

Friends of the Land

A newsletter of Iowa's natural resources volunteer friends groups
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Keepers of the Land is the Iowa Department of Natural Resources
 volunteer program.

New Group Embraces Damaged Lake

by Michael Dhar

From the air, Carter Lake looks like a giant 'C' wrapped around the city that bears its name. The oxbow lake, left behind by an 1877 rerouting of the Missouri River, surrounds the town of Carter Lake in a sort of geographical embrace.

Today, following decades of declining lake health, the citizens of Carter Lake are hugging back. Last fall, a group of concerned residents formed the Carter Lake Preservation Society, a non-profit corporation working to revive this western Iowa lake.

"You look at old pictures of Carter Lake, you see what it used to be like," said Carter Lake Mayor Russ Kramer, a strong supporter of the society's efforts. "It's a beautiful

little town and we need to spend some effort making the lake look like something. It's our namesake."

Over the past several decades, declining water levels, pollution from runoff, illegal dumping, litter, and erosion have severely damaged the lake. In the 1950's, a series of levees and dams built along the Missouri River eliminated annual spring floods at Carter Lake, producing a stagnant pool of water.

For the past 50 years, in other words, Carter Lake has served as the final resting point for all runoff-associated pollutants washing into it. The lake now constitutes an impaired watershed, one suffering from algae, bacteria and turbidity (cloudy water).

Members of what would

become the Carter Lake Preservation Society first got together last year to address those problems.

After several months of hard work, the group can now boast of tremendous progress, having worked with city, county and state officials to set several projects in motion. Two members of the society went so far as to earn seats on the Carter Lake city council.

Even before attaining non-profit status and adopting their "Preservation Society" name last November, however, core members had accomplished a great deal. They held their first event, a highly successful community lake cleanup, in September.

During that one-day outing, more than 200 volunteers walked the shores of Carter Lake, removing enough garbage to fill roughly twenty-five 10-wheel dump trucks.

Despite the event's success, however, organizers viewed it as simply the first step in a long-term, multi-pronged approach to lake improvement. Discussions with cleanup volunteers convinced organizers they could best accomplish their goals by creating a nonprofit group.

"The day after that event we started talking about how



Carter Lake surrounding Carter Lake

important it is to continue cleanups and be an advocate of the lake," said society member and new Carter Lake councilperson Steve Wilbur. "We needed a group that could be organized and dedicated to making sure the lake was clean, that could bring the powers that be together in an organized fashion."

Carter Lake, thanks to its location along the Iowa-Nebraska border, lies enmeshed in an administrative tangle, making the preservation society's advocacy especially important, Wilbur said. The lake straddles the jurisdiction of two states (Iowa and Nebraska), two cities (Carter Lake and Omaha), and two counties (Pottawattamie and Douglas).

One of the preservation society's main functions, therefore, has been to get all those governmental entities working together on the same

See **Carter Lake** page 4



Carter Lake Cleanup volunteers

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On the Road to Say Thanks!



A note from Keepers of the Land director Merry Rankin

One of my goals since I took over as Keepers of the Land director was to visit all of our friends groups personally and thank you for your wonderful contributions.

I know that a personal visit has an extra special meaning above and beyond simple words of appreciation and gratitude given via a phone call, letter or e-mail. There's just something really unique when a thank you comes directly to you from a real person.

And so... the Keepers of the Land staff will be hitting the road this spring, summer, and fall to visit you, share in your successful events, and provide you with a personally-delivered heartfelt thanks for all that you do for our state parks and all of Iowa's natural resources.

Whether or not you realize it, your efforts touch many lives beyond those who are in your friends group or those who attend your friends events. In fact, most of the lives you touch are likely folks you will never meet. A majority of what you do is what I call "planting seeds."

It's kind of the idea of the gardener or farmer who each year plants seeds of beauty and nourishment with nothing more than the faith that their care in planting the seeds will result in something very vital and meaningful to someone in the future.

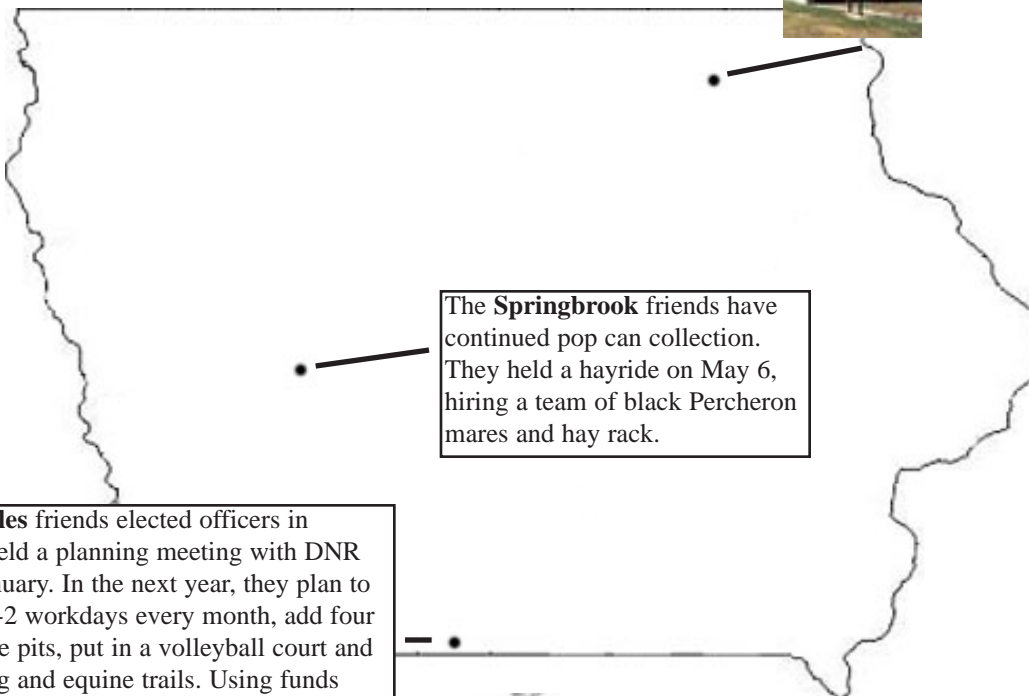
Sometimes, the gardener and farmer will be lucky enough to witness how their "plantings" touched a life, but in most cases they will not personally be a part of the many connections and life changing moments they brought about. But yet they can always be proud in knowing that without their efforts nothing would have started to "sprout," let alone "blossom".

So, be looking for us. And if you have an event that you feel is one we just can't miss, let us know. I look forward to sharing in your "plantings."

Field Report: Updates from other friends groups



The **Ft. Atkinson** friends have been planning the 30th Annual Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous, Sept. 22 through 24, 2006.



The **Springbrook** friends have continued pop can collection. They held a hayride on May 6, hiring a team of black Percheron mares and hay rack.

The **Nine Eagles** friends elected officers in October and held a planning meeting with DNR officials in January. In the next year, they plan to hold at least 1-2 workdays every month, add four new horse shoe pits, put in a volleyball court and clean up hiking and equine trails. Using funds raised last summer, the group put up a shelter house this April. They have nine fundraisers scheduled for this summer, hoping to raise money for new playground equipment.



New Ledges Friends Group "Takes Off"

by Michael Dhar

They grow up fast.

Just three months after their first official meeting, Iowa's newest state park friends group has already earned nonprofit status, gained more than 30 members and held a handful of successful events.

Core members of the Friends of Ledges, Inc. held their first organized meeting in January. By the end of February, they'd become a nonprofit corporation. And over the next two months they checked off many of their short-term goals.

"They have just really taken off," said Ledges Park Manager Marc Peter. "There's a lot of energy and fire with this group so far."

Respect for the beauty and history of Ledges State Park inspired the fast start, said Friends Secretary Dennis Buckles.

"The down-deep feeling is that this is for the betterment of the park," he said. "We

want to give something back."

Already, the group has made progress at Ledges. They held a volunteer cleanup and park improvement day on April 1, attracting thirty-six volunteers to help paint and repair picnic tables, pick up litter and assist with other tasks. In mid-April, volunteers helped spread donated rock around the campground fire pits. At the end of April, park supporters installed tile at the youth campground.

Additionally, the friends group began fund-raising through pop-can collection. They installed donated tubs and trashcans as collection-sites around the park.

Months before they even became a friends group, several of the group's members helped out with a park improvement project, volunteering to help install new stone planters. The extra volunteer labor made possible a project that park staff may not have had time to complete, Peters said.

"They got done in two and a half hours," he said. "It

enthusiastic campers who became volunteer hosts two



Volunteers repair a picnic table at an April friends event

would have taken regular staff a week or more. And the staff is stretched so tight, it would have meant other work didn't get done."

The Friends of Ledges group arose out of discussions among the park's staff and volunteer campground hosts. James and Laurie Gideon,

years ago, asked Park Manager Marc Peter why more park improvements weren't being accomplished.

The answer was a lack of funds a staff labor shortage. But the park manager floated the idea of a friends group as a means to accomplish additional projects, and the Gideons agreed to start one.

The group envisions further projects for Ledges, both in the short and long-term. They hope to refurbish the park's bathrooms, install informational bulletin boards and repair a kiosk at the campground's entrance.

Their "big, big project" would be to reconstruct a log cabin that was used by Ledges State Park's original caretaker, Carl Fritz Henning, James Gideon said.

The finished cabin would also function as a park visitors center, featuring Ledges artifacts and a camping shop.

Put it on the Mantle: Friends Groups Honored

Several of Iowa's volunteer friends groups earned awards or award nominations recently. Congratulations on some well-deserved recognition!

Iowa Governor's Volunteer Awards, April 2006

- * Union Grove State Park's "Lake Park and Holding Corporation" – Length of Service Award
- * The Friends of the Mines of Spain – Length of Service Award
- * The Friends of Elk Rock State Park – Group Award
- * Several friends group members also won individual awards.

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Iowa DNR Keepers of the Land Volunteer Awards, November 2005

- * Rock Creek State Park Staff – Outstanding DNR Staff Award
- * Lake Park and Holding Corporation – Outstanding Group Volunteer Award

Carter Lake Projects Already Underway

Carter Lake

Continued from page 1

strategic plan, said Preservation Society President Jeanne Eibes. Group members have succeeded wonderfully in navigating the governmental maze, Kramer said.

"I can't remember a time when there was so much energy focused towards Carter Lake by so many agencies," he said. "And I can't remember a time there's been so much energy in town on any issue. The whole city has really come together on this."

The society's short-term goals include installing erosion control ("rip wrap") and rain gardens (to help filter

runoff) along most of the lake's public shoreline.

Already, the city of Carter Lake has pledged to install rip-wrap on 1,000 feet of shoreline. Carter Lake has also secured \$163,000 from Pottawattamie County for lakeshore projects and a \$50,000 earmark from the Iowa DNR to help fund restoration. This June, the friends will hold a fundraising drive, aiming for \$200,000.

In addition, the society has worked with government officials to commission a study of the pollution entering Carter Lake. Conclusions will help officials determine the best means of dealing with these contaminants, such as divert-

ing or filtering runoff.

Society members and government officials have also worked on plans to restore the lake's optimal volume by 2008, either by pumping in water from underground or from the Missouri River.

Altogether, these projects will cost an estimated three to three-and-a-half million dollars – making cooperation among all relevant agencies especially important, Eibes said. Long-term plans include possibly dredging the lake to remove sediment.

The group hasn't finished cleaning up litter, either. They held their second annual



Cleanup Volunteers

cleanup this April, attracting roughly 300 people to help remove garbage. The next effort is set for April 14, 2007.

Calendar

June

- * **June 2:** Friday in the park at Pleasanton, 5 p.m.
- * **June 3:** BBQ Cook Off at Nine Eagles, 4 p.m.
- * **June 7:** Rain Garden Demonstration and Installation Workshop, 305 McKenzie, Council Bluffs, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- * **June 30:** Friday at the park at Pleasanton, 5 pm.

July

- * **July 1:** Hog roast at Nine Eagles, 5 p.m.

Look for more volunteer news and events at:
www.keepersoftheland.org

August

- * **Aug. 4:** Friday in the park at Pleasanton, 5 p.m.
- * **Aug. 5:** Hog roast at Nine Eagles, 5 p.m.

Funding!

Find out tips and hints about fundraising for non-profits at this Web site:

jblockinc.com/currentnews.htm

September

- * **Sep. 1:** Friday in the park at Pleasanton, 5 p.m.
- * **Sep. 2:** Hog roast at Nine Eagles, 5 p.m.
- * **Sep. 22:** Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous, School and Media Day, 10:30 a.m. - 2 p.m., Ft. Atkinson
- * **Sep. 23:** Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous, Open to public, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Ft. Atkinson
- * **Sep. 24:** Ft. Atkinson Rendezvous, Open to public, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., Ft. Atkinson