

FALL 2019

# IOWA NATURAL HERITAGE

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



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Home at the Lakes

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A short-eared owl glides through the prairie at the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge near Prairie City in Jasper County.  
*Photo by Eric Williamson*



Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation

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

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It’s time.

As we have celebrated our 40th anniversary this past year, one thing has stood out: People taking action makes good conservation happen. They are turning their hopes and dreams into deeds — stewarding the land, protecting special places and passing on the message to the next generation. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation is honored to partner with so many amazing people and inspired by their commitment to a better Iowa. This issue shares stories about a few of the people that are working hard to protect and improve Iowa’s natural resources.



JOE MCGOVERN  
*President*

We are working with farmers and producers that are running viable operations and benefiting water quality by striking a balance between working lands and natural lands. We are working with volunteers that are lending a hand to help steward special places. We are honoring people that have spent a lifetime teaching young people the joy and importance of our natural world.

However, we recognize Iowa needs more. We need to empower people to scale up the good work that is already being done. We need action on a statewide basis.

There are people and communities across our state that are ready to take action, but they can’t do it alone. In 2010, Iowans voted to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund through a constitutional amendment. Nearly 10 years later, Iowans are still waiting for their representatives in the legislature to fund the Trust Fund. It will sit empty until lawmakers raise the state sales tax at least 3/8 of a penny, which would generate nearly \$200 million per year to clean our water, protect our soil and provide more opportunities for outdoor recreation. That is the type of action that can create generational change.

Nature enthusiast. Farmer. Hunter. Angler. Paddler. Cyclist. Hiker. You may call yourself one — or all — of these. If you do, there is a good chance you want to make Iowa’s natural landscape as healthy and vibrant as possible. Let’s urge our elected officials to take action by funding the Trust Fund. We cannot afford to wait.

It’s time.

**Volunteers harvest prairie seed** to help with native prairie restoration.  
*Photo by Katy Heggen, INHF*

**This Slender ladies' tresses orchid** was found on an old quarry site-turned-prairie in Madison County, which was donated to INHF by Bob and Roslea Johnson. Photo by Derek Miner, INHF



**“Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.”**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

As a land steward, I often regard rare orchid species as indicative of a high quality remnant prairie. So, when I spotted this Slender ladies' tresses orchid (*Spiranthes lacera*) on a former quarry site-turned-prairie – a landscape that was degraded, restored and is now protected – I was immediately humbled by nature's ability to survive.

This orchid was within an old prairie seeding created in the early days of the Conservation Reserve Program. Before the land was donated to INHF, the landowner increased diversity in the old prairie seeding by inter-seeding natives and removing invasive species. This orchid came in by its own doing, the seed likely wind-blown from a parent plant nearby. It led me to wonder if some orchid species are more resilient than we might think.

When protecting land, we often want to point to something tangible that makes the investment worthy. It is human nature to place value on things as justification for what we need to keep or throw away. When it comes to determining conservation value, land that has been turned by the hand of man is often at the bottom of the list. Although we must focus on protecting the highest quality places, we cannot overlook the value of protecting degraded landscapes and newly reconstructed prairies. Sometimes, I think there are things we cannot see that need protecting, and if we're lucky, we might see these “late-bloomers” later on.

—DEREK MINER, Land Stewardship Associate

Pat and Enid Cancilla of Iowa City win INHF’s Hagie Heritage Award

Pat and Enid Cancilla of Iowa City have been selected to receive the 2019 INHF Lawrence and Eula Hagie Heritage Award. The annual award recognizes Iowans who have demonstrated an outstanding commitment to conservation and improvement of the natural environment.

Pat, 89, and Enid, 88, were nominated for their conservation leadership and advocacy in Johnson County, their work restoring native habitat on their farm near Lake McBride, their commitment to educating young people and their volunteer efforts with environmental groups.

“Johnson County has accomplished a lot of really good things in the area of conservation,” said Rod Sullivan, vice chair of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. “I sincerely don’t believe we would be where we are today without Pat



Enid and Pat Cancilla, the 2019 winners of INHF’s Hagie Heritage Award, are shown after seeding their Johnson County farm with native prairie seeds. Photo courtesy of the Cancillas.

and Enid Cancilla.”

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

Other finalists for the 2019 Hagie Heritage Award were Loren Lown of Pleasant Hill, Tom Murray of Decorah and Rich Patterson of Cedar Rapids. 🍷

New staffers join INHF

INHF is excited to welcome three recent additions to its team: Database Administrator Kevin Cutsforth, Chief Financial Officer Patricia Wright and Communications Assistant Genna Clemen.

Kevin joined INHF last spring. As database administrator, he has focused on developing, launching and managing a new database.

“It’s all about improving connectivity; connecting staff across departments and increasing transparency in our work so we can deepen our connections with supporters,” Custforth said.

Patricia joined INHF last summer. As the CFO, she oversees INHF’s finances, providing financial reports, planning and analysis to advance the INHF’s commitment to financial excellence and transparency.

“It’s important that donors have that



Cutsforth



Wright



Clemen

feeling of service and trust,” said Wright. “That the funds they’re entrusting to the organization are held and used according to their wishes.”

Genna joined INHF this fall. As communications assistant, she is responsible for the design of INHF publications; social media planning, management and execution; and video production.

“As an INHF intern alum, I’m excited to return to INHF and eager to share the stories and beauty of Iowa’s land, water and wildlife with more people,” Clemen said. 🍷

Thank you, interns!

INHF continues to be proud of its interns and thankful for the important work they accomplish!

Over the course of 11 weeks

9 statewide stewardship interns and

5 blufflands stewardship interns representing

eight

colleges and universities spent the summer restoring and exploring native landscapes across

IOWA.

Over the course of the summer, they worked on

41 18

projects different sites in counties.

Collectively logging over

6,000

hours on the land.

FOUR office interns also made contributions to INHF’s work with projects ranging from grants to graphic design, legal tasks to storytelling.

QUARTERLY PROTECTION REPORT

An quick look at new INHF protection projects and land transferred between July 2019–Sept. 2019.

Newly protected areas

Becker Conservation Easement

150-acre conservation easement adjacent to Sac City. Protects stream corridor, pasture and woodland, providing positive water quality benefits. (Donated by Bruce and Tancy Becker)

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition

76 acres northeast of Bondurant in Polk County. Once restored, this land will benefit Buffalo Creek, increasing water filtration and reducing sediment runoff. Will provide wildlife habitat for many grassland and wetland bird species. (Will be owned and managed by Polk County Conservation Board)

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 otter pups have been seen here. (Will be owned and managed by Butler County Conservation Board)

Hart Family Wetland

160 acres in Benton County near the Cedar River that protects 34 acres of pasture and fen as part of the Middle Cedar River Watershed Project. This project will restore native prairie and wetland vegetation, which will improve water filtration and retention and reduce soil runoff. (Will be owned and managed by Benton County Conservation Board).

Madison County

684 acres of woodland along the North River. Provides habitat for a variety of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Preserving the property will improve floodplain storage and help maintain soil integrity. (Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Middle Raccoon River WMA

154 acres of woodland along the Middle Raccoon River. Protects oak, hickory and walnut trees and provides habitat for whitetail deer, turkeys, bobcats and other small mammals and reptiles. (Will be owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge Addition

74 acres in Jasper County that will protect scenic beauty, restore native tallgrass prairie that increase wildlife habitat. Will expand grassland bird habitat for species such as Henslow’s sparrows, bobolinks and dickcissels. (Will be owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

Oak Ridge Conservation Area Addition

83 acres of cool season meadow and mixed oak woodlands in Woodbury County that will provide opportunities for hunting, hiking and bird watching. (Will be owned and managed by Woodbury County Conservation Board)

Raccoon River Valley Trail and High Trestle Trail Link

Three properties in Dallas County that will help link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail. (Owned and managed by Dallas County Conservation Board)

Wright County

90-acre conservation easement along White Fox Creek. Protects wildlife habitat and enhances the water quality of the creek. (Conservation easement held by INHF)



INHF recently transferred 120 acres in Winneshiek County to the Iowa DNR that will be added to the Falcon Springs Wildlife Management Area. The new public area is approximately 2 miles northwest of Decorah. Photo by Emily Martin, INHF

Land transfers to public partners

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Addition

74 acres adjacent to Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. Protects wildlife habitat, reduces soil erosion and increases rainfall retention. (Owned and managed by Polk County Conservation Board)

Falcon Springs WMA Addition

120 acres of woodland and agricultural land northwest of Decorah in Winneshiek County. Provides outdoor recreation opportunities for birders and upland game hunters. (Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Heritage Hills WMA Addition 1

140 acres of woodland and remnant prairie in Madison County. Provides numerous outdoor recreation opportunities. This is the second tract transferred in this complex. (Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Heritage Hills WMA Addition 2

Two properties totaling 200 acres of mostly grassland with high quality oak, hickory and walnut woodland in Clarke County. Protects vital habitat and expands the nearby, but unconnected, Heritage Hills WMA. (Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Magnetic Park

51 acres in Cherokee County that will link to a city trail. The trail will create a loop around the city and the remaining land will be seeded to restore native prairie. (Owned and managed by the City of Cherokee)

Pilot Knob WMA Addition

156 acres of restored wetlands and rolling hills east of Forest City that will provide significant wildlife habitat once restored to native vegetation. The land will provide nesting habitat for waterfowl such as Bluewing teal and Mallards and benefit water quality. (Owned and managed by the Iowa DNR)

Robin’s Nest Wildlife Area

79 acres along the Cedar River. Provides quality wildlife habitat for species such as Whitetail deer, turkeys, common yellowthroats and Barred owls. Consists of native vegetation, pasture and woodland. (Owned and managed by Mitchell County Conservation Board)

Raccoon River Valley Trail and High Trestle Trail Link

Six properties in Dallas County that will help link the Raccoon River Valley Trail and the High Trestle Trail. (Owned and managed by Dallas County Conservation Board).

# HOME AT THE LAKES

BY EMILY MARTIN  
Conservation programs coordinator | [emartin@inhf.org](mailto:emartin@inhf.org)

**P**eople have long flocked to the Iowa Great Lakes to dive into the blue water and marvel at the largest set of natural lakes in Iowa.

Whether it's West Okoboji, Big Spirit, East Okoboji, Upper Gar, Lower Gar or Minnewashta, "the Lakes" as they are often referred to, hold a special place in the hearts and minds of Iowans, many whose families have been coming here for generations.

Like many Iowans, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's (INHF) roots at the Lakes run deep. Over nearly four decades, INHF and its partners have protected 5,800 acres in Dickinson County and established a regional system of trails. INHF has taken on several new, high-profile land protection projects this year, many of which have led INHF to deepen its connection to this special place and the community of people committed to protecting it.

## Big protection on Big Spirit

INHF's recent purchase of three parcels adjacent to existing public lands — plus the 2018 purchase of the 160-acre Wallace & Bowers Nature Area — ensure that conservation will always be a priority on land near the north shore of Big Spirit Lake.

Collectively known as the North Shore Project, these 48 acres — along with the public and privately protected lands they link — create one of the largest contiguous stretches of protected land along any of the Iowa Great Lakes.

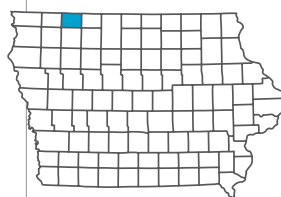
Because Big Spirit provides drinking water to 5,600 people, a conservation buffer near the lake has extra, long-term importance, though the benefits provided by these lands extend well beyond Big Spirit and the surrounding towns.

"Because of its position at the top of the Lakes, this conservation zone has the potential to help clean the water not only around Big Spirit Lake, but for all those who visit and live at the Lakes,"

**A new 10-acre prairie strip is taking root** at Wallace & Bowers Nature Area on the north Shore of Big Spirit Lake. A 50-acre alfalfa buffer bolsters its progress. *Photo courtesy of David Thoreson.*

## Iowa Great Lakes

Dickinson County



**LAND:** A collection of protection projects on Big Spirit, East and West Lake Okoboji

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** Water quality benefits, outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat

**PARTNERS:** Donors, public agency partners, volunteers and farmer tenants.

said INHF Vice President Anita O'Gara.

INHF purchased the North Shore Project from extended family members involved in the Bartels, Bartels & Fox LP in 2019. The family, which has owned land in the area since 1866, chose to sell the three parcels to INHF for conservation. INHF is now in the beginning phases of exploring how prairie and wetlands can be restored on the land in ways that offer the greatest benefit for water quality. Funding for the project and future ownership are under consideration.

Restoration continues on the neighboring Wallace & Bowers Nature Area, the largest property in the complex of INHF-protected land on the north side of Big Spirit Lake, which was purchased in partnership with the Wallace and Bowers families.

Together, INHF and Dickinson County farmers and tenants Jake and Gary Johnson are realizing a shared vision for the land that includes restorative farming, a way of farming that keeps the health of the soil and the Lakes at the forefront.

Thanks to this family — third-generation farming tenants on this land — restorative farming practices including no-till, cover crops or buffer strips have been applied to every acre of its crop ground. In 2019, a 10-acre prairie strip was planted along the south boundary using native seed sourced entirely from Dickinson County. While the prairie continues to take root over the next few years, a 50-acre alfalfa buffer is actively working to slow and absorb water runoff before it can reach Big Spirit Lake. A seven-acre wetland will be restored in the northwest corner to catch and store water, which will provide native habitat and remove nutrients before they enter the chain of lakes.

"This is why we do it," said Jake, holding up his 2-year-old son Leroy, at a field day INHF co-sponsored as part of the annual Iowa Prairie Lakes Conference last summer. The event brought together farmers, neighbors,

community members, conservationists and others to learn from, share knowledge and connect with one another.

"Iowa's soil and water are arguably our most valuable natural and economic resources. Clean water and sound land stewardship are critical to making the Okoboji region a great place to live, work and play," said Greg Grupp, an INHF board member and Lakes local who attended the field day and volunteers at the site.

"We are proud of our partnership with Jake and Gary and grateful to all the Johnsons for their innovation, agility and shared love of the land," said INHF President Joe McGovern. "Though still in its early phases, this project can serve as a model for what is possible when conservation and agriculture work together."

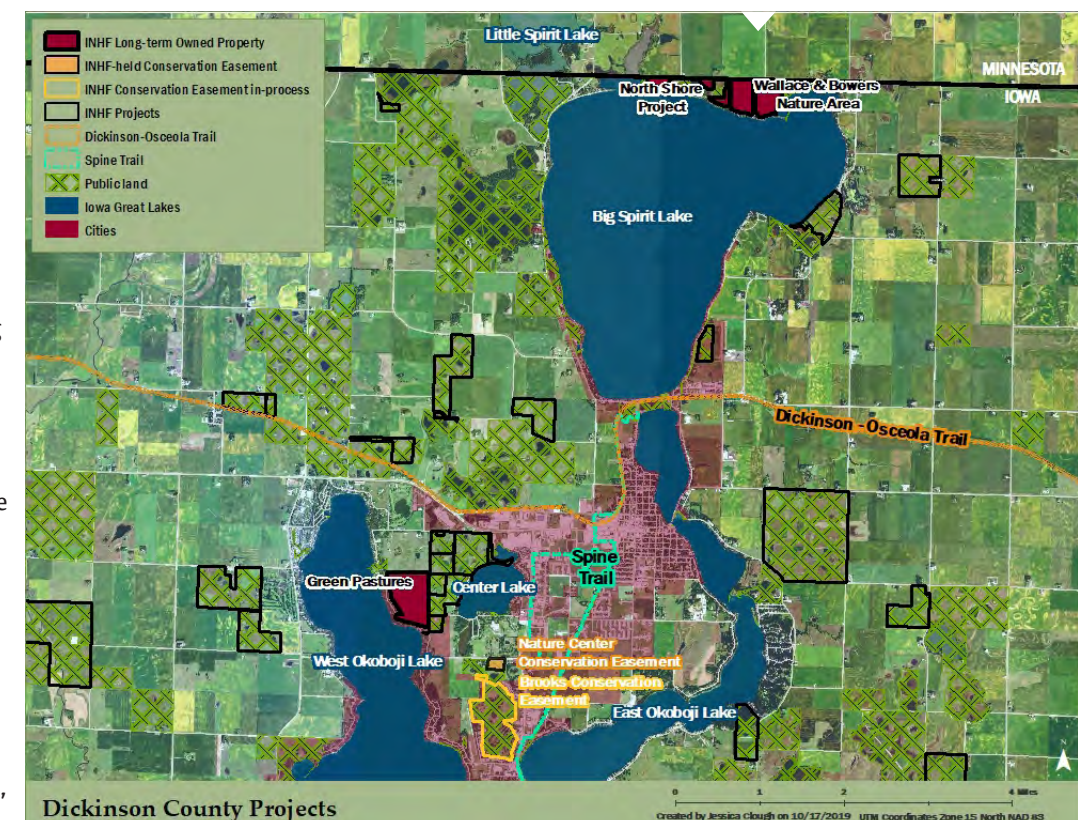
## Centering nature

South of Big Spirit, INHF is partnering with the Dickinson County Conservation Board (DCCB) to create a conservation easement that will provide permanent protection from future development in the heart of the Lakes.

**"Iowa's soil and water are arguably our most valuable natural and economic resources."**

— GREG GRUPP,  
INHF BOARD  
MEMBER

**The North Shore Project,** which links INHF's Wallace & Bowers Nature Area to neighboring public lands, and a conservation easement between West and East Lake Okoboji, are helping to create two new conservation areas in the Iowa Great Lakes.  
*Map by INHF.*





**Dickinson County farmer** Jake Johnson speaks at a recent field day INHF co-hosted at Wallace & Bowers Nature Area as part of the Iowa Prairie Lakes Conference. *Photo by Joe Jayjack, INHF*

**"This is the place that people seem to come together and work toward a common goal without question."**

— JOHN WILLS,  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
COORDINATOR

The project lies on land situated between East and West Lake Okoboji within Okoboji city limits. It is near other beloved outdoor areas including the Spine Trail, Kenue Park and the Dickinson County Nature Center complex, as well as other private lands protected by INHF-held conservation easements. Together, these lands create a place for nature and expanded access for people to experience it.

The Dickinson County Conservation Board (DCCB) received an anonymous donation to purchase and protect the 230-acre Brooks Golf Course from future commercial and residential development in 2019. A local icon with 27 holes, nine of which are surrounded by prairie, the popular course offers open green space in an otherwise densely populated part of the Lakes.

Public comments from a meeting DCCB hosted last June indicated the golf community is open to creative ways to add nature interpretation and access for activities such as birding, cross-country skiing and running the grass perimeter to the course. DCCB is updating the golf management contract as they look for ways to bring more nature-based experiences to this land.

Just north of the golf course is another INHF-held conservation easement with DCCB where the Dickinson County Nature Center

now stands. Covering 17 acres, DCCB and INHF worked together to protect this corner of Kenue Park in 2009 before the nature center was built. The property stretches from Nature Center Road back to the northern edge of DCCB's wetland area. DCCB is now able to ensure the property will be used for wildlife habitat, open space recreation and outdoor education forever.

"Together, the Brooks and Kenue Park conservation easements ensure that lands near the Dickinson County Nature Center and other popular public lands remain as open-space forever," said Conservation Easement Director Erin Van Waus.

### At home at the Lakes

Just as nature is continually evolving, so too are the ways INHF protects, restores and stewards land. Projects in the Iowa Great Lakes are no exception.

From partnering with landowners to protect private lands, to working with local conservation and recreation groups to create public parks, trails and other natural areas, the ways INHF has worked with local partners has varied greatly over the years. That work will continue and expand as INHF looks at long-term ownership and stewardship of select properties.

INHF currently owns and will continue to care for three properties at the Lakes: Wallace & Bowers Nature Area; Green Pastures, 163 acres of restored wetlands, grasslands and several remnant prairie knobs in a highly developed area near West Lake Okoboji donated by Ann and Sig Anderson; and Wheeler Woods, 15 acres of woodland and 266 feet of undeveloped shoreline on West Lake Okoboji donated by Lois Morgan.

"Our decision to own land is a reflection of what we've been hearing from our friends at the Lakes who want to see more of the area permanently protected," McGovern said. "We have gained the capacity to manage land in a way that lives up to the expectations that come with long-term ownership."

The local vision, leadership and enthusiasm for protecting the Lakes have been as unique and special as the lakes themselves. No matter who is leading a project, there is never a shortage of people willing to step in and help.

"This is the place that people seem to come together and work toward a common goal without question. There are over 80 partner organizations that I work with through the Clean Water Alliance, and those partners all feel a need to be part of the answer," said John

Wills, environmental coordinator at Dickinson Soil and Water Conservation District and a state legislator.

"In my memory, we've never been more present to the people and needs at the Iowa Great Lakes," O'Gara said. "Our vision is to continue to help people take action. The needs of the Lakes will change over time, but INHF will always be there, ready to support those who seek to know and protect this special place." 🌿

**Once established**, the prairie buffer along the south border of Wallace & Bowers Nature Area will help slow and hold water on the land, benefiting water quality and soil health, and provide pollinator habitat. *Photo by Joe Jayjack, INHF*





Illustrations by Genna Clemen, INHF

# IN OUR NATURE

The benefits of time spent outdoors

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

A doctor, a lawyer and a pharmacist walk into the woods... Slowly. They've assembled at the edge of the woods with a dozen other Iowans at Jester Park in Polk County on a misty evening in early September to partake in forest bathing, a form of nature therapy that has become increasingly popular in the United States in recent years.

Medical practitioners, mental health professionals and agencies across Iowa are beginning to incorporate various forms of nature therapy into their practices and programming, taking note of the growing interest in and ever-expanding base of evidence around the connection between nature and wellness. As it turns out, not only is time spent outdoors good for people, nature itself stands to benefit from the relationships forged in fresh air, too.

## Taking root

Shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing, was developed in Japan in the 1980s. Unlike a hike, nature walk or sightseeing trek, forest bathing is not about exercise, species identification or scenic overlooks. Rather, it's a slow, contemplative walk focused on immersing oneself in nature and experiencing the benefits of being fully present in the outdoors.

"It's really about taking in nature in a more mindful way," said Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, a Cedar Valley-based physician and our guide for the evening.

Hackenmiller first began leading these

walks as part of a series of workshops about nature and wellness at Prairiewoods, a Franciscan ecospirituality retreat tucked into 70 acres of woods and prairie in the Cedar Rapids metro. The workshops were so well received that she decided to become a certified nature therapy guide in 2017. In addition to her medical practice, she now leads nature therapy walks and provides workshops combining outdoor adventure, integrative wellness and nature therapy.

"There's just been an explosion of interest in this in the last couple of years, and an increasing understanding that this is real medicine, both by people who practice it and in health care," Hackenmiller said.

## Big medicine

By her own admission, Hackenmiller was once one of the most conventionally minded physicians she knew. However, after 12 years as an OB-GYN in the Cedar Rapids area, she was burnt out. Around this same time, her husband Dave was diagnosed with stage four cancer, passing away in 2012. These experiences, along with her personal journey raising a son on the autism spectrum, led Hackenmiller to explore integrative medicine, and later, having found personal solace in outdoor adventure, nature therapy.

"Once you go down this road, you can't go back to seeing things the same way," she said. "We all have an inherent need to be outdoors. There's power in that connection, if we just

allow ourselves to experience it.”

The bond between nature and human health is well documented. Among other benefits, time spent simply being in natural areas has been scientifically proven to reduce blood pressure, lower stress indicators, improve mood, increase the ability to focus, accelerate recovery from injury or illness, boost

is good for us,” Hackenmiller said.

Dr. Amanda Hardy, a Des Moines and Ames-based licensed mental health counselor specializing in perinatal mental health, is an enthusiastic advocate of nature therapy as a tool for improving mental health. She integrates elements of nature therapy into her practice and workshops centered around reconnecting people with nature.

“There’s a metaphor we use a lot in mental health about climbing the mountain,” she said.

## “Nature therapy helps us recognize our existence within a broader system.”

— DR. AMANDA HARDY,  
LICENSED MENTAL  
HEALTH COUNSELOR

“In nature therapy, we’re doing that in a more literal sense.”

Wilderness therapy programs, which cater to people scaling physical, mental and emotional peaks of all kinds, have long recognized the healing qualities of nature. Though she’s a proponent of such programs, Hardy notes people don’t need to be going through life-changing events to reap the mental health benefits of incorporating elements of nature into their daily lives.

“Nature therapy helps us recognize our existence within a broader system,” Hardy said. “When we begin to recognize the connection between nature and ourselves and nature as therapy, we begin to understand what our disconnection from nature does to our mental health.”

### Lay of the land

According to 2010 census data, 82 percent of Americans now live in urban areas, up from 64 percent in 1950. Experts project that 90 percent of the U.S. population and 68 percent of the world population will live in urban areas by 2050.

While the shift to the city has been more gradual in Iowa with 64 percent of Iowans

now living in urban areas, that number has been steadily increasing since the early 1900s, and the state’s metropolitan areas have seen significant growth in the last decade. Iowa’s population has increased by nearly 100,000 since 2010, with Dallas (32%), Linn (14%) and Polk (12%) counties seeing the most growth.

Unlike many major metropolises, in Iowa, urban living does not equal the absence of nature. Many municipalities have invested in parks, trails and other outdoor amenities, recognizing the importance of natural spaces for their communities. Public lands, along with private nature preserves, offer opportunities for Iowans to explore outdoor areas outside the cityscape — a benefit recognized by the state’s leading health experts.

Just this fall, the Iowa Board of Health issued a resolution in support of the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund, which would provide permanent, reliable and substantial funding to support Iowa’s outdoors, outlining the ever-growing base of evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of time spent in nature.

### Creating connection

As a naturalist with the Warren County Conservation Board (WCCB), Karen Johlas-Szalkowski is always keen to find new ways for people to experience nature. She took a personal interest in nature therapy, and after a bit of research, decided to invite some guest guides to lead forest bathing walks through WCCB parks.

It wasn’t long before Johlas-Szalkowski and fellow WCCB naturalist Kelsey Longnecker decided to become certified nature and forest therapy guides themselves, a move that was supported by the Friends of Warren County Conservation, which funded their guide training.

“It’s different than any other programming we offer,” said Johlas-Szalkowski. “It’s about taking time to slow down, be in the moment, and using all of your senses to experience nature.”

Johlas-Szalkowski also knows that just as

those that come to bathe in WCCB’s prairies, woodlands and other natural areas are likely receive something from the experience, be it medicinal or simply memorable, so too will the lands.

“It’s a good way to reconnect with nature,” Johlas-Szalkowski said. “If you don’t appreciate those places, you’re not going to take care of them.”

Jacques Cousteau once said “people protect what they love.” But to love something, you must first know it. At the heart of nature therapy is the belief that in coming to know nature, we come to know ourselves; that we are part of nature, not separate from it. In that knowledge, there is healing power, for people and wild places. 🌿



### Peace of mind

Prairiewoods, an ecospirituality retreat center in Cedar Rapids, will soon be permanently protected. The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are in the process of donating a conservation easement on 45 acres of prairie and woodland to INHF, ensuring this sacred space will be protected forever. Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, Iowa’s first certified nature and forest therapy guide, first began leading forest bathing walks as part of a series of workshops about nature and wellness here.

*Photo courtesy of Prairiewoods*



# WILD WOODLAND

BY ROWAN MCMULLEN CHENG  
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**B**etween the orange oak and golden yellow hickory leaves, the canopy of the most recent addition to Fox Hills Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Ottumwa in Wapello County is ablaze in autumn.

Encompassing 116 acres of upland woodland habitat along the Des Moines River, the woodland offers high quality wildlife habitat, stunning views of the river valley below and expanded opportunities to experience a sense of wildness just three miles southeast of the county seat.

“We have a limited ability to protect more acres in this area so when something

as beautiful as this opens up, it’s very exciting,” said Jeff Glaw, an Iowa DNR wildlife management biologist.

The addition, which was purchased by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) in 2018, transferred to the Iowa DNR in 2019 and is now open to the public, is part of a complex of protected land along the river that includes over 3,000 acres.

## Woodland wonder

The addition’s mature woodland draws an impressive assortment of woodpeckers. Visitors are greeted by the iconic tip-tapping of Redheaded, Pileated and Downy woodpeckers.

### Fox Hills Wildlife Management Area Wapello County



**LAND:** 116 acres of quality woodland and wildlife habitat

**SPECIAL FEATURES:** View of Des Moines River, low-impact recreation, diverse bird populations

**PARTNERS:** Iowa DNR and INHF

Preferring the mature stands of White oak and Shagbark hickory, this property also draws in Red-bellied and Hairy woodpeckers.

“We’re looking to keep the mature trees, especially the oak and hickory that have been there for a long time, and weed out the non-native species, like black locust,” said Glaw. “One of the issues we have with quality forests is fragmentation, so we fill in the areas that are too open by planting more trees.”

Offering dark skies, plenty of insects, living and dead trees, the addition also provides excellent habitat for bats. On a clear night, recreationalists will likely see common Iowa bats like the Little brown bat and the Big brown bat, as well as the federally endangered Indiana bat and the federally threatened Northern long-eared bat.

“The maternal bat colonies really like the river corridor area and the creeks that feed into the Des Moines River,” said Glaw. “We do everything we can to protect them, like increasing public awareness and education and making sure our forestry management plan maintains the trees and areas they like.”

The addition is also within the Soap Creek Bird Conservation Area (BCA), drawing in bird watchers, and as with many quality upland woodlands in Iowa, wildlife abound in the secluded hunting area.

## River renewal

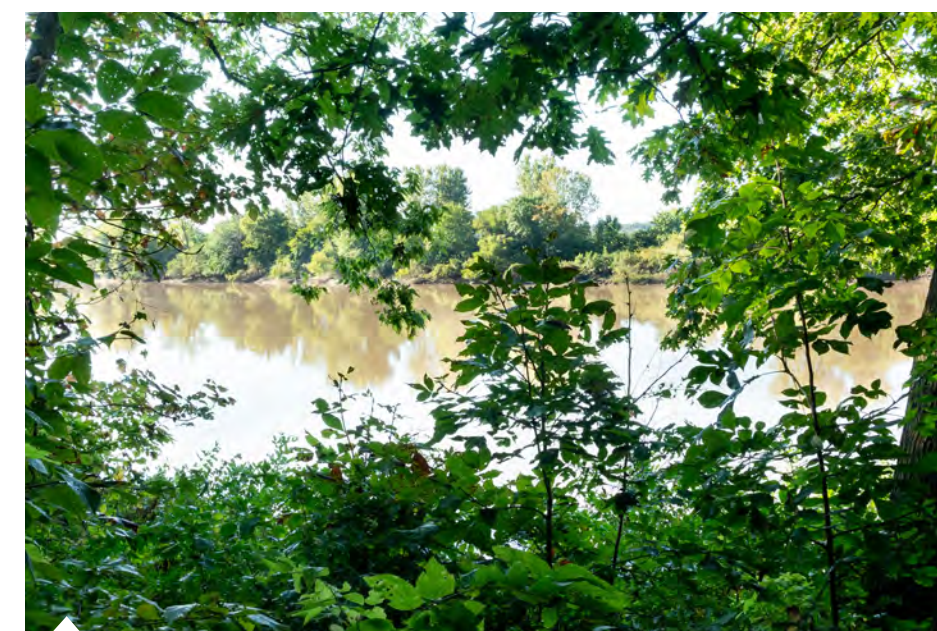
Walking through the property, a southern-facing upland bluff opens the woodland understory to showcase panoramic views of the Des Moines River valley. Even as the days grow shorter and the leaves fall, suspended in the autumn wind as they float down the bluff to the cool river below, the river is still full of life. Forever flowing, the southern part of the Des Moines River rarely completely freezes over.

Year-round access to food and fresh water make this area a prime residence for large waterfowl. Thousands of geese flock to the chilly river each year. Bald eagles reside along the tree-lined bluff.

A scenic perch overlooks the sandy shores of the Des Moines River as water rushes below, birds chirp above and leaves rustle all

around. The natural soundscape provides a symphonic escape from typical city noises.

“It’s probably as close as you can get to being in a real wilderness. You don’t hear cars or trains,” said Glaw. “You can listen to nature and see it at its finest. It’s a nice area if you want to get away and clear your head.” 🌲



There is much to discover walking through Fox Hills WMA. Moving toward the edge of the woods, the Des Moines River begins to show through the trees. Photos by Genna Clemen, INHF



**Gerry Schnepf** was INHF's first president, serving from 1979-1994. Schnepf recently retired after 20 years as executive director of Keep Iowa Beautiful.



**Mark Ackelson**, who worked with Schnepf at the Conservation Commission in the '70s, was one of INHF first staffers and served as president from 1994-2013.



**Joe McGovern** started at INHF in 1999 as land stewardship director and has served as president since 2013.

# FROM ACORN TO OAK TREE

## An oral history of INHF's beginnings

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

**A**s Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation's 40th anniversary year comes to a close, we look back on the early years of the organization through the eyes of the three people that have served as president of INHF: Gerry Schnepf, Mark Ackelson and Joe McGovern. This story was edited together from different interviews conducted over the past year.

### Beginnings

**Gerry Schnepf:** I was with what was then called the Iowa Conservation Commission (now the Iowa DNR). I can't tell you about the number of occasions we had as an agency trying to acquire property in which we were never timely enough, or

responded quickly enough or in the right manner. Also, we were government and people didn't want to deal with us.

**Mark Ackelson:** Gerry and I had been really frustrated about the lack of progress being made on conservation, recreation and wildlife issues in Iowa. It was obvious that there was a really important role for a private organization to do in concert with others, including the Conservation Commission, that which they couldn't do on their own.

**GS:** As a result of that I went to the director of the Conservation Commission at the time and I said "I've got an idea I'd like to try."

So we went in and visited with Gov. (Robert) Ray, and the governor said, "Well, who would be a good group of people to review an organization like this?" One was Bill Brenton of Brenton Banks. Another was Robert Buckmaster (president of KWWL-TV in Waterloo and INHF's first board chair). He was an avid fly fisherman and hunter. Bob and I went and visited with Anna Meredith (of the Meredith Publishing family) about this new organization. We were at her home south of Grand Avenue in Des Moines and we're sitting there talking and she says, "Do you hunt?" And Bob says, "Yeah, I hunt a lot, including turkey. And here's what a turkey sounds like." And he whips out a mouthpiece for a turkey call and starts calling turkeys. With that, and a lot of laughter, we knew we were on the right track.

Gov. Ray was provided a list of potential board members and helped to establish the initial board of directors, which had 12 members and Buckmaster as the chair. The board soon expanded to include more than 30 members from around the state. Today, the INHF board of directors has 34 members.

**GS:** The governor did something interesting at their first meeting. He had everybody around a big table and he asked, "I want each of you to tell me personally why you want to be involved."

**Joe McGovern:** I think the board is the very heart and soul of our work. That tradition was established very early on, and you see it play out today. We do have a big board, and that's where we get a lot of strength. We cover the state. Our staff and board work very well together.

**GS:** The initial slogan: "For those who follow." When Bill Fultz (partner at CMF&Z and early INHF board member) was putting together the branding and everything, I went to him with two pages of options and he looks at it and turns it over and says, "Alright, let's start over." And he came up with it almost instantly. I'll never forget that.

### Land protection

**MA:** The first project was Whitham Woods in Fairfield. It was really quite interesting. Daisy Whitham was really concerned about the future of her property and she

wanted to make it available to the public. She said, "Here's what I want to do, and I'm not so sure I trust you, but I don't have anybody else to do this." And we did.

*Whitham Woods is still owned by INHF and leased to Jefferson County Conservation Board. The former nursery is a popular spot for hiking, photography, fishing and bird watching.*

**JM:** Our role is making sure that those places are available. We want to make sure that they are there forever. We strive to make sure that when we do something, it lasts. When I look back over the last 40 years and we can talk about our first project still being there, still being available to people, that is very important to me.

**GS:** The other side of the equation, our first big project, was the Mines of Spain in Dubuque. We ended up getting a grant from the Secretary of the Interior — \$1.2 million.

**MA:** It was a really complex project. Our board knew about that. This kind of set the tone for how INHF was going to operate. We didn't know where the money was going to come from. Complicated legal

issues. And the board said, "Let's test ourselves." The board could have taken something really easy, but they wanted to tackle the difficult stuff right away. Then we got involved in two trail projects!

### Trails

**GS:** The first one was from Waterloo to Cedar Rapids — The Cedar Valley Nature Trail. We worked with three donors: Dick Young, Bob Buckmaster and Carl Bluedorn. And those three put up all the money to acquire that right-of-way. There are what I call big-big people and big-small people. These were big-big people. They just did what was right and for the right reasons.

**MA:** Now it doesn't sound like a lot of money, but in the early '80s we were talking about buying the right-of-way for \$650,000, and there were no grant programs available for it. Again, that risk, how do we do this? There was more controversy than we had estimated.

**GS:** Pioneer Hi-Bred made a \$200,000 commitment to the trail. But an adjacent landowner wanted the land. So he went to Pioneer and asked them to back off. So five of the top people from Pioneer met with Ann Fleming and four other INHF board members, and eventually, Ann says "You're blackmailing us. You want us to give up on this idea for the state just because you don't want to pay out that money and that landowner wants the land." And she said, "Well, guess what? We're sticking with it." And I about had a heart attack. That was a hard swallow — losing the support of Pioneer. But eventually they came back. Boy, Ann was strong. That's what I mean by big-big people.

**MA:** I was escorted out of town



From left to right, then-INHF President Gerry Schnepf, Daisy Whitham, Gov. Robert Ray and Lloyd Whitham are pictured in 1980 when Daisy donated Whitham Woods in Fairfield to INHF.

twice, at public meetings on two different trails, for my own safety by the sheriff. I remember being asked to appear before a board of supervisors about a proposed trail. And I went to the meeting and suddenly they set me up in the courtroom with my back to a huge audience of angry people. That's unfortunate, but it was also part of the learning process. About how to prepare and engage the public.

**GS:** There was a clear role for INHF, because at that time the legislature restricted the DNR from getting involved in trail projects.

**MA:** The question I got a lot was “Why does INHF do trails? Isn't INHF a conservation organization?” Well yeah, but part of getting people outside is having trails so they can do that. A lot of those original trails were also about habitat. Some of those trails are in parts of the state that, back then, was about the only habitat that was left was these old railroad corridors. A lot of these communities that we worked with on trails were originally tied together by the railroad. Then when the railroad was gone, relationships changed. As one of our volunteers said, “I never liked those people because the only time we saw them was on the football field on Friday night. And now I get to know them!”

**JM:** We're clearly focused on nature. But we're also focused on the relationships and the partnerships and how important it is that we all do this together. We can't do this alone. We don't want to do it alone. We want to make sure that everything is done in a way that raises all the boats. Because it will last a lot longer if we are doing this together.

**GS:** Another thing we did early

on was Buckmaster, Duane Sand (INHF's soil stewardship program consultant) and I made visits to national agriculture companies. At the time, the most popular images in farm publications to promote products was bare black soil. And it was because it was a good graphic contrast. So Duane analyzed all these major companies and their advertising. We flew all over the place to meet with these top CEOs, and we said, “We're not going to ask you for money. We want you to do one thing: Change your photos.” And, by golly, in a year's time they all changed. They all went to no-till and different kinds of operations. And that's a very subtle thing, but I think it did a lot in leading to change.

### Transitions

**MA:** I feel really honored to have been asked to be president of this organization (in 1994). I can't imagine my career being anything more satisfying than what I was able to find here and help create. But it's not all about the president, as you know, it's about the whole organization, including the board, the volunteers, the donors, the staff and the landowners and communities we worked with.

**JM:** I've always been connected to the outdoors. When the opportunity presented itself to come to INHF, it was very natural. I met with Mark Ackelson and he invited me in, there was this land stewardship position open. Quite honestly, I didn't know a lot about INHF that day, but I really liked Mark, and the idea of working for Mark was exciting. I quickly learned how important the work was, and how much they had already influenced. They influenced a lot of the places I already enjoyed, like the

Skunk River Greenbelt.

**MA:** We had a lot of volunteers, but no program to recognize them and focus the work. We also put more emphasis on our intern program and expanded it into stewardship.

**JM:** The land stewardship program at that time was a lot different than it is today. I was the only land stewardship employee. We had historically only been more interested in protecting and making lands public, and the idea of owning and managing our own land was relatively new. We had been around for a long time, but it wasn't necessarily embraced. I felt a real connection to the land stewardship program back in 1999 when I started, and was excited about being able to grow that program.

**MA:** So INHF is 40 years old and we've only had three presidents. That's pretty remarkable for any organization. That stability is one of the reasons INHF has been successful.

**JM:** Growing up with INHF — I've spent 20 years of my career here — I can't imagine being anywhere else. I think the beauty of INHF is that the mission has stayed the same. Our commitment to Iowa is steadfast. Our culture has stayed strong. We have had to be creative. The landscape around us has changed. How we do our work — we have had to stay innovative. The most important part is that we don't let up. We know there is a lot of work to do, and we're going to face challenges. Many times, there is unnatural opposition, and it doesn't make sense to us. We need to understand why. That will likely open opportunities to protect even more, and we can come to some understandings of why nature is important to everyone. 🌱

# Progress in the prairie

BY ROWAN MCMULLEN CHENG  
*Communications intern*

Removing undesirable and aggressive species, like cedars and dogwood, to make room for native prairie is hard, often thankless work. Even in a war against encroaching invasive species, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) Land Ambassador Jeff Jutting sees hope in the sometimes slow and arduous restoration process.

“It seems like an endless battle, but there are victories,” said Jutting. “It's satisfying to experience the sense of accomplishment in a solid day's work and to see the progress I've made in the prairie over these last few years.”

For the past three years, Jutting has volunteered as a land ambassador at Perkins Prairie, a 30-acre INHF-owned prairie preserve in Greene County. Land ambassadors make a one-year minimum volunteer commitment to mostly autonomous land stewardship work, supporting INHF's land stewardship team and efforts by devoting their skills, time and attention to caring for a special property. Together, they expand INHF's stewardship capacity, collectively contributing hundreds of hours on the land. Today, ten land ambassadors help steward over 900 acres across six different properties throughout Iowa.

Jutting, a retired Patient Safety Coach for Unity Point Health, first began volunteering as a land ambassador after attending several INHF volunteer events. The Heritage Valley Garlic Mustard Pull is an annual rite of spring for Jutting and his wife. After awhile, Jutting realized that as an INHF land ambassador he could set his own schedule and enjoy even more time on the prairie.

“Our land ambassadors are amazing additions to our event-based volunteer opportunities because they go above and beyond the call of duty,” said Volunteer Coordinator Melanie Schmidt. “Through their service, land ambassadors are able to learn about stewardship plans, and through its land ambassadors, INHF is able to learn more about the properties they steward. They are the eyes and ears of these properties, and we value the relationship we have developed with every single one of our land ambassadors.”



Jeff Jutting, Carroll Perkins and Karen Voge-Perkins, who donated Perkins Prairie to INHF in 2015, at Seeds & Cider at Perkins Prairie this past fall. Photo by Genna Clemen, INHF.

As far as Jeff is concerned, his efforts aren't complete without taking time to enjoy the pure peace and tranquility that wild lands and other special places have to offer. As the sun begins to sink and the colors across the horizon golden, even the most determined of land ambassadors know it's time to take a deep breath and reflect.

“It's renewal for me,” said Jutting. “There's the physical renewal because of the exercise, the actual work associated with it. Then also the mental and spiritual renewal.”

**“It's satisfying to experience the sense of accomplishment in a solid day's work and to see the progress I've made in the prairie over these last few years.”**

— JEFF JUTTING

One of Jutting's favorite places at Perkins Prairie is on top of a gentle hill that provides a full panoramic view of the property. To the left, he can see some of his past accomplishments. Cedar trees and clumps of dogwood once lined what is now lush native grasses that erupt with bright yellow coneflowers come summer. To the right, there's progress yet to be made.

“I wish I had a couple thousand acres of prairie or millions of dollars I could donate to INHF, but I don't,” said Jutting. “I do have lots of time, so I can volunteer that and give back to my community and to the state of Iowa. In many ways, time can be more valuable because it enables me to spend time here and I can help restore this prairie.” 🌱

LEAVING A LEGACY

“There is a place to find common ground between agriculture and nature,” said Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) Land Stewardship Director Ryan Schmidt. Breen Prairie Farm is one such place.

In 1989, Helen Reichart donated 140 acres three miles from Monticello to INHF and donated another two acres through a bequest in 2011. There’s a woodland and dry limestone prairie remnants that are home to a high diversity of species, but a lot of the land produces crops.

Reichart’s land was farmed by her family for over 130 years, and she wished to keep agriculture, nature and her family’s name as part of its landscape and legacy.

“I was afraid that persons interested in buying our little diversified farm would clear away all the beautiful trees and wildlife cover... It would have destroyed the charm and character of the land,” Reichart said in an article about the donation published by the Cedar Rapids Gazette in December of 1989.

INHF is pleased to have a strong and cooperative relationship with brothers Cliff and Leslie Mardorf, who have been the tenants on the land since it was first donated by Reichart. They’ve been willing to try third crop rotation and no-till practices. “We continue to learn together,” said Schmidt.

Breen Prairie Farm shares its charm with many. Volunteer Land Ambassador Dean Zimmerman spends time tending the prairie regularly. In the summer, college interns on INHF’s Statewide Land Stewardship Crew get a chance to see the intersection of conservation and crop ground while working to remove invasive and non-native plants there. In the fall, INHF volunteers hand harvest prairie seed. The farm also provides income that supports INHF’s mission, helping protect more special places across Iowa.

We are proud to honor Helen’s wishes by continually striving to preserve the character of the land that she held so dear, while exploring how best to balance its agricultural and conservation interests.

— ABBY HADE TERPSTRA,  
Donor relations director



INHF stewardship interns at Breen Prairie Farm this summer.

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

To see how including INHF in your will or trust can help make your vision for Iowa a reality, contact Abby Hade Terpstra at [aterpstra@inhf.org](mailto:aterpstra@inhf.org) or 515-288-1846, ext 15.

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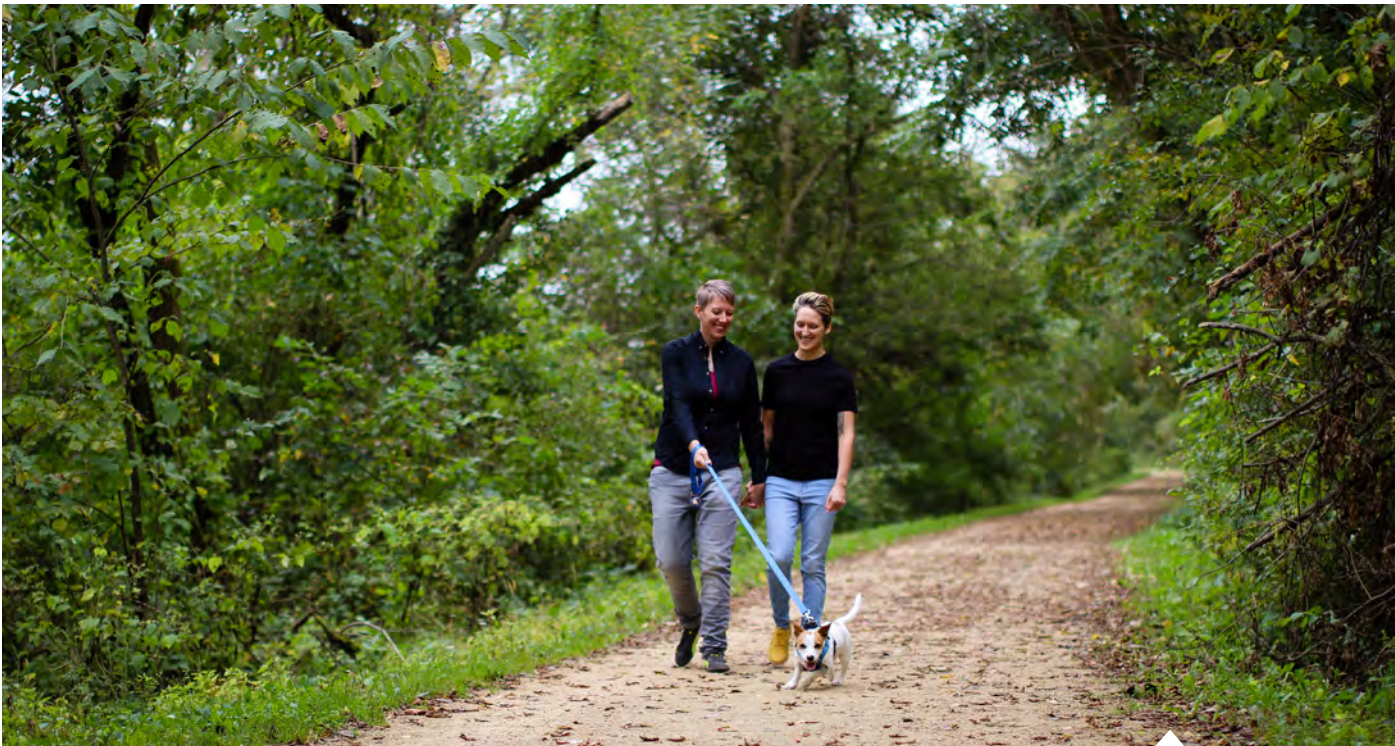
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Dick Ramsay  
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Austin Swartz  
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Find more Iowa places to explore at [www.inhf.org/blog](http://www.inhf.org/blog)

Golden Greenways

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

Put away your sandals and bring out your sweaters. It’s officially the season for cool hikes and nature’s color collage. Iowa’s multi-use trails offer a fantastic setting for soaking in the autumn display.

The Heritage Trail runs about 30 miles from Dyersville – of Field of Dreams fame – to Dubuque. With plenty of parking close to the trail, start on the western trailhead in Dyersville then head east.

The trail follows the old Chicago Great Western Railroad corridor, originally built in the 1880s to link Chicago, Minneapolis, Omaha and Kansas City. In the 1960s, the company determined the 32 bridges and trestles were no longer safe for railway traffic, and abandoned the line in the 1980s. Shortly after, INHF began working with local community leaders, partners and members to build support for

converting the old railroad corridor into a multi-use trail – one of INHF’s first – acquiring the corridor, providing technical expertise and fundraising support.

Small towns provide points of interest and water breaks along the way. The town of Graf draws in fossil hunters with its ancient limestone cliffs along the river and old railroad cuts. As you approach the town of Durango, you’ll pass near the Little Maquoketa River Mounds State Preserve, a choice spot to explore the area’s popular water trails.

Overhead, big blue skies contrast with the vibrant warm shades to create optimum autumn scenery.

To learn the best time for your trail adventures, visit the Iowa DNR’s Fall Colors page. 🍂

The Heritage Trail is used by cyclists, hikers, walkers and even snowshoers throughout the year. *Photo courtesy of Travel Dubuque.*

On average, fall foliage is in its most colorful stage during mid-October. The change happens later as you move south.





Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation

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**Prairie seed harvests** are happening all around Iowa during the fall season, as seen as INHF's Perkins Prairie Preserve in Greene County. Each year, INHF's stewardship staff, land ambassadors and volunteers harvest seed to help ensure a wide diversity and maintain local genetics. Hand harvesting ensures species that may otherwise be missed through other harvest methods — especially the early bloomers — are collected. Prairie seed is expensive and it takes a lot of time to hand collect, so having several people involved in the process is a huge boost to INHF's stewardship efforts. *Photo by Genna Clemen, INHF*

