

Naturally LOUISA COUNTY

Rich in Nature, History and Culture

DEC. 2023
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EDITED BY
Lana Artz-McComb

Virginia Grove Timber Harvest

By: Lisa Louck, DNR District Forester

If you spent time walking the trails of Virginia Grove in the last few months, you have likely seen some different markings. Luckily, there is no tree disease that causes blue paint lines to form on the trunk, so it must be the forest management plan in action!

Virginia Grove is managed for multiple goals including recreation, wildlife, access, and overall forest health. I have had the pleasure of walking Virginia Grove many times over the last decade to develop and update a forest management plan. Having a healthy forest means maintaining and managing for the widest range of habitat and animal resources.



Trees growing mid-story, shading out future oaks.

Oak-hickory forests have been a dominant forest type in Iowa, but lack of management has allowed oak trees to age while different trees gained a foothold under the oaks.

Without harvesting some of the mature trees, there will be little hope for new oaks to have enough space and sunlight to grow

to maturity. As older oak trees age or die naturally the other forest type will become dominant.

Trees at Virginia Grove were chosen for harvest on a tree by tree basis. Age, species, tree condition, proximity to other mature and young oaks were all factors in the decision. After harvest work is completed, all areas will be monitored and assessed for needed follow up management such as weed tree removal, invasive plant control and prescribed fire.

The shorter term results after harvest will be brushier areas where young oaks could start growing. There will be an overall healthier forest because declining and overly dense trees have been removed. Farther reaching results of this work will hopefully be a more diverse, vigorous, and healthy forest for the current and future park users.

If you have any questions or concerns as this management gets underway, please don't hesitate to reach out.

lisa.louck@dnr.iowa.gov 319-759-1108.

Editor's Note:

This article has been republished in anticipation of the timber harvest taking place during Winter 2023-2024.

Staff discovered an early brochure (20+ years old) developed to take visitors on a self-guided hike through the Oak-Hickory Forest Community at Virginia Grove. The Wapello High School Art Club provided art work!

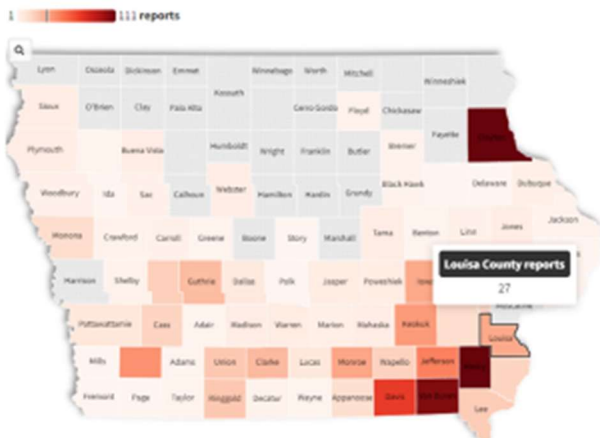
Please use the enclosed brochure to explore the wonders of Virginia Grove!

www.LouisaCountyConservation.org

EHD in Deer

By: Sarah Martinez, LCC Naturalist

With fall in the air and the start of hunting and trapping seasons underway, reports of dead deer across SE Iowa have been pouring in. While some are found on dry land, the vast majority turn up close to streams or ponds. The animals have no signs of gunshot wounds, broken bones, or any external trauma, they are seemingly healthy on the outside. So, who's the culprit? Small, mosquito-like flies, called *Culiocoides* midges, carrying a highly transmissible virus called Epizootic Hemorrhagic disease (EHD). These midges bite and feed on the blood of deer, transferring the disease to the individual in the process. The mortality rate is extremely high, reaching as high as 90% in white-tailed deer. Over 1,000 cases have been reported across 68 Iowa counties, making this the most widespread annual distribution on record! It's important to note that the virus is not capable of being transmitted from deer to humans.



The Iowa DNR has received 1,074 reports of EHD disease in deer populations across 68 counties in Iowa. These are only reported EHD-related mortalities, which is not an estimate of total mortality. Typically, the state sees around 50 reported cases per year across 10 to 15 counties.

EHD is not new to Iowa. Handfuls of cases are logged each year since its arrival in 2012. However, the drastic increase in reported cases this year is not something we should ignore.

Research suggests this viral disease may be more widespread in years with long periods of drought or frequent flooding. These events expose plenty of low water conditions and stagnant pools and ponds, perfect for these mud-loving midges to lay their eggs.

While there is no treatment or preventative methods for wild populations, you should know what you're looking for if you stumble across an affected individual. Infected deer become quite lethargic, weak, and display swelling of the tongue, eyelids, head, and neck. They also display excessive salivation, avoidance of direct sunlight, and develop a rapid pulse and fever, leading them to seek out water to reduce their body temperature. Most deer that die from EHD are found in or near open water.

There is some good news. EHD is seasonal, typically peaking in the late summer and early fall. The first hard freeze kills the midges. Having a slightly warmer fall this year may have contributed to the outbreak, prolonging the lives of the midges, and giving them more opportunity to spread.

With the seasons changing once again, we can expect that this disease activity is on the downhill slide, with no long-term impacts to the overall deer populations in Iowa.

To report dead deer please call or email the Conservation Officer for Louisa County, Joe Fourdyce at 563-260-1225, joseph.fourdyce@dnr.iowa.gov

Louisa County Transfer Station

Drop Off Recycling and Waste Disposal

Open Monday-Friday: 8 am - 4 pm

Open Saturday: 9 am - Noon

14048 70th St., Wapello, IA 52653

Questions? 319-523-5013

Household recycling – FREE

Tires, e-waste & appliance recycling – small fee

louisacountyia.gov

Facebook: Louisa County Transfer Station



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Winter Wreath Making

Monday, December 11; 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Langwood Education Center

\$5/wreath

Get into the winter spirit by making a natural wreath to bring some holiday cheer into your home for December! Wreath base, greenery, and decorations will be provided along with hot coco and popcorn.

All are welcome to explore the trails at Langwood before or after making their wreath.

All ages welcome!

Registration Required



Christmas Bird Count

tentative Friday, December 15

The Annual Christmas Bird Count for Louisa County will take place mid-December with a tentative date set for December 15th.

Join a team of bird enthusiasts to help with the largest global bird count! All are welcome whether you are a beginning or experienced birder.

More information will be sent out in early December.

Contact conservation@louisacountyva.gov to let us know you are interested in receiving more information.

Noon Year's Eve!

Tuesday, January 2; 10:00 am - Noon

Langwood Education Center, Free!

Bundle up and join us for our favorite annual tradition! Celebrate 2024 with indoor and outdoor crafts, nature activities, snacks, and more.

We will gather together to countdown to a noon birdseed toss and lemonade toast to the New Year!

Langwood will remain open through 2:30 pm for winter trail exploration and maybe even some sledding!

Let others know on the Facebook Event!

Unless otherwise stated, all registration and program information can be found at:

LouisaCountyConservation.org

Online reservations are available for most programs:

MyCountyParks.com/County/Louisa.aspx

Call our office: 319-523-8381

Send an email: conservation@louisacountyva.gov

DIY Worm Composting

Wednesday, January 3; 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Letts Public Library

\$25 - bin and worms

\$20 - bring your own bin

Having a worm composting bin is a practical and fun way to reduce food waste in your home!

Learn about the problems associated with food waste and make your own worm composting bin (complete with worms) to take home!

This event is co-sponsored by the Louisa Regional Solid Waste Agency.

Registration Required

Digital Planetarium

Remember StarLab from past years? This year we are thrilled to bring StarLab's fancier cousin, the Digital Planetarium to Louisa County!

The Digital Planetarium allows for easier access in and out plus improved graphics and the ability to go on a digital journey through space!

Coming to you in January of 2024.

Scheduled dates so far include:

Mellinger Library - Morning Sun

Wednesday, January 10th, Time TBA

Columbus Junction Public Library

Friday, January 12th; 2:00 pm - 5 pm

Letts Public Library

Saturday, January 13; 10:00 am

Fruitland Community Center with Letts Public Library

Saturday, January 13; 2:00 pm

Great Backyard Bird Count

Saturday, February 17; 9:00 am - 10:00 am

Eden Park

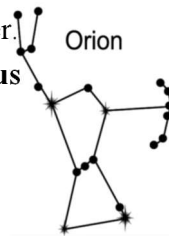
Join the Great Backyard Bird Count and help us survey the birds that are visiting the prairie at Eden Park.

This is a great excuse to get outdoors and enjoy the beautiful winter weather.

All ages welcome.

Come for as long as you'd like.

Let others know on the Facebook Event!



Have you tried Natural Dyes?

By: Lana Artz-McComb, LCC Naturalist

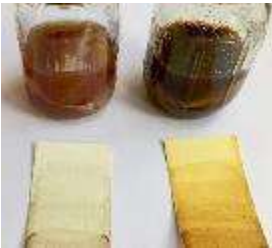
Just boil it! Natural dyes can be made from plants, minerals, even bugs. If you're looking for a fun experiment to try, look no further than natural dyes!

Step 1: Take yourself for a walk in nature (or through the produce aisle at the grocery store).

Step 2: Collect handfuls of leaves, seeds, stems, or berries.

Step 3: Add your nature items to a pot of water and bring to a boil. You'll notice the liquid starting to change colors. The longer you boil, the darker your dye will get.

Step 4: Strain the liquid to remove the remaining bits of nature.



Step 5: Dye any natural fabric - cotton t-shirts, cotton t-shirt yarn, cotton balls, linen, wool. Be sure to experiment with how long you leave your fabric in the dye. Some dyes will change colors as they dry.

Optional: Add a few tablespoons of alum or white vinegar to your dye to help it set.

Dye Ideas for Fall:

- Walnuts (dark brown)
- Acorns (warm brown)
- Birch Bark (peach/pink)
- Pokeweed Berries (purple)
- Sumac Berries (red-pink)

Dye Ideas from Produce:

- Avocado Skin (pink!)
- Red onion (purple)
- Turmeric (orange)
- Beets (Red)
- Spinach (green)

Thank you, Community Foundation of Louisa County!

LCC received two grants from the Community Foundation of Louisa County, one for environmental education and one for improvements at Virginia Grove Recreation Area.

The environmental education grant will purchase supplies used for both school and public programs. We will be replacing consumable supplies and purchasing new mini-Genesis bows. We are especially excited about the mini bows because it will open the range of accessibility that we can provide for archery programs. The grant will also be purchasing supplies for water quality education and animal structure/function programs.



Evelyn Kling next to her bullseye during archery at Summer Nature Day Camp

Virginia Grove Recreation Area received grant funds to improve accessibility at the pond. The project will include an ADA accessible sidewalk leading from the parking lot to the existing accessible dock. The existing dock will be renovated including the addition of an accessible picnic table and fishing area. Fish habitat will be improved around the area to provide habitat and spawning structures for fish.



The dirt path leading to the fishing dock will become a sidewalk thanks to CFLC!



community foundation
of Louisa County
An Affiliate of the Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine



LOUISA COUNTY CONSERVATION

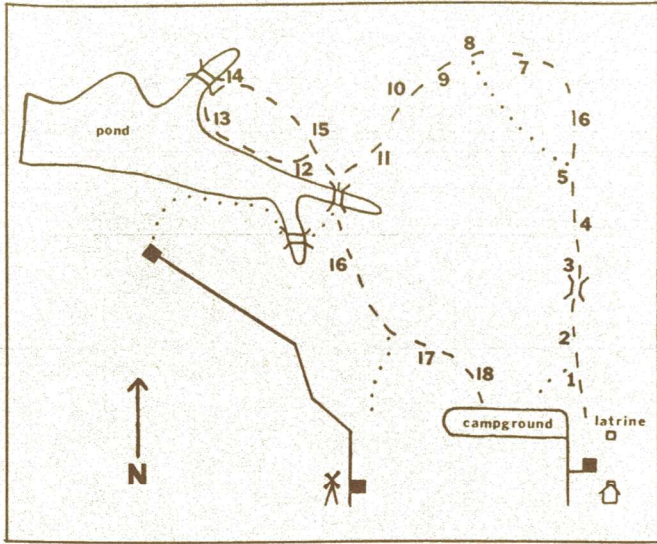
12635 County Road G56, Suite 101
Wapello, IA 52653
319-523-8381; Conservation@louisacountyia.gov
LouisaCountyConservation.org

<p>LCC STAFF</p> <p>Lana Artz-McComb Dani Boysen Noah Robb Jacob Ewart Sarah Martinez</p>	<p>BOARD MEMBERS</p> <p>Elizabeth Kling vacant Joellen Schantz Brad Quigley Josh Hardin</p>
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trail length: $\frac{3}{4}$ mile

- guided trail
- other trails
- road
-) (bridge
- parking lot

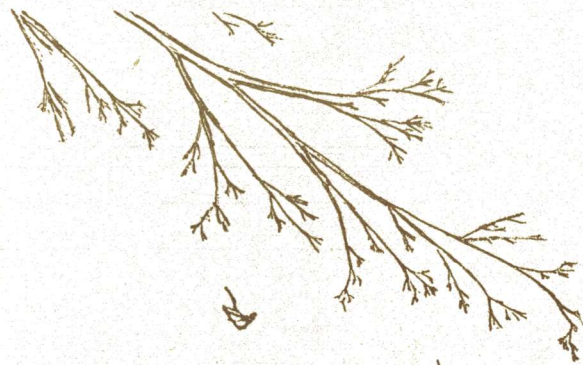


If you enjoyed this nature trail and brochure, you may be interested in some of our other programs and facilities. For more information contact:

Louisa County Conservation Board
 111 South Fourth
 Wapello, Iowa 52653
 [319] 523-8381



Thanks to the Wapello High School Art Club for providing some of the art work for this brochure.



A Walk Through...

the oak-hickory
forest community



a self-guided
nature trail at
**Virginia Grove
County Park**



BEWARE!



POISON IVY can be found all along this trail. When touched, an oily substance on the plant can cause a rash. Look for it as a small plant, vine or shrub. Avoid it by staying on the path.

A community is any group of plants and animals living together. People live in communities called towns. Plants and animals live in communities such as forests, ponds, meadows and streams.

The members of a community depend on each other for survival. As you walk through the communities on this trail, think about how the members help each other.

1 This community is called an **oak-hickory forest**. It's easy to see why when you can identify some of the trees.



The **shagbark hickory's** name gives it away - look for the "shaggy" bark on mature trees. There are 5 oval leaflets which are often very large. It is the most common wood used in making tool handles.

The **white oak** can be identified by the round lobed leaves. The fruit is the familiar acorn. The wood is a favorite for making fine furniture.

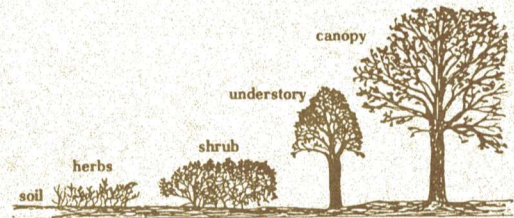


2 The oak tree in front of you is called a **wolf tree**. It has found a place in the sun to spread out its branches.

Wolf trees are not good lumber trees - the side branches cause the "knots" in finished boards. However, they are good for wildlife since they provide extra food and shelter.



3 Can you see the **5 layers** that make up this forest community?



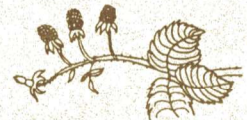
Different kinds of plants are adapted to live in each layer because of difference in light, temperature, and humidity at each level. Can you guess where there is the most light? The lowest temperature? The highest humidity?

4 The **shrub layer** in this forest contains many thorny species. This is an indication that it has been grazed at some time. The grazing animals avoid the plants with the sticker (imagine a mouth full of thorns!) and eat the more tender plants. This allows the thorny plants to take over.



Multiflora rose was planted for wildlife habitat but has become a problem weed.

Black raspberry is an edible plant, similar to domestic varieties.



Gooseberry is good for making pies and jelly and is enjoyed by wildlife, too.

5

The **herbs**, or green plants, form a carpet on the forest floor. Many of these plants bloom very early in the spring, taking advantage of the extra sunlight they receive before the trees get their leaves.

Notice that in sunny areas the ground cover is taller and thicker.



May Apple



Dutchman's Breeches



Violet

6

Take a closer look at one of these **fallen trees**. There are many plants and animals living on, under and in a log like this - moss, lichens, fungi, insects and worms. They get food and shelter and help decompose the log and return its nutrients to the soil.



The log is a tiny community itself!

7

Did you see other **vines** growing on the trees when you were looking for poison ivy? Two harmless vines can be seen crawling up the trunks trying to reach the sun.

Virginia Creeper is sometimes confused with poison ivy. Look for 5 leaflets on the virginia creeper.



The **wild grape** looks similar to garden varieties but the dark purple fruit is much smaller.

8

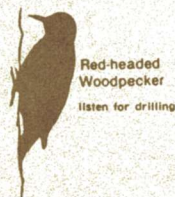
The **canopy layer** is made up of mature oak and hickory trees. Notice how tall and straight these trees are, with branches only at the top. Forest trees are closely surrounded by others leaving them only one way to grow - up, to reach the sun's rays.

Trees in your yard are fuller and shorter because they get sunlight from all directions and grow outward as well as upward.

9

Stop a while and **listen**. You probably won't see many animals on your walk through here, but you may hear them - if you're quiet.

Can you hear a squirrel running through the leaves? How about a woodpecker drilling for insects? How many different birds can you hear singing?



Red-headed Woodpecker

listen for drilling



House Wren

a gurgling, bubbling song



Black-capped Chickadee

"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee"



Blue Jay

"jay, jay"



Cardinal

a slurred whistle
"what-cheer, cheer, cheer"



Catbird

"mew, mew"

10

The oak-hickory forest provides **food and shelter** for many animals. The grass layer provides nesting and resting places. The shrubs provide berries and shelter. The canopy provides nuts and cavities for nesting.

11

The **understory layer** is made up of young oak and hickory trees and a variety of tree species that will not grow as tall as the canopy trees. These species do not need as much light and thrive in the shade of the canopy.

Take a close look at the leaves of the **hackberry**. Many have galls caused by insects who use them for food and protection.



The leaves of the **red mulberry** can vary greatly in shape. The seeds are an important food for birds.

Ironwood, or hophornbeam, is a tough, very hard wood. Because of its small size it is not used much commercially.



See how many different flowers you can find blooming on the way to the next station.

12

Now take a look at the **pond community**. To many people, life in a pond just means fish. Plants are also an important part of the pond community. Everything from cattails to microscopic algae provide food and shelter for the animals of the pond.



13

Stop and listen to the sounds of the pond community. Frogs and toads join the chorus here and you will probably hear different birds than those in the forest community.

Besides fish, the pond provides a home to many other animals - wood ducks, redwinged blackbirds, frogs, snails and turtles.

14

The pond and adjoining grassland are important to the forest community because they provide **edge**. Many animals prefer areas where two or more habitat types come together because of the greater variety of food and shelter available.

15

Dead or **hollow standing trees** are an important part of the forest community. Woodpeckers drill them for insects and also nest in them. Raccoons hibernate and raise their young in them. Squirrels use them for escape cover.



Can you think of any other animals that need hollow trees?

16

Get down for a closer look at the **soil layer**. Scratch away some of the leaf litter. Insects, worms and other tiny animals living in the soil layer help turn leaves, twigs and other waste matter back into soil.



17

This area of the forest is being managed by using **timber stand improvement**. Trees growing too close are thinned out and misshapen trees are removed to allow the best canopy trees to grow tall and straight. Over the years some of the mature trees may be harvested for lumber.

A forest such as this can be properly managed to allow some harvesting (and income) and still maintain its usefulness to wildlife.

18

Man is an important part of most natural communities. We have the power to destroy them through misuse or we can learn to live in harmony with the other members.



Save our Streams Monitoring

By: Lana Artz-McComb, Louisa County Conservation Naturalist, Soil and Water Conservation District Assistant Commissioner.

The Izaak Walton League's Save Our Streams (SOS) program is the only nationwide program training volunteers to protect waterways from pollution and bring information about water quality to their communities.

The program began in 1969, when water pollution problems were easy to see – like massive oil spills and burning rivers. Early Save Our Streams volunteers cleaned up trash from their local waterways and reported problems like streams becoming clogged with silt.



In the 1980s, the League recognized that with the right training, volunteers could collect scientifically valid

data to assess water quality in local streams – a conviction that has proven true. Ever since, the League has been teaching volunteers to study stream health and report their findings to decision-makers.

Today, trained volunteer stream monitors across the country are uncovering pollution problems and urging their local leaders to take action on water quality. The work of these volunteers also creates a critical record of water quality over time, making it possible to quickly identify pollution problems that develop in the future.

What about Louisa County?

SOS has taken the place of the discontinued IOWATER program managed by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The data from IOWATER monitoring sites has been absorbed into the SOS database.

The last database records for Louisa County are from 2014. Louisa County Conservation Naturalists intend to partner with the Soil and Water Conservation District to establish SOS monitoring sites in Louisa County. Particular emphasis will be on the Long Creek Watershed which runs from western Louisa County, south of Cotter through Cairo, before entering the Iowa River west of Hwy 61.

Naturalist Sarah Martinez and I received our Save Our Streams Certification this Fall and plan on establishing monitoring sites where Long Creek enters Louisa County, at a half-way point at Cairo Woods Wildlife Area, and where Long Creek joins with the Iowa River. The goal will be to establish water quality data points including chemical tests for nitrates, phosphates, dissolved oxygen, and pH as well as stream bed observation and macroinvertebrate surveys.

LCC already does basic water quality lessons with elementary school students throughout the county. SOS will be an additional program where we hope to involve middle school and high school students in the water quality monitoring process.



Stay Tuned:
Save Our Streams Monitoring
Events on Long Creek
Spring and Fall of 2024

Learn more about Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring in Iowa and explore Iowa's existing SOS data at iwla.org/water/regional/iowa

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
260 Mulberry St., Suite 2
Wapello, Iowa 52653
319-527-8068

SWCD Commissioners:
Jonathon Ball Kathy Dice
Dan Vogeler Tim Knutson
Drew Yotter



The Mission of the Louisa County Soil and Water Conservation District is to conserve, protect, and enhance our resources for current and future generations by providing information and assistance to farmers, landowners, operators and residents of Louisa County.

Changes

By: Al Bohling, Co-Founder and President of TRCF

At Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation we are experiencing significant changes since I last reported.

I'll start with the Katie Hammond news. As most of you know, Katie accepted the position of Director of Muscatine County Conservation in October of 2023 after serving as Naturalist and Director of Louisa County Conservation since 1999.

Katie has been instrumental in the success of TRCF and the implementation of our mission. Her dedication, energy and leadership has helped us provide support to many people and projects doing sustainable things for our environment.



TRCF has embraced her change to Muscatine County Conservation and invited her to become a TRCF Director. She accepted and will join other non-Louisa County Directors in continuing our mission in Louisa County and the entire TRCF area.

Katie is a great educator, her dedication and inspiration to

the spirit of our mission has been amazing. From grant writing to construction observation, she has demonstrated the energy to implement a top quality organization. We are thrilled she will still be with us in a changed role.

The TRCF Directors and LCC staff have set aside donations for a Katie Hammond Environmental Education Fund as a tribute to her and all her hard work and dedication in Louisa County. Any donations would be earmarked for youth who may have financial barriers that stop them from attending Louisa County Conservation summer camp opportunities.

Welcome

TRCF is excited to welcome two new Directors: Lynette Grimm and Amanda Heindel. Great additions! Both have younger children and they keep us focused on educating youth. We are very excited about our future. Remember, we are volunteers committed to the preservation of the precious resources in the Louisa County area. We have used your gifts wisely and grown our ability to do good things.



Paddle Louisa County

Thanks to a generous grant from the Community Foundation for Louisa County, TRCF created a video promoting paddling the water trails of Louisa County. Brad and Lynette Grimm from The Grimm Company joined Louisa County Conservation for a July paddle on the Iowa River Water Trail. Using a drone and footage taken throughout the day, The Grimm Company created a beautiful video highlighting Louisa County's water resources.

Thank you to Louisa County Conservation's River Paddlers Camp and the Quad Cities Women's Outdoor Club for allowing your adventures to be documented!

[Please check out the video on the Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation Facebook Page!](#)



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Foundation Directors
Alfred C. Bohling, Jr
Amanda Heindel
Dan Vogeler
Don Kline
Jay T. Schweitzer

Jeanne Mott
Karen Minnis
Lynette Grimm
Steve Johnson
Cindy Klebe
Dale Howell
Katie Hammond

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www.tri-rivers.org



Back row: Al Bohling, Dani Boysen, Karen Minnis, Jay Schweitzer, Cindy Klebe, Katie Hammond. Front row: Dan and Sue Vogeler

Thank you, Dan Vogeler!

Dan Vogeler retired as a Tri-Rivers Foundation Director after 16 years of steadfast commitment and inspiring leadership. His demonstrated interest in conservation is unsurpassed. Dan and his wife, Sue, have generously offered fishing and hunting experiences that raised funds for our mission. They willingly share their knowledge and land with others. TRCF expresses our deepest appreciation for Dan’s commitment to our mission!

MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN LOUISA COUNTY

Enclosed is my donation for:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500
 \$1,000 Other _____

Name or Business _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Return this form and payment to:
 Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation
 12635 County Road G56, Suite 106
 Wapello, IA 52653

Please earmark my donation for:

- Langwood Improvements
- Louisa County Trails Council
- TRCF Scholarship
- Environmental Education
- Use my donation where needed most
- Katie Hammond EE Fund

General Donations are payable to:
Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation

- Endowment Funds are payable to:**
Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine (for Iowa Tax Credit)
- Tri-Rivers Endowment Fund
 - Trails Endowment Fund
 - Paris Scholarship Endowment



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“Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather.”

-John Ruskin



NOON
Year's Eve!

Tuesday, January 2

Langwood Education Center

10:00 am

Celebrate the new year with indoor & outdoor nature fun!

Ring in 2024 with a countdown to noon, bird seed toss, and lemonade toast.



Save a tree!

Receive this newsletter via email.
Conservation@louisacountyia.gov
 and ask to be put on the email list.

**If you want this newsletter
 in larger print
 call 319-523-8381.**



Printed on recycled paper

Naturally Louisa County is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

It is provided free to the public as an innovative collaboration between government agencies, private organizations and individuals interested in showcasing the natural and cultural resources of Louisa County, Iowa.