Focus on Stewardship

The mission of Johnson County Heritage Trust is to preserve our natural heritage through the protection and management of land and water with significant environmental value. We frequently refer to our protection and management activities using the word stewardship. Here’s a bit more about what JCHT means when we speak of our stewardship responsibilities and activities.

The Random House dictionary of the English language defines stewardship as taking charge of, administering or managing another’s property or financial affairs. Using this definition, JCHT does not so much own our properties (though in most cases that is legally true) as we are entrusted to care for these properties for others. Who are these others?

In my view, the others for whom we are stewards are you, our members, and future generations, our children and their children. For over 30 years we have focused on preserving the natural heritage of Iowa. Our natural heritage has been much disturbed to be sure. JCHT’s objective is to locate, preserve and enhance the remaining remnants of this natural heritage.

How do we do this, you might ask?

Here is an overview of our Stewardship activities.

• Our Land Acquisition and Protection committee utilizes a comprehensive inventory of all the properties in the county that are currently protected as well as those that merit protection. As opportunities arise (or as we proactively seek relationships), this committee leads the initiative to protect additional remnants of our natural heritage.

• Our Property Management committee assigns a property manager for each property, develops a property management plan, monitors all the stewardship activities and records the work in both pictures and journals.

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**OUR GOALS FOR 2010!**

*Enhance our capability and capacity in land stewardship.*
- spend more time in property management activities.
- hire a land stewardship professional.
- generate resources through a successful property stewardship campaign.

*Develop and implement a Conservation Easement policy consistent with Land Trust Alliance practices and Standards.*

*Continue to prepare for Land Trust Alliance Accreditation.*

*Continue to engage members of our community in conservation and reach a membership goal of 750 members.*

*Build and enhance our volunteer program.*

**OUR MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF 2009!**

1) Major restoration at Belgum Grove featuring prairie re-construction and water feature.
2) Invasive species removal and timber stand improvements at O’Mara-Newport Woods and Hora Woods properties.
3) Invasive species removal at Turkey Creek Preserve, Shimek Ravine and Big Grove properties.
4) Completion of JCHT’s first comprehensive easement monitoring.
6) Exceeded 500 member milestone.
7) Secured an office, making JCHT more accessible to volunteers, members and the general public.
8) Promoted Administrator to Executive Director.
9) Logged more than 3,500 volunteer hours.
10) Changed format of JCHT newsletter published bi-annually to a Conservation Journal published quarterly.

(letter from president continued)

- Our Board members, volunteers and hired professionals are on each of our properties regularly carrying out property stewardship activities including prescribed burns, timber stand improvement, invasives removal and much more.

- Our Resource Development committee leads the effort to generate the financial resources we need to be excellent stewards of our land and water. Your membership contributions are very important to us, as is your donation of time and your participation in JCHT activities. Note: our web site, www.JCHT.org, is a great resource to learn more.

I am amazed and deeply grateful for the support JCHT receives from our members and sponsors. Thank you for your generous support. As always, feel free to contact me or Tammy Richardson, our Executive Director, with your comments or suggestions.

Sincerely,
Dick Schwab
More than ten years ago, when a committee chaired by Mary Newhauser drew up the first long-range plan for the Johnson County Heritage Trust, the protection of the Iowa River and its corridor was made one of our goals. The floods of 1993 and 2008 and the continuing problems with pollution now make this all the more important. But what have we done?

The new dam, pond, and wetland at Belgum Grove is one achievement, because it will hold back water that flows into Dirty Face Creek. This affects but a fraction of the watershed, and it is downstream from Iowa City. Upstream, our ongoing prairie restoration at the Turkey Creek Preserve and preservation of Big Grove are helping protect this small part of the Iowa River watershed.

Much more needs to be done, and it is hard. The Iowa River watershed above the Coralville Dam covers over 3,000 square miles. When a Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) is built within the watershed we can’t do a thing about it. Runoff from the fields, where manure is spread ends up in the Iowa River. There are now 1,222 CAFOs in the Iowa River Watershed.

What can we do?

Senator Rob Hogg of Cedar Rapids will be introducing legislation this session to establish Watershed Management Authorities that would bring cities and counties within a watershed into a common watershed management structure. This deserves our support. People living in a watershed need more control over the activities that affect its land and water.

In the meantime, we all need to pay more attention to the River. Learn its history. Observe its daily and seasonal changes. And enjoy it.
Recently, in doing an essay, “Learning the Iowa River,” for a special issue of The Iowa Review on rivers, I discovered the wonderful collections of historic photographs of the River that are in the State Historical Society and the University Library. A small portfolio is in the Review. There are hundreds more, starting with the 1880s, from Iowa Falls nearly to the Mississippi. (To see the University collection go to http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu and search “Iowa River.”)

These pictures are a visual history of the River, and are better, in a way, than a written one. They show the early mill dams, some of which later became power dams; the evolution of bridges from the lovely bowstring bridges of the 19th Century to concrete bridges of today; the cutting of ice in the winter; the blowing up of ice jams in the spring; the islands that used to be in the River; the woods on its banks; the many floods (some bigger than 1993 and 2008); the changes in the course of the River, including major ones made in Iowa City by the WPA in the 1930s; the building of the Coralville Dam; and all the diverse recreation on and along the River that is now almost gone: picnics, excursion boats, scores of canoes and canoe races, fishing, hunting, swimming and swimming races, skating, even sailing. There are even pictures of the pontoon bridges across the River made by ROTC cadets as part of their training. Until the 1930s, both football and baseball were played alongside the River, on Iowa Field (now the Library parking lot).

Such pictures prove that the Iowa River was once a much larger part of life here in Iowa City and eastern Iowa than it is now. Pollution and fear of it, artificial lakes, swimming pools, and such have changed all that, making us much less aware of the River, less concerned about it, less respectful of it.

Last year Barbara Eckstein from the English Department arranged for three bus trips to important sites on the River so that people could learn more about it and its problems.

We need more such study. We need to learn again how to benignly use and respect and enjoy the Iowa River.
—The Johnson County Heritage Trust is in the midst of fundraising for their Property Stewardship Capital Campaign. JCHT members should be receiving a Property Stewardship Capital Campaign brochure in the mail during February. Please be generous. Letters to past members have recently been sent out reminding members that the membership year coincides with the calendar year, so membership dues are now due. Thank you very much to those who have been so prompt in responding! Our office volunteers have been very busy as a result of that mailing! Letters were mailed out also to potential organization sponsors—thank you to Neumann Monson, P. C. (Cider Moon Sponsor $1,000) and MidWestOne Bank (Autumn Sponsor $500) for your prompt replies and generous support! If any of you know of a business that may be interested in being a JCHT sponsor, please make sure to let me know.

—A meeting was held January 25 to discuss Conservation Easements and the future of JCHT in regards to conservation easements. Mark Ackelson, President of Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation was to be our speaker that evening, however, he couldn’t make it due to the weather, so that meeting has been rescheduled for Monday, February 22 at 5:00 p.m.

—Our ALUMNI event that was to be held Tuesday, February 9 was canceled due to the weather it is rescheduled for March 3. We are in the process of rescheduling that event for March. Plans are underway for Prairie Preview XXVII to be held Tuesday, March 9 at Parkview Church and the Annual Meeting to be held Friday evening, April 23 at North Ridge Pavilion. Invitations and Annual Reports will be mailed out late March or early April.

Upcoming events:
3/3/10 Alumni Event
3/9/10—Prairie Preview
4/23/10—Annual Meeting
4/24/10—Belgium Grove Earth Day Work Day 9:00 a.m.
Rain date May 1st
5/23/10—JCHT Family Day
10/9/10—“Under a Cider Moon...A Celebration of Autumn” fundraiser

and right NOW nominations are being taken for our annual conservation award, please forward your ideas to us.

An Enchanted Prairie Preview to be held March 9

IOWA CITY—Prepare to be enchanted at the Johnson County Heritage Trust’s 27th annual Prairie Preview, to be held Tuesday, March 9, 2010, at Parkview Evangelical Free Church, 15 Foster Rd., Iowa City, beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Writer and photographer Bill Witt will present “Enchantment by Prairie,” weaving together visions of our natural prairies, both past and present, through his beautiful photographs and thoughtful prose.

The Prairie Preview also includes information and displays from local environmental organizations and agencies. Doors open to the public at 6:30 p.m. for registration and to view the exhibits, with Witt’s presentation at 7:30.
The Story of Belgum Grove and the Great Christmas Tree Hunt

by Dan Black

One of the projects scheduled for Belgum Grove this winter was fish habitat construction on the newly-built 3.5 acre pond. It all started with a press release and posted flyers asking for donated Christmas Trees to be dropped off at Belgum. This resulted in the donation of ten trees to the cause, not nearly enough.

Never daunted by lack of numbers... the Great Christmas Tree Hunt continued. This time Belgum Grove property manager, Wayne Peterson, and his loyal assistant, Dan Black, headed to the Iowa City Landfill, where lo and behold, they witnessed a site that fish habitat builders could only dream of—there before their very eyes rested hundreds and hundreds of trees in a huge pile awaiting the dreaded mulch grinding machine.

With trailer in tow, Wayne and Dan proceeded with loading of the much coveted habitat. Well, as fate would have it, the trees were tangled, interwoven, frozen and ice/snow covered. The huge pile did not give up its bounty easily. After much prying and dragging and wrestling, the trees were loaded. A site to behold—the ‘Bulky’ load of at least 25 trees, weighed in at 1,756 pounds and was stacked 15 feet high, it might be best described as a Missouri logging operation gone bad!!

One can only imagine the sight of this rig winding down the back roads of Johnson County, to Belgum Grove at a maximum speed of 15 mph. Never the types to think small, Wayne and Dan returned for a second load—this time weighing in at 1,890 pounds preceded by a similar wrestling match with the trees and the slow return trip to Belgum Grove.

Several weeks later, with the help of Belgum Grove’s good friend and neighbor Roger Stutsman, the trees again were loaded and transported across Dirty Face Creek and close to their final resting place near the Pond, or “Lake Wayne”, as some have begun to call it.

The next chapter of the Great Fish Habitat Project unfolded on February 13th with the assistance of the Swisher/Shueyville, Iowa, Scout Troop #37 (see photo on the back cover). The many trees were tied in groups of six and attached to large pipe ballasts in 16 locations around the pond. As fisherman will tell you, habitat is EVERYTHING when it comes to development of a “Good Ol’ Fishing Hole”.

The last chapter of this project will unfold when the ice goes out this spring and the pipe ballasts carry the tree habitat to the bottom of Lake Wayne. Wayne says it’s about a three year plan, so bring yourself, a child, and your fishing poles, then settle in for a fine afternoon at a “Good Ol’ Fishing Hole”.

If you are not up to date with your JCHT membership please make your annual pledge now to continue to receive Heritage and the other benefits of JCHT membership. Feel free to share this publication with your friends!

Become a fan of JCHT on facebook … Johnson County Heritage Trust fulfills its mission through the generosity of its members and donors. Every gift to the Trust is respected and appreciated. Please think of JCHT for not only lifetime gifts, but also as a part of your testamentary planning. A gift to JCHT is a gift to your children and community.

Pick a membership level and renew (or become a new member).
Student Member ____ $10  Regular Member ____ $25  Family Member ____ $40
Sustaining Member ____ $50  Sponsor ____ $100  Benefactor ____ $250
Heritage Keeper ____ $500 or more