The generosity of people who are dedicated to conservation never fails to impress. Along with Tammy Wright and Past-President Mark Madsen, I had the pleasure of attending an award ceremony at the State Capitol recently. Tom Gross and Linda Lee received their award for the donation of a one-hundred-acre property in Washington County to Bur Oak Land Trust, and Shannon Ramsay received her award for the placement of a conservation easement on her fabulous property in Jones County. Once again, I’d like to express, on behalf of the Trust, our deepest appreciation to these folks.

Also, after several months of diligent effort, I’m delighted to announce that Bur Oak Land Trust has been notified of Land Trust Accreditation Commission re-accreditation for another five years. The process has involved delving into and reporting on literally every aspect of our operation. We are one of only two land trusts in Iowa to have achieved national accreditation. We can be justifiably proud of this achievement.

Last year, the Trust applied for and received funding for an AmeriCorps State Planning Grant. After quite a process, I am pleased to report that as of the very day I write this column, our application for a full AmeriCorps grant will be submitted. This grant will allow us to hire two full-time AmeriCorps members to work the land. We’ll also have an additional full-time member in the office to help with educational and outreach efforts. During next summer’s work season, we’ll also have part-time members to assist with our land conservation efforts. My thanks to all who worked to make this happen. It’s really a game changing event for the Trust.

Finally, we’ve reported in the past about the discovery of the endangered rusty-patched bumble bee (RPBB) on several of our properties. The Trust has received financial support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in our effort to provide additional suitable habitat for the RPBB’s.

You will soon be hearing more about the work that the Trust will be doing to protect a threatened species – the ornate box turtle – which has recently been discovered on one of our properties. The news of this discovery was covered by our local press, but also by other newspapers including the Cedar Rapids Gazette and the Des Moines Register. We have also recently heard from Iowa Public Television who wish to film a segment about the turtles for their Iowa Outdoors program.

It’s a very exciting time for us all at the Trust. Thanks to all for your continuing support, and I look forward to seeing you on the land.
Executive Director’s Report
by Tammy Wright

AS KEN SAID, WE HAVE big news since our last edition with reaccreditation, AmeriCorps, and new land protection...and Bur Oak Land Trust is deeply grateful for your support and dedication to our organization, our community, and to local conservation efforts.

I would like to recognize our long-standing partners as well as our new partners in our joint efforts to protect and conserve our natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations:

- Nancy Seiberling Circle members (those who donate $1,000 or more unrestricted annually).
- Redwing Shoes in Coralville: Mention Bur Oak Land Trust to save 10% on qualifying purchase, and we receive $5.
- Hills Bank and Company: Youth completes an Explorer Passport and $5 goes into their youth bank account and a $5 match goes to Bur Oak Land Trust.
- Christian’s Carpets and Fine Flooring: Mention Bur Oak Land Trust and 4% of receipt will be donated to us.

We welcome our newest partners: New Pioneer Co-op, MediRevv, Iowa City Landscaping, and many others. All of these partnerships, whether through event sponsorship or share the profit, make things happen for Bur Oak Land Trust. Most importantly, these partnerships help us spread the word about who we are, what we do, and why what we do is so critical.

Thank you to those who contribute in any way – from monetary donations to volunteering to including Bur Oak Land Trust in estate planning. Your support furthers our conservation mission, and we look forward to a great summer together!

Facing page: Bee fly on milkweed, photo by Kate Sulentic. Tom Gross and Linda Lee with Governor et. al. at Gift to Iowa’s Future, photo by Kati Bainter at Iowa DNR. Front cover: Ornate box turtle, photo by Jason Taylor. Back cover: Widow skimmer, photo by Carl Kurtz. Above: Shannon Ramsay with Governor et. al. at Gift to Iowa’s Future, photo by Kati Bainter at Iowa DNR.

Property Steward’s Report
by Jason Taylor

IT IS FAIRLY EASY to become overwhelmed with major environmental issues like climate change, water quality, and invasive species. The problems are so complex, and the scale at which they are happening is massive compared to the general nuisances we deal with on a daily basis. As individuals, we feel best equipped to tackle small tasks and are motivated by the satisfaction and relief when the work is done.

Unfortunately no quick fixes that to the most important issues of the day, so the incentive of completion is less valid. A shift in mindset is necessary, away from instant gratification and towards one of communal good. I often describe the land restoration work we do as "generational"; the fragmentation and degradation of the landscape didn’t happen overnight, so we can’t think that the solution to those problems will either. I’m aware that my effort to improve a fraction of a percentage of native land in Iowa is limited, both by the number of years I devote to it, as well as by the amount of work I’m able to do. The work will never truly be done, so instead of completion, I’m motivated by contribution. My work is added to that done by the massive community of like-minded individuals, such as yourself, all for the greater good.

This theory of practice is applicable to most environmental issues. Turning off lights, driving fewer miles, eating less meat, and wearing natural fiber clothing are all simple individual contributions that help. However, a great example of communal effort is planting native species in your yard. The reality is that you won’t be replicating the incredibly complex ecosystem formed over thousands of years in true native prairie, but your micro-prairie planting is still a great oasis for pollinators. Multiply one backyard prairie by the dozens or hundreds possible in a neighborhood, and suddenly you have an urban habitat capable of sustaining a wide variety of native bees and butterflies.

Some of the best ways to help are actually inactions rather than actions. A USDA Forest Service study showed that lawns mown once every two weeks had a greater diversity of bee species than lawns mown every week. Likewise, a reduction or elimination of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers on your lawn will not only save you money and time, but also improves the overall health of your lawn. Perhaps my favorite inaction is not raking all of the leaves off my yard every fall. A layer of leaves provides a suitable location for a variety of insect eggs to overwinter, and over time they simply decompose into a natural fertilizer.

The daily decisions and actions you make and the resulting impacts may seem small, but remember that you are part of a worldwide community of like-minded individuals. Or, as Mother Teresa once said, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.”
SIGNIFICANT BEAUTY. Wildlife habitat. Riparian lands. Wetlands and forests. Worthy of preserving and conserving. These are some of the descriptions for Shannon Ramsay’s 45-acre property in Jones County, which she purchased in 1995. Locally known as Slide Rock (named after a large piece of bluff that fell into the Wapsipinicon River in 1917), the property has numerous special eco-systems and a rich history as a former camp site for Native Americans and early settlers. Sheer bluffs and expansive views overlooking the Wapsipinicon encourage visitors to connect with nature. Upland and bottomland forest, goat prairie, and sand prairie are home to more than 45 different native plant species including nodding trillium, rue anemone, and a multitude of ferns. More than 100 species of birds either nest or migrate through this property, including pileated woodpecker, green night heron, and merlin. Not only is there a high diversity of bird and plant species, but also a meandering creek and adjacent wetland runs into the Wapsipinicon. In the spring, these wetlands are a stopover site for warblers, thrushes, tanagers, and other woodland birds. Impressive 60 ft. limestone cliffs overlook the river, which also has a wing dam in the river registered and dated between 2,000 to 4,000 years old.

Shannon says, “Even before this special property was protected with a conservation easement, I have enjoyed sharing the place with Bur Oak Land Trust, Iowa Woodland Owners Association, State Archaeology, Trees Forever groups, Jones County Conservation Board, and Prairiewoods for field days. I’ve encouraged Native Americans to use the property as a site for ceremonies and gatherings, and they always recognize the ancestors who lived here before.” Shannon works hard to maintain the special nature of the property by managing for wild flowers, wildlife, and removing invasive species. She allows a few individuals to hunt deer and turkey, and encourages friends and family to take walks and enjoy Slide Rock. Fourteen acres of the property are in high quality pollinator habitat and enrolled with NRCS as set-aside acres. In 2018, Shannon Ramsay signed a conservation easement for the entire property to be permanently held by Bur Oak Land Trust.

Shannon has been an avid conservationist, committed to protecting and restoring natural areas and, in 1989, founded Trees Forever as a volunteer. She continues to lead Trees Forever with passion and dedication. Recognized both nationally and locally for her leadership and accomplishments, Shannon was the 2017 recipient of the Nonprofit Leader of the Year award from the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation and was selected as a Women of Influence Award by the Corridor Business Journal. She serves on numerous boards and task forces, including the national Forestry Research Advisory Council, and is a member of the Cedar Rapids Downtown Rotary.

As stated in the conservation easement deed: “...the purpose of this Conservation easement is to assure that the Easement Area will be preserved forever in its natural, scenic, open space and undeveloped condition, and to prevent any use of the Easement Area which would significantly impair or interfere with its conservation values.” With this conservation easement – held by Bur Oak Land Trust – this land will be protected in perpetuity.

Susan Spears is the administrative assistant at Bur Oak Land Trust. When not working on local conservation projects, she enjoys gardening, playing the ukulele, and singing in the Iowa City Family Folk Machine choir.

**Belgium Grove Stream Restoration Project Has Multiple Benefits** by Wayne Petersen

IF YOU VISIT BELGUM GROVE and see large equipment moving lots of soil, rest assured that it is part of a plan to provide multiple benefits to the property. Belgium Grove’s Dirty Face Creek will serve as a stream mitigation site because local development is impacting another stream in Johnson County and the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) has developed rules that protect streams and require mitigation if streams are impacted.

Stabilization plans have been developed for the lower portion of creek bed and banks. Two riffle-pool structures are proposed to ensure the bed of the stream does not down cut, ensuring less erosion of the stream bank. In addition, vertical banks will be sloped back so they can be vegetated and rip-rap (large stones) will be placed at the toe of the slopes, providing additional stream bank stabilization. Most importantly, the stream will be reconnected to its flood plain.

Like most prairie streams, Dirty Face Creek has down cut over time, creating a U-shaped channel with high vertical stream banks, and it is “disconnected” from its flood plain. When high flows occur, water can’t spread out on a flood plain as it would in a stable natural channel. Lowering the flood plain and providing overflow channels will allow rising water to spread out and increase the carrying capacity of the stream, slowing down the velocity of flows and reducing stream bank erosion potentials—reducing the delivery of sediment to Old Man’s Creek and the Iowa River.

It will also protect the high-quality prairie and only disturb areas where the prairie planting has been degraded by invasive species. An estimated 15,000 cubic yards of soil will be excavated. Large scrapers will take the material to a neighboring property, owned by Roger and Sally Stutsman, to fill in low areas and stabilize grades. The cost to Bur Oak Land Trust? Nothing. The project developer will cover the estimated $300,000 to $350,000 cost.

Wayne is retired from a 41-year career in the field of soil and water conservation. He enjoys fishing and traveling and working with Dan Black to help take care of the Belgium Grove property as volunteer property stewards. Photo by Jason Taylor.

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**The View from Down Here** by Casey Kohrt

FOR THOSE WHO DON’T KNOW ME, here’s my story: I’ve been here 60-some years, and although I haven’t moved, I’ve seen a lot. Back in 1951, I rolled off the line as a white-topped baby-blue Studebaker in South Bend Indiana. I looked good with my fins and white-walled, tires and I had a couple owners before I got snatched up by the Dickens Clan. Crazy Eddie would borrow me and burn the rubber off my tires, raising hell. He did love to go up to the family farm – visiting the ponies, sheep, chickens, and goats. They were housed by the old Ice House that used to store cut ice, behind the dam that at one time carried a railroad. The dam failed at some point, and a bunch of the Goosetown Bohemians rushed to rescue, then smoke, all the stranded carp. Then one day, it finally happened.

Crazy Eddie was driving up and down the small hills, called the Devil’s ribcage, which is a common landform in the Southern Iowa Driftplain (check it out on those fancy LiDAR maps). He bottomed out, and I was stuck, axle deep. He then burned up my engine trying to get out. He got out and I thought, “Well, they will tow me out.” Well, days turned to weeks, to months. Then winter. Hmmm.

After a few years, I accepted my fate, adopting the ways of a hermit, and just observed. The late 1960’s seemed to mark the end of the small feedlot and farms in a lot of Iowa, and land was passed over to people not interested in farming it. Shrubs like gooseberry and multiflora rose thrive since the farm animals avoided them. In time, trees, like walnut and red and black oak started popping up through the brush. I could see one large grandma walnut tree over the draw and a huge white oak in the distance. Soon there was almost a full canopy over my once open area, and spring ephemerals returned. I saw squirrels plant white oak nuts on the ridges one year and deer moving back into the area to browse the oaks in the winter. I heard people say the deer hadn’t been around in quite some time.

Eventually the trees were able to get out of the reach of the deer and wild turkeys reappeared. In the early aughts, I noticed a small shrub called honeysuckle start to appear. The birds seemed to love it, but their leaves came out much earlier than the trees or spring ephemerals and stayed on much later. Suddenly the ephemerals had no sun, with a full understory of honeysuckle, and the spring ephemerals disappeared.

About that time, some nice folks started coming out and yakking about how nice it was next to a much larger park. Before I knew it, we had people out here digging and cutting out the honeysuckle. Savanna indicator plants popped up, like the horse gentian. People seeded in the little opening next to me, and it was such a joy to see new prairie plants poke up after a prescribed fire. I also started seeing visitors from the park look through the new fence opening and hear, “Oh, there’s the old car, I know where I am now.” It seems i’m making some new friends. Next time you’re out, stop by and say “Hi” while you’re enjoying the changes on the land.

Casey Kohrt helps manage the Dickens Property, as well as neighboring Hickory Hill Park. He lives in Iowa City, on Ralston Creek (know your watershed address), with his partner and their furry friend Scooter, who goes absolutely hyper when he finds out we’re going to the park.

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**Belgium Grove Stream Restoration Project Has Multiple Benefits** by Wayne Petersen

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Local Conservation Efforts Crucial to a Safe, Local Food System  by Blair Frank

PROTECTING WILD AREAS results in a cleaner, safer community for you, me, our children, and their children. Since native prairie and woodland do not contribute to toxic run-off, they help us develop a safe, local, urban food system. My vision of an urban food system – not limited to conventional gardens – is a food space that has positive educational, economic, transportation, ecological, and healthcare outcomes. The entire community benefits from food that is unsprayed, nontoxic, and organic, from clean water, fertile soil, and fresh air.

With this in mind, and as 2018 transitioned to 2019, I pondered how I might donate $8500 to celebrate my 9-year experiment in truth and botanical sanctuary, Gaia’s Peace Garden. This number constitutes 10% of the cost to transition the garden to new stewards/owners, and I gave multiple gifts of $1000 to help promote a healthy food system in Johnson County – accessible to everyone – including Iowa City and Coralville pantries and several other groups who are working to create this safe food system.

This led me to Bur Oak Land Trust, which I highly value for its role in protecting the natural wild areas in Iowa City and beyond. As a local nonprofit land trust founded more than 40 years ago, Bur Oak Land Trust accepts donations of land from property owners who want their natural areas to be in the public trust, available for present and future generations. I think it’s important to reiterate their mission: to protect and conserve natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations.

A safe local food system depends on the existence of a healthy local ecosystem, so I view Bur Oak Land Trust’s mission as vital to our wellbeing and wholeness. Like a canary in a coal mine, the wild areas across this country – urban and rural – are crucial indicators as to whether this planet, this city, and our children and grandchildren are going to survive and even thrive. Blair is a retired pastor and nurse and in his free time loves to garden.

Above: Blair presenting check to Bur Oak Land Trust administrative assistant Susan Spears.

Gifts In Lieu of Flowers

AS WE TAKE TIME to remember this Memorial Day . . .

Making a tribute or memorial donation to Bur Oak Land Trust in honor of a loved one is a lasting way to celebrate how much a person’s life means to the donor. Donating in lieu of flowers celebrates a loved one’s life by supporting the outreach of Bur Oak Land Trust’s mission and values.

Please consider making a tribute or memorial gift today!

6th Annual Music on the Prairie

PLEASE JOIN US at Belgum Grove on Saturday, July 6, for our annual benefit concert, featuring Home Brewed followed by Rochester Ramblers. Gates open at 4:00 for guided tours and hayrides; music starts at 5:30. Bring a lawn chair and a picnic or purchase Italian from Baroncini’s Ristorante. See you on the prairie July 6! 3261 500th St. SW Iowa City

Family Day at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve

CONNECT WITH NATURE at Turkey Creek on Sunday, May 19, from 1:00—3:00! Enjoy outdoor activities for kids of all ages. Outdoor environmental educators will be on hand. Refreshments provided. 2545 Sugar Bottom Rd., Solon

13th Annual “Under a Cider Moon...a Celebration of Autumn”

SUPPORT LOCAL CONSERVATION EFFORTS! Live and silent auction items, hors d’oeuvres, local wine and beer at The Celebration Barn, October 27. Doors open at 3:00. Sponsorship and table sponsorship available.
Bur Oak Land Trust Donors, 2018

WE ARE IMMENSELY GRATEFUL to the following individuals and organizations who gave to Bur Oak Land Trust in 2018. Due to your generosity, we can continue to protect endangered and threatened species like the rusty patched bumble bee and the ornate box turtle.

$10,000–$25,000
Barbara Beaumont and Kurt Hamann
Elisabeth Swain and Jeff Klahn
Thomas and Meredith Quinn
Steven and Janie Schomberg

$2,500–$9,999
Alliant Energy Foundation
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Thomas Hosmanek
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Nancy Lynch
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Earth Care Working Group
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Margery Hoppin
Tara Martin
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Kathleen Molzen
Kristin Summerwill

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Jason Taylor

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Tim Grady
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Kenneth Lacina
Willard Lee
Robert F. Ray
Robert Sayre

MANY THANKS to all of you on behalf of the birds, bees, flowers, and trees—who can’t thank you themselves!

Iris shreves, marsh marigold, indigo bunting, fringed gentian, Asclepia, Hepatica, Jacob’s ladder by Mark Müller
Protect, preserve, restore . . . it’s all about the trust.

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