



# Heritage

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Newsletter of the Johnson County Heritage Trust

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## Changes at Hora Woods

Hora Woods is a 20-acre JCHT property just northwest of West Branch. Historically, the area where Hora Woods is located was mostly rolling prairie, with very widely-spaced red, white, and bur oaks, hickories, and thickets of hazel, elm, and prickly ash. This is according to descriptions of the area from the first survey, in 1841, when the land was acquired by David Jayne of Philadelphia. The Hora Woods property appears to have been exposed to less farming than the adjacent properties and, gradually, without fire or tilling, the open prairie was succeeded by a woodland ecosystem. It was a woodland when J. Orville and Mabel Hora acquired the property in 1949, and a woodland when it was donated to JCHT in 1986 by Mabel Hora.



Work day at Hora Woods, February 2006

Hora Woods was to be maintained by JCHT in its “natural state.” But determining its natural state depends on when you look at the land. Before European settlement, the land was subjected to frequent fires that maintained an open prairie. When the area was settled and fire was suppressed by the farming of surrounding properties, trees eventually came to dominate the property.

From 1986 until 2006 JCHT did not undertake any major management activities at Hora Woods. Thanks to funds provided by the Capital Campaign, Tom Madsen conducted a plant inventory of the property for the Trust in 2005. He documented some 154 species of vascular plants in Hora Woods; 90% of these are Iowa natives. Though trees dominate the canopy, there are abundant ferns, forbs, grasses and sedges, including a sedge, *Carex hitchcockiana*, not recorded elsewhere in Johnson County. Based on the history of the area and the diversity of plants found in the inventory, the Trust, with expert advice of Mark Vitosh (Iowa DNR District Forester), and board members Harry Graves (Director of the Johnson County Conservation Board) and Wayne Petersen (NRCS Urban Conservationist), developed an initial management plan for the property that is based on the return of fire, with the goal of returning Hora Woods to a more open woods/oak savanna.

The canopy at present is dominated by old (some more than 100 years) white, bur, red, and black oaks, shagbark hickory, black cherry, and American elm. In addition, over the last 50 years basswood, bitternut hickory, and other shade-tolerant species have become more prevalent, causing less sunlight to reach the ground. As a conse-

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## Changes at Hora Woods

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quence, oaks and hickories that need light to germinate are becoming scarce. Few young oak or shagbark hickories exist at Hora Woods. Without management, these species will eventually be lost from the property.

During the winter of 2005/2006 David Kelch and his ArborPro crew, working on the eastern quarter of Hora Woods, first removed many large trees that had been destroyed by severe storms in the past 2 or 3 years and had created a hazard. Shade-tolerant trees, including elms, basswood, bitternut hickories, and box elders, were cut and piled. Many of the brush piles were burned in late February by JCHT volunteers. This process is helping to mimic what fires would have done over the past 100 years, resulting in a much more open canopy that should allow oak and hickory regeneration. During the upcoming year, the Trust will conduct a prescribed burn in the area to stimulate the growth of additional fire-dependent plants and to help suppress nonnative invasive species. There are areas of reed canary grass, garlic mustard, multiflora rose, Canada thistle, and smooth brome that may additionally need to be chemically treated to prevent their spread throughout the property.

Please come out and see what happens when the Trust returns fire to Hora Woods!

*Gene Szymkowiak*

## Thank You, David Curry

David Curry has concluded a two-year stint as President of the Johnson County Heritage Trust's Board of Directors. As David leaves the Board he can be proud of the many exciting accomplishments he oversaw. On David's watch ...

- A successful capital campaign was undertaken to raise funds for advancement of the JCHT mission.
- An Administrator was hired – the first time JCHT has had staff!!!
- Criteria for evaluating and prioritizing tracts of land for preservation were drafted.
- Land management committees have been asked to develop more aggressive management plans for our properties and have been given more authority to implement components of these plans.
- Vegetation surveys of all five JCHT properties were conducted over the past year.
- The committee structure of the Trust has been revamped to be more effective at accomplishing objectives.
- More member-focused activities are being organized.

## Letter from the Past President: A Forward View

The mission of Johnson County Heritage Trust – preserving some of the precious natural areas of Johnson County - has not changed much during the more than twenty-five years of its existence, but our approach to reaching this mission has. Beginning with the presidency of Bob Sayre six years ago and continuing through my own two years, our organization has taken a much more conscious, thoughtful, and active approach to conserving the land for which we are currently responsible and identifying additional land worthy of preservation. Under the capable leadership of Dick Schwab and the new Board, I'm sure that this process will continue and expand.

I prefaced the president's report at our annual meeting in late April by saying that the membership and Board of JCHT have had a very busy and productive year. The long-term goals, developed in our strategic planning in late 2004, are to identify and preserve land with significant environmental value; to develop a management plan for each property; to engage and energize the community; and to generate adequate financial resources. The tasks we identified to work toward these goals last year were largely accomplished.

We have good reason to be pleased by our increased membership numbers, the expanded level of conservation activities, the generous response to our capital campaign, and the high level of energy and enthusiasm shown by our members for preserving our local natural resources. And we have just completed written criteria to guide the difficult decisions regarding additional properties for which JCHT might want to take stewardship responsibilities. I'm sure you will be hearing more about these decisions in the year to come.

I was privileged to serve on the board of Johnson County Heritage Trust for the past six years, and to work with many of you during this time. I will continue my participation in the efforts of the Trust with optimism about what we will be able to accomplish together.

*David Curry*

- And, for the first time, JCHT became the holder of conservation easements that preserve privately owned property. Conservation easements are a tool for land preservation that the Trust will utilize increasingly in the future.

David leaves the Trust poised to move ahead in helping to preserve the natural heritage of our community. We thank David for his many hours of dedicated service as member and President of the JCHT Board of Directors.

*Wayne Petersen*



## *Letter from your President*

The Johnson County Heritage Trust is actively engaged in the pursuit of our mission-- the identification, acquisition and management of land with significant environmental value. The relevance of our mission is driven by the rapid development of our county, which, if not thoughtfully done, will dramatically alter or eliminate our natural systems. This was highlighted in our recent capital campaign, which focused our attention on "A Watershed Moment".

The Land Acquisition committee is actively considering several properties. We are using our recently updated Land Evaluation Criteria to assess objectively the quality of a property as well as the feasibility of acquiring it. This is a challenging process, but also very worthwhile. We will make better and more informed decisions by using this process to guide our thinking. As before, each property recommended for acquisition will be discussed with you, our members, before a commitment is made.

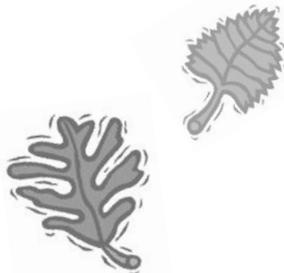
Each of our five existing properties is being actively managed through a Property Management Committee guided by a Property Management Plan. Typically our first order of business is managing invasive species (beating them back in most instances). We have several significant improvement projects under consideration that would dramatically enhance our properties and the natural systems we are striving to preserve.

You will find a list of JCHT committees in this newsletter. These committees derive their strength from the people who choose to get involved in the work of the Trust. I encourage you to select a property or committee and get engaged in the important work of our land preservation trust. You have skills and talents to contribute to our mission! Please contact Tammy Richardson or me if you would like to become more involved.

I am privileged to serve as President of the JCHT. Our success in fulfilling our mission will be the result of the work of your Board of Directors (we have an excellent Board) and your active support (both time and money). I encourage you to contact me (dschwab@avalon.net or 430-0130) with questions, comments, and encouragement.

Thank you.

*Dick Schwab*



## *Dale Shires Presented 2006 Conservation Award*

At JCHT's annual meeting on Saturday, April 29, the 2006 Conservation Award was given to Dale Shires. Dale had served as the Extension Director for Johnson County from the early 1970's to the mid 1990's. Since his retirement from the Extension Service, Dale has worked part-time for the Johnson County Soil and Water Conservation District. At the SWCD he has coordinated efforts to develop a watershed protection plan for the Clear Creek watershed. His efforts have been recently been rewarded with a significant grant that will be used to apply conservation practices to improve water quality and reduce flooding potential in Clear Creek.

Dale has also played a major role in developing the rain water audit. Based on the energy audit concept, the rain water audit provides a tool for people to assess the "hydrologic functionality" of their property. The audit helps people to calculate the amount of water their property receives and the capacity of the land to absorb rainfall. If a property is shedding runoff rather than absorbing rainfall, it is contributing to flooding and the degradation of water quality. Based on the audit, people can adopt landscaping practices to improve the capacity of their land to manage water sustainably. Dale is currently working to promote the development of software that will link economic benefits to sustainable water management.

*Wayne Petersen*

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## *Propane Prairie Update*

Progress is being made in the permanent protection of Propane Prairie. For those unfamiliar with the site, the property encompasses 3 acres, some of which is high-quality prairie, some degraded prairie and some restorable prairie. This site has been inventoried: it has 116 species of flowering plants, 95% of which are native, and represents wet, mesic and dry prairie species. This makes Propane the highest-quality prairie left unprotected in the county. The diversity found in prairie remnants is unique and cannot be reproduced in reconstructed (planted) prairies. JCHT is looking possibly to acquire Propane Prairie. Because the price will be significant-- probably be more than \$50,000-- due to the high price of building lots in the area, JCHT will be doing a special fundraiser to raise the necessary funds. Aldo Leopold wrote of saving native areas: "The key to intelligent tinkering is to, first, save all the pieces." This is one of the last pieces of prairie left in a county seven-tenths of which was once covered by prairie. It cannot be replaced.

*Casey Kohrt*



## Family Day at Turkey Creek Preserve

Gray skies and cold temperatures did not deter a small but hardy group of visitors to Turkey Creek for JCHT's first Family Day on May 13, 2006. Children, parents, and grandparents joined in a variety of activities—they helped Dick Baker and his daughter Kris conduct an IOWATER assessment of Turkey Creek, measuring nitrate, nitrite, phosphate, pH and dissolved oxygen, and identifying



*Conducting an IOWATER assessment at Family Day*



*The audience observes Zephyr, a Swainson's hawk, at Family Day*

aquatic insects, and they engaged in a "scavenger hunt" (sample questions: What is the name of the plant that looks like an umbrella? Find a beaver dam and draw it on the map! Where does the water from Turkey Creek go?). Visitors were also privileged to hear Kristene Lake of the MacBride Raptor Center talk with feeling and knowledge about birds of prey, and to meet and observe Zephyr, a Swainson's hawk, and Cypress, a barred owl. Finally, Kelsey Herringa of Solon engaged the group in lively and uproarious storytelling. Many thanks to all who volunteered their time and expertise!

*Mary Woolsey*

### Volunteers Needed for JCHT Committees!

The progress and success of JCHT is, in great measure, the result of the commitment and work of its members. Much of the work of the JCHT members is carried out through committees of the Board. These committees and their charters are presented below. Please contact either **Tammy Richardson** (info@jcht.org or 319-857-4741) or **Dick Schwab** (dschwab@avalon.net or 319-430-0130) to become active on one of these committees.

## Johnson County Heritage Trust 2006 Committees and Charters

### Land Acquisition

- Identify land in Johnson County with significant environmental value
- Identify property adjoining JCHT land and other protected areas
- Evaluate properties of interest using the land acquisition criteria
- Recommend acquisition of properties of interest to the board

### Resource Development

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive resource development plan consistent with our strategic plan
- Plan, organize and execute capital campaign activities
- Collaborate with other committees on membership and fund raising activities

### Membership and Events

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive plan of membership recruitment and events
- Ensure membership records are accurately maintained
- Increase membership in JCHT
- Plan, organize and execute JCHT events and the annual meeting

### Publicity

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive plan for publicity and communication
- Provide oversight and guidance to JCHT Administrator for our web site
- Regularly communicate JCHT mission and activities via news releases to print and electronic media
- Compile and edit JCHT newsletter twice per year

### Property Management

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive stewardship plan for each property
- Provide guidance and support to a property management committee for each property
- Coordinate stewardship activities on properties to safely and effectively utilize financial and volunteer resources

### Governance

- Provide oversight and guidance to the board on matters of governance
- Conduct an annual review of the bylaws and accreditation standards and recommend appropriate changes to the board
- Recruit new and board members
- Provide orientation and training to new and existing board members
- Periodically assess board effectiveness and recommend improvements

## *New Board Members Introduce Themselves*

**Don Bolin:** Born in Cedar Falls, medical school at U of I, lived in California for 6 years, then back to Waterloo, and retired from medicine 3 years ago. My parents lived on a wooded acreage, and we always seemed to be out roaming about the countryside, learning about nature. My Mom was a gardener and birdwatcher, and I picked up gardening from her. Currently my wife Liz and I live in three acres of woods, where I grow lots of flowers, including native wildflowers, like wild orchids. I've always been interested in habitat protection, having belonged to The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and now recently joined JCHT. I am happy to be a new member of the Board, viewing it as an opportunity to contribute my time and effort to this cause. I am humbled after my first meeting, seeing the skills that other members bring to the Board, but hope my enthusiasm and strong back will be useful.

**Casey Kohrt:** I was born and raised in Clinton, Iowa, close to the Mississippi River, which became my playground. I decided to major in forestry, and attended Iowa State University. I interned with the US Army Corps of Engineers at Lake Red Rock during the Great Flood of 1993. The year after, I went to work fulltime for the Corps on the Mississippi River out of LeClair, Iowa, where we helped manage 54,000 acres of diverse bottomland habitat from Guttenburg to Hannibal, Missouri. In 2001, I moved to Iowa City to work for the Iowa Geological Survey of the DNR doing Geographical Information Systems (GIS). I have been active in the Iowa Prairie Network for about ten years, and served two terms on the Johnson County secondary roads committee, where we drafted a native plant policy to manage roadsides with remnants in them. In my spare time I enjoy gardening with my partner at our house on Rundell Street and visiting natural areas throughout the state.

**Glen Meisner** is a Professional Engineer and Land Surveyor in the State of Iowa. Since 1989 he has been a partner in MMS Consultants, Inc., which specializes in municipal engineering and land development. Glen graduated from Iowa State University in 1972 with a BS in Civil Engineering. Kathy and Glen have three grown children and two grandchildren. Hobbies include hunting, fishing, yard work, and University of Iowa and Iowa State University athletics.

**Jane McCune:** I've lived in Iowa City since 1968. I live on a wooded lot with my husband, Bob Wachal, and three cats. My partner and I own Blank & McCune, The Real Estate Company. Being in real estate has given me an appreciation and understanding of the importance of stewardship of the land. I served on the strategic planning committee for JCHT a couple of years ago and enjoyed it, so I decided to become a Board member.

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## *Research on Bees at Turkey Creek*

This spring Steve Hendrix, Professor of Biology at the University of Iowa, began a study of bee nesting at Turkey Creek, testing for the effects of two different kinds of nest boxes, two heights of boxes, and two locations (grassland or stream edge). He explains the study as follows:

Pollinators are critical to the reproduction of many prairie forbs as well as crops and therefore provide critical ecological services. In Iowa prairies, pollinators known as solitary bees (each female nests individually) are most abundant both in number of species and in number of individuals compared to bumblebees and butterflies. Agricultural practices negatively affect the diversity of solitary bees, but recent studies have indicated that the provision of artificial nest sites for bees may enhance solitary bee diversity. At Turkey Creek we are testing the usefulness of two different types of artificial bee nests for cavity nesting bees. One artificial nest type is a block of wood with holes drilled into it in which we insert cylinders of paper which can be removed easily. The second type of artificial nest consists of 4-5" sections of bamboo that have been hollowed out and wrapped together in set of six. We are also testing whether or not placement of the two near the canopy of the grass or only 4-5" off the ground attract more bees. Lastly, we are also testing whether location of the nests in the grassland proper or close to the woodland edge affects their use by bees. We will be periodically sampling the nest blocks and bamboo throughout the summer to determine occupancy and we will bring the nests back into the lab in the fall to examine their contents in detail.

*Steve Hendrix*

We were saddened by news of the death  
of Joseph Haman of Swisher on February 4, 2006.

Mr. Haman was a lifelong outdoorsman and a JCHT member. We were touched to learn that his family directed that memorial gifts be sent to Johnson County Heritage Trust. Joe's daughter, Jolene Haman, recalled: "I often went with him when he walked on the Heritage Trust property, and his love for the land was very deep, as well as his joy for its preservation."

The family would like the funds to go toward helping to  
purchase land for preservation.

Our deep appreciation and sympathy to the Haman family.



## *Vegetation Surveys Available!*

Reports of the 2005 vegetation survey conducted by Tom Madsen on JCHT properties are now available online. They can be accessed at <ftp://ftp.igsb.uiowa.edu/pub/download/casey/jcht/> then the folder for the specific property. In these directories, you will find a Word document that is the report for each site, and an Excel spreadsheet that contains the species list for the site. You will also see another folder that contains images of the site through time.

Brochures on **garlic mustard** are available from JCHT Administrator Tammy Richardson.

### How to Reach Us

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[www.jcht.org](http://www.jcht.org)  
E-mail: [info@jcht.org](mailto:info@jcht.org)

## *Members Wanted:*

This newsletter is being sent to 750 people.  
Approximately 200 people are paid  
JCHT members.  
Please check our website and see if your  
membership is current.

If you are no longer interested in receiving  
Johnson County Heritage Trust mailings,  
please contact our Administrator, Tammy  
Richardson, at (319) 857-4741 or email  
[info@jcht.org](mailto:info@jcht.org)

## THANK YOU!

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