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Heritage

Bur Oak Land Trust
Environmental Journal



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President's Column

by Carter Johnson

COMMON GROUND. Those words mean a lot to me as I write this column in November 2016. We waded through a stream of divisive rhetoric this past year. Words and images were transmitted, broadcast, printed, and tweeted at us to inform us about our choices. I trust that amid the flotsam and jetsam you found glimpses of what can be achieved collectively.

I know that you, as a contributor to Bur Oak Land Trust, have made a choice that does have a positive impact on conservation in Iowa, and for that I thank you.

Earlier in 2016, we announced a campaign of our own: the Conserve. Protect. Grow capital campaign to raise funds to purchase forty acres of Iowa woodland and support stewardship activities on all our properties. On the rainy day of that announcement, guests from the community, the press, and students from Solon's Lakeview Elementary hiked our Big Grove property under a protective forest canopy. For me, the day's success was marked by muddy footprints on the trails. Small, still developing tracks of youth and well-worn boot treads of more seasoned hikers all intermingled with the forest soil.



That day was an excellent example of the common ground that our land trust protects. The intellectual common ground—the idea that we share these places—is as important as the actual soil we left our tracks on. The idea that places should remain in their natural state is compelling to many of us. Further planning is required to achieve those goals. Many hands and minds contributed to the success of our capital campaign. That kind of collective effort is what makes our organization thrive.

Finally, there is the land itself, our literal common ground. The landscape contributes to who we are individually and collectively. For me, the wide horizons of Iowa encourage big thoughts and a sense of freedom. The woodlands I walk give me pause to consider all the interconnections of plant and animal communities. The rivers and streams that drain our state carry me and my thoughts into the unknown around the next bend.

Thank you for contributing to the ongoing stewardship of our land. I hope to see you out there in 2017.



Front cover: eastern cottontail,
photo by Diane Zumbach.
Back cover: illustration by
Mark Müller.





Executive Director's Report

by Tammy Wright

HAPPY 2017! We continue to experience exciting times at Bur Oak Land Trust. By the time you read this, our Conserve. Protect. Grow campaign has reached a successful end, allowing us to purchase the forty-acre Big Grove Addition and conserve it and our other properties. I can't thank all our supporters enough. To say that our land trust is on a roll is an understatement. I am pleased to announce that our board of directors has made a huge commitment and investment by purchasing our first work truck and making our property stewardship specialist, Seth Somerville, our first full-time employee.

Bur Oak Land Trust received more grants in 2016 than ever before, thanks to the dedication of our capital campaign intern, Maureen Marron. We are deeply grateful to the Iowa Native Plant Society, Rockwell Collins, Alliant Energy, Monarch Watch, Mid-WestOne Bank, Cargill, the Community Foundation of Johnson County, MidAmerican Energy Foundation, and Great Western Bank—all of whom invested in our future by providing funds for our capital campaign, tools, trail markers, trees, plants, and quail habitat. Due to their generosity and the dedication of our individual donors, we were able to make more of a difference on our properties in 2016 than ever.

I'm excited to see what 2017 has in store for Bur Oak Land Trust and its properties, inhabitants, and supporters. Please join us for Prairie Preview XXXIV at the Clarion Highlander on March 9 to hear Steve Hendrix, UI professor emeritus of biology, talk about the status and importance of wild bee populations in Iowa (with terrific illustrations). And note that our annual meeting will take place on Earth Day, April 22, at Terry Trueblood Recreation Area. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for making so much possible for our inspiring organization!



Property Stewardship Specialist's Report

by Seth Somerville

ON JUNE 22, when the Cubs were in the middle of a June swoon, my oldest boy, Max, and I were scheduled to make our first trip to Wrigley Field. But the night before, a huge rain-storm hit Johnson County. Creeks

were flooded, and people starting having flashbacks to 2008. Due to tornado warnings and the threat of floods in Chicago, we stayed home. As I sulked about missing the game, a problem was brewing at Turkey Creek.

Three months earlier, Sue Zaleski, John Van Rybroek, and I had placed a cedar bench in memory of Tony Zaleski next to Turkey Creek, just off the main trail. I was happy to see the bench being used by hikers, folks at Family Day, and groups from Taproot Nature Experience. A few days after June 22, I got a call from Taproot: the bench was missing.

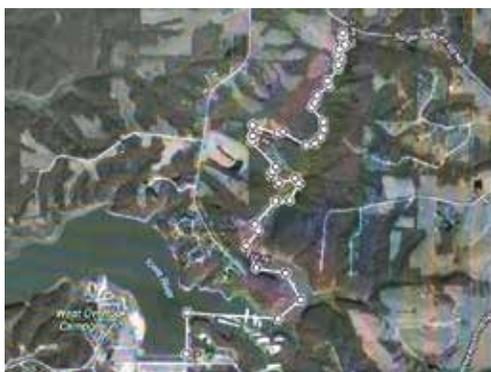
I took walks along the creek to search for it, Taproot groups looked, and John was also on the lookout. After a few months, I decided the bench was lost. Then I got an e-mail from Zac at Taproot. His group had spotted the bench floating in the Coralville Reservoir's debris catch, 2.89 miles from where it had started its journey. Thrilled at the prospect of salvaging the bench, I arrived at the spillway with a length of rope, prepared to spend a few hours trying to lasso that bench free of debris. Things continued to look up. Someone had removed the bench and set it on the shore. It was slightly damaged and more than a bit weathered, but the glue held up! With some TLC, this bench will be like new at Turkey Creek again.



It turns out that on June 22, the cedar bench set off on an unexpected journey down Turkey Creek, which had turned into a raging river churning downstream to the reservoir. The bench made it through logjams and around sharp bends in the creek, then took the scenic route past the limestone bluffs right through the Coralville Lake Marina. Our Taproot friends spotted the bench as it waited to be shredded to pieces through the spillway's outflow.

Taproot's nature explorers are our eyes on the ground, providing children with opportunities to explore the outdoors. In this instance, they brought real joy to a handful of people who intended that bench to be enjoyed at Turkey Creek for years to come. Next time you visit the preserve, sit on the bench and imagine the force of Turkey Creek roaring around a bend!

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The Legacies of Richard Feddersen by Holly Carver

WHEN RICHARD T. FEDDERSEN died last August, he left ninety-six years of lively family stories and warm memories to his wife, Ann, and their children, Nancy and Rich. He also left a significant amount of funding intended for nonprofit associations. Amazingly, Bur Oak Land Trust received \$250,000 from Dick's estate. "This was an organization-changing gift for us," says Executive Director Tammy Wright.

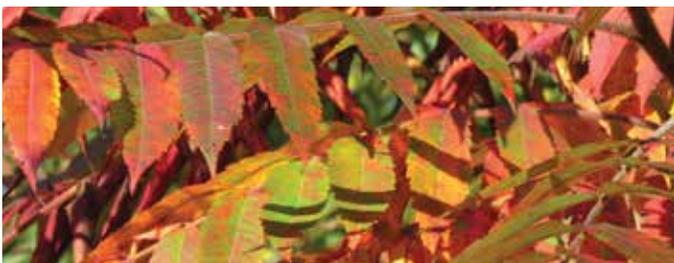
Dick and Ann had been consistent annual supporters of our land trust; they had made a generous gift during our campaign to establish a property steward position, and they had attended Family Days and Cider Moon over the years. But the size of this bequest surprised us, and we wanted to know more about Dick. To this end, Tammy and I talked with Dick's daughter, Nancy Feddersen Hyde.



As it turned out, Nancy was responsible for directing this most welcome gift to the land trust. Her father had a great love for Iowa land, her mother a great love for nature. The family spent as much time outside as possible, no matter what the season. They camped at Sugar Bottom before there was a road into the area, they lived on a houseboat on the reservoir all summer, they went waterskiing and snow skiing and hiking.

Active and intelligent, Dick was an avid hunter and fisherman, a ferocious reader of philosophy and politics, a terrific storyteller. Born in 1919 in Ottumwa, he graduated with honors from UI in 1941. After serving four years in the Pacific arena—he was among the first troops into Hiroshima after the bomb—he returned home, married an Iowa City girl, and took over his dad's car dealership.

Dick had inherited two large tracts of farmland from his parents—indeed, his great-grandfather had purchased some of this land from a Native American group upon his return from the



Civil War—that his mother leased out on a cash-rent basis. I could barely imagine how much, during his war years, he must have looked forward to seeing his Iowa land again. As Nancy tells it, he was shocked to see the condition of his family's acres. The farmer leasing these fields had done nothing to conserve the land, and four years of absence had made a noticeable difference. Dick took over the management of his family's farm and switched to custom farming, insisting that his leaseholders employ such conservation measures as no-till farming and contour plowing.

Nancy says her father often told her, "You can't talk about land in Iowa without talking about farmland. Take care of the land, and the land will take care of you." Dick took feeding the world very seriously. He recognized and accepted the responsibility of careful land stewardship and the related need for partnerships between farmers and conservationists.



As we talked, I came to see that Nancy's decision to direct part of Dick's estate to the land trust perfectly reflected her father's personality. She painted a clear picture of a foresightful and kind man with a strong sense of family, responsibility, and gratitude. He loved his land and respected it and understood the difference between the two. Bur Oak Land Trust's mission of careful conservation was his mission, too, and his personal and philosophical legacies are manifold.

Red maple, red-winged blackbird, sumac, and American robin, photos by Lain Adkins

Iowa Climate Science Statement 2016: The Multiple Benefits of Climate-Smart Agriculture

Since 2011, Iowa researchers and educators have produced annual statements describing the very real effects—including earlier, heavier rains and increased flooding and soil erosion—that Iowans are experiencing from climate change.

Last year's statement addressed agriculture. Released October 5, 2016, it was signed by 187 science faculty and researchers from 39 Iowa colleges and universities. Describing the benefits of more widespread adoption of proven soil conservation practices, this straightforward document from Iowa's top scientists and educators is a major contribution that will resonate with all Bur Oak Land Trust supporters.

IN APRIL 2015, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the new U.S.D.A. initiative, Building Blocks for Climate-Smart Agriculture. Through this program, Iowa's former governor proposed expanding voluntary, incentive-based programs and initiatives to enable farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to confront human-caused global warming.

Farmers and land managers who have implemented proven conservation practices have positioned Iowa to lead implementation of Climate-Smart Agriculture. Iowa's leadership through wider adoption of conservation practices will benefit our state, while these practices lessen human contribution to net greenhouse gas emissions. Iowa—once replete with soil carbon built by deep-rooted perennial vegetation—can reduce net greenhouse gas emissions with crop-perennial systems that pull heat-trapping carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and rebuild soil carbon. Thus Iowa—already a world leader in agricultural production and products—could now also take pride in “carbon-storage farms” that also improve soil health, wildlife and pollinator habitat, and water quality.

Carbon can be rebuilt in soils through boosting two widely accepted conservation practices prioritized by the Climate-Smart Agriculture program. First, transforming marginal croplands to perennial vegetation in land set-aside programs permanently stores carbon in soils, preventing its exposure to air and transformation to carbon dioxide, while also incorporating nitrogen that would otherwise enter waterways. Second, reducing cropland tillage prevents soil erosion, thereby reducing silt and phosphorus runoff and returning carbon and nutrients to the soil just below the surface.

Climate-Smart Agriculture aims by 2025 to reduce nationwide net emissions and enhance carbon storage in the soil by over 120 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent annually—the same effect as taking 25 million passenger vehicles off the road. By comparison, Iowa has 4.3 million registered vehicles. This achievement would match the greenhouse gas reduction of U.S. wind farms built from 2000 to 2015.

Iowa's and our nation's Climate-Smart Agriculture efforts will be one part of a worldwide initiative, strengthened by the U.N.-sponsored climate talks held in December 2015 in France. The resulting Paris Climate Agreement produced new commitment toward implementation of national plans for limiting human-caused global warming.

We, as Iowa educators, believe Iowa should play a leadership role in this vital effort, just as our state has already done for wind energy. We urge our representatives to help Iowa's innovative farmers and land managers establish a multi-faceted vision for land stewardship by vigorously implementing federal, state, and other conservation programs. Doing so could generate a more diverse landscape with acres dedicated to deep-rooted, native perennial vegetation within working lands (buffer strips, strip prairies, grazing land, and in-

tegrated crop-livestock systems among other possibilities). Such a landscape would benefit all Iowans by transforming Iowa's vast croplands into resources that simultaneously generate food, feed, fuel, a healthier climate, better soils, wildlife habitat, and cleaner waters.



Planting a portion of corn and bean fields with native prairie species can decrease soil loss and reduce runoff. Photo courtesy of Lisa Schulte-Moore, Iowa State University.

Eastside Recycling Center by Cheryl Miller

THE IOWA CITY metropolitan area is one of the fastest-growing in the nation. By 2050, population in Johnson County is projected to have increased by 57 percent. Much of the infrastructure needed to accommodate this growth is yet to be built, making sustainable urbanization a compelling field of study.

Fortunately, the region has an important resource for this study: the Eastside Recycling Center, which opened on Earth Day, 2012. The brainchild of Dave Elias, former city landfill and wastewater superintendent, Eastside is a place not only to recycle glass and newspapers, pick up bags of compost, and shop for used furniture and salvaged construction materials. It is also a place where traditional views of cities as biological deserts and generators of waste can be challenged and different approaches to conserving energy, cleaning water and air, and providing habitat for wildlife can be tested.

The grand design underlying Eastside relates to water, especially to ecologically sound approaches to managing urban stormwater. Brice Maren, grounds manager, recently showed me around the four-acre site and described the tremendous stormwater problems that had developed in this industrial corner of the city. “All the impervious surface here was making the creeks very flashy—a couple of inches of rain would raise water levels a couple of feet very quickly.” The volume and force of runoff were eroding parking lots and undercutting streambanks, dumping sediments into streams, and degrading water quality and all that depended upon it downstream.

To slow down the water, Eastside employs a variety of strategies to increase porosity, the centerpiece being a biofiltration system between the warehouses and parking lots and the creeks. Biofilters are vegetated strips, swales, and pools that use plants to slow down and absorb runoff and pollutants. Land trust members Liz Maas and Brenda Nations, who is also the city’s sustainability coordinator, were instrumental in planting the biofilters with native species that are easier to manage and more beneficial to wildlife than nonnative species.



These plantings have evolved into a stunning prairie. Brice says, “Because we don’t spray out here, we have a resilient food web. We do not run equipment of any kind over the biofilters or rain gardens, so we’re not compacting the soil, and the native plants have extensive root systems that help keep the soil healthy.” Although a formal seed-gathering or propagation program is not yet in place, Brice is receptive to Iowa Citizens interested in growing these natives in their own gardens: “You don’t have to be an expert at plants or bugs to create a healthy environment. You just have to educate yourself a bit, get outside, and learn from your experiences!”

Eastside also provides habitat for birds and animals whose populations are declining as ours are rising. According to Brice, “We have lots of worms and bugs, frogs, toads, turtles, snakes, rabbits, woodchucks, etc., all the way up to a long-tailed weasel that definitely was the keystone species that ultimately controlled the rabbit population and the plant population they fed on.” And then there’s the pollinators. In a recent article in *Heritage* about a study of wild bee populations, Steve Hendrix described bee populations at Eastside as “off the charts, twice what we found elsewhere in Iowa City.”

Brice says, “Anybody who has any interest in learning about our plants and gardens, stormwater runoff management systems, collecting eggs and rearing monarchs through our IC Monarchs program, collecting seeds or plants, or volunteering is our welcome guest.” Contact him at Brice-maren@iowa-city.org if you’d like to learn more.

How does all this relate to urbanization in our area? Recently, city engineers visited Eastside to evaluate the applicability of green infrastructure approaches at other stormwater problem areas around town. What they—and we—can learn there can help us reimagine urbanization in the Iowa City–Cedar Rapids corridor not as a growing source of waste but as a beneficial part of the larger ecosystem.

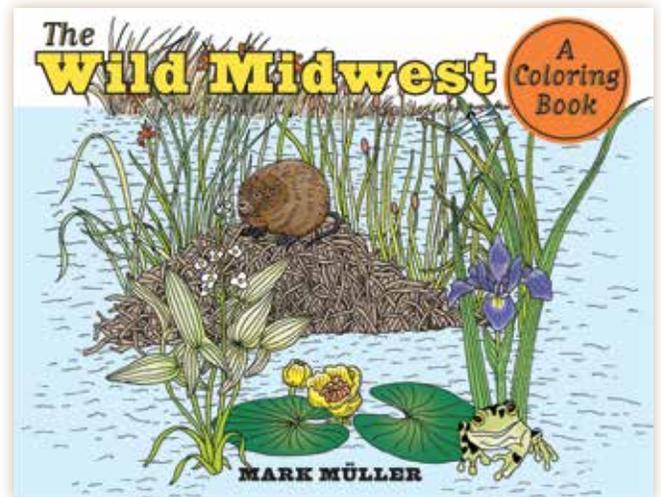


Mark Müller's Wild Midwest by Karen Copp

IN MY ROLE AS design and production manager for the University of Iowa Press, I've been lucky enough to work with Mark Müller and his distinctive art for more than twenty years. In 1994, he illustrated *A Country So Full of Game: The Story of Wildlife in Iowa* by James Dinsmore, and he returned in 1999 as illustrator and coauthor of *An Illustrated Guide to Iowa Prairie Plants* with Paul Christiansen.

Never one to follow a straight path, between 2000 and 2005 Mark created some of the first if not the first folded, laminated pocket guides to the natural world. *Prairie in Your Pocket*, *Woodland in Your Pocket*, and *Wetlands in Your Pocket* have inspired other naturalist-authors, and the press is now publishing its twenty-eighth laminated guide, *Fish in Your Pocket*.

In 2016, Mark headed in a new direction with *The Wild Midwest: A Coloring Book*, meant to inspire and relax nature lovers of all ages. For your coloring pleasure, here's the cover of his book plus the same drawing from inside the book. Tear this page out, imitate Mark's realistic colors, or create a landscape in a totally different palette. Enjoy!



Bur Oak Land Trust

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Protect, preserve, restore . . . it's all about the trust.

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