

Ada Hayden Conservation Education Award

Kinsey Nielsen - The 2021 Ada Hayden Conservation Education Award goes to Kinsey Nielsen the Natural Resource Manager at Nahant Marsh Education Center. The mission of Nahant Marsh Education Center is to protect, enhance, and restore the marsh through education, research, and conservation. Kinsey has definitely been working hard to follow their mission statement. Kinsey routinely works with the marsh's friends' group to do a variety of work from collecting and planting prairie seeds to invasive species removal, just to name a few. While doing these tasks, Kinsey and volunteers regale each other about their projects on their own properties. Besides working with the Nahant Marsh Friends Group, Kinsey also held a public seed harvesting program and assisted with sessions for the Iowa Master Conservationist Program. For the past several years Kinsey has also had two summer interns each summer to educate about prescribed fire, management techniques, and get experience using various equipment. Upcoming plans are to plant over 1,000 trees to restore 30 acres of degraded bottomland forest.



Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award

Barb Gigar- We are happy to award Barb Gigar the Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award. Barb is an employee of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and has had a rich career in environmental education. Through her career Barb has written, or contributed to, hundreds of conservation education teaching resources for formal and nonformal settings. Barb has been a leader in the conservation education community throughout her career. She has served on countless committees, task forces, and boards, representing the conservation education perspective and advocating for resources and processes that support integration of conservation in local formal and nonformal education efforts. She regularly brings opportunities from national partners to Iowa and seeks innovative ways further conservation education.



Charles Jacobsen- It is an honor to award Charles Jacobsen the Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award. Charles (Chuck) has an extensive career in environmental education rooted in his beginning with playing in the creek on his way home from school. Starting his formal career in environmental education Chuck became the president for the Soaring Eagle Nature Society, the director of the Soaring Eagle Nature Center, and then transitioned to become a Naturalist with Clinton County Conservation. Many naturalists note Chuck's love for music and his influence on their own music career. Also Chucks name is synonymous with the love of paddling, cross country skiing, astronomy, paleontology, and backpacking. If there is anyone who deserves to bestow the honor of Aldo Leopold's name it is Charles Jacobsen.



Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award

Jared McGovern – If you have ever met Jared McGovern, you’ll remember him. His enthusiasm for everything in life is very contagious. Jared has been working for the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium as their Curator of Conservation Programming and a Senior Education Manager for the past six years. One thing Jared is very passionate about is freshwater mussels. He partnered with numerous agencies to create these very unique little silos in the City of Dubuque’s Bee Branch Watershed to house 2,500 freshwater mussels to educate and engage youth and the community. Jared believes in advocacy with action and has spearheaded various projects like his Student Lead River Research Program or the Teens Take CAARE Initiative - Conservation Action through Advocacy, Research, and Engagement. I’m sure we “shell” see many great things from Jared yet to come.



Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award

Exploring Winneshiek County Over Time: A 4th Grade Geology Unit – This unique program was created by three educators, Lilly Jensen, Birgitta Meade, and Larry Reis. When COVID hit, Winneshiek County had to think of unique ways to present their normal unit of fourth grade geology virtually. They chose to talk about Dry Run Creek and its flooding to highlight a local natural resource that the kids could actually go and visit to discuss the Iowa CORE Earth Science Standard of erosion and changes to the earth over time. Dry Run Creek is a perfect example for this standard. The creek used to run right through downtown Decorah, but even better yet, through the school's property! Now however, the creek goes through culverts under their football field and under a walking bridge near the school entrance. Students discuss how and why the creek's path has changed over time. The first introduction for the kids to Dry Run Creek is actually from an 87-year-old Decorah local named Rosalyn Eppens. Rosalyn has a recording of her personal account of the 1941 Decorah Dry Run Creek flood that devastated the town. A Google Earth's Voyager platform was created to do a virtual tour of where the creek used to flow and where it currently flows. This platform allows the kids to see where Rosalyn was talking about and to see how it currently looks. Rosalyn was even able to do a Zoom meeting with the fourth graders to answer further questions they had about Dry Run Creek. What a great way to connect local things (people and natural resources) to the Iowa CORE!



Date of photo unknown, but likely Decorah Dry Run Creek Flood of 1911.
Photo courtesy of Steven McArthur.

“Ding” Darling Environmental Education Award

Building Better Birder and Citizen Scientists Workshops – Kelly J. McKay, Mark A. Roberts, Brian P. Ritter, and James M. Wiebler

Taking things to a whole new level, Building Better Birder and Citizen Scientist Workshops morphed into a statewide program for 26 different county conservations throughout the state of Iowa, each doing four workshop events! As some of you know, coordinating with just a few partners to do a single program is hard enough to get details hammered out and scheduled. Now try doing that for 26 different entities each doing four programs. That’s enough to turn anybody into a yellow-billed cuckoo. Things that were offered at events ranged from guided birding hikes identifying various species and talking about the habitats and ecology of the species to various PowerPoint Presentations discussing various avian research projects to a variety of bird identification presentations. The end goal of doing all these workshops was to reconnect the public with nature through birding and hopefully get them actively involved with their local conservation organizations and projects. With five programs left, these workshops have already reached 1,610 total participants and recorded 225 bird species! Not bad considering we are still in a global pandemic! Data from these citizen scientist workshops will be reported to the Iowa Ornithologists’ Union in seasonal field note reports.



Outstanding Environmental Education Program (Two or Less Full-time, Equivalent Naturalists)

Buchanan County Conservation Board (Sondra Cabell and Michael Maas)- Running an environmental education program with only two people is no easy task. Throw in a worldwide pandemic and you have a tough road ahead of you. Buchanan County Conservation is this year's recipient for the Outstanding Environmental Education Program for programs with two or less naturalists. Sondra Cabell and Michael Maas are shining examples of two dedicated naturalists who did not let the pandemic stop their efforts but used the opportunity to adapt and continue to offer quality environmental education. From adapting programs to meet social distancing requirements to working with their conservation boards master plan, Sondra and Michael are well deserving of this award.



Outstanding Interpretative Non-Print Media Award

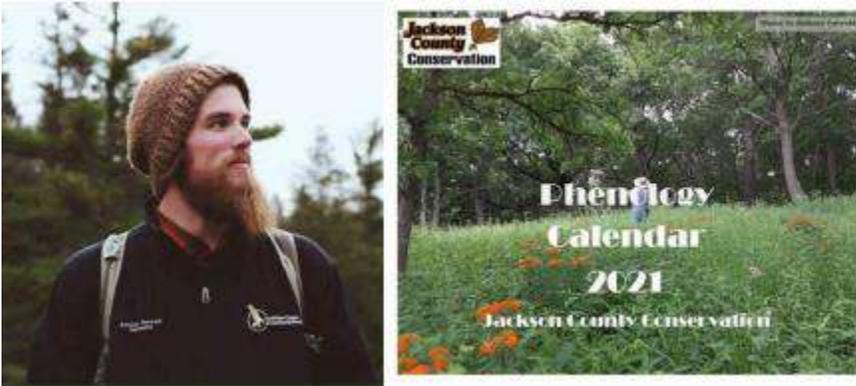
Katie Struss – Facebook Live Educational Video Series

When the pandemic hit in March of 2020, all of Katie's in person programs were canceled. Since she was no longer able to physically go and see people, but she still wanted to educate people, she decided it was time to kick up her technology game and take things virtually. So, Naturalist Katie Struss from Buena Vista County Conservation started creating Facebook Live Videos. She started with all her educational animals and then branched out to various topics like spring wildflowers, Dutch Oven cooking, and even one on prescribed fire on a prairie. Videos often include things like craft and snack ideas to go along with the theme. As of November 2021, she has created 57 virtual programs and is planning to continue these videos in the future. These videos had a total of 33,284 views and 2,751 shares/interactions on their Facebook Live Posts. Teachers and home-schooling parents have shared the videos with their students. Other groups like church groups, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, care centers, and libraries have all used and shared the Facebook Live Programming too. She is hoping to reach a broader audience in the future as the conservation staff continues to expand the Facebook Live Virtual Learning Curriculum, along with their in-person programming.



Outstanding Interpretive Print Media Award

Tony Vorwald (Jackson County Conservation Phenology Calendar)- This year's Outstanding Interpretive Print Media Award goes to Tony Vorwald for the Jackson County Conservation Phenology Calendar. The Jackson County Conservation Phenology Calendar was originally started in 2017 with Naturalist Emily Highnam and was adopted by Naturalist Tony Vorwald in 2018 and has been his pet project ever since. The Phenology calendar highlights the changing natural phenomena observed in eastern Iowa. Each year the calendar gets better with more detail and this project has been an opportunity for Tony to continue to develop his skills as a naturalist. The Jackson County Conservation Phenology Calendar also serves as a fundraising item for projects like the People Prairie Project and the Friends of Jackson County Conservation Habitat Committee.



Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award

Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Benton County Conservation Field Days and Zoom Meetings- The honor of the Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award goes to Iowa Education Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Benton County Conservation for their collaborative Conservation Field Days and Zoom Meetings. The field days have attempted to expand the students' knowledge of the outdoors and things they can do outdoors and how they can enjoy it safely. With the pandemic the program had to shift gears and adapt with some zoom base programming. Some highlights from this program include feeling and holding animal pelts and mammal skulls. Other highlights include wild edibles hikes, canoeing at Rodgers Park, cooking food with solar ovens, among other programs.



Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award

Clear Creek Amana Middle School Outdoor Classroom- Clear Creek Amana has an advantage in teaching environmental education with their newly finished outdoor classroom to expand student's knowledge. It incorporates nature, a STEM classroom connected with the outdoor classroom, and social-emotional learning. The outdoor classroom provides students with the opportunity to be outside and engaged physically, cognitively, psychologically, and socially. Clear Creek Amana Middle School is a worthy recipient for the Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education Award because they have taken progressive steps to incorporate sustainability and STEM into the everyday life of their students while at school and beyond.



Outstanding Volunteer Award

William Muhs – Cedar County Conservation

If you ever want to learn about plants, William Muhs is your man. Residing in Cedar County, Bill has helped countless individuals learn about a wide variety of plants. He regularly helps his local Naturalist identify and even manage plants. Since 2010, Bill has taken all the Summer Naturalist Interns for Cedar County Conservation to tour his personal property to show them numerous plants that Cedar County Parks and Wildlife Areas lack. Not only does he take interns out on plant tours, he even does public plant tours on various properties. For well over 14 years, Bill has led or helped lead the Cedar County Historical Society's Geller Preserve Wildflower Walk (two hikes in the beginning of May). Bill also volunteers his time for the Cedar County Historical Society for their "Prairie Days" for the past 11 years. Rain or shine, Bill is there with his always enthusiastic attitude and poster boards of prairie plants talking to people about the plants people would have encountered. Speaking of old times, Bill has also cared for a pioneer cemetery called Fairview for well over 14 years. Bill hand digs or pulls invasive plants, so he doesn't disturb the native plants in this oak savanna remnant. His back breaking, manual labor can also be seen at Cedar County's Townsend Wildlife Area. You can see exactly where Bill has been. You will see a beautiful patch of wild geraniums, bellworts, and bloodroot and then five feet away you will see where Bill has not gotten to yet, and it is a disaster of nothing but garlic mustard and mature trees. Not only does Bill help the native plants everywhere he goes, he also very generously donates local, native ecotype seed for all of Cedar County's school pollinator plots. As he says each time, "I was deprived of seeing beautiful plants like this when I was in school. I don't want that to happen to these kids. They need to see what was right here in Cedar County over 200 years ago." Thank you, Bill, for your perpetual enthusiasm as you donate your time and effort to help educate individuals and make the world a better place.

