

2024 IAN-ICEC Award Winners

Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award

For Lifetime Achievement in EE Excellence and Leadership

Rod Marlatt – Fayette County Conservation (Retired)

Rod Marlatt's unwavering dedication and lifelong commitment to conservation in Fayette County and the State of Iowa have left an indelible mark on our natural environment. His ability to connect with people from all walks of life, instilling in them a sense of responsibility towards our planet, is truly remarkable.

Rod began as the director of the Fayette County Conservation Board in 1985 and founded Fayette County Pheasants Forever the same year. In 1989, Rod established one of the first and largest roadside management programs in the state of Iowa. Between 1990 and 2000, Rod implemented countless other programs and projects that benefited Fayette County, including the establishment of the Elgin Maize Maze (one of the first in the state of Iowa) and creation of the Fayette County recycling center and program.

In 2008, Rod began working with the Northeast Iowa RC&D (Resource Conservation & Development) on the development of the River Bluffs Scenic Byway. The byway traverses over 100 miles through Fayette and Clayton County and brings thousands of visitors per year to the area. Rod currently serves as the chair of the byway board and the chair of the Byways of Iowa Foundation. Rod began working with area partners and stakeholders to establish the Turkey River Recreational Corridor (TRRC). The TRRC was the first regional Iowa Great Place and helped to establish the Turkey River Water Trail and many multi-use trails in Northeast Iowa.

Rod would say he puts his "blood, sweat, tears, and spit" into everything he does. He truly holds a passion for Fayette County and the state. Rod Marlatt's legacy in conservation is not just a testament to his knowledge and expertise, but also a beacon of hope for future generations. His dedication serves as an inspiration, reminding us all the importance of preserving our natural heritage for the well-being of our communities and the planet.

Ada Hayden Environmental Education Award

For Outstanding Efforts to Educate about Preservation, Land Management, or Natural Resource Conservation

Kaytlan Moeller – Dubuque County Conservation

Mowing to Monarchs – Turf to Prairie Conversions for Urban Yards

Mowing to Monarchs (M2M) is a program established by Dubuque County Conservation and Dubuque Extension Master Gardeners. The four-year-old M2M program provides accessible training, information, and an experience base to guide urban, suburban, and rural homeowners in successfully adding high-value native plants in their yards.

Dubuque County Conservation under the leadership of naturalist / outreach coordinator Kaytlan Moeller provides funding and administrative resources. M2M is supported by the Dubuque County Conservation Board as part of its annual budget from the County Board of Supervisors. The Iowa State University Dubuque Extension Master Gardeners, coordinated by Ray Kruse, Horticulturalist, provide

horticultural/native plant content training, coaching, and research-based information.

Through this program, participants are encouraged to understand and appreciate their local ecosystem—the native plants that thrive here, the wildlife that depends on them, and the delicate balance of their surroundings. M2M has become a catalyst for fostering a greater sense of place, turning novice gardeners into passionate stewards of the land.

The Dubuque County Mowing to Monarchs program is led by naturalist/outreach coordinator Kaytlan Moeller, along with the volunteer skills of engineers, ecologists, teachers, administrators, lawyers, academics, and artists. Over 400 participating landowners benefit from the education and experience of the M2M pocket prairie program. Mowing to Monarchs is an innovative experiential program bringing together the resources of two governmental service and educational agencies, and has expanded far beyond the position descriptions of a naturalist. The shared goal is to increase native habitat and pollinators in our county both now and in the future. It serves as a model educational program to move land owners to action in converting turf grass to pollinator habitats. The Mowing to Monarchs program is transforming Dubuque County—yard by yard—into a more biodiverse and ecologically sustainable community. It builds a stronger connection to nature and leaves a lasting impact for future generations.

Bohumil Shimek Environmental Education School Award

For Outstanding Efforts by an Environmental Educator

Laura McCreery – Davenport North High School

Each year Laura. McCreery brings her environmental education students to the Upper Mississippi River conference. At the conference the students are treated like young professionals in the field. They bring prepared questions and participate in discussion. Most years they participate in the poster contest and usually win prizes. Mrs. McCreery guides this same group of students to present their research to friends and family during an evening event.

In addition, McCreery volunteers after school and on weekends to support the Green Team. Mrs. McCreery is incredible at maintaining connections to the environmental agencies in the Quad Cities and staying informed with all the community activities concerning the environment. Each week she presents several opportunities for the North High School Green Team to participate. It is her policy that the club be student led and so she leaves it up to the students to decide how they should use their time. Right now, students are participating in a nationwide creek water monitoring project, litter and recycling data collection of the school yard, a holiday free store, and presenting a film at the QC Environmental Film Festival in February. These are just the pursuits the group is engaged with now with Mrs. McCreery's support and guidance.

I can't think of anyone more deserving of this award than Mrs. McCreery who somehow is able to teach the next generation of science minded citizens to care about the environment formally in classes during the day and to help to give opportunities for students to start their participation and stewardship of the environment now in extracurricular activities.

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

For Excellence in EE Programming by an Agency or Institution

Muscatine County Conservation Board

Muscatine County is blessed with numerous aquatic and forest resources. Our programming takes advantage of that by focusing on getting people out into these environments, becoming more familiar with them (the environments and the people), and having fun!

More than 90% of our field trips include aquatic activities such as fishing, pond study, stream exploration, paddling (K-12), and various water related games and activities. Fieldtrips also make use of woodland areas in various parks for nature hikes, tree and shrub activities, forest fauna, and sometimes simply jumping in leaves.

Many of our activities take place at Discovery Park in Muscatine. This former site of the County Farm, and former woodland blending into prairie, is at the west edge of Muscatine and within walking distance for several schools. We also travel with school groups to other County and State Parks as well as the Big Sand Mound Nature Preserve, which is managed, by Bayer and MidAmerican Energy.

Our education offerings also include public fishing, archery, canoeing/kayaking, Hunter Education, wildlife and plant programs. Summer is devoted to Nature Camps and SPARK- the Muscatine Community School Districts summer school. We offer 8 weeks of camps for youth ages 18 months to 14 years.

Throughout the year, we share our services with other agencies, groups and organizations including State and Federal Campgrounds, YMCA, Libraries in Muscatine, Wilton, and West liberty, Senior Care Facilities and agencies, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, civic groups, local businesses and corporations, the Iowa DNR and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

We supplement the great outdoors in many of our activities with “tools”. These include: A 15-passenger van and a seven-passenger van for transportation. We have canoes/kayaks, GPS units, fishing poles, archery equipment (for indoor or outdoor use), microscopes, binoculars, hand lenses, dip nets, live reptiles/amphibians, live raptors, fur/skull collection, and numerous other natural artifacts.

In addition to the various programs offered our staff maintains a nature center devoting time to animal care, building maintenance, and exhibit upkeep.

History of the EE Program

Muscatine County hired its first Naturalist in 1976. Over the next 20 years, the program was led by four different naturalists. In 1996, we began hiring a seasonal intern to assist with education programs. In 2000, we hired our second full-time naturalist. From 2005 -2010, we employed an Assistant Naturalist through the AmeriCorps Program. In 2011-2012, we had two part-time staff to assist with education programming and to coordinate a shooting sport and fishing grant from the Iowa DNR. During the 2013 and 2014 years, we had one part-time staff to coordinate the fishing/shooting sports grant. From fall of 2014-2023, we have only had two fulltime naturalists, with one of the naturalist's splitting duties between education and park officer. We were able to participate in the Iowa Governors STEM Council and had one extern during the summer of 2021-2022. In 2022-2023, we were able to have two externs through this program to help with summer programs. In May 2023, we gained a fulltime naturalist as Dave Bakke, who was also a park ranger, was retiring soon. In 2024 we have had two fulltime naturalists that can focus solely on education! What an exciting time for EE in Muscatine County.

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

For Excellence in EE Programming by an Agency or Institution

Winneshiek County Conservation

WCCB employs three full-time education staff including Larry Reis, Naturalist and Resource Manager with 41 years as an interpretive naturalist for WCCB; Hanna Meyer, Education and Outreach Coordinator; and Evan Neubauer, Recycling and Waste Reduction Educator. In the summer, WCCB also employs seasonal help to assist with summer programming. In summer 2024, WCCB hosted a local teacher through the Iowa STEM Teacher Externship Program for a six-week term, employed one naturalist intern from May-August, and hired several summer camp assistants for 1–2-week periods. WCCB's non-education staff also assist with educational programming as needed. They include Ryan Wiltgen, Maintenance Technician who teaches the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) and fishing through Fish Iowa!; John Kraus, Resource Technician who teaches NASP, Fish Iowa!, natural resource management, water quality through the Save Our Streams program, and coaches Envirothon at Decorah High School.

WCCB's Lake Meyer Nature Center, built in 1973, was one of the first spaces dedicated to outdoor education in the state. Though WCCB's educational programming is 50 years old, our detailed program records date back to 2008, when a new director implemented a records system. From 2008-2023, the education department has seen growth in their annual programs given and contacts nearly every year. WCCB programming recovered from a drop due to the COVID-19 pandemic within a year and are now exceeding pre-pandemic numbers. WCCB's education budget in FY 2023-2024 was nearly 36% of WCCB's total operating budget. This demonstrates the high priority the WCCB places on environmental education. WCCB education staff have proposed and received funding for recycling and waste reduction education, outdoor recreation equipment (fly-fishing equipment, kayaks, outdoor exploration backpacks, snowshoes, cross-country ski boots, GPS units, archery equipment, equipment trailer, microscopes), unique programming (Driftless Safari, archaeology dig boxes, 4th Grade Geology Unit), marketing initiatives (bike trail maps), and facility upgrades that enhance programming (tree plantings, handicap-accessible fishing docks and a kayak launch, trailside benches and picnic tables, open-air shelter). These grants have allowed the department to expand their offerings and equipment to effectively meet the needs of the county.

In Winneshiek County, outdoor recreation programs have proven to be among the most popular educational offerings for local schools and youth organizations. Many Winneshiek County schools have difficulty scheduling and/or paying for field trips for outdoor recreation, so WCCB brings the equipment to schools, often conducting units on fishing, archery, or cross-country skiing and snowshoeing that last several weeks, usually as part of a PE class. These "Fit Environment" units were developed in 2009 through the REAP-CEP grant program. Some of these units, particularly fishing units, close with a field trip to a local natural resource to help students practice their new skills in the "real world." This in-depth and longer-term approach helps students to build lifelong outdoor recreation skills and competence much more readily than just a single-shot outdoor recreation field trip can.

Teachers are always looking for innovative ways to implement the Iowa CORE standards in their lessons. For environmental education programming to remain relevant, it needs to help students meet their grade-appropriate standards. WCCB education staff are working to align all outdoor recreation, environmental education, early childhood, and waste reduction programs to Iowa CORE standards. The WCCB program guide has expanded to offer over 100 lessons, over half of which are currently standards-aligned. Education staff work with local educators to adapt lesson plans to meet the specific learning needs of their students.

WCCB education staff has also developed and implemented several unique educational projects. One of the most recent projects is to develop educational programming on the Decorah Impact Crater, a discovery of significant geologic and palaeontologic finds that are unique to Winneshiek County. Since 2021, WCCB education staff have been developing a standards-based, interactive geology unit for 4th grade students that includes hands-on, minds-on lessons on topics

such as the Decorah Impact Crater, local fossils, rock features, geologic time, and the nature of science. WCCB's educational programming does not slow down when school is out of session. For nearly 15 years, WCCB provided outdoor learning experiences for hundreds of campers at Luther College's Discovery Camps. In 2023, Luther College passed along full management of Discovery Camps to WCCB staff, who gladly adapted to running the program.

Waste reduction and recycling are growing areas of concern in Winneshiek County as the landfill and recycling center work to properly dispose of the population's waste. Since 2021, WCCB staff have partnered with landfill and recycling to develop standards-aligned lessons on a range of waste reduction topics from renewable energy to sorting recyclables to backyard composting. One of the major waste reduction projects has been to reduce food waste entering the landfill by promoting backyard home composting.

WCCB also targets the underserved in the community, especially the assisted living facilities. Naturalist Larry Reis presents a new program each month to five facilities in our county and as well as ten surrounding facilities that house former county residents. Larry has developed over 160 narrated PowerPoint programs which he offers on a rotation. All the professional quality photographs in these programs are taken by Larry and are available to all educators through his Flickr account. In addition to sharing a new presentation with the community each month, Larry compiles his observations of nature, both written and photographic, into a digital collection that contains over 40 years of phenological changes in Winneshiek County – the Winneshiek Ark.

Outstanding Interpretative Print Media Award

Story County Conservation – Story County Conservation brochures

Story County's Park brochures were long outdated – both in appearance and information. Printed on tan paper, created in Publisher, and many still contained clip art as the only visuals. This was a very large, long-term project that Story County Conservation (SCC) staff had not been able to commit to. Paige Higby was hired as a seasonal employee specifically due to her graphic design skills, ready to tackle the project.

The purpose of the 2024 revamp included multiple facets: an updated look, updated maps and park info, as well as incorporating QR codes to easily lead users online to SCC's website and interactive map.

Sixteen original brochures were scaled back to a collection of now only 11. This includes brochures for the major county parks, as well as Volunteering, Fishing, and more; plus, the creation of a new Public Trails brochure that includes a list of all maintained SCC trails, their addresses, distance, etc. This new brochure has been very popular.

The old brochure collection almost entirely lacked photos – and those that were used were very outdated. This new collection has been much more effective at catching peoples' attention. Paige's use of photos and color, as well as simple symbols have made the brochures eye-catching, easy-to-read, and much more valuable in general. We have noticed a large increase in the number of brochures picked up from numerous SCC parks since the new roll-out.

Another improvement was incorporating QR codes to the brochures, which allows users to easily find SCC's event calendar, social media, interactive trails map, rules and regulations, and more online.

The same general layout was used for each brochure. Paige took special care to make the new designs simple and user-friendly, so they can be easily updated in the future by others without special program skills needed. This is incredibly important as our parks are ever-changing and staff turnover could largely affect the ability to make these types of changes in future years.

Outstanding Volunteer Award

Robert (Bob) Hartzler – Story County Conservation

As a recent retiree that is “making up for lost time,” Bob has logged over 448 volunteer hours with Story County Conservation (SCC) just in 2024. Bob’s contributions are varied and are felt by the education and natural resources staff. He has done everything from assist with basic set-up and cleanup at craft programs, to help set up caches or luminaries for outdoor programs, “babysit” campfires, independently led activities for a local STEAM Night when SCC scheduling conflicts didn’t allow staff to attend, and has hand-delivered, by bike, the print newsletter, Prairie Horizons, throughout the community. Not only does Bob contribute to SCC’s education efforts, but he also helps staff learn. He spent a career conducting research on weed biology, herbicide use, and integrated weed management. As a Master Volunteer, he’s now a trusted source of information to the SCC staff.