



KAmeriCorps Keepers of the Land

Newsletter

Summer 2005: June - September

Issue 4

AmeriCorps Members Blaze Water Trails

by Michael Dhar

For thousands of Iowans each year, reconnecting with nature means setting boot, hoof, wheel or tread to earth on a recreational trail. To a growing number of nature lovers, however, "trail use" calls to mind a different piece of equipment entirely: the paddle.

The popularity of water trails – rivers and streams ideal for canoeing and kayaking – has hit a growth spurt in recent years. And, thanks in large part to the efforts of two AmeriCorps members, Iowa officials have finally taken notice of the state's wettest rec trails.

This summer, AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land members Matt Purdy and Nate Hoogeveen helped create the state's first ever Water Trails Committee.

The new group, operating within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), will administer grants to local paddling organizations and work to keep communication among citizen groups and state officials open and productive.

"This is a way of marketing a body of water as a great place to go," Hoogeveen said of the committee. "Water trails are the greatest thing. I think getting more people in the water means more sane

ing to create the committee. Hoogeveen joined AmeriCorps in October, though he had already

years, paddlers have paid non-motor boat fees to the state, but received no benefits in terms of specific water trails programs. This year, for the first time, the DNR will administer grant money aimed at improving those trails.

At this May's special session, the state legislature appropriated \$50,000 for such grants. The new committee will dispense the money to local groups, so that they can invest in trail signs, informational kiosks, access point improvements and other projects.

Hoogeveen and Purdy will help design templates for signs and kiosks and assist in other ways. The real impetus for progress will come from local paddlers, however, Hoogeveen said.

"We're going to let ideas for water trails develop locally," he said. "The DNR's role is to facilitate."

The Trails Committee also involves a Water Trails Task Force, which will research programs in other states.

In addition, the task force will help make decisions on signage and administrative action. Members will include

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Hoogeveen teaching a paddling clinic

people."

Hoogeveen and Purdy both brought many years of outdoor recreation experience to AmeriCorps, and a strong desire to improve water trails in Iowa.

Purdy finished his part-time AmeriCorps term this September, having spent six months of service work-

helped the water trails effort as a citizen. The two, bolstered by grass roots efforts from paddling enthu-



Purdy suits up to hit the water

siasts, helped convince state officials to fund water trail improvements. For

Inside...

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Full-time Members

Introducing the 2005 Full-Time AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land members

The following members served full-time this summer, and will finish by next spring.



Joe Bauman	25
Coralville Wildlife Unit	
Position: Wildlife	
School: Upper Iowa Un.	

Joe Bauman worked as a grounds technician – doing mowing and other maintenance – at Upper Iowa University before he joined AmeriCorps. He plans to continue working temporary positions until he can find full-time work with the DNR. The wildlife management and conservation major likes AmeriCorps because “it’s a good program and I can get experience in a field I want to be in.”



Michael Dhar	25
Central Office	
Position: Marketing/Comm.	
School: University of Iowa	

While many people join AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land to avoid sitting in front of a computer all day, Michael Dhar joined so that he could do just that. The former English major signed up with AmeriCorps because the position allowed him to write and do creative work for a good cause. After his term ends, he hopes to find work in science or marketing writing. Dhar enjoys reading, learning guitar and attending concerts.



Mark Fields	23
Springbrook Education Cntr.	
Position: Conservation Ed.	
School: Wisconsin-Stevens Pt	

Mark Fields joined AmeriCorps to gain experience working outdoors and in natural resources. The wildlife and biology major hopes one day to work in wildlife management with the DNR. Working as an interpreter at the Springbrook Education Center, he has enjoyed building relationships with other natural resources staff. “The most challenging part is finding different ways to teach the kids,” he said.



Suzanne Gustafson	57
Springbrook Education Cntr.	
Position: Conservation Ed.	
School: Drake University	

For 30 years, Suzanne Gustafson tried to make her classroom look like the outdoors. As an elementary school teacher, Gustafson decorated her rooms with plant life, stuffed animals, paintings of prairie grasses and clouds, and more. Now, as an AmeriCorps interpreter, she has a genuine outdoor classroom. AmeriCorps has allowed her to combine her love of teaching with her love for the outdoors, she said.



MJ Hatfield	55
Boone Wildlife Research Stn.	
Position: Prairie Seed Harvest	
School: Iowa State University	

MJ Hatfield found an ideal fit with a position at the Prairie Seed Harvest Team – she can now work on her avocations full-time. For the past 30 years, Hatfield has devoted her leisure hours to prairie plants, insects and other native Iowa wildlife. Among other pursuits, she has taken on the reconstruction of 25-acres of prairie and the restoration of 80-acres of oak savannah. She is also a nature photographer.



Jason Jesina	24
Mount Ayr Wildlife Unit	
Position: Wildlife	
School: Central College	

Jason Jesina first joined AmeriCorps as a trail crew leader with the ecosystem management team in 2004. He had been working as a seasonal at Pine Lake when the park manager recommended him for the trail crew. For his second AmeriCorps term, Jesina took a wildlife position so he could learn about the DNR’s wildlife program. He hopes to work full-time with the DNR in parks or wildlife.



Katie Kemp 25
 Various State Parks
 Position: Trail Crew Leader
 School: Tulane University

Katie Kemp hopes to find herself, one day, in front of crowds of park visitors, teaching them about the environment. The environmental science and history double-major wants to be an interpretive park ranger at a national park. Kemp also enjoys dance – including swing, ballet, salsa and “a smidgen” of waltz. “If someone offered me a position with a dance company, I’d take it in second,” she said.



Russell Koskovich 31
 Various State Parks
 Position: Trail Crew Leader
 School: U. of Iowa, others

Russell Koskovich has seen Lake Tahoe from the top of a 90-foot cedar tree – and will probably do so again. The extremely active former nursing student spends most of his free time in outdoor pursuits – including tree-climbing, mountain biking, skydiving, hiking and skiing. A lover of learning, he was drawn to AmeriCorps because it gave him the opportunity to learn continuously about the environment as he worked.



Calvin Kunkel 24
 Bays Branch Wildlife Unit
 Position: Wildlife
 School: Wisconsin-Stevens Pt

Calvin Kunkel joined AmeriCorps so that he could get work experience in his chosen field – wildlife management. With a marriage date set for October, Kunkel is looking at natural resources jobs in Wisconsin. The wildlife ecology and management major enjoys hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities. He appreciated the chance to meet people in the DNR and AmeriCorps during his term of service.



Shannon Meister 23
 Prairie Rose, other parks
 Position: Interpreter
 School: NW Missouri St. U.

Shannon Meister hopes one day to work in either public relations or children’s ministry – doing after school programs and classes. The former public relations major stays very involved in her church, serving on church committees and volunteering for church functions. She has gone on several missionary trips, including one in which she visited and studied several African countries.



Brad Mohr 28
 Upper Iowa Wildlife Unit
 Position: Wildlife
 School: Upper Iowa University

Brad Mohr spends most of his free time hunting something or riding something else. The conservation management major enjoys waterfowl hunting and also spends a lot of time racing four wheelers and dirt bikes. He joined AmeriCorps because he hopes one day to work full-time in a DNR wildlife unit. “It’s working outdoors, doing stuff I like to do,” he said. “I like the work and the people.”



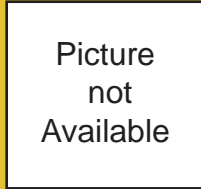
Paula Purdy 27
 Various State Parks
 Position: Trail Crew Leader
 School: William Penn U.

Paula Purdy joined AmeriCorps because it offered a unique work experience. “It appealed to me that I might get to work outdoors, doing creative work and staying active,” she said. Her passions include conservation, “the protection of our resources we’re losing more and more rapidly,” and personal health. The former sociology major enjoys walking, reading and listening to music.



Kim Rasler 44
 Springbrook Education Cntr.
 Position: Conservation Ed.
 School: W. Illinois University

Kim Rasler learned about AmeriCorps from staff at the Springbrook Education Center. She had already come to know them after attending several outdoors and environmental programs, including “Becoming an Outdoors Woman” and other courses. The former education major has enjoyed teaching kids at Springbrook, and plans to continue helping children and volunteering after she leaves AmeriCorps.



Travis Riley 24
 Sweet Marsh Wildlife Unit
 Position: Wildlife
 School: Upper Iowa University

“I don’t like being indoors,” Travis Riley said, explaining why he wants to work in natural resources. The former conservation management major hopes to work full-time someday with the DNR or a related organization. Riley graduated in May of last year. He worked temporary jobs for the Clay County Conservation Board, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and other groups before joining AmeriCorps.



Tricia Rummer 23
 Central Office
 Position: Volunteer Program
 School: NW Missouri St. U.

Tricia Rumer hopes to keep working with volunteers or in government after her second term with AmeriCorps ends. The former speech communication student minored in international studies and would like to work more with state or national governments. “I’m most passionate about learning and watching other people learn,” she said. “I enjoy seeing people look at things differently and discuss different ideas.”



John Sanden 60
 Various State Parks
 Position: Trail Crew Leader
 School: Central Missouri St.

John Sanden spent 19 years teaching English in Japan before returning to the United States last year. He then worked odd jobs, including bar tending and pearl diving, before joining the AmeriCorps trail crew. Sanden enjoys working outdoors and amateur carpentry (he built his own cabin in Japan). “I’m three times as old as some people on the crew,” he said. “It makes it hard to keep up...for them to keep up with me.”



Michael Schaffer 47
 Central Office
 Position: Comm./PR
 School: Grandview

Michael Shaffer hopes to own a newspaper someday – one with a “circulation of maybe 5 to 10,000 and a staf of 4 to 6 tops” – where he would serve as managing editor. The former journalism student joined AmeriCorps after he found the position at his college’s career center. He likes that the job allows him to use and refine skills he learned in college – writing articles, designing, taking pictures and interviewing.



Woodson Spring 25
 River Barge
 Position: LL & W
 School: University of Iowa

Woodson Spring joined AmeriCorps so he could help fund his service aboard the Living Lands & Waters Mississippi River cleanup barge. Spring joined the barge crew as a full-time member last year, though he had volunteered with them several times in the past. After finishing his AmeriCorps term, Spring plans to start a small business and go to grad school for forestry.



AmeriCorps Members help storm victims

by Michael Dhar

On a river barge, from behind the wheel of an emergency response vehicle and on the phone at a 1-800 help-line, three AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land members came to the aid of Hurricane Katrina victims this fall.

Katie Kemp, Russell Koskovich and Woodson Spring each helped connect disaster victims with vital resources after August's devastating Gulf Coast hurricane.

Spring, serving on the Living Lands & Waters river cleanup barge, travelled to Louisiana with the rest of his crewmates. That program's director, Chad Pegracke, steered his barge to affected areas so that crewmembers could put their volunteer spirit to use in recovery efforts.

Koskovich and Kemp each served three week terms with the Red Cross. Koskovich travelled south to Louisiana where he drove an emergency response vehicle, eventually moving up to a supervisory position.

Kemp, unable to travel to the affected area because of a food allergy, served at a Red Cross 1-800 call center in Washington, D.C. She worked first as a call agent, before moving up to case reviewer.

The former Tulane University student volunteered because of personal connections to the area, she said. Kemp lived in New Orleans while in college, and her family lived on the Mississippi Gulf Coast for several years.

"The house we were living in is gone," she said. "We had

friends in the area and I was all gung-ho to help people. I felt really bad that I wasn't down there."

At the D.C. center, Kemp took calls from people in need, wrote down their information and forwarded it to groups supplying food, clothing and other necessities.

"The hardest and

best thing was listening to people's

stories," Kemp said. "A lot of times, you could tell people were healing, because they were able to crack jokes."

One caller described how she had learned to bake muffins on a charcoal grill; another told Kemp about the

matched storm victims with groups that could provide money, shelter and other assistance. Under one program, Lens Crafters donated glasses to people who had lost them.

Other efforts included an emergency food stamp resource and a low income energy assistance program.

"That was the good part," Kemp said, "when you got a call

and were able to refer them to some place that could help them, put shelter over their heads and food in their mouths."

Koskovich had a much different experience, spending three weeks in the devastated

week term of service, Koskovich drove an emergency response vehicle, bringing necessities to storm victims.

In his first five days of service, his vehicle delivered more than 7,000 prepared meals to shelters. Koskovich coordinated with a central shelter and outlying sites, determining what meals, clothing, bedding, canned food and other supplies each location needed.

When Hurricane Rita hit in late September, Koskovich helped evacuate people at his shelter. Once they arrived at the Expo Hall in Shreveport, Louisiana, Koskovich worked with other volunteers to figure out logistics – how to fit everyone in the building, how to find them all sleeping arrangements and more.

By the time he finished, Koskovich had worked 25 hours straight. While that was his most exhausting stretch, the trail crew leader also put in one 19 hour day, one 16 hour day and averaged about 12 hours per day during his three-week term.

The experience left an impression. Seeing and dealing with so many people in dire need was traumatic, he said.

"For the first week after I got back, I couldn't sleep," Koskovich said. "I kept having nightmares."

Now that the bad dreams have abated, Koskovich said he would definitely go and help again.

"It was an incredible life experience," he said. "It was experience after experience after experience."

“It was an incredible life experience. It was experience after experience after experience.”

National Guard clearing off football fields so local children could return to a somewhat normal routine.

"Some of the stories were close to home," Kemp said. "One lady had worked at a local car repair place we'd gone to."

Kemp logged 8-9 hour shifts, six days a week. She worked the night shift – 11:30 p.m. until 7:30 a.m.

"You get a lot of interesting people making calls at four in the morning," she said.

Call center organizers

regions themselves. He was deployed to Baton Rouge in September, and eventually moved to Lafayette with a convoy of evacuees.

Though not a former Gulf Coast resident, Koskovich felt the same desire to help as Kemp.

"When I sit here in Iowa, where the weather's great and everything's in its place, it makes me think," he said. "If I have it this good, and there are people who have things so bad, I want to go help."

During much of his three-



Field Report: What AC members are doing

Earth Movers: Trail Crew

The AmeriCorps trail crew spent this summer moving tons of earth and stone across the state parks of Iowa.

They began in June at Cedar Rock State Park, where they rebuilt a set of stairs leading from the park's Frank Lloyd Wright house to the boat dock, using limestone and concrete pavers. After finishing that project by the end of the month, the crew travelled to Big Creek State Park. Here, they used field stone boulders to create erosion control on a popular fishing spot along the lake.

In August, the crew moved on to Palisades-Kepler to continue work performed by previous trail crews. They did extensive rebuilding of some trails and touch-up work on others.

The next few months will take the crew to Stone State Park where they will work on a fire council ring for the park's friends group. They also plan to do some prescribed fire management of prairie and woodland areas.

Once winter sets in, the crew will scatter to various parks offering shelter. They'll work on trail clearing and

cont'd next page...

Water, Trash and Volunteers: Keepers of the Land

Two members serving with the DNR's Keepers of the Land program spent a busy summer season promoting and organizing volunteer events.

Michael Dhar and Tricia Rummer worked on several watershed cleanups, volunteer appreciation events and the Iowa State Fair. Dhar produced communications and marketing materials, while Rummer helped manage the events themselves.

Cleanups included Project AWARE, the Carter Lake Cleanup and the Upper Iowa River Cleanup. Dhar and Rummer helped those projects attract more than 300 volunteers, generating roughly 9,300 hours of service.

Both Project AWARE and the Upper Iowa effort boasted increased volunteer turnouts this year (by 100 and 40-percent respectively), in part due to Dhar and Rummer's work.

Both members helped produce promotional and educational displays for the Iowa State Fair. Dhar designed magnets and kiosk items, while Rummer helped organize

cont'd next page...

Edutainment: Interpreters

Springbrook

Three members helped teach thousands of Iowans about natural resources this summer at the Springbrook Conservation Education Center. Mark Fields, Suzanne Gustafson and Kim Rasler conducted programs on fishing, shooting, canoeing and many other topics.

The special skills and abilities of Springbrook's AmeriCorps staff served the center well, wrote Site Supervisor AJ Winter in a survey response.

Gustafson's 33 years of experience as a classroom teacher helped the center comply with National Science Standards and work effectively with visiting schools. Rasler assisted groups in emergency situations, helped teachers when they were uncomfortable with program material and constantly assisted coworkers on projects.

Seasonal Interpreters

Kenneth Hamilton, serving at Viking Lake State Park, helped re-route the Burr Oak nature trail, set up new stations along the trail and reorganize a brochure. Roughly

cont'd next page...

Getting the Word Out: Marketing

This summer, Michael Shaffer filled a new AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land marketing-public relations position. The former journalism student used his computer design, photography, interview and writing skills to support three DNR programs that connect Iowans with natural resources.

Shaffer designed posters, created administrative forms, wrote several articles and took photographs for the Help Us Stop Hunger (HUSH) program. This initiative invites hunters to donate unused deer meat to Iowa's hungry. Shaffer also designed a promotional ball cap (5,000 were purchased) and "spent many hours on the phone talking to HUSH participants," wrote Site Supervisor Ross Harrison in a survey response.

Shaffer has done similar work for the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) license plate program. In addition to press release and design work, he managed a "complex set of promotional mailings," Harrison wrote.

Schaffer also helped with the DNR's Nature Store

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Ecosystem Management/Trail Crew (cont'd)

maintenance.

Two trail crew members spent three weeks volunteering with Hurricane Katrina disaster relief efforts.

Russell Koskovich volunteered as an Emergency Response Vehicle driver. Katie Kemp went to Washington, D.C., where she helped at the Red Cross 1-800 call center.

(See article, page 5.)

Interpreters (cont'd)

600 people attended his interpretive programs.

Ryan Lensing, serving at George Wyth State Park, worked with several groups to develop a wide range of interpretive and volunteer programs this summer.

He helped Boy and Girl Scouts earn merit badges and worked with conservation officers and the Cedar Valley Walleye Club to promote fishing. Lensing also helped the Harmant Reserve Nature Center with kayaking and canoe programs and borrowed their equipment to do programs at George Wyth. In addition, he organized several volunteer cleanups at the park.

Marie Wendell conducted educational and volunteer projects at Pleasant Creek and other parks.

Keepers of the Land (cont'd)

volunteers to staff display tables. She also helped manage the DNR's recycling efforts at the fair. Their efforts contributed to the recruitment of 125 new volunteers and the recycling of over 2500 beverage containers.

Rummer also helped organize the annual Campground Host Appreciation Event in September. Dhar produced press releases for individuals honored at the event.

Dhar and Rummer's efforts have contributed to "incredible volunteer recruitment results," wrote Site Supervisor Merry Rankin. They have also helped improve recycling efforts, local press coverage, community empowerment and local partnerships.

Marketing-Comm. (cont'd)

program, putting in many days organizing, managing inventory and selling products for the State Fair.

Thanks in part to Shaffer's work, the HUSH program has 66 new lockers. The Nature Store sold \$17,000 in t-shirts and hats at the State Fair and another \$14,000 in licenses and subscriptions to the DNR's Iowa Conservationist magazine.

Look for Shaffer's upcoming articles about HUSH and the Nature Store in the Conservationist.

Water trails could set environmental precedent in Iowa

Water Trails

Continued from page 1

Purdy and Hoogeveen, other DNR officials and interested citizens.

When Purdy joined the AmeriCorps program, he became Iowa's first full time water trails coordinator. Unlike most other states, Iowa had never funded such a position, though there had long been a need, said DNR Trails Coordinator Mark Edwards.

Purdy – who runs outdoor learning programs at UNI and has worked as a city recreational administrator – proved ideal for the job, Edwards said.

"He had a lot of experience

and he brought in an on-going network," Edwards said. "He also has that personal passion."

The flurry of new activity on water trails – including the new coordinator position – points to a changed attitude among Iowa officials, Purdy said. Iowans realize the importance of natural resources, not only for environmental and health reasons, but also for tourism, he said.

"In Iowa, we've been going about tourism in terms of amusement parks, dog races and casinos," he said. "As time's gone on, we've started to understand that people visit a location because it's a beau-

tiful place. By enriching our backyard, we not only improve Iowans' way of life, but we can also increase tourism."

DNR officials have no intention of stopping with water trails, Edwards said. ATV, equestrian, foot and other trails will all get their day. Long-term goals call for improvements in all of Iowa's various recreational trails.

Water trails, which lend themselves to an environmentally conscious approach, provide the perfect test-run for developing other similar programs, Purdy said.

"Water trails can influence how we use the last remaining scraps of our resources," he

said. "We can hopefully set a precedent that the really important thing is ensuring that trail use doesn't wreck the resource."

Edwards and others hope to build towards an Iowa trails summit, which will get the state ready for next year's National Trails Symposium, taking place in Iowa for the second time.

Iowa's advance work on water trails could pay off at the symposium and beyond, Purdy said.

"Water trails are just picking up nationally" he said. "Iowa has a chance to be on the forefront."



Church volunteers protect “gifts of nature”

by Michael Dhar

Give a little environmental knowledge to a motivated group, and it’s like sparks on dry kindling.

Tricia Rummer found that out this summer, when she helped awaken one church’s environmental spirit through education.

Rummer organized a presentation at the Fort Des Moines Presbyterian Church this May. The second-year AmeriCorps member spoke about service opportunities at the DNR’s Keepers of the Land volunteer program, where she had just started a new position.

Rummer also explored the connections she sees between an environmental outlook and a religious one.

“We worked out a way that I would present the volunteer program and also talk about how I see natural resources from a spiritual level,” she said. “I told them about what we’re doing to protect these gifts on earth.”

Other DNR officials, including Keepers of the Land director Merry Rankin, attended the presentation and answered questions about waste removal, recycling and other “every day” environmental topics.

Church congregants

received the program enthusiastically, said Pastor Don Elly.

“People got a lot out of that Sunday,” he said. “They

sonal step toward better stewardship by eliminating

Styrofoam coffee cups from their Sunday services. The church now encourages congregants to provide personal coffee mugs under the “bring your mug to church” program.

Congregants at Elly’s church have shown a desire, highlighted by their response to Rummer’s presentation, to protect the environment, he said.

“I think there is an aware-

ness that as people of faith, we have a responsibility for the world in which we live,” he said. “But sometimes people don’t know how. They think they’re powerless to help.”

hazardous waste cleanups and more. This October, the group organized a water quality testing field day at Easter Lake. Church members learned how to measure pH levels, search for environmental indicator species and perform other water quality tests.

Elly first contacted the DNR because he wanted to involve his church in a local environmental project, he said.

“I saw Earth Day on the church calendar and I wanted to make that come alive in the life of the congregation,” he said. “So often we hear about the national and international programs, and it doesn’t relate to the local level.”

Elly plans to continue working with Rummer and the



AmeriCorps member Michael Shaffer collects a sample at the church’s water quality testing event

had a lot of questions.”

Rummer gave the churchgoers information on various Keepers of the Land opportunities – including the IOWA-WATER citizen water quality monitoring program, Waste Free Lunches, Household Hazardous Waste cleanup days and more.

“This group is very passionate,”

Rummer said. “But they also needed some tools to get involved.”

Immediately after Rummer’s presentation, church members brainstormed ways they could benefit their environment. They realized they could make a small, per-



Rummer explaining testing methods to church members

ness that as people of faith, we have a responsibility for the world in which we live,” he said. “But sometimes people don’t know how. They think they’re powerless to help.”

The congregation has plans for other initiatives in the future, including household

Keepers of the Land to keep environmental topics in his congregation’s thoughts. Rummer and Elly discuss environmental awareness and involvement once or twice a month and plan to expand their work to include other congregations.

“We have to think of ways to keep this in front of people,” Elly said. “Three to four times a year, we need to remember ways we can take care of the world...because it takes care of us.”