



IMPACT REPORT 2024



FROM THE DIRECTOR



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

ON THE COVER Aerial view looking west toward Iowa of the upper Mississippi River at the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers. © Mark Godfrey/TNC; Emmett Wilke at a volunteer event © Casey Struecker/TNC; Nashville warbler © Andy Raupp /TNC Photo Contest 2019; Open prairie at sunset © Getty Images THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM State Director Graham McGaffin at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. © Amber Markham/TNC; Bison © Maria Jeffs

First and foremost, thank you for your support and encouragement over the past year. It has been truly humbling to see what we can achieve together. I recognize that as I write this letter we are in the thick of an election year. The rhetoric is often divisive, at all levels. It can be easy to get entrenched in what divides us rather than focusing on what has the potential to unite us. Nature has that power.

Years ago, I hosted Senate staffers on a hike because one of our priority projects required support from our federal delegation. About halfway through the hour-long excursion, a summer thunderstorm rolled in, and it started pouring. We crouched in a small alcove along the trail, trying to minimize how soaked we were going to get, but to no avail. Eventually we had to hike back, shake hands, wring out our maps, and laugh. What else can you do?

I had personally known the congressional staffer we were hiking

with for a couple years. TNC got along with his office well, and I believe he saw us as a trusted voice for conservation issues. But, more often than not, we found ourselves on opposite sides of issues. The experience of being outside, enjoying a beautiful hike, and then getting surprised by the storm quickly united us in a common cause of speed-hiking out of the downpour without sliding off the trail. But what also emerged from the shared experience was a more constructive dialogue for long-term conservation solutions.

As you read the stories here in our 2024 Impact Report, I would encourage you all to consider and celebrate those opportunities to unite around nature, and embrace your role in helping The Nature Conservancy continue the great work that Iowa needs us to do.

Together, we find a way.

Graham McGaffin



American Buffalo
Bison bison

Iowa Leadership Team

Graham McGaffin, State Director
Chelsea Carter-Kern, People Services Manager
Amber Markham, Director of External Affairs & Climate
Scott Moats, Director of Lands/Fire Manager
Josh Spies, Director of Freshwater Projects
Carrie Walkiewicz, Director of Development

Iowa Board of Trustees

Loree Miles, Dallas Center, *Board Chair*
Sharon Krause, Des Moines, *Chair Elect*
Brian Bourgeois, Mechanicsville
Jeff Chungath, Des Moines
Joe Conover, Milford
Chad Dummermuth, Cedar Rapids
David Johnson, Des Moines
Rob Manatt, Dewitt

Paul Morf, Mount Vernon
Gregg Oden, Ph.D., Iowa City
Robert Riley, Jr., Des Moines
Lee Schoenewe, Spencer
James Stein, Muscatine
Scott Tinsman, Davenport
James Von Maur, Davenport
Larry Weber, Ph.D., Iowa City

REFLECTIONS FROM OUR VOLUNTEER LEADERS

The Board of Trustees in Iowa represents business and community leaders from across the state who volunteer their time and talent to help shape our work and support our conservation efforts. They are part of a group of more than 1,500 individuals from every state and several countries who, along with the Conservancy's global board of directors, guide the Conservancy's conservation strategies around the world. Trustees in Iowa engage in long- and short-term planning, fundraising, protection, community outreach, and advocacy on behalf of the Conservancy, and we are deeply grateful for their leadership. Below are personal reflections from just a few of the individuals who currently serve on the Iowa board.

1 GREGG ODEN | 2020-present

My love affair with nature began while growing up in extreme southeastern South Dakota, where the Missouri River was a mile away in one direction and the part of the Loess Hills that would become the Conservancy's Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve formed our horizon in the other direction. Many happy hours were spent along the river and exploring the creeks and roadsides in the country for the little wonders to be found there. Later, my wife and I enjoyed backpacking in the High Sierra, a pristine wilderness where you can go 200 miles without crossing a road, giving us a deep and lasting appreciation for the importance of landscape-scale protection. This is a guiding focus of the Conservancy today, together with its longstanding commitment to science-based action and to seeking partnerships leading to tangible results on the ground. So, it is a privilege to be a Trustee and help advance these goals here in Iowa and beyond.

2 JEFF CHUNGATH | 2023-present

I spent summers on a farm and understood early on the importance of the soil, water and interdependence of organisms, including humans. Conservation was a natural progression from those early years. I've helped with prescribed burns and restoring prairie, including my backyard prairie and rain garden. I agreed to serve as a Trustee when I heard of the effort to integrate large tracts of wilderness. We need large, interconnected preserves to protect a diverse set of plants, insects and wildlife.

3 SHARON KRAUSE | 2019-present

When I was growing up along the Mississippi River, my family spent nights and weekends enjoying all that nature in Eastern Iowa has to offer, thus instilling my deep-seated appreciation for the outdoors. As an adult, it became increasingly apparent to me how conservation impacts our economy, outdoor recreation opportunities, and food and water supply. It also became clear Iowa is not on an island; our actions impact those down the river from us and even farther, those with whom we share an ocean. The Conservancy recognizes this and the way in which local, regional and continental ecosystems across the globe intersect and react. I am energized to align myself with a conservation organization where I can devote my time and resources to protect not only Iowa, but lands and waters that extend well beyond our borders.

4 JIM STEIN | 2015-present

When I was a teen, I attended Camp Manito-wish, a YMCA camp in northern Wisconsin. I loved the woods and I loved the water. I still love the woods and water. I thought then and still think today about how important the clean water, clean air, and experiences in the outdoors are to all of us. A close friend mentioned to me that I sounded like someone who should get involved with The Nature Conservancy, so I did! We only get one world! We better take care of it, and that is what The Nature Conservancy does.

1



2



3



4



FROM TOP © Courtesy of Gregg Oden, Jeff Chungath, Sharon Krause, Jim Stein BACKGROUND Chris Helzer/TNC

Innovation in sustainable grazing at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve

Conservancy preserve a test site for precision cattle management

Join us in the field

Are you interested in learning more about the virtual fencing project and joining our next “Field Day” open house? Contact Amy Crouch at acrouch@tnc.org for more.



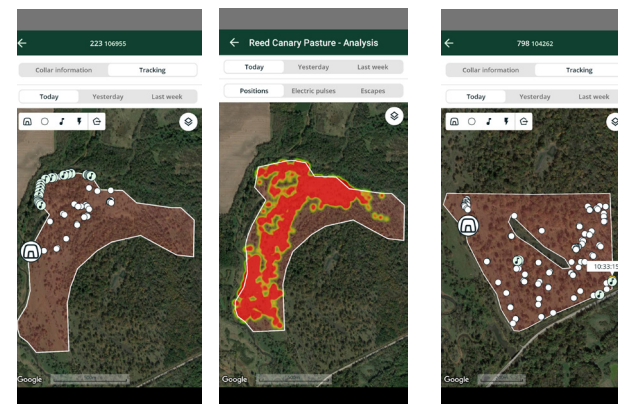
Most weekends, you can find Elizabeth Owens out halter-training shorthorns—wearing her favorite old, brown coat—on her family’s farm in Eastern Iowa. She’s a sixth-generation cattle breeder. Her day job also includes working with cattle; as eastern Iowa assistant land steward, she helps test technology innovations for sustainable grazing for The Nature Conservancy.

In 2023, Owens and others kicked off a pilot project to test virtual livestock fencing at the Conservancy’s Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve. There, a tenant’s 51 beef cattle were outfitted with collars—like chain necklaces with a small box instead of a cowbell—that use GPS technology to keep the cattle inside a boundary. They emit a sound as a deterrent when needed.

Managed on a phone app, with boundary areas drawn with a fingertip, these virtual fences can be changed regularly. This fluidity can protect sensitive plant and animal species, adjust to weather and flooding, or make spots off-limits, without having to install permanent fencing.

“Here, nature needs grazing to function better,” says Amy Crouch, the Conservancy’s Little Sioux project director and sustainable grazing lead. “This technology can help us get there.”

Much of Iowa’s landscape is adapted to grazers, be they bison, grasshoppers or cattle, and all of the Conservancy’s main preserves in Iowa are grazed, according to Crouch. The opportunity to remove fencing on a landscape, and make land management more targeted, is garnering attention.



THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Field day with partner organizations at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve © Amy Crouch/TNC; Smartphone screenshots displaying the GPS location of cattle. © Elizabeth Owens/TNC; OPPOSITE PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM CIRCLES Close-up of cattle wearing GPS collar tracker © Amy Crouch/TNC; Monarch butterfly resting on an ironweed plant © Elizabeth Owens/TNC; A temporary holding tank for cattle is required to attach trackers to individual cows. © Elizabeth Owens/TNC OPPOSITE PAGE BACKGROUND Cattle with calf at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve © Elizabeth Owens/TNC

"We want to be the ones who take the risk of testing new technology. We want local producers and public land managers to learn from our failures and our successes. We picked a landscape that's a challenge, and we want to drive innovation to advance regenerative grazing as a viable option."

— Amy Crouch, Little Sioux Project Director

Along the way the Conservancy staff has learned about area cell reception coverage, battery life, cattle behavior, vegetative cover and more. Owens says this technology could help improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat and reduce erosion, helping to improve thousands of acres of native landscapes.

Owens, Crouch and the team are now in the middle of their second season piloting small-area virtual livestock fencing on Conservancy property, and they regularly encourage community members, public land managers and cattle folks to come to "field days" out on the preserve to see it for themselves and ask questions.

"It's one more tool in our conservation toolbox," says Owens. "And it's a really cool one, too."



The science of land protection

We use three main protection strategies to preserve Iowa's diverse lands and waters—acquisition, partner transfers and conservation easements

We prioritize places for land conservation based on science and where we can have the greatest impact to ensure the health of our plants, animals and waterways across the state.

“Iowa has so much more biodiversity than people realize,” says Josh Spies, director of freshwater at The Nature Conservancy in Iowa. “Here at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve, for example, we’re protecting a mosaic of prairies, savannas, streams and wetlands. Together, this creates the most biologically diverse place in our great state—critical for the many species that live here and ones passing through on migration.”

The Conservancy's scientific ecoregional assessments help identify places to protect for critical conservation value across the state. Our scientists look at key species, habitat and land connectivity. In addition, we apply “resiliency science”—planning for a warming world, identifying where and how landscapes will change, and analyzing how to best protect biodiversity—to decide when and how to acquire land for conservation.

Why TNC?

We have a 60-year history as a science-based nonprofit in Iowa. Our work is collaborative and nonpartisan. We plan and implement strategies focused on the health of our natural systems that sustain our lives and livelihoods.

HOW WE WORK



Acquire land to manage long-term for biodiversity

What's acquisition? In this approach, we buy and manage the land and hold the fee title ourselves. These are critical lands and waters to manage for biodiversity and are identified in conservation plans.

According to Spies, Iowa is one of the most fragmented and least connected landscapes in the country. The Conservancy is working to reverse that and better connect key landscapes for species migration and protect the wildlife, water and land that make Iowa special.

Example—Land of the Swamp White Oak

The Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve is a gem—a rich floodplain home to birds, flowers and slow-moving streams, and a place where the Conservancy has worked for 39 years.

It's also one of the nation's first designated "Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas" and the landscape serves as a living laboratory. Conservancy scientists and volunteers conduct wildlife research, manage invasive species and more.



Buy land to transfer or assist our partners

What's a land transfer or assist? "Oftentimes, we play a critical role in helping others protect land," says Scott Moats, the Conservancy's director of lands/fire manager. "A land transfer or assist is when we are working with agencies or public and private partners to help them protect places that we won't end up owning or managing. We can get more done for conservation by working with, and supporting, others."

Example—Loess Hills tract

This 834-acre parcel is a missing link, so to speak, of intact tallgrass prairie and woodlands, that sits adjacent to already protected spaces—Stone State Park and Heendah Hills State Preserve.

Now, it's a connected natural landscape, essential for birds and other species of plants and animals. In 2023, we transferred the property to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, after purchasing the land from a private landowner.



Secure conservation easements to protect lands and waters

What's a conservation easement? It's a legal tool and designation to protect natural areas and can prevent development or land conversion. A landowner reaches out to us when they are interested in enrolling a portion—or sometimes all—of their property in an easement. We pay the landowner for the value of any applicable development rights, or they may choose to donate that value to us. We currently hold 35 conservation easements across the state. We also help others in the process of acquiring an easement.

Example—Cosgrove Green easement

Kathy Cosgrove Green recently donated 19 acres of virgin prairie in the Little Sioux Watershed to the Conservancy as a conservation easement. "My dad and I often walked around the prairie, and he'd show me where the old wagon tracks were," says Green. "I've always felt protective of this special place. Compared to the alternative to what this land could become, I couldn't fathom that. There is so much value in this land remaining just as it has always been."

Growing the opportunity to make a difference for climate

Conservancy creates playbook for nonprofits to access tax credits for rooftop solar



Unlocking funding to expand access to solar power

Did you know the federal Inflation Reduction Act invests in clean energy like solar? Qualifying “exempt” nonprofits and businesses in Iowa can utilize now-extended tax credits to install rooftop solar panels! To find out more, please visit nature.org/iowaclimate and download our Solar for Nonprofits Guide.

Last fall, local leaders and community members gathered to cut the ribbon and turn on a giant switch, literally. They were celebrating the opening of a new rooftop solar project at the nonprofit Urban Dreams in Des Moines, which offers community programs to remove barriers and uplift underserved and underrepresented people.

“Installing the solar panels is the easy part. It’s the process of applying for the tax credits that can be daunting,” says Patrick Snell, The Nature Conservancy’s climate and external affairs associate in Iowa. “Ensuring more people and organizations have the resources they need to access the benefits of rooftop solar is the Conservancy’s big priority.”

Here’s the thing: places like nonprofits, schools, and churches are exempt from federal taxes, which means they’re not always eligible for tax-associated rebates and credits. This is a barrier The Conservancy and partners set out to remove by creating a playbook that all nonprofits can utilize to help improve rooftop solar program access.

Now, qualifying exempt organizations—like Urban Dreams—can install rooftop solar panels

and apply to receive money back from the federal government, just like many homeowners already do. In fact, Urban Dreams is one of the first organizations nationwide to go through the federal solar tax credit’s new “elective-pay” option. It’s pretty big news for access, equity and climate resilience. The Conservancy sees this model as a road map that could be followed by all nonprofits nationwide. “It’s a great climate solution, financial decision and community benefit,” Snell says.

“Urban Dreams will benefit from the solar power generated on our roof, and the community will benefit from the resources we can save to give back to those in need,” says Izaah Knox, executive director of Urban Dreams. The solar array system is expected to save more than \$3,200 a year in energy costs, which will enable Urban Dreams to reinvest in its people and programming.

This solar installation caps a two-year Grow Solar initiative in Polk County. The solar systems installed during the two years of that program will avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 1,094,220 lbs. of CO₂ every year.



OPPOSITE PAGE A new solar array has been installed at Urban Dreams, a nonprofit organization in Des Moines. THIS PAGE BACKGROUND Urban Dreams' Executive Director Izaah Knox cuts the ribbon on the new solar array. THIS PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT Conservancy staff Patrick Snell, Amber Markham and Graham McGaffin stand by the sign celebrating the Urban Dreams solar partnerships; Izaah Knox turns on the switch to power the new solar panel array for the first time; Climate and External Affairs Associate Patrick Snell talks with solar partners. All photos © 1 Source Solar

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS IN IOWA

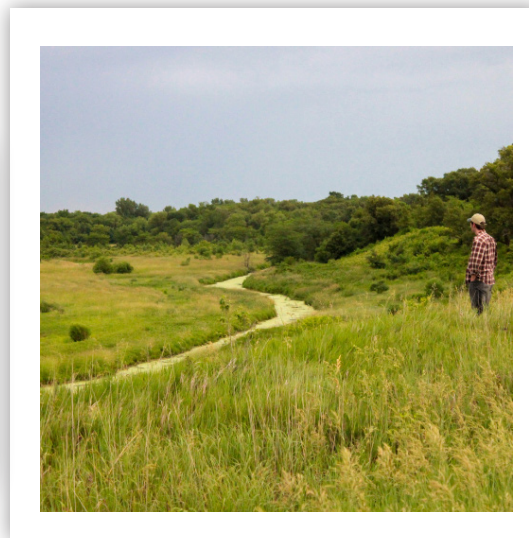
In April 2024, The Nature Conservancy in Iowa concluded a year-long celebration of our 60 years as a chapter. Thanks to the many of you who helped us reflect on and celebrate the milestones over the years. With your support and encouragement, we look forward to addressing the challenges ahead—in the next 60 years and beyond!



© TNC

1980

After decades of leadership from volunteers, the Conservancy hires its first state director.



© Sofie Jaramillo A.

1985

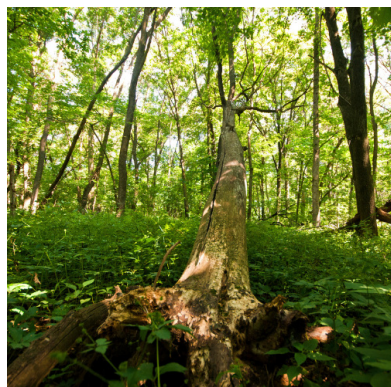
The “Savannah Project” begins in eastern Iowa with the first land acquisition in the Lower Cedar Valley.



© Chris Helzer



1963



© Lauren Nickell

1963

The Iowa Chapter is established and begins to permanently protect land with the acquisition of Berry Woods, a 42-acre high-quality forest south of Des Moines.



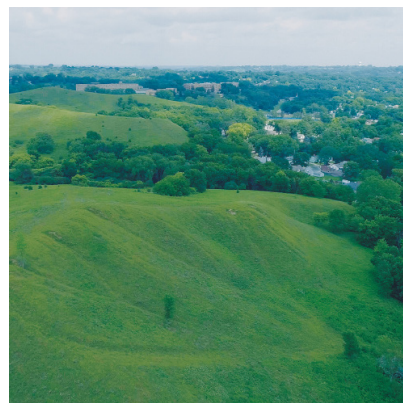
© Amy Crouch

1972

110 acres are purchased in the Little Sioux Valley—a unique geological formation and remnant prairie. Today, Freda Haffner Kettlehole Preserve is the most visited preserve in the state.

1982

Sioux City Prairie is acquired in the scenic Loess Hills. The 150 acres of prairie is open to the public for hiking and wildlife watching.



© TNC Iowa

1980 1982



© TNC Iowa

1988

The Anna Beal Internship Trust Program begins. Scholarships are awarded to resident college undergraduates for a hands-on summer internship working on Conservancy properties throughout the state.

© TNC Iowa



1992

The Conservancy makes its first acquisition at the Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve in the Loess Hills, which features the state's only populations of prairie rattlesnakes, black-billed magpies and other unique wildlife.

© Dale Maxson



2001

The Boone River Watershed and the Lower Cedar River become focal areas for our freshwater conservation work.

2006

The Conservancy joins a coalition of conservation partners to help establish a Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund for Iowa.

© Matt Fisher



© Chris Helzer



2010

The Conservancy joins Iowa's Water and Land Legacy (IWILL) coalition to help establish funding for the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

2019

The Iowa Chapter hits a milestone of 20,000 acres protected through acquisition or easement.

© Dale Maxson



1999

The Conservancy completes the first conservation easement with a private landowner, demonstrating that landowners can protect the Loess Hills while still living and working on the land. Conservation easements have since protected approximately 7,000 acres of private lands in the Loess Hills.



2003

In partnership with the Missouri chapter, the Conservancy acquires land in the Grand River Grasslands, an open grassland that is home to many species, including prairie chickens.

© Nina Hale_TNC Photo Contest 2021



© Chris Helzer



2008

American bison are reintroduced at Broken Kettle Grasslands Preserve.



© Casey Struecker

2023

Additional acquisitions at the Broken Kettle Grasslands expand the Preserve to 3,316 acres. The Conservancy also completes a comprehensive Freshwater Action Plan to guide critical conservation actions in our rivers, streams, wetlands and watersheds across the state.



Enhancing soil health

Iowa is home to some of the world's best farmland. Programs like 4R Plus help safeguard and improve the health of Iowa soil and water, which is important to the long-term quality of life for Iowans and the sustainability of farming.

Learn more at 4rplus.org

A vision for the future of farming

Working together with farmers to reach common goals

Each spring, Paige Frautschy drives through the rolling Iowa countryside, flanked by empty brown fields ready for planting. She is struck by a vision of a different spring landscape—one where lush green cover crops stretch as far as the eye can see. “Year-round living roots in every acre is the goal,” says Frautschy, the agriculture program director for The Nature Conservancy in Iowa. “This benefits both the environment and farmers.”

Frautschy's passion for regenerative farming practices is evident. She emphasizes the importance of incorporating techniques like cover cropping to enhance water quality, protect soil health and improve climate resilience.

“Over 80 percent of Iowa's land is in row-crop agriculture. How we manage our land can simultaneously support the function of natural ecosystems, a strong farm economy and vibrant rural communities everywhere.”

— Paige Frautschy, Iowa
Agriculture Program Director

The Conservancy is pioneering programs to support farmers in adopting conservation practices. Through a science-based approach and a wide network of experts and partnerships, innovations nationwide are revolutionizing the agricultural landscape.

Karen Wilke, associate director of freshwater at The Conservancy in Iowa, meets with landowners regularly as part of her work out on the land, building oxbow wetlands to restore historic waterways and improve water quality. She says that farmers and conservationists care about the same thing—the health of the land. “People love talking about their farms,” Wilke says. “They share their concerns about erosion and runoff. We are a resource hub that can help that, and together, we can achieve shared conservation goals.”



The collaborative spirit extends beyond the Conservancy, as we partner with organizations like the Iowa Soybean Association to drive conservation efforts across the state. “Our working collaboration supports on-the-ground work where our priorities and geographies overlap,” says Roger Wolf, Iowa Soybean Association’s director of conservation. “Through this, we’re working to harness what we’ve learned to drive action across Iowa and nationally to unite ag-retail and advance scalable conservation practices.”

The future of agriculture and conservation go hand in hand, according to Frautschy. The Conservancy bridges gaps and forges partnerships, acting as a critical puzzle piece to create a sustainable and prosperous future for Iowa’s lands and communities.

OPPOSITE PAGE LEFT TO RIGHT A farmer checks soil quality in a corn field. © Harlen Persinger; A buffer strip along the edge of the field prevents nutrients and soil from running into local waterways. © Jason Whalen/Fauna Creative
THIS PAGE BACKGROUND Farmers on their family farm in Anderson, Iowa, check their soybean crop’s health. © Harlen Persinger; THIS PAGE TOP TO BOTTOM This field showcases the practice of no-till farming and crop rotation techniques. © Harlen Persinger; An agricultural field with buffer strips helps with erosion control, creates habitat and improves water quality. © Harlen Persinger; A combine drives through an agricultural field that implements no-till and other 4R practices. © David Ike



How policy helps shape our land legacy

Behind the scenes: a Q&A with Amber Markham

Amber Markham, the Conservancy's Director of External Affairs in Iowa, reflects on the Conservancy's policy work and why it matters for conservation.

How did you get started in government relations and policy work?

This is my 18th year doing policy work, and I started my career at the Iowa Farm Bureau. I actually grew up on a farm, here in Iowa. Both of my grandfathers had Century farms—row crops of corn and soybeans. So I know how important conservation work is for our farmers and our wild spaces.

So what are your policy priorities with TNC right now?

Here in Iowa, most people know about “IWILL.” It’s the bipartisan-created Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy, a constitutional amendment that passed in 2010, with 63% support from Iowa voters. It creates a Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund for permanently protecting natural resources and outdoor recreation. Its impact could be enormous for Iowa.

Sadly, the funding structure for it has not been implemented and the fund has been sitting there, empty. We have a lot of policy

goals but this work remains a priority. We continue to defend and advocate for what Iowans voiced that they wanted, and we work to make sure it doesn’t take a step backward, either.

What happened with the funding for IWILL?

The amendment stipulated that the funding comes from an increase in sales tax, which hasn’t happened yet. Not everyone is a fan of tax increases, which I get. This is the original funding vehicle that the voters approved, though, so I think we all need to think about the benefits that a sales tax increase can bring, and how to get that done so we can all benefit. Without it, we lack the funding to get conservation work done at a scale that matters.

At the end of the day, the one thing we can all agree on is the importance of our land. IWILL benefits our state’s water quality, farmers, recreation opportunities and the rural economy.





What can folks in Iowa do to help?

We all have to say something. We, as Iowans, have not forgotten how much this matters. Based on the well-attended committee hearing turnout over the last several years, it's abundantly clear that Iowans want protected natural resources, places to recreate, protection from flooding, water quality and more.

Politics are hard and scary, and it's easy to step back and let others handle it. Now, more than ever, we all need to lean in. You need to call your legislator and talk to them

about what's important to you, your legacy, and how the natural world matters to your family.

You need to go to coffee with your local legislator and tell them about conservation work on your farm and fishing with your family or a bike ride with your kids on a local trail and how the IWILL work is still important to you and is still a top priority for all of us.

What does it all mean to you, personally?

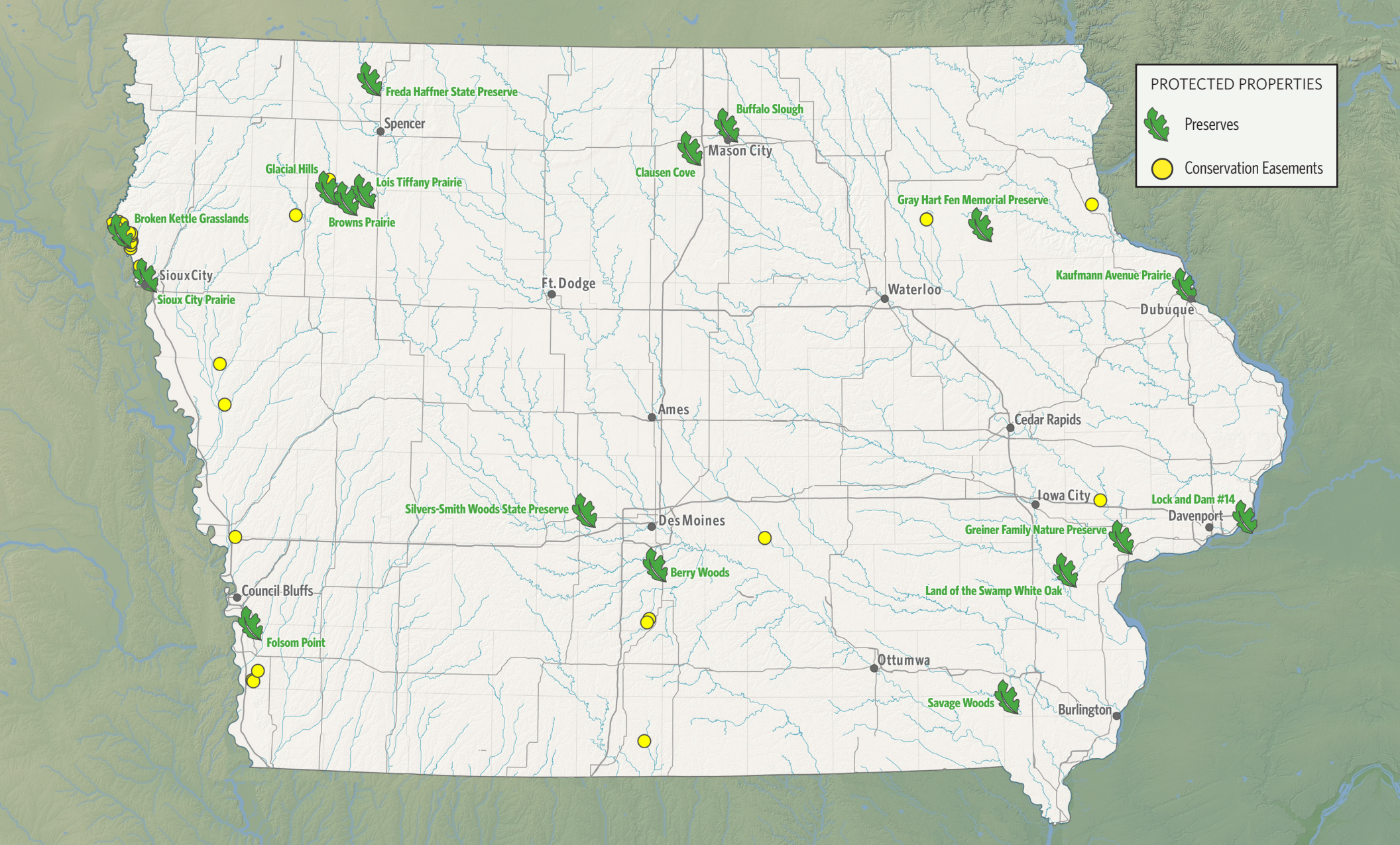
Good question. I think about my own legacy with this work. I came from a family of farmers and I have my own kids now. I'm fighting for our environment, our rural economy and our farms. Funding IWILL benefits all of these. I'm fighting for my past, our present and our future.

Find your local legislator

Go to: www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find

Get involved in TNC policy

To learn more about IWILL, please visit: www.iowaswaterandlandlegacy.org



PROTECTED PROPERTIES

Preserves
 Conservation Easements

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The Nature Conservancy in Iowa
 505 5th Avenue #630
 Des Moines, IA 50309

nature.org/iowa
iowa@tnc.org
 515-244-2044

TNCIowa
 nature_ia

At **The Nature Conservancy in Iowa**, we envision an Iowa where healthy, functioning lands and waters allow biodiversity to thrive and where we embrace transformative climate action for the **benefit of all people and nature.**