



# Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps



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## A Day at the Fair

submitted by Megan Daniels



Funnel cake, cotton candy, and homemade lemonade – what more could I ask for? This was my first Iowa State Fair and I was in hog heaven! This is truly what Iowa is all about – people coming together to learn, have fun, and eat some great food!

While at the Keepers of the Land booth, I was bombarded with questions. Unfortunately only a handful dealt with volunteering. It never ceases to amaze me the crazy questions people come up with: “What does DNR stand for? Can you get me a deer license?” As AmeriCorps members working for the Department of Natural Resources we are often viewed as “state employees” and not volunteers.

The fair was a great way for me to promote AmeriCorps, explain our program and what we are doing for the DNR. I received a dozen questions about the budget crunch and used that as a segue into our program and how they, too, can volunteer at our state parks, wildlife areas, recycling centers, etc. to help reduce spending. The individuals I spoke with seemed genuinely interested in helping us beautify and save our precious natural resources here in Iowa.

There was one older woman who said something that really made my day. “I’ve heard about AmeriCorps and I think it is a wonderful program. You should be very proud of the work that you do.” When she said that, I had a smile a mile wide. She made me realize that what we are doing for Iowa is something that deserves a lot of praise. We should all be proud to say we are AmeriCorps helping to make Iowa a little better place to live and enjoy.

*Co-Editors: Erika  
McCroskey and Kathy  
Maline*

## Peer Recognition Event

submitted by Aaron Narigon

On August 12, 44 members of the Keepers of the Land AmeriCorps gathered at the Holiday Inn, Des Moines. Mark Edwards orchestrated the event by starting the group into a number of team building, thinking-outside-the-box activities. These activities included finding the most unique characteristic that two partners had in common and then presenting them before the group. There was also a great deal of discussion, centering on what went well during the course of AmeriCorps membership and what could have been improved. Edwards also brought up an environmental ethics theme he has particularly stressed the entire summer, intrinsic value vs. instrumental value. No group consensus could be reached, once again, and then an enormous variety of pizzas appeared from The Big Tomato to end the discussion. Once everyone was full, masks were brought out and groups were formed. The skits that followed hurt many viewers’ stomachs from the amount of laughter. Prizes were handed out during the entire evening, and by the end everyone had a nice AmeriCorps memento.

August 13th was the actual day of the Governor's Conference, and it was held at the Botanical Gardens in Des Moines. This conference included all members of AmeriCorps currently serving in Iowa. The event started out with a light breakfast, and then moved into a workshop by Deb Gauldin entitled, “Thanks I Needed That.” She sang songs and told stories designed to show the power and importance of humor and laughter in everyone's life. She also facilitated a creative activity called “a collage of my life” which included pictured and words members felt best represented who they are. Following a short break, Governor Thomas J.

Vilsack gave a speech in recognition of AmeriCorps' service to Iowa, thanking the program and its' members warmly. Following lunch, participants attended a service fair where different programs displayed what they had done during their term of service. Then, for many, it was a final farewell to fellow members as everyone heads back to school or their "normal" jobs.

**2001:**   
**NATIONAL  
CONFERENCE**  
**Community Volunteering and  
National Service**  
submitted by V Pierce

Of the 3 Promise Fellows in Iowa, Sarah Goepel (a Promise Fellow with the State Library) and I were asked to attend the 2001 National Conference on Volunteer Service in Minneapolis. Although many other Promise Fellows nationwide were not able to attend the conference, we were just delighted to be there. We left the Wallace Building and arrived at the Millennium Hotel. Sarah stayed on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and I stayed on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor. Later that evening, Sarah and I went for a downtown walk-tour. On our way back just a block from our hotel, we got into a dark street alley. Sarah quickened her pace. When we merged with the next street, she slowed down and said, "Sorry, I walk like I know where I am going in a situation like that." What a lesson! Safe in the hotel, my roommate arrived at about 10 o'clock, from New Jersey, and immediately crashed until morning.

The next day most of the Promise Fellows convened for the orientation. We were asked to split into small groups with the same interests and we worked on a community topic project. I was chosen to be the primary contact person in our group. They then gave everyone the 2001 program directory book. We were supposed to attend either the seminars relating to our topics or any seminars that looked interesting to us. Before we all scattered, I met my future hangout gang, which included the future and returned Peace Corps people.

The next morning was the official opening ceremony and it began with encouraging words from the Assistant Secretary General Office of External Relations United Nation, Congressmen, and many more top leaders. In addition to the speakers, cultural dancers and musicians performed off and on.

One evening, we all took a short bus ride to an art museum building, where we enjoyed a great Chinese buffet. We were freed to tour the museum, watch an IMAX movie, and even dance to the live band of Jamaican music. The band played till the closing hours. My "Peace Corps group" went beyond the wee hours to explore the night activities of the big city.

The rest of the time at the conference I saw Sarah only once or twice. We were busy attending programs. It was so nice to hang out with my "Peace Corps group," especially because one of the women is going into the Peace Corps a few weeks after the conference. We told her what things to bring and what to expect. The best of luck to her, the rest of the Peace Corps Volunteers, and to all the AmeriCorps Volunteers for volunteering their time.

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**Prairie Perspective**  
submitted by Karie Wiltshire

Sweating through this summer has reminded us that Iowa is home of the warm season, and my service in the field has produced tangible evidence of that warm season, in the form of tallgrass prairie forbs and warm season grasses. As the Prairie Reconstruction Specialist with the Marion and Mahaska County NRCS offices, I've become seasoned through June and July while coordinating three field days, recruiting two groups of volunteers to plant prairie along the Oskaloosa bike trail, and developing plans for more than 100 native-species interested landowners.

Throughout it all, grasses are heading out and prairies are progressing beyond the Black eyed Susan, leaving many curious about their new native plants. I devoted the cold season to integrating perspectives from botany, wildlife biology, agronomy, and common sense to create a 'Guide to Identifying Iowa's Tallgrass Prairie Species,' aimed toward landowners in my counties with warm season and native forb CRP plantings. With information about the twenty

forbs and five grasses commonly included in CP-25 mixes and decorating roadsides in this region, the color guide will help with identification while providing insight about ecology, wildlife use and growth characteristics. The guides are available, with limited supply, through my offices.

With a cooling of the season, I look forward to focusing my energies to prairie protection: facilitating several conservation activities with landowners on several newly identified remnants, and creating what I've coined as 'Prairie Coalitions' around 2 public prairie remnants in my counties.

## My AmeriCorps Experience

submitted by Christine Evans

I was asked to write about my average day, but in order to give everyone an idea of what I do, my average day turned into my average week, two weeks, or sometimes my average month. And it all depends on the wildlife management area being inventoried. Let me explain.

I have been assigned numerous wildlife management areas throughout the Northeast Iowa District that need field inventory of the woodland habitats. To start, I print aerial photos of the wildlife management area to be inventoried, grab my things, and then head out to

an area. Once I've reached the management area, I orient myself by finding all access roads and identifying all boundaries if possible. I choose a starting place and proceed to cruise the woodland. I walk up, down, and around slopes and drainages, identifying dominant tree species, understory, and shrubs present and dividing the management area into stands (a management unit based on species present, age of species, and terrain) also known as stand mapping. I have found that this process can be quite challenging in northeast Iowa during August and is hardly ever a single day job! I will spend several days to a few weeks cruising an area. I enter this information into ArcView, mapping out each individual stand on an aerial photo exactly like I did in the field. ArcView, in a nutshell, is a computer program that allows you to manipulate aerial photos and combine tables and charts. I write stand descriptions for each stand including: aspect (north, south, east, and west), slope, wildlife priority, size class (of tree species), species present, understory, shrubs, management suggestions, and finally any additional observations. This information then gets entered into a spreadsheet and all soon will be linked together through ArcView.

Not everyday, or every week, but most certainly every month I am presented with new adventures in new places, some challenging, others not so challenging; and that is what makes my service right now so rewarding.

## Volunteers In Natural Resources Conference

November 16-17, 2001

Hotel Fort Des Moines, Des Moines

**Celebrate and recognize the achievements of IOWATER and DNR Keepers of the Land volunteers!**

**Gather ideas and learn about various programs and projects!**

**Watch for more information coming soon!**

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The editors would like to apologize for an unfortunate omission from the last issue. When welcoming the trail crew, we inadvertently missed recognizing **Joel Wiborg** as a member. Our apologies and thanks to Joel and the entire trail crew for their hard work this summer.

If you know of anything that should be in the next newsletter or would like to contribute an article, please contact [Erika.McCroskey@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Erika.McCroskey@dnr.state.ia.us) and [Kathy.Belden@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Kathy.Belden@dnr.state.ia.us)

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