

JANUARY 2020

# Heritage

Bur Oak Land Trust  
Environmental Journal





BUR OAK LAND TRUST protects and conserves natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ken Lowder President  
Chris Jensen, Vice-President  
Steve Schomberg, Secretary  
Neil Joss, Treasurer  
Lain Adkins  
Mary Sue Bowers  
David Bright  
Jerry Denehy  
Ben Dillon  
Sarah Else  
Don Hodson  
Kate Jamison  
Shaun Vecera  
Larry Weber  
Seth Zimmermann



To make a contribution, sign up for volunteer opportunities, or find out more about us, contact:

### BUR OAK LAND TRUST

5 Sturgis Corner Drive, Suite 1250,  
Iowa City, IA 52246

P.O. Box 2523, Iowa City, IA 52244-2523

Phone: 319-338-7030

E-mail: [info@buroaklandtrust.org](mailto:info@buroaklandtrust.org)

Website: [www.buroaklandtrust.org](http://www.buroaklandtrust.org)

Like us on Facebook and

follow us on Twitter @BurOakLT



## President's Column

by Ken Lowder

IT HAS BEEN MY GREAT HONOR and pleasure to serve as president of Bur Oak Land Trust. My term will come to an end this coming spring. I owe a great debt of gratitude to so many for their steadfast support – both to me personally and to the Trust. Thank you to each one of you.

The changes at the Trust over the last two years have been monumental, but none as great as was the hiring of our AmeriCorps team. Speaking as one of the volunteer property stewards, I have at times felt deep frustration that management of our natural areas was becoming overwhelming. We just didn't have the manpower to take care of them to my satisfaction. Our AmeriCorps team, led by Land Steward Carter Johnson, has already charged into chainsaw training, prescribed fire training, and wild land first aid. The team members have been hard at work at Belgum Grove, Muddy Creek Preserve, Turkey Creek Nature Preserve, and Big Grove Preserve. Next spring will see the team grow to ten members – all of whom will be working the land. It's a game changer for the Trust, and planning is underway for the second year AmeriCorps team.

The benefits that accrue from the AmeriCorps project, while enormous, have come with significant financial challenges. Our operating budget has increased dramatically. In order to come to grips with this challenge, Tammy Wright has shifted her responsibility to the

new role of development director. She will lead the effort to keep the Trust on sound financial footing. I urge each of you to help us meet this challenge.

I strongly believe that the best days for Bur Oak Land Trust lie ahead. Executive Director Jason Taylor will be leading the way, together with a strong support staff. I look forward to watching Bur Oak Land Trust expand and grow in its effort to protect and conserve natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations.



- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship





## Executive Director's Report

by Jason Taylor

FEW PROCESSES EXCITE and invigorate as much as team building, and as you will see throughout this issue of *Heritage*, team building has been the focus for the last four months. In early

September, our inaugural cohort of AmeriCorps members started their year of service, proving very quickly that the effort the Trust had committed over the last two years to start the program was well worth it. The sheer volume of work that the team has collectively completed in just sixteen weeks is unprecedented, bringing a new level of excitement to the Trust.

Beyond the actual work, the collaborative nature of the AmeriCorps program is invaluable. Trees Forever is a host site for Hannah Wadke, tightening the connection between our two programs. As part of her role, our conservation education specialist, Lidija Stojanovic, is connecting with numerous organizations in the area, providing speaking opportunities as well as educational activities for youth. We have also been able to extend our natural resource services to other organizations, as Hannah Davey speaks to in her article, and have expanded our ability to host volunteer events and tours of the Trust properties.

As much value as the team is providing to our organization, our goal is to make sure that we are in turn providing a constructive learning opportunity for our AmeriCorps members. Through a generous donation to the Trust, we have been able to organize a number of trainings and certifications that will help propel the members' future careers in conservation. Carter and I were able to put together a "wish-list" of hands-on opportunities that help create a safer and more knowledgeable team, and nicely supplements the academic capabilities the individuals brought with them.

To support the team, we also brought on a new program director, Meredith Roemerman, who has already contributed to the recruitment of the second group of AmeriCorps members. She replaces Brooke Flattery, who was instrumental in the development and management of the first-year grant. Meredith was an AmeriCorps member with the American Red Cross for two years and, most recently, was a reporter with the *Muscatine Journal*.

As we start the new year, I would like to again thank all of you. Your continued financial support has provided us with the capability to bring on this new and exciting opportunity, and we hope to share the benefits with you throughout the year. We look forward to seeing you at the various Bur Oak Land Trust events in 2020, as well as out on the properties.

*Lesser ladies' tresses, photo by Jason Taylor. Facing page: Fungi in winter, photo by Melissa Serenda. Ken Lowder working at Big Grove Preserve, photo by Mary Lowder. Front cover: Prescribed fire at Belgum Grove, photo by Jason Taylor. Back cover: Dirty Face Creek, photo by Bob Rude.*



## Property Steward's Report

by Carter Johnson

DESPITE THE ICE AND SNOW of the Iowa winter, life carries on. Hardy songbirds forage woodlands and feeders. Reptiles and amphibians idle their biological engines and wait for the warmth

of spring. Small mammals tunnel and seek the seeds dispersed after another summer show of blooms on the prairie. Some of those seeds escape detection and find a fertile soil bed in which they will germinate and grow. Yes, even though it is subtle in these wintry months, we know natural processes persist. One might even say it is life changing.

This past fall I have had the privilege to work with our AmeriCorps stewardship members on a daily basis. For a good portion of that time, Claire, Hannah, Kate, and Sarah have been acquiring training and building skills that will benefit Bur Oak Land Trust during the remainder of their service term. I hope that benefit persists for each of them as they move forward in their lives and careers. They are acquiring and applying best stewardship practices in the larger context of a team and the wider scope of Iowa's ecosystems.

The stewardship team has applied those practices on many of Bur Oak Land Trust's properties in the late summer and fall. We have covered a lot of ground and had the opportunity to observe the properties from multiple points of view. As a result, the AmeriCorps members have identified previously undiscovered populations of *Spiranthes ovalis* on three Bur Oak Land Trust properties. Commonly known as lesser, oval, or October ladies' tresses, this diminutive orchid species is listed as threatened in Iowa, a fantastic find thanks to the sharp eyes of our team. Its presence reflects past stewardship work, and will influence our management plans and activities for these sites going forward.

The trees are bare and the prairie is going to grey and brown as I write this report. Stewardship work goes on, but the shorter days allow for a bit more reflection on the year past. I realize that training and skill accrual are incremental and subtle, much like a small spikelet of white flowers. It may not seem like much at the time, but I hope we all appreciate that little things can still be life changing.





## Leveraging the Power of AmeriCorps by Brooke Flattery

AMERICORPS IS A NETWORK of national service programs that leverage the power of its members to address some of our country's most pressing needs. About 75,000 AmeriCorps members all across the country tackle different community needs in different ways. These members dedicate their time and skills to strengthening communities by serving anywhere from three months to a year.

Bur Oak Land Trust's AmeriCorps program was established in 2019 to address the issues of habitat loss and fragmentation, the spread of invasive species, and the lack of exposure to nature by people of all ages. This program is federally funded and is facilitated by Volunteer Iowa. Our members vastly expand our

organization's abilities in terms of what we are able to do on our properties and how we are able to engage more people. Their hard work and dedication helps us further our mission of protecting and conserving natural areas to enrich and engage current and future generations on a much larger scale. By conserving the native prairies and woodlands of Eastern Iowa, we improve the economic, environmental, educational, and recreational opportunities in communities throughout our region and help to instill a conservation ethic in the people and places we serve.

*Brooke Flattery served as the previous grant writer/program director for Bur Oak Land Trust and is currently the associate planner for the City of Fort Dodge.*



*Growing Futures youth group with Hannah Wadke, Patty Reisinger, and Aaron Brewer, photo by Aaron Brewer.*

## Growing Futures with Trees Forever

by Hannah Wadke

EDUCATION. EMPOWERMENT. EMPLOYMENT. These are key values that Trees Forever's new Growing Futures program uses while youth work to plant trees in the community. My goal has been to work in an AmeriCorps program outside of Michigan, my home state, and I'm Bur Oak Land Trust's first AmeriCorps member to work for a host site at Trees Forever. This program gives teenagers their first job while also exposing them to environmental education and enrichment activities. Working with Cedar Rapids Growing Futures has given me many new opportunities and taught me a lot about myself. I enjoyed planning Saturday events with my supervisor, talking with nurseries, and corresponding with the city arborist to get the correct trees in the right spots across Cedar Rapids. I am truly enjoying all the behind the scenes work needed for a successful planting. Through many long hours, I am gaining more confidence in my abilities and am becoming a better leader. Even though we have often had rain and experienced dropping temperatures, my Growing Futures teammates don't complain,

and they have impressed me with their work ethic—despite how tired or cold they may be.

This fall we partnered with many groups to get trees into the ground, including helping Boy Scouts plant 175 fruit tree seedlings. With the help of a diverse group of volunteers, we also planted 199 hardwood trees in the right-of-way along several neighborhoods. In addition to planting, we watered trees and scheduled enrichment activities for Growing Futures. Participants were particularly engaged in learning budgeting skills at a financial literacy course and exploring Wickiup Hill Learning Center. They were also impressed and excited by the professional tree climbers who demonstrated their craft for us right next to our headquarters. I'm enjoying the opportunities of #GettingThingsDone as an AmeriCorps member of Trees Forever and I am looking forward to the spring 2020 session of Growing Futures!

*Hannah Wadke is a full-time AmeriCorps member serving at Trees Forever as program assistant. She comes from Michigan, where she earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Grand Valley State University.*

## Strengthening the Community through Conservation Education by Lidija Stojanovic



imagining the future that could be built by getting the youngest generations connected to nature in a meaningful way.

The reality of being a public-school educator or youth program leader is that often there is little wiggle room in strict curriculum or little to no resources for providing hands-on environmental education experiences for their kids. With the support and guidance of Bur Oak Land Trust staff, and under the financial backing of AmeriCorps, I am in a unique position to lessen the educator burden. I believe in the importance and urgency of the conservation education role for a few reasons. In many places, science is not high on the list of educational priorities; therefore, the position of the conservation education specialist offers an opportunity to bridge the gap by providing newer and unique experiences beyond schools and youth programs.

Opportunities for outdoor adventures and hands

WHEN I THINK ABOUT how having a meaningful childhood and young adult education experience has inspired me to this day, I find myself immensely grateful for all the educators, volunteers, and family who made my experience possible. I remember the first time I was introduced to a very special relationship in nature in second grade: the monarch and its host plant milkweed. My classmates and I were in awe of the seemingly magic caterpillar and at the same time, deeply perplexed and saddened to hear my teacher say that they might not be around in ten years.

Many years later, that lesson is still repeated to elementary students in one way or another, but it doesn't do enough to change the trend of declining pollinator species. Perhaps only a few are inspired to think critically about their role in the giant web of life and the disappearing habitats around them. I thought about the monarch lesson often as I went through school, and it inspired me to advocate for more time learning outdoors;

-on experiences foster inspiration and build the foundation and ethics of environmental stewardship. I believe many of you who read *Heritage* are excited and inspired by the beauty and timelessness of native landscapes and the interconnectedness among all living things. Somewhere along the way, you were given the knowledge, resources, and perspectives to make connections that brought about a shift in values and the desire to demonstrate environmental consciousness. This conservation education role specifically opens many new doors for Bur Oak Land Trust to educate, engage, inspire, and strengthen our communities.

*Lidija Stojanovic is a full-time AmeriCorps member serving as a conservation education specialist for Bur Oak Land Trust. She enjoys hiking, fishing, and facilitating science education.*

*Lidija and Taproot at Scattergood School, photo by Zac Wedemeyer.*

### Exotic Bush Honeysuckle Most (Un)Wanted

- ◆ **Introduced** to the U.S. in the 1800s as an ornamental shrub
- ◆ **Propagates rapidly**, shading out native vegetation
- ◆ **Produces** numerous berries, which are spread by birds

#### ***Stop the spread!***

Two honeysuckle species are native to Iowa (*Lonicera dioica* and *L. prolifera*). These vine species are quite distinct from the exotic, woody shrub honeysuckles (*L. morrowii*, *L. maackii*, and *L. tatarica*). All exotic, invasive honeysuckle shrubs should be cut at ground level and treated with an approved herbicide. When shrubs are shorter than twenty inches, they can be pulled directly from the ground. Prescribed fire is another management tool for suppression and management of honeysuckle shrubs.



## Restoring Prairie by Sarah Lawinger

PARTWAY THROUGH ITS SERVICE TERM, Bur Oak Land Trust's first AmeriCorps program has already made some great progress on several projects. Between training and getting oriented to the properties, the team has gotten to put newly-learned or improved skills to good use. Over the past few months, we have had the pleasure of helping to facilitate several days of seed harvesting, both in-house and with our invaluable volunteers, at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve and Belgum Grove. Groups such as Coralville IDT, University of Iowa students, and Boy Scouts helped us gather buckets and buckets of prairie species seed, weighing in at about 50 pounds! Now nearing the end of autumn, the seed has been cleaned, dried, and stored, to be spread on several Bur Oak Land Trust properties in the future.

One of the properties to be enhanced by this seed is the 40-acre addition adjacent to original Big Grove Preserve, which the Trust acquired in December 2015. This parcel was previously used as a pasture for grazing cattle, but recently our AmeriCorps team started an exciting project to restore the land to prairie. This has entailed clearing trees along the property boundary lines – where a fence will be installed – and cutting and treating invasive species such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, and multi-flora rose. Moving forward, we will continue felling more trees. We hope that this, along with the removal of cattle and a future seeding, will be monumental in helping to restore this property to a flourishing prairie to be enjoyed by current and future generations.

*Sarah Lawinger is a half-time AmeriCorps member serving at Bur Oak Land Trust as a stewardship technician. She is also studying English and sustainability full-time at The University of Iowa.*

*IDT crew collecting seed, photo by Hannah Davey.*



## The Right Conditions and a Detailed Burn Plan Ensure a Successful Burn by Hannah Davey

PROTECTING IOWA'S REMNANT and reestablished native prairies has become the focus for many, including landowners and Bur Oak Land Trust supporters Mary Brown and Judy Felder. Together with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, they and others formed a partnership to protect, restore, and manage Indiangrass Hills, a 752-acre native prairie habitat.

In the fall, the Indiangrass Hills team asked Bur Oak Land Trust to

help with prescribed fire management – a tool used to mimic the disturbance of natural fire. This was a great opportunity for our AmeriCorps team to get first-hand experience with prescribed burning after completing our S-130/S-190 training. The group chose a 3.8-acre remnant prairie for the burn to reduce woody vegetation – specifically river birch that is starting to encroach into the prairie.

Our seven-person crew successfully completed the planned burn using a drip torch for ignition, hand tools such as flappers, and mobile water units for suppression. With some daylight remaining, we decided to attempt a second burn at a different site on the property. Unfortunately, burn conditions at that point quickly became less favorable, which demonstrated how a variety of conditions need to be met to successfully use prescribed fire as a maintenance tool. It was easy to see that creating a detailed burn plan prior to ignition, knowing the surrounding terrain and local weather forecast, and maintaining good communication are essential to ensuring the safety of the crew and completing a successful burn.

*Hannah is a full-time stewardship technician and AmeriCorps member. She is an Iowa State University graduate with a strong interest in wildlife and habitat, often keeping her outdoors, either hunting or kayaking with family and friends.*

*Hannah using a drip torch, photo by Jason Taylor.*



# 2019 Bur Oak Stewardship,

## OUTREACH

**3,073**

**Group and  
volunteer hours**

**8**

**Local and national  
news outlet stories  
on "Turtle Dogs"**

including  
*Smithsonian* magazine  
NPR *All Things Considered*  
Iowa Public Radio

**56**

**Talks, tours,  
and displays**



**\$110,340**

**Funds raised**

Grants  
Sponsorships  
Share the Profit

**↑ 68% from 2018**

## Bur Oak Land Trust AmeriCorps



**6** AmeriCorps members

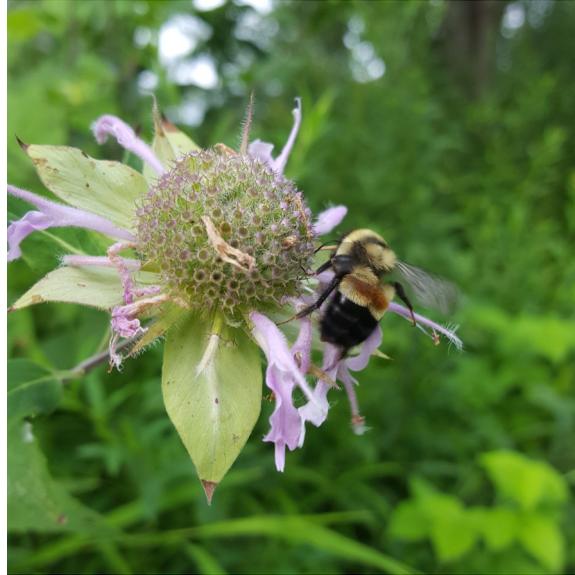
**475** Service hours

**53** Training hours

Training includes National Outdoor Leadership School wilderness first aid certification, chainsaw safety, NWCG S-130/S-190 wildland firefighting certification, Scouts BSA youth protection training, herbicide applicators certification

# Land Trust

## *Service, Growth*



### MANAGEMENT

5

#### **Threatened and endangered species protected**

Rusty patched bumble bee  
Smooth green snake  
Ornate box turtle  
Lesser ladies' tresses orchid  
Long-eared owl

50

#### **Pounds of prairie seed harvested**

112

#### **Trees or shrubs planted**

Swamp white oak  
Highbrush cranberry  
Arrowhead viburnum  
Nannyberry  
Wild plum

856

#### **Acres protected**

Conservation easements: 378  
Owned properties: 478

### Looking forward to 2020...

Bur Oak Land Trust has big plans for the upcoming year. A sample of projects include constructing more trails, establishing a pawpaw grove at Turkey Creek Preserve, restoring prairie at Big Grove Preserve, and beginning EQIP-funded habitat improvement projects at O'Mara-Newport Woods and Shimek Ravine.

We will also work with volunteers to conduct surveys of threatened and endangered species including the rusty patched bumble bee and ornate box turtle, pull invasive species like garlic mustard, and harvest prairie seed.

Staff, AmeriCorps members and community volunteers will continue to serve in the spirit of the seminal conservation work started more than 40 years ago.

You can support that work by making a sustaining donation. Details on how to donate are available at [buroaklandtrust.org/donate](http://buroaklandtrust.org/donate).

## AmeriCorps Training for the Future

by Claire Carlson

TO BETTER ADVANCE THE MISSION of Bur Oak Land Trust, AmeriCorps members have participated in numerous training days throughout the course of their first three months of service. At the end of October, members completed S-190/S-130 wildland firefighter training. Since then, all AmeriCorps members have gotten the chance to use their training and safely participate in prescribed fire at Indiagrass Hills and Belgum Grove. Members also completed a weekend-long NOLS Wilderness First Aid (WFA) course. Throughout the two days, members spent part of the day inside learning how to apply treatments for various injuries and illnesses, and the rest participating in scenarios that helped members practice patient assessments in complex situations that simulated a wilderness setting. Not only can members now deliver basic first aid, but they can also splint an arm or leg using only the materials they have on hand – a life-saving skill for remote working conditions.

A large component of AmeriCorps members' work involves invasive tree and shrub removal, making safe chainsaw usage and operation a necessity. Members have been actively learning how to properly and safely wield chainsaws and other large power tools. Even though several have chainsaw experience from past internships and jobs, it is important that they continue to develop their chainsaw skills and ensure that safety is maintained for all working environments.



Recently, members have also begun commercial pesticide applicator training. Due to the nature of pesticides, it is imperative to maintain safe application. Once members have passed the exam for this certification in spring 2020, they will be able to apply pesticides, in this case, primarily herbicides, on their own. Having certified members will help combat invasive species and other unwanted vegetation on Bur Oak Land Trust properties. Many of these trainings serve not only to increase member knowledge, but also heavily focus on individual and group safety. All the members are looking forward to applying their certifications and training after their service as they advance in their careers.

*Claire Carlson is an AmeriCorps member pursuing her "victory lap" at the University of Iowa as a second-year senior in geoscience. She loves spending time outdoors, reading, and drinking lots of coffee. In the future, she hopes to work in the field of aquatic sciences, focusing on water quality and pollution.*

*Chainsaw training AmeriCorps members, photo by Claire Carlson*

## XXXVII Prairie Preview



PLEASE JOIN US Tuesday, March 3 for our 37th annual Prairie Preview! Local environmental groups will be on hand. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for registration and exhibits. At 7:30 p.m.

keynote speaker Sarah Nizzi from the Xerces Society will present "Integrating Nature into our Daily Lives and Why it Matters."

*The Bohemian Hotel is located at 2525 N. Dodge St., Iowa City.*

## Bur Oak Land Trust Annual Meeting



MEMBERS ARE encouraged to attend Bur Oak Land Trust's annual membership meeting Friday, April 17 at the Unitarian Universalist Society to discuss 2019 achievements and 2020 goals.

*The Unitarian Universalist Society is located at 2355 Oakdale Road, Coralville.*

## Family Day at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve



CONNECT WITH NATURE at Turkey Creek Nature Preserve from 1-3 p.m. Saturday, June 6. Enjoy outdoor activities for kids of all ages. Outdoor environmental educators

will be on hand. Refreshments provided.

*Turkey Creek Nature Preserve is located at 2545 Sugar Bottom Road, Solon.*

## 7th annual Music on the Prairie



COME AND ENJOY an evening of live music at Belgum Grove Saturday, July 11! Annie Savage and the Savage Hearts, and Marc and Brandi Janssen will perform.

Bring a picnic, blankets, and chairs to relax on the prairie.

*Belgum Grove is located at 3261 500th St. SW, Iowa City.*

## Bur Oak Land Trust

P.O. Box 2523  
Iowa City IA 52244-2523

Protect, preserve, restore . . . it's all about the trust.

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

