



PRAIRIE RIVERS *of Iowa*

A Note From the Watershed and Waterways Program Coordinator

Thank you all for joining us for the Prairie Rivers of Iowa newsletter. This year has been filled with new challenges, but also several successes. The watershed team's work on the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant has continued to produce several great results for conservation here in Central Iowa. We completed the seed bank program for 2019 with a total of fifty-five participants with several continuing their interest for next year's program. Our pollinator flyways system has also gone through a major change with a new logo and name to be unveiled at its launch later this fall. In the meantime, we have been hard at work mapping endangered pollinator sightings in the state.

The Prairie Rivers Watersheds and Waterways team has continued doing an excellent job with community outreach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, outreach efforts have been slowed, but we've found some creative ways to get around the restrictions. The Ames EcoFair was canceled, but both I and our Watershed Educator Dan Haug were able to present our conservation chat

topics on KHOI Radio through the virtual version of the EcoFair. We were also able to complete our first field day, albeit virtually through a Zoom meeting with our partners at the Story Soil and Water Conservation District and Iowa Learning Farms. Speakers included Dr. Billy Bush and Dr. Tom Isenhardt who discussed the Bear Creek Research Farm and the benefits of saturated buffers, as well as Dan Haug and myself who discussed Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF) mapping tools and our conservation field visits. The best way to stay informed on events is to follow and keep in touch with Prairie Rivers of Iowa on social media. Our Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are always updated with great information about events and important topics. Thank you all again, and please enjoy our newest newsletter.

Sincerely,

David Stein,

Watersheds & Waterways Program Coordinator





The Prairie Rivers of Iowa Native Seed Bank Experiment

by Prairie Rivers of Iowa Watershed Coordinator David Stein

The newest project from the watershed team was the implementation of a native seed bank for the community to use. The premise was simple, Prairie Rivers of Iowa would provide free native seeds to local residents to use toward conservation, as long as they signed a contract promising to plant the seeds. It didn't matter where people were located in Iowa, or how large of a piece of land they had, as long as they were interested in planting some new habitat, we would help them out. Through trial and error, we were able to secure several donations from seed companies and a \$500 grant from the Walmart Community Foundation. At the peak of the program, we were able to offer participants seeds from over thirty species of native plants. When participants would come into the office, we would sit down with them to discuss their land, how sunny or shady it was, how wet or dry the soil was, what animals they wanted to attract, etc. We'd then pick out the right seeds for those conditions. The last bit of the process was probably the most difficult, this was waiting until the late spring and early summer to see how planting went, and to collect the final results.

To say that the program was an unexpected success would be an understatement. What started as a small and simple project exploded into something embraced by the community, both locally and statewide. Between October and April, we had fifty-five landowners (around fifty more than I was expecting) participate in the program! The majority were urban or suburban landowners from the Ames-

Des Moines area looking to establish smaller native gardens. However, we had participants from all over the state, with some coming from as far away as Marion and Linn counties, with wildly varied lands. The seed that our participants picked up was used for a variety of purposes including erosion control, beautification, native edible herbs, water quality, and most importantly for our programs establishing and enhancing pollinator/wildlife habitat. After reviewing and calculating everyone's withdrawal forms, the seed bank program was able to enhance and establish 31.29 acres of pollinator and wildlife habitat. Participants generously donated a combined \$469.00 for future conservation projects and drove a combined 3704 miles to pick up their seeds.

The last piece of this project was to send out a post-planting survey to our participants. We will use these surveys to shape the seed bank programs in the future. So far we have received excellent feedback that we will use to make seed bank decisions moving forward. Additionally, in the surveys, several participants stated that they would like Prairie Rivers to provide conservation services moving forward. Thinking ahead to next year, we have several goals for the seed bank program including the doubling of seed species available, a garden and landscape design service, and a formal catalog of species and their habitat needs. All of these will be incorporated into a new program that we are launching this fall. So stay tuned!



Volunteers Join in on Water Quality Testing this Spring

by Prairie Rivers of Iowa Watershed Educator Dan Haug

It turns out that stream monitoring is quite compatible with social distancing. Twenty-eight volunteers participated in the Squaw Creek Watershed Coalition's 13th Spring Water Quality Snapshot on May 30 and 31. Together we tested water quality at forty-three sites on Squaw Creek, its tributaries, and the South Skunk River! This time, Prairie Rivers of Iowa assembled the equipment, organized the event, and entered the data. We're happy to support this dedicated group of citizen scientists in better understanding and drawing attention to our local rivers and creeks.

As the name implies, this is a snapshot in time. The water quality on one sunny weekend in May is not necessarily representative of the month, let alone the year. As described here and here, water quality can change dramatically in response to a big rainstorm. But for this moment in time, testing many sites gives us a very detailed picture of the Squaw Creek Watershed.

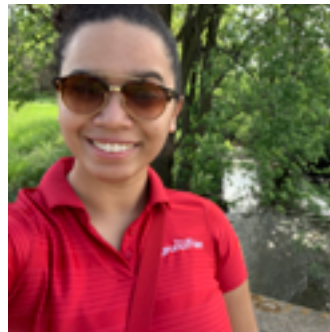
To learn more visit <https://www.prrcd.org/2020-spring-water-quality-snapshot>.



The Kopecky family by the South Skunk River



Jeff White at Gilbert Creek



Kelly Nascimento Thompson at Glacial Creek



Kurt Plagge and Mary Burnet at Onion Creek



A Note From the Iowa Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Program Coordinator

This has been a strange year for our Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway program as it has been for all of America and the world. COVID-19 brought everything to a screeching halt about mid-March. Quarantines, limited travel, closed borders, and everyone was to stay home. Restaurants were closed to dine-in and many struggled to make ends meet as they shifted to carry out and/or delivery. Museums and other attractions closed. Hotels became ghost towns.

In Iowa, the tourist season is usually just ramping up in the spring. Attractions begin preparing their grounds and sprucing things up for visitors. There is excitement in the air as Iowa's tourist season in any other year spikes in July. This year, we are told to social distance and many events are canceled or postponed until fall or until 2021. Some attractions are using this COVID-19 time to do a deep cleaning, reorganizing, or work larger outdoor projects that are usually inhibited by visitors and their anticipated visitor experience.

One of Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway's roles is to help promote sites and attractions. How do we do that when many are mandated to be closed or owners are unsure if it is "safe" to open once the mandates are lifted? One way we have found is through social media posts. At first, there was nothing to report on as no one was going anywhere and no one was doing anything. So we shared past photos of attractions and outdoor attractions where people could social distance.

Our interpretive panels are something people can still enjoy while social-distancing. They are outdoors and nothing needs to be touched to read them to enjoy the information and photos. There are no door handles, no person behind the counter, and social-distancing can be accommodated easily.

What about events? The Iowa Department of Transportation Iowa Byways program decided not to participate with a booth at the Iowa State Fair this year, but now even the fair has been canceled. The Heartland Byway Conference was postponed until October of this year. The way things are looking, that might not happen either. But meetings do need to continue and many are being held virtually. In early June, we attended the Preserve Iowa Summit virtually. All of the sessions were held via ZOOM and recorded. There is a window of time where attendees can re-watch any of the sessions. We anticipate there will more of these types of summits and conferences in the future.

The Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway is researching and creating innovative ways to continue our mission to educate the public about this historic road, showcase the route, and support our attractions. Stay tuned. We are in this for the long haul!

Sincerely,

Janice Gammon,
Iowa Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Coordinator



Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Projects Underway Summer 2020

by Prairie Rivers of Iowa Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Coordinator Janice Gammon

Our focus this year is to continue with our Interpretive Master Plan and we have a big related project in the works. We do mean BIG. The Harrison County Historical Village and Welcome Center asked us to re-design an outdoor interpretive panel that was deteriorating. It is four by eight feet. That's right, four by eight feet! The estimated weight is 120 pounds so we're glad the manufacturer can ship it directly to the welcome center.

We've written several grants to create more interpretation in or near the communities of Clinton, Belle Plaine, Marshalltown, Jefferson, Arcadia, Denison, and Woodbine and are waiting to hear the outcomes.

The Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway has received a grant from Iowa Tourism to create a couple of two-minute videos about breweries, wineries, and distilleries in eastern Iowa. One video will feature the Clinton area and the other features the Cedar Rapids area. University of Iowa graduate students will do the filming and editing.

Once completed, the video will be shared on social media, traveliowa.com, prcd.org, and participating businesses platforms. We plan to continue this project in the coming years featuring central and western Iowa.

Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Wins National Award

by Prairie Rivers of Iowa Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Coordinator Janice Gammon

The Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway managed by Prairie Rivers of Iowa has won the 2020 Byway Organization Interpretation Award bestowed by the National Scenic Byway Foundation. Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway Coordinator Janice Gammon and others have been invited to represent the byway for the award presentation at the Heartland Byway Conference for October 27-29 in Leavenworth Kansas.

"We're honored to receive the award. This project started five years ago with two panels and now to date, we've created twenty. Our immediate goal is to install at least one interpretive panel in each of the forty-three communities the Lincoln Highway connects in Iowa," says Gammon.

The Lincoln Highway of Times Square to San Francisco fame in part runs 460 miles across the heart of Iowa. While scenic byway attributes may entice travelers with or without signage, interpretive panels enhance the visitor experience considerably, especially when installed in a unified manner along the route. The interpretive panel project had its beginnings in 2016 when the Iowa Resource Conservation & Development Association wrote a grant for each Iowa Byway to create two interpretive panels related to conservation practices. These two by three-foot panels on a steel base served as the "seed" and helped sell the idea of interpretive panels to other organizations and communities.

The sample template was later included in the Lincoln Highway Heritage Byway's Interpretive Plan. The Iowa Lincoln Highway's six panels highlighted in the award educate the public about the Lincoln Highway, the first improved transcontinental road in America. The route in Iowa travels from Clinton along the Mississippi River, to Council Bluffs along the Missouri River. Each panel covers a different topic of historical value to the visitor and adds to their experience while on this historic road.

Prairie Rivers of Iowa is pleased to have won this award and give credit to our interns over the past 5 years who have added their touches to the twenty panels we've created. For this award, six panels for our work during the past two years were submitted. They included panels in Iowa located at the Eugene Koch Memorial Park in Westside featuring the community and veteran, a panel about the Iowa Department of Transportation reclaimed overpass girder in the Lions Club Tree Park east of Grand Junction, a panel created for an Eagle Scout project in Tama's Lincoln Highway Bridge Park about the Boys Scouts and their 1928 Lincoln Highway concrete markers, a panel about the Lincoln Highway Association's first Field Secretary Henry Ostermann in the Maple Hill Cemetery east of Montour, and a panel outside Nevada's City Hall where the Lincoln and Jefferson Highways share the same roadway.



Board Member Spotlight: David Andrews

David Andrews grew up on a diversified grain and livestock family farm operation near Melbourne, Iowa where he continues an active management role. He's done agricultural consulting work in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Tanzania and has managed large agricultural projects in Romania and the Philippines.

Most recently, he retired as executive director of the nonprofit Michael Fields Agricultural Institute whose focus is education, research, and policy initiatives to promote organic agriculture in East Troy, Wisconsin.

David and his wife and daughter have moved back close to the family farm in Ames, Iowa. He holds a Bachelor's and Master's of Science degrees from Iowa State University and is currently managing director of AgHound, LLC where he stays busy consulting with conventional and organic farmers.

Welcome Our New Prairie Rivers of Iowa Staff!

Please welcome our latest additions to our staff. Nan Bonfil joins us as event coordinator and Daniel Huber as technology assistant.



Nan Bonfil
Event Coordinator



Daniel Huber
Technology Assistant

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