President’s Column
by Carter Johnson

It’s that time of year. Days are shorter and colder. Nature’s color palette shifts from vibrant greens and golds to more subtle earth tones. My favorite of all the natural hues is the deep indigo of the winter sky as the day makes its quiet retreat into night. Standing in the chill air to observe that sky change has been a thrill for me since I was a boy bringing in firewood for the night. Now that my fingers seem to get cold faster as I stand in witness, I am all the more grateful for the warmth of home.

Gratitude for more than just warm fingers is almost a compulsion for me at this time of year. Those aforementioned winter nights are long and invite equally long thoughts. Add to that the holidays we celebrate with those we love as well as the changing of the calendar for the New Year, which invites a holiday card recap of another year lived. In my capacity with Bur Oak Land Trust, I am grateful for so many things related to our mission to protect and conserve natural places. In this spirit of gratitude, I want to share some place-specific things that warm my heart as I wait for another growing season:

• The hillside prairies at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve that provide forage for the rusty patched bumble bee—a recent addition to the endangered species list that persists on land we own and manage.
• The ephemeral beauty of spring bluebells and bloodroot at Shimek Ravine.
• The positive effects of thoughtful management with prescribed fire at O’Mara-Newport Woods.
• Pileated woodpeckers’ distinctive calls under the hardwood canopy at Big Grove Preserve.
• The forest understory at Pappy Dickens Preserve made accessible by the hard work of many volunteers.
• Buzzing pollinators in the background for Music on the Prairie at Belgum Grove.
• The majestic oak and hickory trees that provide shade from the summer sun at Hora Woods.
• Late-summer blooms and head-high grasses on the small remnant that is Strub Prairie.
• The fall colors that highlight our newest property, Muddy Creek Preserve.
• I am thankful for those things and much more. Thank you for your contributions to Bur Oak Land Trust. You make all this gratitude possible.
**Executive Director’s Report**

by Tammy Wright

Happy New Year to you, happy fortieth anniversary to Bur Oak Land Trust, and thank you for another great year of mission success! I invite you to add a new resolution to your list: spread the word about Bur Oak Land Trust to your family and friends. What could be better than supporting and promoting your local land trust? You can and do make such a difference right here in your community for future generations!

We appreciate those businesses that generously partner with and promote our organization by sharing a portion of their profits. Please note these upcoming events: Benefit Sunday at Devotay on Sunday, January 21, 4:00 to 9:00 p.m., and Big Grove for Good at Big Grove Brewery on Tuesday, April 24, 5:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Other dates to mark on your calendar are Thursday, March 1, Prairie Preview XXXV (that’s right, thirty-five years!) with Mark Hirsch, author of *That Tree*; Friday, April 20, our annual meeting; Sunday, May 20, Spring Family Day; Saturday, July 7, Music on the Prairie with Banjoy and the Slow Draws; Sunday, September 16, Fall Family Day; and Saturday, October 6, the twelfth annual Under a Cider Moon . . . A Celebration of Autumn.

You can assist Bur Oak Land Trust in so many ways. Yes, writing checks is an excellent way; however, volunteering, spreading the word, connecting us with influential people and businesses, and making us aware of grant and other funding opportunities are just samples—the sky is the limit!

Bur Oak Land Trust staff, board of directors, and volunteers wish you the happiest, safest, and most productive year ahead.

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**Property Stewardship Specialist’s Report**

by Seth Somerville

I was fortunate enough to attend the Land Trust Alliance’s Rally in Denver in October, where I met people from all over the country who do the same kind of work I do. One of my biggest takeaways from a stewardship roundtable discussion concerned the impact that natural disasters can have on land trusts. While flooding and torrential rain cause erosion issues on Bur Oak Land Trust properties and conservation easements, we have faced nowhere near the level of trauma that Sonoma Land Trust stewardship staff faced.

The level of disaster experienced in Sonoma County was truly horrific. Sonoma Land Trust staff described how smoke in the distance quickly turned into confusion on the ground. Power went out and communications went down while chaos spread throughout the area. Thoughts about protecting the land became secondary as staff focused on their families’ survival. One staff member, clearly traumatized by the experience that had unfolded mere days before Rally, made an excellent point: the land would benefit greatly from the fire. But what is the land trust’s role in the community in times of need?

That led me to think about how we could allocate our land trust’s resources in the aftermath of a natural disaster. I am now creating a disaster response plan to outline ways to mobilize our truck, trailer, tools, and volunteers to help our neighbors get back on their feet. We could deliver sandbags to businesses or homes trying to stay dry during the next flood. The truck and trailer and a couple of volunteers could clear debris after straight-line winds. Bur Oak Land Trust is part of the community in good times and bad. Hopefully we can avoid a disaster, but if one hits we will do our part to make things right.

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**Bur Oak Land Trust Is Renewing Its Accreditation**

by Steve Schomberg

The Land Trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national standards for protecting natural places and working lands. Bur Oak Land Trust is pleased to announce it is applying for renewal of its 2013 accreditation. The public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant’s policies and practices. Because we use accreditation to foster excellence as a land trust, renewal is a timely way to check that we are following the best policies and practices.

The commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Bur Oak Land Trust complies with national standards that address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards, see http://www.landtrustaccreditation.org/help-and-resources/indicator-practices.

To learn more about the program and submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or e-mail your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be faxed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attention: Public Comments, 518/587-3183, or mailed to 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs NY 12866. Comments will be most useful by April 29, 2018.
The 2017 reissue of the popular *Landform Regions of Iowa* map identifies the broad patterns and features of Iowa’s remarkable topographic diversity and—on the reverse side—explains the geology behind their appearance: how they are arranged, what they are made of, and why they look the way they do. New to this updated map are shaded relief, glacial moraines, two subregions, remapped paha and linear features, revised explanations, and new contact information.

Dry ridges and peaks of the Loess Hills contrast with wetland swales, lakes, and hummocky moraines of the Des Moines Lobe. Steeply rolling hills across the southern half of Iowa contrast with more gentle slopes and open views across northwest Iowa and the Iowan Surface. Bold bluffs and damp ledges of Paleozoic-age bedrock provide scenic overlooks and cool secluded glens in northeast Iowa. And rivers in broad alluvial valleys flow along Iowa’s eastern and western borders and throughout the state’s interior.

Geological insights lead us to appreciate our surroundings, help explain the distribution of native plant and animal habitats, and invite us to think more deeply about what lies beneath our feet and more broadly about the expanse of geologic time and the workings of natural systems within our midcontinental landscape. The more accurately we understand Iowa’s terrain and what lies beneath it, the better decisions we will make about how it is used.

Such maps, in the service of Iowans and their natural resources, are the work of the Iowa Geological Survey, now a unit within the University of Iowa’s IIHR-Hydrosience and Engineering research center. Copies are available without charge from IGS offices in Trowbridge Hall and at the Oakdale campus or online as a PDF at www.iowageologicalsurvey.org. For further details, see the book *Landforms of Iowa* by Jean C. Prior.
From Our Members

IOWA CITY NATIVE Amy Elizabeth Dobrian received her MA in printmaking and MFA in printmaking and drawing from the University of Iowa. She has exhibited nationally and internationally in more than a hundred group and solo exhibitions. Versed in intaglio, lithography, and relief printmaking, she now focuses on works that combine printmaking vocabulary and technique with collage and hand drawing.

In her words: “A bird is a momentary experience. A warbler in the woods is a flick of moving color between sun-dappled leaves. A meadowlark is a voice in tall grass or a patch of yellow against a bright sky. A swirling swallow is a long gestural line. I try to capture the essence of each bird from these glimpses on long walks in woods and prairies, balancing realism and detail in my depiction with a sense of the ephemeral. The medium of monotype allows me to work spontaneously in transparent layers of color to evoke light and shadow moving through grasses and leaves. Each color is a separate ink drawing printed on top of the last. Unlike an etching or a woodcut, the plate contains no permanent image, so once printed each drawing is unrepeatable. For me, the practice of art and time spent in nature share the same purpose. Each forms a connection to a collective unconscious, to a universal experience of beauty. I want my work to be a vehicle of connection for the viewer to the magic and the necessity of wild places.”
since childhood, I've felt more peaceful, relaxed, and at one with the world when walking in the woods, feeling the wind on my face, or listening to birdsong. I have assumed that most people felt the same to some degree. But reading *The Nature Fix* added an entirely new dimension to my appreciation for nature's soothing, healing, and stimulating capabilities. Florence Williams documents the many human-nature relationships that are now being studied around the world. These studies comprise a relatively new research field based on an elementary premise: because humans evolved within natural settings, over the millennia we have incorporated ties to nature's shapes, colors, scents, and sounds into our deepest functions and beings.

Through easily understood and appealing prose, *The Nature Fix* outlines psychological and medical research that has blossomed in the last few decades. Williams takes us to Japan's forest therapy wellness trails, where researchers monitor the pulse rate, blood pressure, and salivary cortisol of meditative walkers. Then to backpacking and river trips in the southeastern United States, where neuroscientists link time spent in natural settings to sharper cognition and increased creativity. And on to research labs at the University of Michigan, where environmental psychologists measure the restorative properties of nature scapes, natural lands that allow frazzled brains to recover function and executive attention. Williams discusses Dutch studies that have shown reductions in diabetes, chronic pain, and migraines among those living close to green spaces. And Scotland's ecotherapy, which provides mental health care outdoors. And Sweden's successful use of horticulture therapy to treat severe depression.

These and other studies have documented that time spent in nature measurably improves both physiological and mental health and performance. Physiological measurements show that contact with nature reduces stress, fatigue, and anxiety; lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and facial muscle tension; and promotes healing. Numbers of immune-boosting killer T cells in our blood creep upward. Relaxing in the natural world eases us biochemically away from the fight-or-flight reflex that can be triggered by jarring city noises or digital technologies into a relaxed rest-and-digest state. Feelings of peace, well-being, and vitality increase. Nature measurably increases creativity. It helps still negative obsessions and ADHD symptoms. Simply living in areas with more natural vegetation can protect our cardiovascular and mental health. Whether we are recovering from illness or grief or simply trying to stay healthy, regular doses of nature provide what we need.

What good is this information, you might ask, when native systems and species are foundering under humanity's increased demands? I would argue that now, more than ever, we can employ this book's information as a toolkit for nature's preservation. We can argue with power for constructing greenways through cities and for pocketing the countryside with nature preserves, knowing that these natural areas will improve human health and mind-set as well as sculpt beauty. We can explain how each of us can—and must—reap nature's multiple benefits. I, for example, have pledged to engage all my senses when outside—to stroke, smell, and sometimes taste leaves when walking, not just observe them and listen to their rustles. And why not, I ask myself, wake up with a brisk early morning walk rather than my usual mug of tea?

*The Nature Fix*, with its research-based descriptions of the deep human need for nature, provides justification in abundance for Bur Oak Land Trust's existence and actions. This book multiplies the definition of who we are and what we do. Our volunteers can be praised for healing the land while simultaneously healing their bodies—and improving natural sites so that others can do the same. I highly recommend this timely book, trusting that readers will have many “aha!” moments as I did even as they enjoy the book's stories of immersion in our precious natural world.

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**Coming Alive: Action and Civil Disobedience**
by Taylor Brorby, Ice Cube Press, 2017
by Genevieve Arlie

In this manifesto of environmental witness and engagement, essayist Taylor Brorby travels from Ames, where he's studying writing at Iowa State University, to his native North Dakota to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline alongside the Standing Rock Sioux, across whose sovereign lands the proposed pipeline will cut. He has long resisted the label of activist in order to skirt its political connotations, but he takes up the mantle now that gas flares are burning his beloved Badlands.
For Brorby, this identity shift is additionally fraught because he was born into and raised on oil money. Although he no longer believes that the fossil fuel industry is an honest way to make a living, he struggles to communicate this message to his family and other members of the working class who as a group resent American environmentalism for leaving them behind with the rise of globalization. And while Brorby now fits the stereotype of a white middle-class environmentalist, in Coming Alive he relates his acutely self-aware attempt, as someone who has profited from the seizure of formerly indigenous lands, to align himself with contemporary Native Americans’ struggles and priorities by joining their fight against the Bakken.

Brorby concludes with an emotional account of his arrest near Pilot Mound, along with twenty-nine other activists who want clean water for the state of Iowa, where we already contend with toxic nitrate runoff from agriculture. Writing from the heart, he tells us how it was there that he came alive to his creative and communal purpose of defending the planet from those who would exploit it. With photos by Paul Anderson, an introduction by Bill McKibben, and an afterword by Kathleen Dean Moore.

drawdown

The solutions that are large scale and provide economic incentives, such as solar farms and onshore wind turbines, seem more achievable. The far harder challenges involve making personal changes in behavior. We humans have an amazing capacity to rationalize our behavior. Nevertheless, I think readers will relate to Drawdown in a very personal way, everyone finding the topics and solutions that speak to them and seem doable, affordable, and, let’s face it, fun. The book will inspire a sense of belonging to a global community of solution seekers.

Collectively, the solutions in Drawdown create a powerful message: the efforts to halt and reverse global warming are innovative, economically feasible, frequently bottom up, often simple, and in motion everywhere. Does it really matter whether Donald Trump withdraws the U.S. from the Paris climate agreement when the rest of the world is leaving him in the dust?
Protect, preserve, restore . . . it’s all about the trust.

Please share this copy of Heritage with your friends and family!