF*

- Chichaqua addition
- Past INHF protection projects
- Public recreation land
- River/stream

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**JAN. 26**  
2019 Iowa Bike Expo  
*Iowa Events Center, Des Moines*

Join INHF and bike groups from across the state for a free-to-the-public exhibition of trail information, bike gear and upcoming events. Learn about Iowa destinations and bicycle advocacy opportunities. Family-friendly.

**FEB. 2**  
Barberry Buster  
*Faulkes Heritage Woods, Marion, Linn Co.*

Take a winter walk in the woods and enjoy a volunteer workday to remove Japanese barberry — an invasive species — from a Linn County public gem. No experience necessary; families are welcome. Bundle up!

**JUNE 27**  
SAVE THE DATE: INHF 40th Anniversary Celebration  
*Des Moines, Polk Co.*

Mark your calendar now: Join us for a 40th anniversary celebration for members and friends as we look back on four decades of protecting Iowa's land, water and wildlife. And keep a look out for more 40th anniversary events happening throughout the state the whole year.

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

## New staffers join INHF

Anna Gray and Emily Martin joined the INHF staff full-time on Jan. 1.

Anna Gray joins INHF as the new public policy director. Anna was INHF's Mark C. Ackelson Fellow during summer 2018 and will continue her work as INHF's liaison to state legislators, leaders and decision-makers to make Iowa's natural resources a state priority.

An Iowa native, Anna grew up on a family farm near Centerville. She earned her law degree from Drake University in 2017 after completing her undergraduate degree at Iowa State University in Agricultural Business and Economics.

"I'm looking forward to expanding INHF's reputation as a leader in conservation policy and as a knowledgeable, reliable resource for state legislators long into the future," Anna said.

Emily Martin joins INHF as the new conservation programs coordinator. Emily has been INHF's grant writing intern since May 2018. Emily will research additional grant opportunities and help coordinate INHF conservation projects.



Also an Iowa native, Emily earned her Masters in Environmental Science from Iowa State University. She enjoys building partnerships, promoting sustainable conservation practices and restoring natural areas. She particularly enjoys working on water quality issues.

"While what I'm doing today may seem small, years from now it could save an entire lake and positively impact a lot of people," Emily said. "I look forward to including more people in the conversation and being more attentive and intentional with our land." 🌿

**Two familiar faces joined the INHF staff** Jan. 1: Anna Gray is INHF's new public policy director and Emily Martin is the new conservation programs coordinator. Both Gray and Martin worked with INHF this past summer through INHF's student education program and will continue their work fulltime in the new year. *Photos by Rowan McMullen-Cheng, INHF*

## South Skunk River buffered with Sleepy Hollow Park addition in Ames

Sleepy Hollow Park in Story County will soon grow by more than 15 acres thanks to a joint project by INHF, the Story County Conservation Board (SCCB) and the Story County chapter of Pheasants Forever.

INHF purchased the land in late October and plans to transfer it to SCCB as soon as fundraising is complete. The local Pheasants Forever chapter was the first group to pledge funds to help make the project happen.

The addition sits just south of the existing Sleepy Hollow Park and directly east of Ada Hayden Heritage Park on the north end of Ames. The existing 21-acre park serves as an access to the 34-mile Skunk River Water Trail, and is a popular spot for hiking, bird-watching and geo-caching. The addition is mostly woodland along with three acres of land that

could be restored to native vegetation.

"The population of Ames has grown by nearly 10 percent in the last decade, with much of the new development expanding north," said Ross Baxter, INHF land projects director. "This project expands the Skunk River greenbelt in an area seeing increasing development pressure."

Ames also has shallow aquifer drinking wells in the area, and the South Skunk River is known to flood in high rain events, meaning that protection of this river area will help water quality and water flow management. 🌿



**An addition to Sleepy Hollow Park** in Ames will almost double the park and protect more of the South Skunk River corridor and water trail. The addition will help manage water levels and quality near two aquifer drinking wells nearby. *Map by INHF*



# IN GOOD COMPANY

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

**T**wice a year, Leah Reser forgoes her usual business casual attire in favor of something a bit more outdoorsy.

“We have a volunteer time off program and get eight hours of paid time off a year to volunteer,” Leah explained. “You can use it for any volunteer activity of your choice. I used mine the first time for INHF because it was outdoors. I had a lot of fun, learned a lot and met some great people.”

That was four years ago. Leah, who works as a client services manager at the Principal office in Mason City, has been volunteering with INHF ever since. She’s part of an ever-growing community of volunteers that lend a

hand on the land through corporate volunteer partnerships, which offer employees at companies across Iowa opportunities to get outdoors, connect with their colleagues and experience the land. Originally introduced through INHF board member Mike Daugherty, Principal employees from the Mason City, Cedar Falls and Waterloo offices now volunteer with INHF twice a year.

Relationships with other corporations including Wells Fargo, RBC Wealth Management, Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company and UnityPoint Health have similar roots to individual INHF board members, supporters and volunteers. In recent years, INHF has reached out to volunteer coordinators at companies without an existing

## BY THE NUMBERS

# 255

Employees of partnering corporations who have volunteered with INHF since 2013

# 832

hours of volunteer time given by corporate volunteers since 2013

# 26

total corporations partnering with INHF on volunteer events since 2013

**“The volunteers we meet through our corporate partnerships are often people we may not otherwise have the opportunity to connect with.”**

- MELANIE LOUIS,  
INHF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

INHF connection.

“Of course, we appreciate all of our volunteers, but the volunteers we meet through our corporate partnerships are often people we may not otherwise have the opportunity to connect with,” said Melanie Louis, INHF volunteer coordinator. “Many aren’t familiar with INHF, haven’t done this type of work before, but find that they really enjoy it. They share their experience with others in their organization, invite more people and some even start volunteering with us regularly, bringing along family and friends. All of this has a huge impact and helps introduce more people to our mission.”

In the last five years, INHF has hosted more than two dozen corporate volunteer events, with 255 corporate volunteers. Together, they’ve logged 832 hours helping restore prairies, woodlands, wetlands and trails across Iowa. Many events are held on the same site year after year, which helps volunteers see the lasting effect they’ve had on the land, and that which the land has had on their relationships with their coworkers and community.

“I’ve really enjoyed meeting and connecting with everyone,” Reser said. “There were a few new people volunteering this year for the first time. I knew their names, I’d seen their faces, but that was it. The volunteer days bring us together and gets people interacting with each other in different ways.”

**Wells Fargo, Principal and Nationwide employees** volunteer on INHF properties. Since 2013, INHF has partnered with 26 corporations to host employee volunteer days, giving employees the chance to work outside and engage with each other. *Photos by INHF*



# Natural SOLUTION

A flood-prone creek has wreaked havoc on Des Moines. New protection upstream aims to ease flooding woes.

BY ROWAN McMULLEN-CHENG  
Communications intern | comminternrowan@inhf.org

On Sunday morning, July 1, 2018, Fourmile Creek crested at 17.47 feet. The creek, which runs through east Des Moines and northern Polk County, has seen regular flooding in the last decade. That July morning, it reached its highest recorded height ever, spurring evacuations of nearby neighborhoods. Between then and now, the city of Des Moines has spent millions buying out 49 flood-damaged homes near the creek.

The floods of 2018 impacted many across the state and left Iowans wondering: What can be done about the increase in severe flooding events the state is seeing? INHF is working to make more natural habitat part of the solution.

INHF recently purchased two adjacent properties in northeast Polk County that will eventually transfer to the Polk County Conservation Board (PCCB). The new Trails End Wildlife Area will permanently protect greenspace and ease flooding in Mally's Park in the community of Berwick, just east of Ankeny and within the Fourmile Creek floodplain. Once completed, the greenspace will help protect about five miles and hundreds of acres of wetland habitat.

"One of the most effective ways to reduce flood damage is protecting land upstream along the river," said Ross Baxter, INHF land

**The 2018 flooding along Fourmile Creek** caused devastation to many Des Moines homes. Protection upstream, coming in the form of the new Trails End Wildlife Area, will provide more natural land for floodwaters in years to come, and in an area facing increasing development pressure. Map by INHF

projects director. "Properties like the Trails End Wildlife Area, once restored, are so important because in their natural state, they hold and retain water to a much greater extent than developed land."

The area will protect about 200 acres of floodplain habitat and outdoor recreation space. Two multi-use trails run through the area — the Chichaqua Valley Nature Trail and the Gay Lea Wilson Trail — both heavily used by surrounding communities and the Des Moines metro area.

The area's natural features and location make it a high conservation priority for surrounding cities and the PCCB, which will use Polk County Water and Land Legacy Bond funding to purchase the area. The quickly growing developments in the watershed

## Trails End Wildlife Area

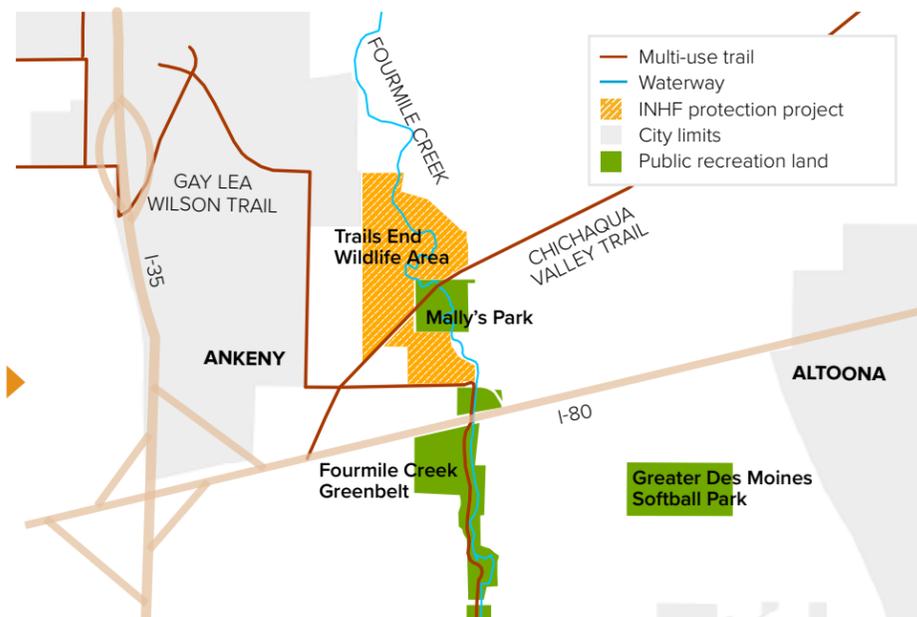
Polk County



**LAND:** 200 acres of restorable grassland and wetland adjacent to Mally's Park in Berwick

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** Floodplain habitat, Fourmile Creek, two multi-use trails

**PARTNERS:** Polk County Conservation Board, INHF



reduces the amount of water the land can hold, causing Fourmile Creek's banks and floodplain to fill faster and more aggressively. The newly protected area aids with this, as identified in the Fourmile Creek Watershed Plan.

"With more and more of that water upstream being diverted for housing, it puts that much more pressure on Fourmile Creek," said Baxter. "Protecting the land also builds greenspace for future generations in an area that probably won't have much 50 years from now. Considering this region is one of Iowa's most densely populated, its protection is a service to mitigate flooding impacts."

For successful flood mitigation and water retention, Polk County will restore the area, including the creek bank and former oxbows, which will reduce water levels during high precipitation events and help restore ecological function to Fourmile Creek and the surrounding land.

"You can spread the water out, reduce nitrate in the water, and give the sediment the chance to settle out," says PCCB Ecologist Doug Sheeley.

With the wetland features returned to their historic glory, Sheeley predicts anything from "dragonflies to deer" to return in tandem. "It's kind of the field of dreams thing," says Sheeley. "If you build it, they will come. It's already got three streams coming in; the stage is set."

The Trails End Wildlife Area's ultimate purpose is "to have a good, healthy,

**The impact of flooding is seen** on the area that makes up the Trails End Wildlife Area near Berwick. Fourmile Creek crested at 17.47 feet in July 2018, its highest ever measurement. The 200-acre area will help retain flood waters during future rain events. Photos by Ross Baxter, INHF

functioning ecosystem with some functional amenities on it to serve the public," according to Sheeley. In addition to restoring the Fourmile Creek floodplain back to what it was historically, the area is meant to serve multiple needs. Outdoor recreation opportunities include bird watching and biking while habitat protection includes wildlife migration security and ecosystem balance.

"While the need for this protection was highlighted by a flooding disaster, it ultimately provides countless benefits for the area," said Baxter. "Looking to the future, this type of protection is one of the best solutions for flood prevention and healthy ecosystems."





# ON SACRED GROUND

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

## Why?

It's a question that comes up often in conversations with Iowans about their decision to permanently protect their land. Some speak with an affection for a place rooted in the past, others, a vision for the future.

But if you strip away the specifics, more often than not, it comes down to connection.

Everyone needs a place they can go to feel connected. Many people find it in nature. Doing so can be — in the broadest definition of the word — a “spiritual” experience.

For some, it's a sense of responsibility rooted in their faith that moves them to protect, restore and steward the land. For others, it is nature itself that provides a sense of place, purpose and belonging. Often, the two are intertwined.

### For the beauty of the earth

Drive far enough along US 30 and you'll come across Wheatland, a small town on the west side of Clinton County in east central Iowa. Nestled into the surrounding hills is the Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat (OLPR), a spiritual retreat center overlooking the Wapsipinicon River.

For nearly 20 years, the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (CHM), an order of Catholic sisters based in Davenport, have run the center, offering people of all faiths — or none — a place to come reflect, meditate and appreciate the

surrounding beauty.

“‘Humility’ comes from the Latin word ‘humus’ which means ‘of the earth,’” said Sister Marcia Eckerman, CHM, who lived and served at OLPR for five years. “For us, that means being grounded in who we are. OLPR gives people the opportunity to find their groundedness, to obtain a deeper understanding of themselves, God in their life and the interconnectedness that exists between nature and human beings.”

CHM founded Ottumwa Heights College (OHC), which among its other educational offerings provided faith formation resources for adults. When the sisters sold the college in the late '70s, they began exploring ways to continue to provide opportunities for spiritual growth.

Throughout the 1980s, Sr. Joann Kuebrich of CHM, and Fr. Vincent Fabula of the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance — both former OHC faculty members — led faith formation programs in rural parishes throughout the region. In time, the need for a dedicated space became apparent. They came upon a 200-acre farm that offered the spiritual stillness they'd been seeking. Over the years, they restored the farm, reconstructing the surrounding prairie, woodland and wetlands. When Fr. Fabula passed away in 1998, the farm was offered to CHM. They've run it ever since.

In recent years, at the suggestion of long-time CHM supporters Joan and Richard Meierotto, the sisters began exploring ways to permanently protect the land. After much thoughtful discussion among the order and laity,

**A retreat visitor explores the grounds of the Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat** near Wheatland in Clinton County. The retreat center is owned by the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and invites people to explore their spirituality and connection to nature. *Photo courtesy of CHM*

**“Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat gives people the opportunity to find their groundedness, to obtain a deeper understanding of themselves, God in their life and the interconnectedness that exists between nature and human beings.”**

- SISTER MARCIA ECKERMAN,  
CONGREGATION OF THE  
HUMILITY OF MARY

CHM gathered together this fall to celebrate the signing of the Our Lady of the Prairie Conservation Easement with INHF, which permanently protects 80 acres of the farm. The move ensures the serene surroundings will always remain, and aligns with the sisters' commitment to care for creation set forth in their Land Ethic

and Principles of Sustainability.

“We believe we are all part of God's creation, not beings above or outside of it,” said CHM Vice President Sister Johanna Rickl. “We are invited and compelled to continue this evolution of creation.”

### Restorative powers

Judy Felder and her prairie restoration partners Mary Brown and Sandy Rhodes also spent years searching for the right piece of land. A place where they could realize their shared dream of undertaking a prairie restoration project that would create a refuge for prairie flora and fauna, and serve as an example of the potential present in highly disturbed habitats.

“I think all three of us fell in love with the property instantly,” Felder said. “I can remember coming around the curve of the road that borders the property and looking up at the hills and thinking, ‘This is it.’ It was like somebody hit me in the chest.”

Judy isn't a religious person. Her relationship to the land isn't faith-based. Rather, her belief in all that is good is based in the land itself.

“I get my grounding — both literally and figuratively — from the





**LEFT:** An early photo of Mary Brown, Sandy Rhodes and Judy Felder at their prairie preserve, Indiangrass Hills, in Iowa County. **ABOVE:** Judy leads INHF interns on an educational hike through the preserve on a workday in 2013. Photos by INHF

**“I have a spirituality, but it has come directly from nature. It’s an integral part of who I am.”**

- JUDY FELDER,  
INDIANGRASS HILLS

land. It keeps me centered, balanced and connected,” Felder said. “I did not come to this from any sort of preconceived place, the land has given that to me. I have a spirituality, but it has come directly from nature. It’s an integral part of who I am.”

In recent years, the landscape surrounding Indiangrass Hills has shifted as conventional farming in the area has intensified. Her faith in the prairie’s — and in her own — ability to persevere has been tested. In these times, as in others, she turns to the land.

“I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to bond to a place, observe things happen over time and season, and watch those things change again and again. So many people don’t have that. They don’t

even know they need it,” said Felder. “Everything changes. It’s about figuring out how to adapt to it, not succumb to it.”

Judy, Mary and Sandy permanently protected Indiangrass Hills’ 640 acres with a conservation easement with INHF in 2005 — just weeks before Sandy passed away from cancer. Though they set out to create a place of refuge for the prairie, it has become a source of renewal for Judy and countless others.

“That place out there isn’t really ours. We’re just taking care of it for a while and hoping it will last into the future. It’s meant to be shared,” she said.

#### **A place to be**

Patrick Swanson grew up next to a nature preserve in West St. Paul, Minn., and developed a love for the outdoors at an early age. He continued to expand his affinity for nature throughout adulthood, first in and around Ann Arbor, Mich. during graduate school, and later in the Loess Hills near his home in Omaha.

“I’ve always felt a connection with nature. It’s something I grew up with. The notion that it went deeper didn’t

infiltrate my consciousness until adulthood,” Swanson said.

Swanson came to crave a place of his own where he could have a lasting impact. His search eventually led him to 60 acres just outside of Council Bluffs. Due to a series of events, Swanson was initially unable to purchase the property, but the opportunity later resurfaced. In retrospect, Swanson sees this as an intervention.

“If your heart is open to the possibility that God provides opportunities to journey with Him on a purposeful path, it is difficult to deny the significance of the opportunity when you understand it is being presented to you,” Swanson wrote in “One Man and a Chainsaw,” a book he published about his experience. “But you are given free will to choose whether or not to travel with Him on that journey. Such was the case for me. I was not entirely confident that I could take on the many responsibilities I would have to bear if I purchased the land. Nevertheless, I felt compelled to do so based on an upwelling of faith that overruled the detracting dictates of reason.”

Neither faith nor restoration were at the forefront of Steve Laughlin’s mind 20 years ago when his long-time hunting partner, Kelley Donham, suggested they buy some farmland to hunt pheasants and train bird dogs. When Steve and Kelly first looked at a 200-acre Mahaska County farm, they were not impressed.

“There was next to no pheasant habitat on it. It was covered with ankle-high brome grass. I thought to

myself, ‘No self-respecting pheasant would use this place,’” Laughlin said.

Still, the place had its appeal, so they bought it. Through efforts to improve habitat, Steve and Kelly learned about the native prairie patches scattered around the property. They conducted prescribed burns, but saw limited results. As retirement approached, Steve began thinking about undertaking a large-scale restoration, but doubted the land’s potential. Not expecting much, he called INHF President Joe McGovern, who much to Steve’s surprise, was excited about the land and its possibilities. It was at this point that Steve began thinking about his faith.

“After 25 years of being deeply involved in our local church we had learned the principles of stewardship,” Laughlin said. “We decided that stewardship of the land was just as important a calling and we felt led to pursue our passion for nature and our desire to protect, restore and care for the land.”

Sustained by a love of the land, their faith and an innate sense of purpose, both Swanson and Laughlin donated conservation easements to INHF — Laughlin in 2010 and Swanson in 2011 — permanently protecting the corners of creation they have worked so hard to restore.

“After more than ten years of these routines, I can clearly see how much impact just one man and a chainsaw can have on a landscape,”

wrote Swanson. “I am also perhaps now more acutely aware that these experiences have impacted me as much as the landscape.”

#### **All are welcome**

CHM opened the OLPR Conservation Easement signing with a song: “All are Welcome.” It was a fitting selection because that’s the thing about nature — it belongs to all of us. It binds us together. Perhaps that’s the most powerful connection that exists — the one that we, inhabitants of this common home, share with each other.

“It’s wonderful to have a place where you can go, lay everything aside and just let yourself sink into that spiritual space,” Rickl said. “That is something everyone can relate to.”

**TOP RIGHT:** Sisters from the Congregation of the Humility of Mary sign a conservation easement on their Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat area. Photo by Katy Heggen, INHF **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Patrick Swanson on his land near Council Bluffs. **BOTTOM LEFT:** Restored grassland on Steve Laughlin’s farm in Mahaska County.

**“We decided that stewardship of the land was just as important a calling and felt led to pursue our passion for nature and desire to protect, restore and care for the land.”**

- STEVE LAUGHLIN





## LEAVING A LEGACY

### I'd like to be a part of INHF forever

A number of INHF's donors have arranged to perpetually support Iowa's land, water and wildlife, even after they are gone. How much of a cash bequest — left by will or by naming INHF a beneficiary of a life insurance policy or retirement account — would it take to endow your annual giving?

Bonnieta Fye was a long time, steady member of INHF. A loving and lively woman, she worked as a nurse for the Veteran's Hospital in Iowa City and was an active citizen in social and environmental issues. Bonnie enjoyed being part of INHF because "you people let me feel a part of it."

Bonnie calculated how much of a gift she should leave for INHF to invest in INHF's endowment so that the 5 percent annual return would be the same as what she usually gave for her yearly donation. For example, a \$1,000 gift would produce \$50 per year. To this day, and on into the future, Bonnieta is indeed a part of INHF's work forever.

— **ABBY HADE TERPSTRA**,  
Donor relations director

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

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

## TRIBUTE GIFTS

### IN MEMORY OF

George William Ackelson  
Steve Atherton  
Alan J. Atkinson  
Alberta Brosnahan  
Betty Murrow Berglard  
Erica Berrier  
Larry Beving  
Gabriel Blaskovich  
Michael Brown  
Max Jack Clark  
Jerry Cable  
Raymond, Irene and Roger Coenen  
Frances Crouse Salyards  
Robert Cutler  
Robert Leo DeMueulenaere  
David and Diana Diersen  
Uncle Bob Dyas  
Janelle Geiserts  
Dirk Glahn  
GMHR Mountain's Top Beggar MH  
GMHR HRCH Mountain's Top Wooden Nickel MH

Benjamin & Susanne Graham  
Linn Hall  
Tom Hedges  
Arthur H Holthaus  
Richard Hoppin  
Jerry Jewett  
Colleen Jolly  
Wilma Murrow Jones  
Wilma Forshay Kelloway  
Arnold Klemme  
Matt Krawczuk  
Larrie LaFoy  
Doug LeWerke  
Chuck Lusher  
John R Mackaman  
Gary "Boomer" Maxwell  
Mike McCabe  
Joseph F. McGovern  
Barbara Meysenburg  
Alice Moeller  
MoMo, Chubby Cat, Sonnewende, and Guinness  
Jeffrey R. Moom  
Thomas Murphy

Vernon T. Olson  
Walt Ordway  
Major General Jack Peppers  
Frank Petska  
Byrle Poush  
Dan Rasmussen  
IHO Dr. Jim Rathe  
Governor Robert D. Ray  
Don and Luella Reese  
Richard K. Richards  
Dan Roush  
Jim Sabelka  
Isabelle & Earl Salterberg  
Richard Sand  
Walter L. Saur  
Kent Sheeley  
Kathleen Sippy  
Polly and Charles Smith  
Rick Smith  
Lorie Stecker  
Chuck Steege  
Harold Steinfeldt  
John Strain  
Chuck and Joyce Swift

Mary B. Terpstra  
Brad Thiede  
Stephen Thomas  
Mike Trettin  
Dorothy P. Vance  
Ed Weimerskirk  
Paul D. Whipple  
Edd and Mary Winslow

### IN HONOR OF

Don Beneke  
John Buzzoni  
The Carlton Family  
George Crouse Family  
Chris Eckles  
Doug Edel  
Garst Family  
GMHR HRCH Mountain's Top Watermark'n Woody MH QAA  
Erin Griffin  
Carol Gustine Rogers  
INHF Staff  
Bob and Patti Jester  
Jason Lang  
Dick McWilliams  
Mountain's Top Woody Sage  
David Murrin-von Ebers  
Karlene Neal  
Frank Olsen  
John and Carol Peterson's 45th Wedding Anniversary  
My brother the forester; Bob Petzelka  
Dick and Carolyn Ramsay  
Ryland and Morgan Richards  
Andy Skahill  
Wanda Skubal  
Louis & Juanita Slauson  
Jim Sutherland  
Donald Wegmann

## CONSERVATION TIP

### Tax time is for nature

This tax season, it's easy to support Iowa's wildlife with the Chickadee Check-off. More formally known as the Fish and Wildlife Fund, Iowans are able to donate part of their state tax contribution to Iowa's wildlife diversity programs, run by the Iowa DNR.

Since the 1980s, thousands of Iowans have supported Iowa wildlife by making donations through their taxes. 100 percent of those dollars go to the state's Wildlife Diversity Program, which protects nongame and vulnerable species through habitat development, research, education and more.

Donating is easy. Simply enter your donation amount on the Fish and Wildlife Check-Off contribution line (usually between lines 55-59 on form 1040), and the sum is either automatically deducted from your refund or added to the amount owed. As with all charitable contributions, the dollars you donate are deductible from next year's taxes.

In 2017, \$145,000 was donated for Iowa's wildlife. To learn more about donating or what your dollars support, visit [www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity](http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity).

**Spring ephemerals** are the first flowers to bloom every year. Often found in woodlands and along streambanks, these small flowers welcome warmer weather. They can be found all over Iowa, especially in public areas. Some of the most common are shown at right. Clockwise, starting in the upper left: Virginia bluebells, Bloodroot, Jack-in-the-Pulpit and Pasque flowers. *Photos by Martha Heinemann Bixby, Christine and John Fournier, Wayne MacPhail and Raita Futo*

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



## Finding the first flowers

BY ROWAN McMULLEN-CHENG  
Communications intern | [comminternrowan@inhf.org](mailto:comminternrowan@inhf.org)

**T**hough many winter days are ahead, it's never too early to start dreaming of spring blooms.

This spring, go on the hunt for early spring flowers. Spring ephemerals are reliable indicators of approaching warmer weather. These fleeting flowers provide an excellent reason to lace up your boots, beat the chill and get outdoors.

From sandy uplands to saturated stream embankments, a myriad of spring ephemerals can be found throughout Iowa. Find the best showings in Iowa's woodlands.

Virginia bluebells are one of the most adaptable ephemerals and are commonly spotted across the state from Scott to Dickinson counties, even in urban areas. Bloodroot colonies are rarer but some of the first to rise in Ledges State Park. In early spring, Pasque flowers dot the Loess Hills in western Iowa.

Setting aside the right time for a brisk hike makes all the difference in finding spring ephemerals. Some ephemerals, like the Four o'clock, will even close their flowers at night. The best time to start looking for spring ephemerals is by mid-March or early April since most of the soil is thawing from winter's frost. Longer periods of daylight also encourage these flowers out of their winter hibernation.

When the weather begins to warm up, the aboveground flowers fall dormant, but their roots continue to develop over the summer. Some ephemerals, like Jack-in-the-Pulpit, develop taproots that make them more sensitive to transplanting.

With a delicate aboveground assortment and brevity, spring ephemerals provide us a preview to warmer days ahead. 🌱

### WHEN WILL THEY BLOOM?

#### MARCH

Bloodroots  
Virginia Bluebells  
Hepatica

#### APRIL

Pasque flowers  
Jack-in-the-Pulpit  
Sweet William  
Shooting Star  
Dutchman's Breeches

#### MAY

Mayapple  
Virginia Waterleaf  
Wild Geranium



Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation

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



NON-PROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
DES MOINES, IA  
PERMIT NO. 1713

**Frozen, snow-covered waves** and rocks form the shoreline along Big Spirit Lake at Mini-Wakan State Park in northeast Iowa. Big Spirit is Iowa's largest natural lake and is within the Iowa Great Lakes system in Dickinson County, along with East and West Okoboji lakes. The park gets its name for the historical Dakotah Indian name for the lake, "Minnewaukon." *Photo by Daniel Ruf*

