



AmeriCorps Members Join “Wild” Art Project



AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land members Michael Dhar, Nate Hoogeveen, Sarah West and Luke Wright joined a “sky art project” this winter in Des Moines. Oregon artist Daniel Dancer arranged 950 students and staff from Capitol View Elementary into the image of a leaping cougar set against an orange sun. West helped set up the event, which aimed to bring Capitol View’s young students closer to nature through art.

AmeriCorps Members Help Save the State’s Prairies

by Michael Dhar

This spring, hundreds of Iowans reconnected with their state’s natural heritage during the seventh annual Statewide Prairie Rescue. The program, a series of prairie workdays, came to a suc-

cessful conclusion in early May – thanks in part to the efforts of several AmeriCorps members.

Jessica Bockenstedt, Suzanne Gustafson, Katie Kemp and Jeremiah Manken all helped set up individual rescues, while Sarah West helped coordinate the entire program.

As in previous years, the 2006 Statewide Prairie Rescue invited Iowans to volunteer at any of 25 spring workdays occurring across the state.

Volunteers helped restore patches of remnant or recovered prairie by planting native flowers,

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Members Reach Out with Prairie Rescue

Prairies

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removing invasive species, assisting with controlled burns and helping with other tasks.

Bockenstedt and Manken put together this year's final event, at Ledges State Park. The two, members of the DNR's Prairie Resource Unit, invited volunteers to plant native prairie flowers on May 6.

The rescue provided a rare opportunity to interact with everyday citizens, Bockenstedt said.

"This event lets people get out and learn more about the prairie," she said. "I get to tell people what the prairie is about, and that's actually an awesome thing."

Roughly thirty volunteers showed up for the Ledges event, helping to plant about two thousand flowers from 14 species.

"We just want to improve this park," said volunteer Pete McIntyre. "When people come out to volunteer, you get a lot more done."

Prairie rescues like the Ledges event introduce Iowans to a part of their state's heritage many have never encountered, said Prairie Resource Center biologist Bill Johnson.

"We have a lot of kids that don't spend a lot of time outdoors," he said. "When people are involved like this, they

cent of the state, supporting an incredibly diverse array of flowers, grasses and insects. Today, however, only .1 percent of that grassland habitat remains, scattered in small patches across the state.

Prairie rescue volunteers help to maintain those fragile fragments through management

and bison.

This year, the prairie rescues celebrated the life of Aldo Leopold, an Iowa-born and nationally renowned naturalist. West helped establish the Leopold theme, working with Cathy Engstrom from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

West and Engstrom decided on the Aldo

Leopold theme after the Iowa State Legislature drafted a bill to designate April as Aldo Leopold month.

Though that bill has not yet made it through the legislature, Governor Vilsack declared this April to be Aldo Leopold month.

Leopold's ideas about citizens' responsibility for the environment fit well with the aims of Statewide Prairie

Rescue, West said.

"I feel strongly about the whole idea of community involvement and having a stake in our surroundings," she said. "Prairie is a significant part of our heritage that is drastically disappearing."



Volunteers plant prairie flowers at the Ledges prairie rescue

can develop a connection to the natural resources of Iowa."

At one time, however, it would have been nearly impossible to live in Iowa without regularly encountering prairie.

Before about 250 years ago, prairie covered more than 70 per-

cent of the state, supporting an incredibly diverse array of flowers, grasses and insects. Today, however, only .1 percent of that grassland habitat remains, scattered in small patches across the state.

Human intervention can partially replace the functions of those fires



Member's "River Revival" Event Spurs Action

by Michael Dhar

Of the many interesting facts to emerge from Iowa Rivers Revival conference this spring, one stood out: Iowa has more river towns than any other state, save California and Texas.

In other words, rivers are a big deal in Iowa – a Texas-sized big deal.

But participants at the March 4-5 Iowa Rivers Revival conference and retreat already knew that. The event attracted more than 90 river enthusiasts to the scenic Boone 4-H camp for two days of speeches, beautiful natural surroundings, entertainment, and, most importantly, discussion and brainstorming.

Organized by AmeriCorps member Nate Hoogeveen as a volunteer generating activity, the conference aimed to foster discussion and action in the pursuit of improved river stewardship and awareness.

"I have this general feeling that rivers are of value to all Iowans," Hoogeveen said. "I'm surprised that more Iowans aren't aware of them. Nobody lives more than 15 miles from a

pretty good-sized river."

Hoogeveen's event, a combination conference and nature retreat, featured more than 30 speakers. They addressed rivers from ecological, historical, political and recreation angles. Panel



Hoogeveen on a river cleanup project last summer

discussions touched on economic development, rivers and agriculture, and river corridors.

Keynote speaker Denny Caneff, executive director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin, spoke about river advocacy efforts in his home state. The speech sparked ideas about what river proponents could do in Iowa, Hoogeveen said.

And those ideas have been put to good use.

More than simply an educational event, the Iowa Rivers Revival conference was a spur to action.

Capping the event was a group discussion led by Kent Newman, a local paddling enthusiast and experienced facilitator.

Attendees discussed what should be done for Iowa rivers and how concerned citizens could accomplish those goals.

"Kent said, 'This could just be a conference and we could do it all again next year, or we could move forward,'" Hoogeveen said. "People decided what we needed in Iowa was a river group, similar to what's in Wisconsin."

This new group took

the form of a nonprofit corporation and adopted the same name as Hoogeveen's conference.

"Iowa Rivers Revival" will work to help "Iowans protect and enjoy our river resources," according to the group's recently drafted mission statement. They will work with community leaders, economic development officials, farmers, outdoors enthusiasts and others to increase the quality and utility of Iowa's waterways.

"We are a group that wants to advocate for Iowa's rivers," said Robin Fortney, founder of Central Iowa Paddlers and a member of the new group. "Our mission is to get people's attention back to rivers. We want to educate people and encourage communities to embrace rivers."

The group plans to address both the health of Iowa's waterways and the enjoyment that citizens can gain from rivers.

"What they're after is first a cultural change that leads toward economic investment in rivers," Hoogeveen said. "The idea is that people



Iowa Towns Should “Embrace” Rivers

Rivers

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could be getting more value out of Iowa’s rivers, if only we invested a little more in cleaning them up.”

The Rivers Revival group got started quickly. At the end of the facilitated discussion, people “self-selected” into a steering committee, Hooegeveen said. Already, the group of 15 people has been meeting regularly and has drafted vision and mission statements.

“We’re still in the steering committee stage, but I know a lot of people are excited about this group,” Fortney said. “A lot of us want to see things happen with rivers in Iowa.”

Possible activities for the new group include lobbying for water quality or water trails funding. They may also push for more public awareness and advocacy about water quality issues.

The group should also encourage Iowa towns to “turn around and face their rivers,” said Dave Kraemer, Ames Tribune editor and president of Central Iowa Paddlers, a conference sponsor. Towns should recognize the importance of rivers not only as natural and historical resources, but also as economic benefits, he said.

Rivers have already played a role in economic development projects in

Dubuque, where officials market the Mississippi as a tourist attraction, and in the Des Moines River Walk Project. Various smaller towns in Iowa have attracted tourism dollars by holding annual floats and related events, Kramer said.

The broad goals of the new Rivers Revival group mirror the original goals of the conference, an event designed to take a broad approach to the topic of rivers. Hooegeveen and the event’s other major planners came from a paddling background, but wanted to reach out to a wider river constituency.

Anglers, farmers, community leaders and


others all have a stake in protecting and improving Iowa’s waterways, Hooegeveen said.


Other groups also lent their services to the event, including the Iowa Environmental Council and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Though Hooegeveen, Kraemer, Fortney and Susan Heathcoate (of the Iowa Environmental Council) did much of the planning and organization for the event, volunteer work ensured its success, Hooegeveen said.

Fellow AmeriCorps members Sarah West and Luke Wright also helped out at the event, staffing registration tables and assisting with other tasks.

Retiring Members

Meet the following members who will end their service this summer.

	Scott Boose 40
Bremer County NRCS	
Position: Private Lands	
School: UNI	
<p>Scott Boose’s greatest passion is for restoration, converting areas affected by human progress back to a natural state. The UNI earth science major is considering various options in the natural resources field. In the past, he has worked as a naturalist and roadside maintenance laborer. The greatest benefit of his AmeriCorps service has been gaining knowledge about all the different NRCS farm programs.</p>	

	Curt Kemmerer 23
Ingham Wildlife Unit	
Position: Wildlife	
School: Iowa State University	
<p>An avid outdoorsman, Curt Kemmerer entered the natural resources field to help “enhance and preserve natural areas so this and future generations have good places to hunt and fish.” Before joining AmeriCorps, Kemmerer served in a temporary position with the DNR at Riverton, doing habitat and wildlife management. The best parts of his AmeriCorps service have been “working with good people,” he said.</p>	



Field Report: What AC members are doing

Wildlife

AmeriCorps service brought Todd Rowenhorst to a new part of the state and a new environment. Originally from northwest Iowa, “east-central Iowa was a major habitat change for Todd,” wrote supervisor Timothy Thompson in an evaluation. “The first task was for Todd to get familiar with the wildlife areas.”

Rising to this challenge, Rowenhorst quickly learned answers to the many questions posed by wildlife area visitors. During this time, he also helped collect deer heads and test them for chronic wasting disease.

In January, Rowenhorst helped improve several hundred acres of timber at Redbird Farms and Hawkeye wildlife areas. In addition, this winter Rowenhorst helped maintain and repair more than 200 wood duck boxes.

Throughout his service, Rowenhorst has put in extra hours and effort, staying overtime to help finish controlled burns and working weekends and evenings helping with chronic wasting disease testing.

Another wildlife member, Brad Mohr, also helped monitor chronic wasting disease. In addition, he completed a prescribed prairie burn on private land as a VGP.

Ecosystem Management/Trail Crew

In October, the trail crew completed several projects at Stone State Park, including a fire council ring and several free-standing stone fireplaces. The crew used stone saws, levels, chisels and mortar to get the jobs done.

From November until March, crewmembers focused on machinery maintenance and repair and brush clearing in the northeast region parks. They also helped clear a staging area in Wapsie State Park so construction crews could fly in for the Hale Bridge project. These projects involved shop tools, chain saws and other equipment.

In coming months, the crew will tear out a chain link fence at the Bellevue State Park overlook, replacing it with an Eastern Red Cedar post and rail system. The crew will install a similar structure at the Green Island Wildlife area.

Crew member Nathan Wieting organized a VGP to pick up Christmas trees after the first of the year and haul them to Pine Lake State Park. There, they were bundled and set in the lake for fish habitat.

REAP

Kim Adams began her service this December with the DNR’s REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) program. She has worked primarily on helping to promote and prepare for REAP’s 16 public meetings.

Her efforts helped attract 935 Iowans to the REAP Assemblies. She also compiled reports and an agenda for the July 15 REAP Congress in Des Moines. In addition, Adams compiled a list of more than 900 REAP stakeholders. This list will make funding more effective.

Showing her dedication to the project, Adams attended many out of town REAP meetings, often arriving back in Des Moines very late at night or early the next morning, said supervisor Ross Harrison.

Adams also helped with HUSH (Help Us Stop Hunger) and the Iowa Nature Store. Her work contributed to the 5680 donated deer collected by the program. These deer produced more than one million meals for Iowa’s needy citizens. Adams has also helped the Nature Store revamp its Web site.

In addition, Adams completed a VGP by assisting the Neal Smith National Wildlife Area with communications.

Parks/Interps

Parks interpreters Tamra Lewis, Lori Spicher and Marie Wendel worked on a one-and-a-half-acre brush clearing and prairie planting project along the Lake Macbride north shore trail. They also undertook similar clearing efforts in another section of Lake MacBride.

Future projects include more wildflower seeding as well as the removal of invasive garlic mustard.

Spicher did additional work, including clearing invasive woody species, at Pleasant Creek State Recreation Area. She also helped restore an information booth at that park.

Other projects at Pleasant Creek included fall prairie seeding and hand collection of prairie forbes and grasses. Spicher was certified as a wildland firefighter this winter, enabling her to do prairie burns in spring.

Spicher has also conducted a number of VGPs at Pleasant Creek and Lake MacBride. She recruited dog trial clubs to help clear woody invasives at the dog trial grounds, held a Clearing of Trail day with local landowners, secured the donation of two large stainless steel fire grills and volunteered with the Salvation Army.