



hoods and communities and at the same time use the canopy of the trees they plant to reduce air conditioning and heating needs.

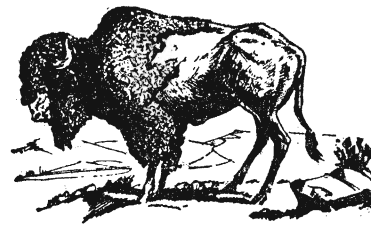
Trees Forever has created a model to build community support to enhance local natural resources. Tree planting for energy efficiency is now leading to tree planting along streams to improve water quality. Trees Forever needs to make this transition since all the investor-owned electric utilities except IES have dropped their commitment to tree planting.

During the last half decade of the 1980s, the Iowa legislature created some of the most progressive environmental policy in the nation. Times have changed. Iowa lawmakers have succumbed to the deregulation and tax cut agenda emphasized in the rest of the nation during the 1990s. If a new environmental agenda is to emerge, the impetus must come from Iowa's citizens working through not-for-profit environmental organizations. I am confident that individual Iowans can become a political force. □

Green Anarchy!

By JEFF NEKOLA

Disappointment and loss are emotions I have become accustomed to when communing with the Iowa countryside. It is rare when I return to northeastern Iowa and am not confronted with the loss of some special place. Feeling so attached to such places, I end up treating each as a death of a close friend. As of late I seem to have been attending one wake after another. Since 1986 five of the last 160 fens in northeastern Iowa have disappeared: two (both among the state's best) to tiling, and three to heavy grazing (one by a bison farmer!). Just this year tiling machines were parked at the edge of the largest remaining fen in the state although as of yet they have not encroached on the fen itself. I have thrice happened upon clear-cut brush piles where only months before ice-age plants and animals lived on some of the few remaining cold-air slopes in the state. The last blacksoil prairie in Linn County disappeared in the summer of 1995 thanks to the Iowa DOT's desire to link Cedar Rapids and the Amanas with four-lane highways. As this is being written, the DOT is



finishing up work on the controversial Marion Bypass project, which will remove the riparian buffer of the 30th Street woods to make consumer access to Lindale Mall more efficient.

I just don't trust the conservation establishment in Iowa to do enough to protect wild areas. I think the Iowa DNR and the Nature Conservancy seem more interested in self-aggrandizement and fund raising than in protecting truly imperiled land and species. And County Conservation Boards are strapped for funds and personnel. I often disagree with management practices they all employ on acquired land, but that's another story.

And I often disagree with how the conservation bureaucracies spend their money. The millions of dollars poured into Otter and Peregrine Falcon reintroduction, a sure provider of positive and free media coverage, ultimately will help save only those two species. A similar amount of money placed into land acquisition would have protected hundreds of other imperiled species as well. Almost monthly it seems I get



unwanted solicitations begging me to donate money to the Nature Conservancy. Besides wasting valuable pulpwood resources with these mass mailings, vast amounts of capital which could have bought precious land are used up. At the beginning of this decade, I was told that due to these and other office expenditures, only one-half of the money given to the Iowa Chapter ever goes directly to purchase land.

Over the last few years I have marveled at the amazing amount which can be accomplished through *individual* action.

Ray Hamilton is an M.D. in Maquoketa. His passion for saving prairie was spurred on in the early 1980s when he attended the Loess Hills Prairie Conference in Monona County. He realized if he saved his money he could become directly involved by buying land himself. In the mid-80s he learned of a local prairie pasture which was coming up for sale, and purchased it. This site is incredibly diverse, harboring perhaps the only surviving colony of clustered broomrape (*Orobancha fasciculata*) in Iowa, plus populations of at least four other rare plants (Richardson's Sedge, Hidden Sedge, Rock Sandwort, Prairie Moonwort), and two of our rarest prairie skippers (Ottoe Skipper and Bunchgrass Skipper).

During this time Ray has been a careful observer of his prairie, managing only when necessary, and always with a gentle hand. He has written an informational booklet for the Iowa Prairie Network group detailing the essentials for diversified prairie management based upon his experience from his land. Ray's tenure as caretaker of this prairie has been marked by no disappearances of rare species populations. I was thrilled to learn last year that Ray had helped purchase the Canton Glade described in my last *Almanac* piece. It could not be in better hands. It's also interesting to mention that Ray's enthusiasm has

spread in Maquoketa; last spring he showed me a magnificent glade south of Maquoketa which some other acquaintances had discovered and subsequently bought.

Joel and Joyce Hanes of Mason City have been on the lookout for natural lands in Iowa for some time. Through their friends they have been able to learn of agriculturally poor, but biologically rich farm lands. They (alone or with the help of others) have purchased three properties. In 1991 this couple showed off to me their most recent acquisition: a large shale glade near Rockford. This is one of the most important remaining examples of this exceedingly rare prairie habitat, and it supports a number of rare species, including the first population of Crawe's Sedge seen in Iowa during the 20th Century. Like Ray Hamilton, the Hanes have been able to incorporate a gentle and effective management strategy in their care of this place. They are the only land managers in the state who actually appear to be controlling the spread of sumac while not endangering the rare species found in the same area.

The advantages of buying land yourself are obvious. First, every dollar spent on personal acquisition efforts will actually end up buying land. None will end up in the hands of mass market advertising campaigns or glitzy, ineffective conservation activities. Second, if you own the land, you also have final say as to management. If you don't want to use fire, you don't have to. If you do want to experiment in spot use of herbicides, you can. Joel Hanes also pointed out that purchases of natural areas may also constitute a crafty investment as demand for untouched land increases.

Ray, Joel, and Joyce have remarked to me that their efforts have not constituted a Herculean investment of their money or time. Ray noted that the prairie/glade land he has purchased



rarely exceeds \$500/acre, as the thin and dry soil of such sites has made farming impossible, and that he was able to afford his purchases simply by choosing to drive an old trusty (and now rusty) red pickup rather than buying a newer vehicle.

If others were to follow their lead, a green anarchy would spread across the state where local people would become the agents to save our heritage. Because of them, I can now imagine a future in which each and every one of us took responsibility to protect our natural heritage rather than waiting for some faceless group to do the job for us. This is the type of grass-roots anarchy envisioned by agrarian prophets like Wendell Berry or Thomas Jefferson where power is invested in the many and not the few, where all can participate in the betterment of their world. Ray, Joel, and Joyce have shown me that such anarchy can be used to give space for all species and to provide a natural legacy for future generations.

Pie-in-the-sky utopia? Not at all. This vision is well within our reach, thanks to the nature of the places needing protection. Most of the remaining unforested natural areas in Iowa are quite small: very few prairies or glades exceed 20 acres, while over 60 per cent of the remaining fens in northeastern Iowa are less than 5 acres in size. The protection of natural areas thus does not have to entail large sums of money. Using Ray's high-end estimate of \$500/acre estimate for prairie lands, a fairly small (\$5000) outlay could protect a 10 acre site. For the price of a new Jeep Cherokee, a 40-acre pasture awash in rare plants could be saved. If you were to pool resources with four other friends, the amount of money invested to protect such a place would amount to that spent for a used car. You can become an active participant in the pro-

tection of our biodiversity for the cost of a used car. Let that sink in for a moment.

We have been led to believe that conservation is out of our hands, that it is too complicated and costly for any but the TNC or DNR or county conservation boards to accomplish. There is no reason, however, that each of us who is comfortably employed can not directly conserve our natural heritage. There is no reason for bureaucratic middlemen to get involved: we can do this work ourselves.

I plan on using that power as best I can. Within the last month, I discovered that a part of the single most important site in the state for rare plants had been sold. The part which changed ownership has on it one of the most important fen habitats in the state, and harbors populations of two species found nowhere else. One of these was last seen in Iowa in the 1890s, while the other had never previously been seen within the state. A new fence had been erected, and corn was growing up to the edge of the site. The DNR and TNC have known of this place since 1987, but never have contacted the previous or current landowners. I visited the new landowner, and offered to buy that one, unfarmable acre from him. He did not laugh at me, but considered the offer. As of this writing, we are both looking into the legal realities of such a land transfer. I am hoping that within the next 12 months, the first acquisition for the Nekola Nature Reserve System will have been made. The DNR and TNC, and their problems, will then become irrelevant to the survival of the species inhabiting that fen. Their survival will then become my responsibility — a responsibility which I gladly will accept — as it will allow me to give back to a land which has been so kind to me. □

