



MAY 2015

Heritage

Bur Oak Land Trust
Environmental Journal



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President's Column
by J. Elizabeth Maas

I TEACH BIOLOGY and environmental science at Kirkwood Community College. My biology classes are prerequisites, so I teach a very specific curriculum. In comparison, my environmental science class is an elective, usually taken to meet a general science requirement. What my students see as a general requirement I see as a grand opportunity to develop consumer awareness, inspire public advocacy, and instill a desire to teach someone else what they learn. When we talk about public advocacy, I remind them of the power of writing letters, attending council meetings, and of course voting. While change can be slow to happen, it is better to be an active advocate than to complain about the current situation.

Much change is happening in our communities today. For example, the City of Iowa City is deciding what to do with the Riverfront Crossings District; redevelopment of this area may include the restoration of a portion of Ralston Creek. The Iowa City Community School District is constructing a high school in North Liberty. Installing a sewer line for it has brought the topic of eminent domain into the minds of private landowners. While considered to have a temporary impact—the final grade will be returned to the preexisting grade—this project will cause the loss of trees and the fragmentation of habitat on private property. Owners of land that this sewer line will cross have strongly advocated against it.

Eminent domain has also become a reason why environmentalists and farmers have joined forces. The state of Iowa is discussing the construction of the Bakken Oil Pipeline, and former representative Ed Fallon is walking across Iowa along the proposed path of the pipeline exchanging thoughts about the project with concerned citizens.

Sometimes we don't have the energy to write a letter or attend a meeting or vote on a subject. Or we do write a letter or attend a meeting or vote—but the cause for which we advocated does not come to pass. What can we do?

We can continue to pay attention to what is happening in our communities. We can participate in organizations that protect land and all the intrinsic values we hold dear and volunteer for community projects that bring awareness to a larger audience. We can donate time and money to publicly advocate for the change we want to see. Talk to our neighbors. Work with homeowners associations to revitalize land not intended as green space. Become a DNR IOWATER volunteer. Keep writing letters, keep attending meetings, and keep voting. Change will come.



Front cover: Pin cherry, photo by Don Farrar. Back cover: Cape May warbler, photo by Jim Durbin.



Executive Director's Report by Tammy Wright

HAPPY SPRING, Bur Oak Land Trust supporters! It was wonderful to see so many of you at Prairie Preview and the annual meeting in our lovely new venues; I look forward to seeing you at Family Day and other future events.

The past few months have ushered in a new era for our property stewardship specialist position.

Jake Hart has been training his replacement, Seth Somerville, since early January. Jake built this position from the ground up, and his efforts will shape our stewardship activities for years to come. Thank you, Jake, and welcome, Seth! We also welcome Susan Spears as our administrative assistant, a new and much-appreciated position.

We extend our sympathy to Nancy Seiberling's children, Grace, Franklin, Christopher, and Angela, with grateful appreciation for the memorial contributions that have so thoughtfully been made in her honor.

As we blossom into spring, I'd like you to consider our native trees and prairie plants. As beautiful as they are, we don't see what's happening below the soil; they must have deep roots in order to sustain their above-ground splendor. I am blessed that I get to experience daily what goes on underground at root level or, in this case, in and outside of our office, so that we can all enjoy the splendor of the efforts of the many volunteers who continue to strengthen this organization.

Meet your new board members!



Josh (Creek) Hoard spent his younger days playing in Old Man's Creek, which ran through his family's farm. He recently purchased the property and, with his wife, Kaily, is eco-upgrading both land and home. This fall he begins studies at the University of Iowa in plant biology and education with the goal of becoming a biology teacher. Passionate about clean water, nutrition, history, and politics, he works for Heritage Land Stewards as a sawyer.



Kendra Lawler grew up on a dairy farm in western Iowa near the Missouri River; she now lives on a forty-acre farm in Johnson County. Kendra and her family have seeded twenty acres with prairie grasses and wildflowers, "healing the land in order to raise animals on pasture, keep habitat for other animals, and have a great, safe location for our family." She intends to bring the same dedication that has energized her toward rehabilitating her own acres to her position on the board.

Meet your new board members!



Tom Hosmanek's love of nature evolved during walks in the woods with his father while growing up in Wisconsin. Formerly a news director at KSTT Radio in Davenport, he spent over thirty years in various sales and sales management positions in the Quad-Cities area with Modern Woodmen of America. He recently completed a Certificate of Nonprofit Management at the University of Iowa and is now enrolled in the MBA program at St. Ambrose University.



Shaun Vecera comes to the board after spending many hours pulling garlic mustard and digging honeysuckle on our properties, often accompanied by sons Patrick and Colin, who are active in Boy Scouts. Shaun has planned Eagle Scout projects that have benefited the trust, and he is developing a conservation camp for the local scout council. A psychology professor at UI, this fall he is offering a seminar on sustainable practices, "How Psychology Can Save the Planet."

Property Steward's Report by Seth Somerville



I AM VERY happy to be your new property stewardship specialist. Jake Hart pioneered this position three years ago, and I will do my best to fill his shoes.

This winter we were busy doing new seeding and interseeding on a few properties. At Hora Woods we seeded a portion of the property that had been choked with reed canary grass. We were able to kill it off and seeded in a diverse mix of prairie and wetland plants that will compete with the reed canary if it returns in the future. At Pappy Dickens we seeded an area with wetland plants to compete with the reed canary and create a more diverse habitat suitable to the property.

The biggest seeding project we had was at Turkey Creek. Many of you may have noticed that we mowed and sprayed it last fall. The mowing was done late in the year so that the natives in the prairie would go dormant while the invasive plants would green back up. We had the field sprayed after bird's-foot trefoil, the invasive that is the biggest problem there, greened up, with the results being visible this spring and the natives being unharmed. We decided to interseed the area with a mix from Ion Exchange because of the lack of diversity and because some areas were very sparse. This was all made possible with a grant from Cargill that we also used to seed two acres in the southeast corner of Turkey Creek. Along with the Cargill grant, we were able to utilize the DNR's Prairie Partners Cost-Share Program to make all of this feasible. In a few years, we should see a richer and more diverse and colorful habitat here.

We had Conservation Corps Iowa again this year. We were able to fund their help through a grant from the Johnson County Community Foundation. This allowed us to get a lot of work done on five properties in a short time.

I look forward to meeting all of you this spring and summer. Jake, thank you so much for everything you have done to help me learn about the properties.

From Our Members Robert Mutel



ONE OF THE SIMPLE, enduring pleasures of living in Iowa is taking leisurely walks on warm summer evenings. The senses are replete with signs of abundant, fertile life. Fireflies dazzle the eyes, the fragrance of wild plum fills the air with sweet perfume, and crickets and owls provide a mellow soundtrack.

The resounding songs of frogs and toads also fill the air, from the high-pitched calls and creaking clicks of spring peepers and chorus frogs announcing the first warm days of spring to the mellow snoring bass of leopard frogs in midsummer. These singers are all males, engaged in the serious business of attracting mates. Frogs are an integral part of Iowa's wetland ecosystem, benefiting humans and other species by eating large quantities of insects and providing an essential food source for larger predators such as fish, snakes, and birds.

Frogs are not just congenial companions on summer nights, they are also sensitive bioindicators, harbingers of environmental change. Although many species have survived almost unchanged for more than 200 million years, their near-term future is threatened by loss of habitat, toxic chemicals, and infectious diseases. Many of the world's frog populations are in precipitous decline—more than two hundred species have disappeared since 1980.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources Frog and Toad Call Survey was established in 1991 to document population changes in Iowa. Every year dozens of volunteer citizen-scientists drive prescribed routes three times in spring and summer, identify each species by its song, and send the results to the DNR. These surveys, now conducted in twenty-three states, are collated and analyzed by the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program, part of the U.S. Geological Survey.

My wife, Connie, and I have participated in this survey since 1993. It's a fun way to explore the natural world at night, both for us and for our labrador, Sandy, although inevitably every year I forget most of the song-species identifications until Connie reminds me. And just like a birding trip, there's always the potential thrill of a new sighting (or hearing in this case), such as our lone green frog in the flood year of 1993.

Interested? Just google the Iowa Frog and Toad Call Survey or call the state coordinator, Stephanie Shepherd, 515/432-2823, extension 102, to get started. Join the growing team of citizen-scientists helping to conserve these amazing animals.

—When he is not hiking, skiing, bicycling, or kayaking, Robert Mutel is a professor in UI's Department of Physics and Astronomy.



Connie and Robert Mutel's woodland in May. Photo by Lain Adkins.
Gray treefrog. Photo by Jim Durbin.

Jennifer Jordan is Iowa City's recycling coordinator. Catherine Cocks recently talked with her about her work.

What led you to a career in recycling? During my undergrad work in biology at the University of Iowa, I took an elective in the Geography Department called contemporary environmental issues. We covered a unit about waste and recycling, and it was really compelling to me; I changed my major to geography and didn't look back. When I graduated, I worked for a local solid waste hauling and recycling company while I applied for graduate school. After I got my MA from UI's Urban and Regional Planning program, I worked at Grinnell College for a year, then at the Iowa Valley Habitat for Humanity ReStore briefly before the City of Iowa City Recycling Coordinator position was created in 2007. I've been here ever since.

In November 2014, you and your colleagues earned EPA recognition for a study of food waste in Iowa City. What inspired you to launch the study, and what did it involve? We have done quite a bit of work locally with commercial food waste reduction and composting since the project began in 2007 with a UI student-led pilot project, so the Food: Too Good to Waste pilot project seemed like the next step toward reducing residential food waste. My intern Jane Wilch led the project; we worked with fifty-two households to measure their weekly food waste weights for six weeks. They received strategies and tips to help them reduce wasted food and save money.

Can you offer two or three simple things people can do to reduce the amount of food they waste? Check out the Food: Too Good to Waste strategies on the city's website. One easy way to reduce waste and save money is to make a shopping list for the week's groceries. Then shop from your fridge, freezer, and cupboards for ingredients

you already have before you go to the store; that way you're not buying excess. Another easy way to reduce waste is to have an area in the fridge where you put stuff that needs to be eaten first, such as leftovers or other perishables.

I've heard some critics say recycling doesn't really solve the problem of the growing amount of waste Americans produce.

How do you respond to this kind of criticism? What is the role of recycling in making American society more sustainable? They're completely right: recycling is not going to save the world. Reduction and reuse have a larger impact. Take a single-serving plastic yogurt container, for instance. It's recyclable, but once you've purchased it, 98 percent of the environmental damage has already been done: the petroleum has to be extracted and refined, transported to a processing facility, processed into plastic, transported to where it's filled, then transported to the store. Each step of the way takes energy and creates pollution. Buying a larger container and portioning it out in reusable containers or even making your own yogurt would use fewer resources. Recycling is one tool, but if we can shift how we consume, we can reduce our footprint much more significantly (and probably save money in the process!).



Spotlight on Strub Prairie

STRUB PRAIRIE, a diverse native prairie remnant at 1554 Polk Avenue NE west of Solon, harbors more than a hundred native species on its 1.08 acres and the smaller conservation easement adjoining it. Affectionately known as Propane Prairie, the land once housed a propane storage business owned by Bud Strub, who made the purchase of this remnant possible in 2006.

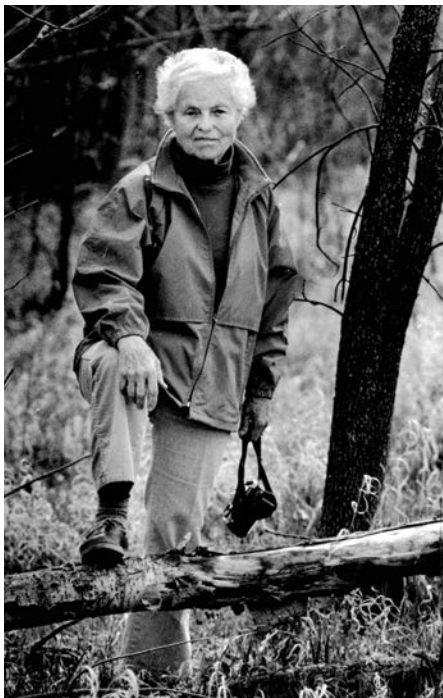
The preserve was one of the last unprotected prairie remnants in Johnson County. For property manager Casey Kohrt, controlling invasive species has been an important part of maintaining the integrity of the existing native prairie plants. Blue-eyed grass, Ohio spiderwort, and golden alexanders bloom in spring, blazing star makes a showy display in summer, and New England aster and heath aster attract migrating butterflies in fall with bottle gentian blooming late into the year.

Small but mighty, Strub has a special magic. Liz Maas loves to bring her daughters here in summer. Stretched out among the grasses and wildflowers, they close their eyes, listen to the wind and the bees, and imagine themselves 150 years back in time when Iowa was one big tallgrass prairie.



Strub Prairie in summer. Photo by Lain Adkins.

In Memoriam, Nancy Seiberling, 1917–2015



WITH WHOLEHEARTED GRATITUDE TO Nancy Seiberling, our far-sighted founder, we asked friends of the land trust to pay tribute to her activist energies. Join us and Project GREEN at the historic Ashton House, 820 Park Road, on May 28 between 5:00 and 7:00 PM as we recognize her contributions to our community and dedicate the Nancy Seiberling Peony Garden.

Upcoming Events

Visit www.buroaklandtrust.org or call 319/338-7030 for up-to-date information about these and other events.

Family Day at Turkey Creek Preserve, May 17

Bird walks sponsored by the Iowa City Bird Club, Hickory Hill Park, Conklin Lane parking lot, 6:30 AM Monday through Friday through May 22

Celebrating the Life of Nancy Seiberling, Ashton House, May 28

Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, Loess Hills Wildlife Management Area, May 29–31

Hawkeye Cooperative Weed Management Area Invasive Species Field Day, Ciha Fen, June 11

Iowa Prairie Conference, University of Northern Iowa, July 16–18

Family Day at Belgum Grove, September 13

NANCY WAS A TRUE VISIONARY. Where other people saw only problems, she saw solutions and committed herself to helping make them happen. Whether beautifying Iowa City through Project GREEN or protecting fragile ecosystems and endangered resources through the Johnson County Heritage Trust, Nancy promoted her ideas for community betterment and personally provided leadership to bring them into fruition. I felt very fortunate to be her partner in getting the land trust off the ground. I am sure seeing it grow and come to own and manage so many properties gave her great pleasure.—Bill Hines

I HAVE WONDERFUL MEMORIES OF NANCY. One spring she showed me amazing wildflowers on her steep slope down to the Iowa River. It was covered with snow trilliums and other wildflowers. She encouraged me to take a few snow trilliums (there were hundreds, as I remember) and start them at our place. I think of her every spring when our now nice-size patch blooms. She was such a key member, starting and/or supporting environmental groups and awareness in the area. And she was always warm and friendly whenever we got together. She was a treasure!—Dick Baker

WHETHER SHE WAS CHAIRING A MEETING, launching a project, or tending her floriferous garden, Nancy had the elegant manners of an impeccable lady—and the determination to match. So it's no wonder that my wife, Kate, spoke of Nancy as having taught her to think, "Why not?"—Carl Klaus

WINDOWS INTO NANCY'S SPIRIT: Her determined cutting of the raspberry canes (never mind the many thorns) from the woodland below her house. Her articulate defense of all things beautiful and wild. Her digging by hand a deep trench through her yard for an underground utility wire—at age eighty. Her positive approach to so much of life. Her vigorous protestations against the clearing and spraying of native plants from county roadsides. The constancy of her smile. These showed the passion and the vision that led her to create our land trust and that gave us all so much.—Connie Mutel

NANCY NOT ONLY LEFT A LEGACY of her garden and love for all things green by giving the progeny of her plants to family, friends, and acquaintances, she left a legacy of her style of community action. She was about doing, and she had a knack for motivating others to work with her, to share her passions, and spread them among others. Hers was a no-nonsense, high-enthusiasm, high-priority and hands-on approach. It was hardly just talk, it was ultimately (usually sooner rather than later) tangible action. She was an inspiration.—Tom Gelman



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 from President Liz Maas,
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Drawings of leopard frog, blue flag, Virginia rail, pink turtlehead, painted turtle, yellow-headed blackbird, bog lemming, spotted sandpiper, common cattail, and great blue heron by Mark Müller.

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