

2023 IAN-ICEC Award Winners

Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award

Dan Cohen – Buchanan County Conservation

Dan Cohen, starting in late 1985, served Buchanan County Conservation as the naturalist for 15 years. He quickly became acquainted with the teachers and staff of the six school districts that served parts of Buchanan County and got the fledgling EE program up and running.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, Dan participated in the Iowa 4H Wilderness Leadership program. He subsequently led many youth on wilderness canoe trips, using the tool of wilderness travel to teach natural history, land ethics, and personal growth to scores of Iowa youth. His excellent leadership on those many trips earned him the 2001 National 4H Wildlife and Fisheries Volunteer Recognition given by USDA/Extension and USFWS in Washington, DC.

Dan played a critical role in the production of the first 40 of the IAN Natural Resource guides. Dan served as an author or co-author of many, edited many of the others, and served as an active participant in the committee that produced the series. Perhaps one of his least recognized but highly significant legacies will be his efforts in the formulation and passage of IWill—Iowa's Water and Land Legacy. Prior to its passage in 2010, Dan spent several years attending numerous planning meetings in Des Moines, lobbying on behalf of the legislation, writing op-ed pieces and other articles and speeches to support the passage of the legislation and eventual approval of the Iowa Constitutional amendment. Dan has also contributed to the Iowa Water Trails program, paddling several rivers in the state and writing reports on those paddles—complete with GPS points and photos—to the Iowa DNR. Using his excellent writing and editing skills, Dan was part of a group that wrote the first 10 water trail brochures for the public.

In his role as Director at BCCB, Dan did not completely remove his educator's "hat" and continues to educate on the natural world and our important role in it as stewards. Dan has passionately worked to pursue the mission of "Increasing our quality of life through programs of conservation and education." Nearly every interaction between him and park guests is a mini education session, even when begun as a confrontation, an inquiry on donations, or a call about campground availability. You can take away the title, but once a naturalist...

The breadth of Dan's local, state, and regional involvement in conservation and education initiatives and committees is wide. He has assumed many leadership roles including serving as President of the Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards, Chair of the Iowa Conservation Education Council (now Coalition), Iowa Association of Naturalists Executive Committee, and Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) Board of Directors. He serves on the Bird Friendly Iowa steering committee and continues to represent county conservation directors on the ISAC Legislative Policy Committee.

Dan has become an exceptional photographer, especially of birds, and is also a gifted writer. Combining these two, he has had articles and photo spreads in the Iowa DNR's *Iowa Outdoors* magazine (Fall, 2020), *The Iowan* magazine and *Iowa Natural Heritage* (Winter 2023). This in addition to frequent well-spoken editorials featured statewide in the Des Moines Register, Cedar Rapids Gazette and Waterloo Courier as well as local papers – primarily in support of REAP and IWill.

Bohumil Shimek Environmental Education School Award

Bree Blom – Clay County Conservation

During the past seven years, Brianne has implemented a variety of conservation programs for the youth and community of Clay County.

As of October 2023, Bree has offered educational environmental programs to over 12,000 children and 3,000 adults. These programs include classroom field trips to Clay County parks, meeting standards and benchmarks for students, Pre-K through 5th grade. She also travels to a variety of schools monthly providing hands-on education opportunities to students. Clay County students are also provided with summer camps. The experiences are endless: habitats for plants and animals, fishing, seasonal changes, explorations of their surroundings, life cycles, etc. Bree has added Nature Babies Camp, Toddler Tracks Camp, CCCB Civic Programs at public libraries, and Summer Celebration Festival. The Summer Celebration Festival is the longest day of the year festival. There are 16 hours of celebrating nature and summer solstice.

Brianne demonstrates professionalism and extreme knowledge of the educational content that she offers students. Her programs offer content introductions, self-learning through explorations, inquiry-based learning, and hands-on experiences and discoveries.

Clay County is extremely fortunate to have Brianne as the CC Naturalist offering Conservation and Environmental Education.

Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award

Lynn Campbell – Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 4-H Youth Development

Lynne Campbell, or the “Butterfly Lady” as she has been known by teachers and students for the past seven years, has been passionate about environmental education for over 34 years while serving as both a learner and leader in many capacities. Lynn’s journey to “Butterfly Lady” status is due to her pollinator conservation efforts!

Her passion for EE began in college with a biology degree and secondary education minor. This led to a 19-year career as a secondary science teacher. Her path shifted significantly when she was selected to serve the prestigious Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellowship in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. The goal of this fellowship was to share practical expertise about STEM education to the legislative process. Then, came a position as an AEA Science Consultant to lead professional development and be able to impact a greater number of students who could experience more authentic learning experiences.

Ten years ago, Lynn returned to ISU where she serves as an Extension Education Specialist III and teaches a graduate course in the School of Education. Her role over the past eight years has been supporting outreach efforts for the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium (created in 2013) through the development of ag and natural resources programming. In 2017, a REAP-CEP grant was received to support the Monarch Eggs Project utilizing her access to the USDA-ARS Unit monarch colony that provides insects for research and educational purposes year-round. The second grant was awarded for her team to serve as the lead state for the National 4-H Council’s Ag Innovator Experience *Monarchs on the Move*. Lynn served as the team lead for the ISU staff and researchers who developed the Monarchs on the Move Facilitator Guide. This project was implemented in 2018 in collaboration with the National 4-H Council.

Lynn has since led two other National 4-H Council Ag Innovator Experience programming grants that includes the AIE Native Bee Challenge and AIE Water Connects Us All. Both projects were created in the spirit of the land grant mission and collaborated with experts at Iowa State University and across the United States.

“Ding” Darling Environmental Education Award

Blank Park Zoo – DISCOVER the WILD Days

In 2021, Blank Park Zoo started monthly events to raise awareness about our SAVING the WILD conservation priorities through activities that inspire conservation action called DISCOVER the WILD Days. The purpose of these days is for guests to Discover, Connect, and Take Action for the species we are highlighting that month. Guests learn information about the priority species, the conservation field partner we support, an understanding of what we do at the zoo to care for the priority species, and how Association of Zoo and Aquarium (AZA) accredited organizations work together for the survival of the species.

While each event has unique activities specific for the priority species, every event is carefully planned out with the following big idea, guiding question and event outcomes:

Megaconcept: Human Dimension of the Environment	Concept: Human Connections with Animals
Big Idea: People have personal and cultural connections to animals.	
Guiding Question: <i>What roles do animals play in your community and around the world?</i>	

Intended Outcomes		
As a result of this event, I want my audience to DISCOVER... 1. the natural history of the priority species. 2. the conservation field partners and what they do. 3. how Blank Park Zoo cares for the priority species. 4. how the AZA community works together for the survival of the species.	As a result of this event, I want my audience to CONNECT with... 1. interest in the story of the individuals in our care. 2. understanding for communities living in the home ranges of the species. 3. motivation to learn more about animal in the care of Blank Park Zoo.	As a result of this event, I want my audience to TAKE ACTION by... 1. Continue learning about the work of our field partners. 2. Making changes in their daily lives to positively impact local wildlife and habitats. 3. Staying connected with Blank Park Zoo.

Unique activities from events have included:

- Coral reef eye spy
- Storytime with Ruby the Reading Red Panda
- Carrion Cafe - learning about how vultures help prevent the spread of disease by eating carrion
- Making enrichment for lemurs
- Zookeeper chats
- Animal training session

Each event is free with Zoo admission and features stories from our conservation partners such as Conservation Fusion, Proyecto Titi, Giraffe Conservation Foundation, and the International Crane Foundation about the work they do in the field with the communities living there. Each July, we welcome local conservation partners including the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Polk County Conservation, Boone County Conservation, and Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge to host stations to discuss the work that we partner with around Iowa to protect and conserve Iowa's natural resources. This year, we held 12 DISCOVER the WILD events with 17,460 guests in attendance.

These events continue to grow and have been an effective way to connect our guests with our field partners and show them how their visit to the Zoo helps save animals in the wild.

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

Kossuth County Conservation Board – Billie Willie and Julie Fosado

The Kossuth County Conservation Board was established in 1962. The first full-time Naturalist was hired in 1986 and a permanent part-time Naturalist followed in 1988. From the inception of Kossuth's EE program, it has always been strong, establishing bedrock programs which laid the foundation for programs still going strong today. Water's Edge Nature Center was built just outside of Algona at Smith Lake Park in 2007 and serves as our home base with programming space, trails, and more. Billie was hired as the Assistant Naturalist in 2003 and transitioned to fulltime Naturalist in 2009. Julie was hired as the Assistant Naturalist in 2009. Their reach includes both passive and active programming!

Maple Syruping: A rustic, authentic, operating sugar shack straight out of the 1950s with original working tools and equipment is nestled into rolling hills of Black maples and basswoods. One of the goals of this program is to show students the phenomena of how sap flows naturally from the tree and is turned into syrup through nothing more than heat and hard work.

Native American Ways Field Trip: Every second-grade class in the county does a unit studying the lives of Native Americans each fall. The unit culminates with a field trip with seven stations (storytelling, games, pinch pots, teepee/beadwork, making frybread, wildlife/hunting, and fire making). If we can give the kids a small glimpse into the past and how different and difficult life was, our goals will have been met for this program.

Union Slough Nation Wildlife Refuge Birding Field Trips: Every spring and fall we partner with refuge staff to lead birding fieldtrips on the refuge. Local third grade students learn to use binoculars and spotting scopes, the basics of bird ID and how to use a bird book. The Slough is a major resting stopover for migratory waterfowl so we get good looks at a variety of ducks, pelicans, swans, and herons. Our main goal is simple; we want kids to realize that ducks and wetland birds are really beautiful (and colorful!) once you start looking more closely.

High School PE Class: A long-term goal of the education team has been to reach high school students as most of our programing is geared toward elementary kids. This past fall, a new high school PE teacher reached out requesting some outdoor education programs. Year One included a kayaking/canoeing unit and a fishing unit. We wanted to give the students the skills to continue these activities on their own if they so desired. We also stressed the importance of time outdoors for their mental health and healthy lifestyles in general as they move through life.

Junior Conservation League (JCL): JCL is an annual program geared specifically for Kossuth County fifth graders and has been run by the Assistant Naturalist for over 30 years. Each interested fifth grader applies for membership by answering a series of essay-style written questions. Up to 12 members are selected. Once the group is chosen, they meet once a month, on a Saturday from October to June for a few hours doing different outdoor activities ranging from checking and cleaning Wood duck boxes, observing pheasant hunting, fire building, ice fishing, snowshoeing, orienteering, tapping maple trees, litter clean-up, canoeing, camping, etc.

Creative Programming

- Songs: Julie has a love for all things gross: dung beetles, vultures, owl pellets, snakes, you name it. This love has been paired with writing silly songs on her ukulele and singing them as part of skits during the annual Halloween Hike. Those songs have grown to be included with like-minded program.
- Summer Camps: In addition to "standard" programming, this summer we focused a few camps on useful life skills like map reading. Other fun things done at camp include survival shelter building, knot tying, hanging bear bags, learning all about Turkey vultures including their vomit and stomach acid and canoeing a portion of the East fork Des Moines River.

Outstanding Environmental Education Program (Three or More Full-time, Equivalent Naturalists)

Nahant Marsh

Nahant Marsh Education Center, located in Davenport, IA, operates as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization nestled along the Mississippi River. Benefiting from its unique location, the naturalists and AmeriCorps members serving at Nahant Marsh extend their educational outreach across state lines. The education team is composed of three full-time naturalists and two full-time AmeriCorps members, each possessing distinct skills and knowledge, yet all sharing a profound appreciation for nature with the community served by the marsh.

To date, the team has actively engaged with over 20,000 individuals through a variety of initiatives, including events, field trips, outreach programs, adult courses, and enriching summer camps, accumulating an impressive total of 20,800 program impact hours. The programs offered by Nahant Marsh are not only well-received but also often reach full capacity swiftly. A notable favorite among the diverse programs is the monthly Breakfast Nature Club designed for retirees, featuring captivating topics such as sandhill crane research, bumblebee biology, and wild edibles. Other popular public programs encompass guided bike hikes, woodworking workshops, and natural crafts workshops, among others.

In the past year, Nahant Marsh hosted a group of dedicated youth volunteers who played a crucial role in assisting with summer camps. These camp helpers, former participants who had aged out of the camps, were driven by their profound appreciation for the marsh experience. Their commitment reflects a desire to contribute to providing other children with the same joy and learning they had cherished over the years.

In conclusion, Nahant Marsh Education Center stands as an invaluable contributor to environmental education and community engagement. The dedication of the education team, coupled with the positive impact on both participants and volunteers, highlights the center's unwavering commitment to fostering a deep connection between nature and the community it serves.

Outstanding Interpretative Non-Print Media Award

Polk County Conservation – Growing River Literacy

Background

Growing River Literacy is a series of short 3–4-minute videos promoting some of Central Iowa's most popular water trails. These first of their kind videos serve as a digital resource for those who are interested in paddling a certain section, along a particular river. This innovative project was funded with support from the REAP-CEP grant program. This project was in response to a dramatic increase in paddling sports and the usage of Iowa's rivers during the 2019- 2020 pandemic. According to the American Canoe Association, paddling sports grew in popularity with 22.9 million Americans taking to rivers, lakes, and oceans in 2019. The 2020 pandemic further increased the popularity of paddling sports with equipment sales hitting all-time records.

Need

The need for this project focused on creating a modern paddling video resource for beginner and intermediate paddlers. The videos make paddlers more literate in their understanding and appreciation of the river they are paddling. The videos combine technical, ecological, and historical information, including a message that promotes the importance of river safety, water quality and good outdoor ethics.

The videos are accessible via computer or phone anywhere a user has Internet connection.

To date, there have been over 2000 combined views of the videos since being posted in 2023. As the videos spend more time online, the number of viewers and those benefiting from the content will continue to grow.

Impact

An online survey was created to gather measurable outcomes and feedback from viewers. Of the over 300 responses, paddling experience level was nearly evenly split between beginner (49%) and intermediate (43%). When respondents were asked if their knowledge significantly increased as a result of watching the video, 75% said yes. 98% of viewers felt more confident and comfortable about paddling the section of river after watching the video. Over 90% of viewers had a significant increase in appreciation for the river after watching the video, and over half of the respondents had a significant increase in knowledge of river history, flora, and fauna. In summary, the viewers river literacy increased as a result of watching the video(s).