

# 2022 IAN-ICEC Award Winners

## Ada Hayden Conservation Education Award

**Polk County Conservation** - The 2022 Ada Hayden Conservation Education Award goes to the Polk County Conservation, Environmental Education Unit. Polk County Conservation (PCC) recently completed a project nearly 30 years in the making with the opening of the new Jester Park Native American Artifact Exhibit. In 1992, PCC received the first of three artifact donations from private collectors. All of the donated artifacts were collected from land that is now Yellow Banks Park, located in SE Polk County. The artifacts were collected prior to the land being managed by PCC. The families that collected them in hopes they would someday be displayed for public viewing. However, in the decades that followed, PCC did not have a public facility suitable to house such a display. Many state agencies and partners worked with PCC to ensure the content was both archeologically accurate and culturally appropriate. This exhibit offers something for all ages and abilities. The exhibit includes educational panels, rare and unique educational artifacts, hands on interactive displays, touchable items, and digital QR codes linking visitors to short educational videos. To see an example, scan the code.



## Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award

**Mike Krebill** – It's Mike! Iowa's first naturalist, working in Black Hawk County starting in 1969. His career included time as a science educator, but most know Mike for his knowledge of wild foods – his a guru extraordinaire.

## Sylvan Runkel Environmental Education School Award

**Cedar River Academy** - Cedar River Academy is a magnet school in the Cedar Rapids Community School District, with a theme of Sustainability. Our mission is to develop a community of high-achieving, future-ready learners with a passion for sustainability of environment, community, and self. As a magnet school, we welcome in students from our public school attendance zone, and also students from out of our attendance zone who are accepted through a lottery system. We carry out our Sustainability theme through thematic units, partnerships, outdoor learning, and sustainable practices. Every student in our building engages with all of these components of learning. Our teachers are in the process of developing thematic units to connect science and social studies lessons with their reading and math curriculum. Last year, kindergarten teachers developed a 6-week thematic unit based around the lifecycle of the monarch butterfly. In reading, they learned about letter sounds and syllables through monarch vocabulary, and read stories about monarchs. In

math, they worked on counting using pictures of monarchs. They integrated social studies by learning about the monarch migration to Mexico, and fine motor skills by cutting and pasting monarch crafts. The second grade teachers created a thematic unit centered around industrialization by teaching agriculture. They incorporated farm manipulatives for center time, and visited a farm during both planting and harvest seasons. They also visited the John Deere tractor and engine museum. Our goal is to create thematic units for every grade level and every unit to build student knowledge and interest. Our outdoor classroom, Rapid Roots, is the first Nature Explore certified outdoor classroom in a public school in Iowa. The outdoor classroom also features a Monarch Watch Certified pollinator garden. Teachers use the area for cross-curricular STEM-focused lessons and free-play with natural materials. Lessons range from drum circles to insect studies. We collaborated with the City of Cedar Rapids on installing a Story Path along the walking trail spanning our school yard and the adjacent Reed Park. Last year, we had 9 staff members complete the Project WILD certification so teachers have the resources and knowledge to connect their lessons with outdoor experiences. Our school is the model building for sustainable practices in our district. Our first major sustainability project was establishing a composting program.

## Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award

**Prairie Woods Nature Center Mural, Sioux County Conservation** – Sioux County Conservation (SCC) created the mural to fill a 15-ft blank wall, printed, cut into 4-inch square tiles, and coded. Colors were selected and each tile became a mini ‘paint by numbers’ project with colored craft paper assigned to a different number. Tiles and craft paper were passed out to 11 participating schools. Students covered their tile with small paper pieces, without covering the black lines. The finished tiles were collected and hung by SCC on a large paper grid according to their code.

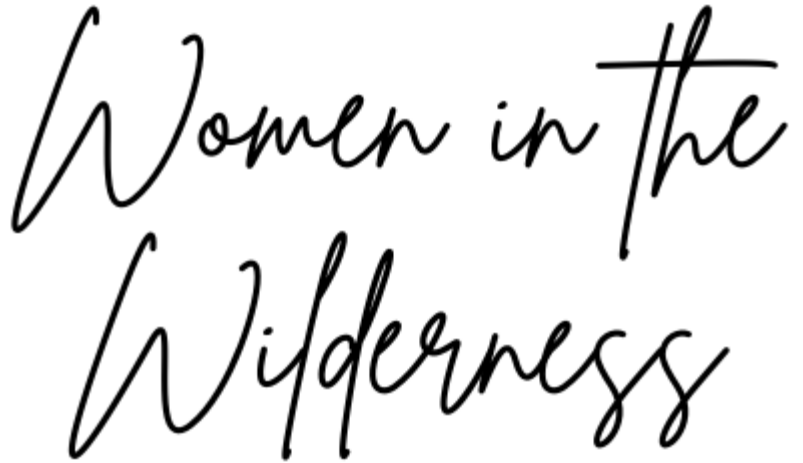


Responses to the teacher survey were 100% in love with the project and all are excited to participate again in the future.

## “Ding” Darling Environmental Education Award

### Women in the Wilderness – Kayla Clausen, Director/Naturalist, Decatur County Conservation

Women in the Wilderness is described as “a monthly gathering of women (21 and older) who wish to gain confidence in outdoor skills, participate in new experiences, and make connections within our community.” This group is open to any woman interested, and you do not need to be a Decatur County resident to join our group and/or events. Members can join our group on Facebook through our Decatur County Conservation Board page and/or join our email list. Currently, we have 218 members in our Facebook group, and we are always adding more. Most of our events are free, but we do charge a small fee if there are supplies for the activity involved. My goal is to connect and partner with different experts for our gatherings, especially other women, not only from Decatur County but from all over the state. Hopefully this inspires women in our group to explore other parts of the state and what they have to offer.

The logo for "Women in the Wilderness" is written in a large, elegant, cursive script. The words "Women in the" are on the top line, and "Wilderness" is on the bottom line, with the 'W' in "Wilderness" being particularly large and stylized.

## Outstanding Environmental Education Program (Two or Less Full-time, Equivalent Naturalists)

**Ringgold County Conservation Board (Kate Zimmerman)** - Ringgold County is one of the smallest and poorest counties in the state of Iowa. The Ringgold County Conservation Board works on a very limited budget and even more restricted staff, employing only 1 full-time staff member, Kate Zimmerman (hired in 2010). This did not deter this small but mighty group of people in the least, applying for grants year after year to complete projects and make improvements. While managing nine areas, encompassing over 1,000 acres, Ringgold County Conservation managed to also start an environmental education program in 2010, growing exponentially over the years to now providing over 200 programs and reaching over 5,000 people each year through educational programming alone. In 2017, Ringgold County Conservation opened the Dagoon Trace Nature Center. RCC was able to build an environmental education center funded solely on grants, donations and fundraisers. Kate led the charge, writing all the grants, organizing the fundraisers and reaching out to anyone that would listen and want to collaborate with us on the project. We established creative funding partners like the Blank Park Zoo, persuaded local contractors to join the project and who all generously gave back and convinced local organizations that they should be a part of our success story. We rallied the community behind a project they never thought possible. Ringgold County Conservation has grown the environmental education side of the Conservation Department so much that we now need more help than ever. That assistance came in the form of a partnership with AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps has been an exceptional asset and provides one summer naturalist position at the Dagoon Trace Nature Center. This not only helps us

provide more programming for the communities, but also provides new internship opportunities for students in our area!



## **Outstanding Environmental Education Program (Three or More Full-time, Equivalent Naturalists)**

**Jackson County Conservation Board (Jessica Wagner, Jennifer Meyer, Tony Vorwald)** – The Jackson County Conservation Environmental Education program has been around for over 30 years and currently operates with three full-time educators. Programming reaches all six school districts in the county with both in-class and field trips, programs for adult and youth organizations, plus public programs. In fiscal year 2021-2022, EE staff offered 81 public programs, visited with students in 662 classroom programs – preschool to 5th grade and a few middle and high schools. JCC also helped launch a School of the Wild partnership with the University of Iowa, reaching 5th graders from Maquoketa, Bellevue, Andrew, and Easton Valley School Districts for three years now. The rest of the school districts will be added in the 2022-2023 school year. EE staff also develops exhibits and signage at the Hurtsville Interpretive Center and county parks. This past year, EE Staff worked to install solar panels to power 100% of the Hurtsville Center’s electricity usage. The Center also uses geothermal for heating and cooling. An information kiosk and interpretive panels were created to educate about renewable energy. EE Staff have been more engaged in land management and habitat restoration since the pandemic. EE Staff have surveyed plant species at remnant hill/goat prairies for the past three summers as well as work to remove woody vegetation and invasive species from these unique ecosystems. Jackson County naturalists coordinate annual counts of the endangered prairie fringed orchid at a wildlife area managed by JCCB. With the help of volunteers, we go out to the marsh every July to count each individual plant and plot the plants using GPS. With the help of USFWS, we continue to manage the area to sustain the endangered orchid population. Jackson County naturalists also partake in statewide and national surveys and research project to help with keeping data and managing wildlife populations including Iowa DNR mid-winter bald eagle survey, Audubon annual Christmas bird count, frog and toad surveys, bat survey, bald eagle nest monitoring, mid-winter bald eagle survey, monarch tagging, and Audubon annual summer butterfly count.

# Outstanding Interpretative Non-Print Media Award

## Fayette County Solid Waste Commission and Fayette County Conservation

The Fayette County Solid Waste Management Commission and Fayette County Conservation Board partnered with Northeast Iowa Resource Conservation & Development in early 2022 to develop a five-video series of educational animated videos about recycling. All five characters were created by Rod Marlatt, Fayette County Conservation Director, and brought to life by



Northeast Iowa RC&D staff. The characters were

voiced by Marlatt and his daughter, Mallory Hanson. The series begins with Mike the Milk Jug and follows his journey from production to recycling when he becomes a park bench. Chester the Cardboard Kid continues the story by featuring his family tree and their long history for viewers to enjoy. Tammy the Tin Can brings in a modern twist and teaches viewers that tin cans can be recycled over and over again, forever! The fourth video features Nellie the Newspaper and her adventure as she is made into a birthday card. The series is rounded out with Rodney the Roll Off Box, bringing all of the characters back together to travel to the recycling center. The series, "Mike the Milk Jug and Friends", has already been a huge hit on social media and is being implemented in community school systems through Fayette County Conservation's Naturalist program. It has been popular with Kindergartners and has been particularly well-received by 2nd graders. The videos can be found and viewed on Fayette County Conservation's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkSDWCSaux0R7epI-6zmR1jTwVPRZGSVc>.

# Outstanding Interpretive Print Media Award

**Ida County Conservation** - This year's Outstanding Interpretive Print Media Award goes to Ida County Conservation for two trail signs at their Education Rain Garden near the Ida County Conservation Center in Moorehead Park. This project came about when the plans for paving the Conservation Center parking lot coincided with flooding across Ida County in the spring of 2019. Ida County Conservation decided this would be a great opportunity to put in an Educational Rain Garden. The location is downhill from the parking lot to the Conservation Center where many walkers travel. One goal of the signs is to provoke understanding of the cause and effect relationship of water quality with human alteration of land, as well as kindle solutions to water quality problems. Another goal is to educate the public on the reasons for native landscaping and inspire the public to use native landscaping in their own yards.



## Challenge

Humans alter the landscape with impermeable surfaces such as rooftops, parking lots, and roads. When it rains, water cannot soak through these surfaces into the ground and instead runs off downhill directly into creeks, lakes, and other bodies of water.



Collectively this results in more flooding events. Additionally, the run-off water often picks up pollutants like soil and fertilizer. Droughts are also more common because there is less water soaked into the ground between rain events.



This rain garden sign was brought to you in part with funding by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Diversity Small Grants Program.

## Solution

Diverting run-off into a rain garden allows water to slowly soak into the soil and recharge groundwater. This is done by adding subsurface drainage tiles that lead from the parking lot and roof gutters into the rain garden. Shaping the garden like a bowl holds the water. Amending the soil with sand, gravel, and mulch and adding native plants improves water infiltration.



Other solutions to increase infiltration are rooftop gardens called green roofs, rain barrels that collect water from gutters, and permeable parking lots that allow water to soak through. Can you think of any other solutions?

