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Natural Areas Owned by the Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

MYRLE M. BURK¹

BURK, MYRLE M. (1511 E. Gresham Road, Waterloo, Iowa 50701.) Natural Areas Owned by the Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. *Proc. Iowa Acad. Sci.* 80(4):175-177, 1973. The Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy was organized April 19, 1963, for the purpose of saving natural areas in the state. During the ensuing 10 years, 8 preserves, totaling approximately

275 acres, have been acquired by purchase, gift, bequest and/or lease. They include prairie, marsh, bog, kettle-hole and hardwood forest. These areas are available to scientists, naturalists and those with aesthetic motives.

INDEX DESCRIPTORS: Iowa Natural Areas; Conservation; Preservation of Natural Areas.

ORGANIZATION OF THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

The Nature Conservancy, an offshoot of the Ecological Society of America, is a non-profit, member-governed organization. In 1917 a group of members of that society foresaw the destruction and waste of our natural resources by man's increased activities and that the preservation of natural areas by the establishment of national parks and monuments would be inadequate. A Committee for the Preservation of Natural Conditions was formed; this was finally organized into The Nature Conservancy.

Its objectives are:

1. To preserve and aid in the preservation of all types of wild nature including natural areas, features, objects, fauna and floral and biotic communities.
2. To establish nature reserves and other protected areas to be used for scientific, educational and aesthetic purposes.
3. To promote the conservation of our natural resources.
4. To engage in or promote the study of plant and animal communities, other phases of ecology, natural history and conservation.
5. To promote education in the field of natural preservation and conservation.
6. To cooperate with other organizations having similar or related objectives.

In 1954 The Nature Conservancy bought the Mianus River Gorge in Westchester, New York, its first land saving project. As the society grew, state and local chapters were organized, which are affiliated with and under the supervision of the national organization. Members have both state and national affiliation.

The activities of the state chapters are governed by the officers and the board of trustees. The chapter solicits members, selects and buys preserves subject to the approval of the national organization, and receives gifts and bequests. It also has responsibility for the management and maintenance of preserves and raises money needed for land purchase. In order to tide the state chapter over the period of initial indebtedness upon purchase of a tract, the national organization lends it money for a year at low interest.

The Nature Conservancy has three funds: the General Fund, the Project Revolving Fund and the Guarantee and Income Fund. The General Fund, which is obtained entirely from the public, supports the national operations. The Pro-

ject and Revolving Fund is the basis of acquiring land. From it money is lent to chapters for the purchase of natural areas. This fund has been increased by a grant from the Ford Foundation, which offered a 4:1 challenge of \$600,000. The Guarantee and Income Fund provides partial support for annual operating expenses by annual endowed income. Its securities may be used as collateral for bank loans for land acquisition.

Since the purchase of Mianus River Gorge in 1954, The Nature Conservancy has saved 374,576 acres in 952 preserves, which vary in size from a .25-acre coastal marsh to 32,920 acres of rugged mountains, valleys and lake front, the Bear Tooth Ranch Mountains in Montana.

Care and management of numerous preserves entails a great deal of expense and labor; to overcome this problem and also to meet the object of establishing preserves to be used for scientific and educational purposes, The Nature Conservancy conveys preserves, usually with a reverter clause which protects the area from misuse, to other organizations. These include the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Biological Institute, National Audubon Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Prairie Chicken Foundation of Illinois, Missouri Prairie Foundation, Montana Department of Fish and Game and other groups with similar interests.

The Nature Conservancy has also cooperated with and assisted other conservation organizations in the preservation of natural areas, e.g., the National Audubon Society in the acquisition of Corkscrew Swamp.

THE IOWA CHAPTER

A meeting to organize the Iowa Chapter was held at Iowa State University, Ames, April 19, 1963. J. M. Aikman acted as temporary chairman; Bruce Dowling represented the national organization. Approximately 75 people attended. The name Iowa Chapter and bylaws were adopted. Ames, Story County, state of Iowa, was designated as headquarters.

The meeting of the Board (the officers and trustees) was called April 20, 1963. The outstanding action of this meeting was the selection of five areas to be sought for preservation. They were Williams Prairie, Johnson County; Goose Lake, Hamilton County; Buck Creek Forest, Clayton County; Coggon Bog, Linn County; and the railroad right-of-way, Webster County. The board outlined the procedure for acquisition: contact the owner, secure an option up to \$50.00 and send descriptions of all areas to the secretary for distribution to trustees. After ten years of experience these trustees no

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doubt would add the qualities of inexhaustible patience and tenacity, the ability to meet unforeseen situations, and tact and understanding with owners. This applies extraordinarily to the acquisition of Williams Prairie, which was finally acquired in 1973 after ten years of negotiation.

Problems of management and maintenance of acquired land have developed. Use of the preserves by the public is restricted to those who have scientific, educational and/or aesthetic motives. Local contacts have been appointed by the chairman to check on improper use, condition, and to grant permission to visitors when necessary. The most important maintenance at this time has been the building and repair of fences. Labor needs have been met partially by volunteer students from Iowa State University, Iowa Wesleyan and by members of the Iowa Chapter. The trampling of the flora is a problem that may be solved by education through the placing of signs at strategic points indicating the fragility of the plants and emphasizing the responsibility of each person.

With the acquisition of more preserves, the management of the areas will become a greater problem, not only financially, but also requiring the time of experts with understanding of complex environmental problems. This is noted by Dr. Robert E. Jenkins, Ecology Adviser of the National Office. He states that "many of the most critical questions deal with ecological matters, such as vegetative succession, natural catastrophes, and ecosystem restoration."

A third point to be considered is the defensibility of the area. When planning to buy an area, size is one factor to be considered; the larger the better is probably the best rule. Other factors are shape and topographical situation, physiochemical environment and the complex problems of dominant species.

PRESERVES OWNED OR LEASED

The Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1973. During this time eight areas have been acquired by gift, lease or purchase.

The first land in Iowa owned by The Nature Conservancy is Berry Woods. It was donated in 1961 by Mr. and Mrs. Don L. Berry as a memorial to Capt. B. C. Berry and Senator W. H. Berry. The 42-acre woodland covers portions of the bluff of the south bank of the Middle River in Warren County. The dominant trees and shrubs include white and burr oak, basswood, shagbark hickory, buckeye, ironwood, prickly ash and dogwood. Rare plants are Indian pipe and showy orchis; dog's-tooth violet, hepatica, spring beauty, dutchman's breeches and jack-in-the-pulpit are also abundant. The preserve provides an excellent outdoor laboratory for biology students of nearby Simpson College, Indianola.

The Iowa Chapter began negotiations in 1965 for its first purchase, a remarkable area of woodland and ravines near Elkader in Clayton County. Originally known as the Kopp Tract, it was renamed the Lyle Retz Memorial Forest in honor of Lyle Retz after his death in 1968. He had given generously of his time and ability toward the acquisition of this preserve. It supports a maple-basswood climax, red and white oak, black walnut, white ash, elm and yew. Three ravines of varying depths lie north and south across the area, cutting into the underlying limestone deposit. In the largest

and deepest ravine huge blocks of limestone have tumbled into the gorge. On these rocks and ravine walls is a luxurious growth of liverworts, mosses and ferns. Most conspicuous is the walking fern, carpeting large areas. In addition to the beauty of its flora, the preserve is excellent for scientific research and as an outdoor laboratory.

In 1967 Miss Alice E. Savage gave eleven acres of hardwood forest to the Iowa Chapter as a memorial to members of her family. The steep-sided hills support oak, hickory and other trees and shrubs. It has not been grazed for many years. Lying southwest of Mt. Pleasant, Henry County, it is available to biology students of Iowa Wesleyan College who use it extensively as an outdoor laboratory.

In the northern part of Fort Dodge, Webster County, is a wooded area of ravines and hogback hills. The timber is dominated by black maple and basswood, with red, white and black oak and hickory. It has not been cut for many years. Mrs. Susan Atwell gave the 7-acre tract to the Iowa Chapter in 1968; it is known as "The Diggings."

Since 1964 the Ames High School Prairie has been considered for preservation by the Iowa Chapter. Through the action of the Ames Conservation Council, leasing it to the Iowa Chapter was approved at the School Board election in 1970. The lease is for 49 years at \$1.00 per year. Management is by a committee that represents the Iowa Chapter of TNC, the Ames School Board and the Ames Park Board. The 7.5-acre prairie lies west of the school and is used by both high school and Iowa State University students. Students contributed labor toward removing trash and building fences. Little blue stem grass is dominant; thirteen other species of grass have been identified; twenty-three plant families are represented.

During 1972 the Iowa Chapter bought two prairie areas. The reward of ten years of meeting discouraging obstacles was the acquisition of Williams Prairie, a 30-acre tract ten miles northwest of Iowa City. This mesic prairie supports approximately 200 species of flowering plants, representing 60 families. Among them are the prairie fringed orchis, bunch flower, turk's-cap lily, *Cacalia tuberosa* and *Zygadenus* sp. Algae, mosses and liverworts are also present. All plants, birds and animals living in this habitat may be considered rare because of the widespread destruction of the native prairie by cultivation, drainage, housing, road building and the use of herbicides. The purchase of this prairie will aid in the preservation of native species. It is now studied by biology students of The University of Iowa. Through ten years of negotiations, interested people and organizations have contributed toward its purchase. The balance will be obtained by subscription.

In 1971 the Iowa Chapter received a large bequest from the estate of the late Frieda Haffner, Burlington, Iowa. The will stipulated that the money be used on one Iowa project. After discussion of various areas the board of trustees decided to buy a farm near Milford, Dickinson County, on which the geological formation known as Arend's Kettle-Hole is located. The area, consisting of 110 acres, has been grazed, but not too heavily. Little is known of the flora or fauna of this particular tract, although the flora of the county has been recorded. The kettle-hole, from the rim down to the bottom, has been explored to some extent. Two hundred forty-one plant species have been listed; of these 160 are prairie species, 25 are aquatics and 50 are weedy. The balance of indebtedness which still exists will be met by dona-

tions of friends interested in saving the natural areas of the state.

During the ten years the Iowa Chapter has saved approximately 275 acres of woodland, prairie, bog, kettle-hole and marsh; thus it has aided in the preservation of many plants and animals, which by destruction of their habitats were becoming rare. These preserves, being relatively undisturbed, have value for the scientist and naturalist.

In the future members will continue to save similar remaining areas. They will welcome information regarding noteworthy and unusual areas and will particularly appreciate financial support and membership in the organization.

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