

IOWA'S COLDWATER CONSERVANCY

ICC WORKS AS A FACILITATOR AND PARTNER IN COLLABORATIONS WITH EDUCATORS, BUSINESSES, OTHER NGOS, PUBLIC AGENCIES, AND LANDOWNERS ON PROJECTS TO PROTECT AND IMPROVE THE ECOSYSTEMS THAT SUSTAIN OUR COLDWATER RIVERS AND STREAMS WHILE EXPANDING PUBLIC ACCESS TO THESE VITAL AND UNIQUE NATURAL RESOURCES

IOWACOLDWATER.ORG



INSIDE:

Beaver dam analogs, watershed partnerships, stream restoration projects, and welcome to our new newsletter!

PART ONE

Watershed Partnerships

Tom Murray, Director and Past President

For over the past fifty years, I have been fortunate to spend many hours enjoying the beautiful coldwater streams of northeast Iowa. Through the years, I have also learned how important a healthy watershed is to all the living species within the ecosystem of these streams. All of us humans and wildlife who live in these watersheds require clean water to survive and thrive.

Here is a definition of a watershed to consider: A watershed is an area of land where all precipitation, snowmelt, and surface runoff drains into a common body of water. A watershed acts like a giant funnel. The higher surrounding land (like hills and ridges) forms the edges, collecting water and channeling it downhill into springs, wetlands, creeks, streams, and eventually a single main outlet. Every single person on earth lives within a watershed.

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PROJECT UPDATES

Beaver Dam Analogs

Dave Jones, Director and Treasurer

A Beaver Dam Analog or (BDA) is a human made, semi-porous structure designed to mimic the form and function of a natural beaver dam. They are constructed using untreated wooden posts and woven branches. Beaver Dam Analogs slow the streamflow and raise the water table which can restore degraded wetland ecosystems. Slower stream flow decreases flow velocity protecting the stream shoreline.



Slowed water pools behind the dam allowing water to naturally spill and seep into the surrounding floodplain. Finally, the slowing water allows sediment to accumulate behind the dam, improving water clarity downstream, filtering pollutants and rebuilding eroded streams. Iowa Coldwater Conservancy (ICC) was created to protect and restore the ecosystems that sustain Iowa's coldwater streams while expanding public access to cold-water streams.

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Stream Restoration Projects



Cameron Aker, Engagement Coordinator, Trout Unlimited

It's been a busy time in the Iowa Driftless over the last few years when it comes to stream restoration efforts, and this year is no different.

Trout Unlimited, along with partners like Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy (ICC), Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association (HFFA), and Trout Unlimited chapters, have been funding and constructing bank stabilization and habitat enhancement projects in some of our most precious coldwater resources.

In 2024, North Bear and Patterson Creek easements were the key focus. Nearly 2 miles of stream banks were reshaped and protected, removing more than 17,000 cubic yards of soil from the floodplain. These projects would not have been completed without many partners from six different states.

Things were slow in 2025 for projects on easements, but the planning was underway for a large 2026 season. TU funded six private lands projects, all of which have a big impact on improving our watersheds.

Yellow River, Silver Creek, Otter Creek, and Bloody Run all had projects funded. The rain kept four from being completed, but two of those were completed in 2025 and two are currently underway in 2026. Two impressive projects are scheduled for construction later this summer, and both are open to public fishing on the Yellow River.



The first is on the Yellow River access area near Castalia. This stretch of stream is high in the watershed and has been impacted by historical post plow alluvium that has been deposited in the valley.

The other is on a property that is near and dear to conservation partners. The permanent fishing easement on Forest Mills Road, downstream of the Forest Mills bridge, has more than 3,000 feet of bank shaping with extensive habitat enhancements.

Between these two projects, more than a mile of stream bank protection and shaping is planned. This will keep tens of thousands of cubic yards of sediment out of the Yellow River.

Both projects include wetland improvements, one of which will tie field drainage to an old oxbow to act as a filter to remove nutrients before they reach the river.

The momentum is strong in Iowa, and Trout Unlimited is relying on great partnerships to keep this going.



Upcoming Events & Programs Calendar

Upcoming Water Quality and Conservation Events in Iowa



Life Depends On Water. Water Depends On You.

SEP
16

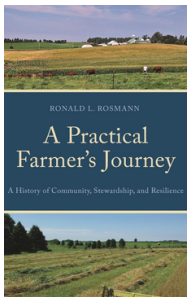
Iowa Water Conference

This year's 20th anniversary theme will spotlight Iowa's water milestones, while challenging our community to set bold new goals. Join the network of professionals, researchers, and advocates shaping the future of water in Iowa and the Midwest. <https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/iwc2022/>

OCT
17

Ron Rosmann, A Practical Farmer's Journey, Q&A and Book Signing

Iowa farmer and author Ron Rosmann will visit Decorah on Tuesday, October 27 at 7:00 p.m. for a presentation and Q&A about his new memoir, *A Practical Farmer's Journey: A History of Community, Stewardship, and Resilience*. The evening will conclude with a book signing at Pulpit Rock Brewing.



NOV 18-19

Iowa Nature Summit 2026

Join Iowa's leading conservationists, scientists, farmers, policymakers, educators, and nature advocates for two days of meaningful conversations about the future of Iowa's natural resources. Located at Drake University, - Des Moines, Iowa



Please note that the event descriptions are taken from the source sites - ICC does not endorse or sponsor these events unless specifically indicated.

Tom Murray

SHINING A LIGHT ON SERVICE



Tom Murray has lived in the Decorah area for over thirty-five years. He is a founding member and past President of the Iowa Coldwater Conservancy (ICC). In addition to ICC, Tom also continues to volunteer on conservation projects with the Iowa Driftless Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association and the Winneshiek County Conservation Board.

In 2021, Tom won the Hagie Heritage Award, which "is given annually by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) to recognize Iowans who have demonstrated extraordinary personal service and commitment to improving the quality of Iowa's natural environment and who encourage others to do the same."



Make a Difference

Your donations to Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy help us accomplish the partnerships and improvements needed to improve water quality in Iowa. We are a 501c3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization.

Please send donations in care of Dave Jones, Treasurer, to 2672 Becky Thatcher Road Muscatine, Iowa 52761.

Beaver Dam Analogs

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New Melleray Abbey owns substantial acreage that includes Monastery Creek, a tributary to Catfish Creek trout stream, which has public access in the Swiss Valley Nature Preserve in Dubuque, Iowa. The Abbey embarked on a wetland improvement project that included the construction of beaver dam analogs. The project includes BDA's because they are considered low-tech, process-based restoration tools that use simple, natural materials and do not require heavy machinery. Part of Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy mission is to advocate and support new stream and wetland restoration practices.

Therefore, in August of 2024 ICC decided to support this effort to test the effectiveness of this novel practice with a \$5,000 grant to construct 10 beaver dam analogs on Monastery Creek. In addition to the financial support, ICC board members joined other volunteer groups to build the beaver dam analogs. Project objectives include; improving the water quality flowing into Catfish Creek and eventually the Mississippi River by reducing the sediment load and pollutants, restoring the wetlands in the watershed, and protecting from brown trout the South Pine Creek Brook trout that will be reintroduced upstream of the beaver dam analogs. If successful, this project is a true "win-win" proposition by reducing the polluted sediment flow into the Mississippi River while at the same time improving the trout stream conditions just down-stream of the beaver dam analogs.

Watershed Partnerships

Continued from Page 1

What we humans do every day in the watersheds where we live, work, and recreate has an impact on the quality of the soils and waters within those watersheds; from our homes, communities, and farms in northeast Iowa, into the Mississippi River and all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Back in the mid-1970's, one of the first landowners I met on North Bear Creek was Walter Langland. The Langland family were among the early settlers on this hilly farmland in Highland Township, Winneshiek County. Valley View Farm, which has been owned by their family for well over 100 years, has been recognized as an Iowa Century Farm.

Walter always enjoyed visiting with stream-side visitors. Whenever I heard his tractor and mower approaching, I always waved and often stopped my fishing for a visit. After he asked how I was doing, and as we got to know each other, he readily recounted his childhood memories of growing up in this idyllic place. Over many of those stream-side visits, I learned that he and his family cared deeply about this special place where they lived, and they worked hard to be good stewards of their land and the waters of North Bear Creek. In 2006, North Bear Creek was designated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources as one of only 35 lakes and streams in Iowa as an Outstanding Iowa Waterway.

The Langland family were active members of the Winneshiek County Soil and Water Conservation District (Winneshiek County SWCD). Walter also served for many years as a Winneshiek County Supervisor. In the early 1990's, the Langlands joined many of their neighbors in the watershed to meet with representatives from county, state and federal agencies in the "planning phase" of the Bear Creek Watershed Project.

The intent of the Bear Creek Watershed Project was to do the following:

- 1.Reduce damages in the Watershed from floodwater and sediment deposits.
- 2.Maintain high quality water in the Bear Creek Watershed's trout streams.
- 3.Improve recreational opportunities in the area.
- 4.Protect the watershed from excessive erosion and resource depletion.

From 1998-2001, funding for the Bear Creek Watershed Project came a wide variety of county, state and federal programs. Lead agencies were the Winneshiek SWCD and the Iowa Dept. of Agriculture & Land Stewardship (IDALS).

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Funding from these groups led to the construction of 53 floodwater-mitigating basins on farms in Iowa and Minnesota. These soil retention structures/basins were intended to collect up to 40-50% of eroding soils from nearby fields to reduce sedimentation and turbidity damage within the watershed. These partnerships also helped landowners convert land formerly planted in row crops to other land use practices, like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with native grasses and prairie plantings. Terraces were also installed on hilly terrain. Some landowners also established Tree Farms and prairie plantings, creating additional wildlife habitats. Many of the silt retention basins and alternative land use practices can still be seen today as you travel the roads along North Bear, Middle Bear and South Bear Creeks.

Unfortunately, even more significant challenges and land use practices within this watershed and throughout Iowa were emerging during these same years. Our climate continues to warm, producing more frequent flooding and erosion of soils. Even more corn has been planted in the thin, steep soils of the watershed to make ethanol while decreasing perennial crops for hay and grazing and increasing more soil erosion. The transition from raising livestock on pastures to very large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFO's) continues, and existing regulations are largely unenforced. Ongoing reductions in federal and state Conservation budgets and employees continues. The number of small, locally owned farms continues to decline, leading to fewer farmers but much larger farms, primarily row cropping corn and soy beans. Serious human health risks in Iowa, including growing cancer rates, continue to be linked to the excessive application of nutrients and chemicals to the land and waterways every year.

What can be done to address these ongoing significant challenges to our land and water in the days ahead? Being willing to consider changing long standing practices is a huge first step for all landowners. I believe we need to continue to listen to and to be supportive of landowners who are willing to work as partners with public agencies and conservation organizations. Since Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy (ICC) was established in 2017, our board members have been very supportive of working in partnerships with land owners, public agencies and other private organizations, and individuals to help fund and provide volunteer hours on similar watershed related projects.

Today, in the state of Iowa there is a growing concern across urban and rural communities about the quality and safety of our water. Clean water should be available every day to everyone who lives in and visits our state and to all the wildlife species who make up the ecosystems that sustain the health of our recreational waters and natural resources. Watershed challenges are complex and expensive to address. Partnerships, are the key to opening the door to change in the right direction. I urge you to become involved and work in partnerships with public agencies and other private organizations like Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy to help address these challenges to our watersheds and the land and waters within them.

Thank you for taking time to learn more about Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy and our ongoing work. In Part 2 of Watershed & Partnerships Annals, I will share more stories and perspectives about our involvement in partnerships over the past nine years, and on recent projects on North Bear Creek and other coldwater rivers and streams within the Iowa Driftless Region.



Photos by: Matt Frana, Winneshiek County Soil & Water Conservation District and currently serving as the Central Turkey River Watershed Project Coordinator.

Contact Information: [\(563\) 382-4352 Ext. 3.](tel:5633824352)

President's Message



We all live downstream

Late summer brings the first subtle hints of fall in the Iowa Driftless. Walnut leaves start to fall, the humidity ebbs and grasshoppers provide a nutrient-packed snack for trout on a windy day. It's a time of changes, and here at the Iowa Coldwater Conservancy it's a time for changes as well. We were founded 9 years ago with the goal of trying to protect Northeast Iowa's Coldwater ecosystems through a collaborative approach that brings together different stakeholders.

Our mission has not changed, but the stakes are higher. Since the inception of ICC, the threats to Iowa's Coldwater ecosystems have only increased. Loss of habitat and changes in industrial agricultural practices have left this ancient, yet fragile, world threatened. For many, the most immediate consequence is the impact on the magical trout fishing in Iowa's Driftless region. Yet the trout are the proverbial "canary in the coal mine" as these issues also impact the very water we drink, which has a host of real-world consequences that range from the sustainability of rural wells to cancer rates. We all, truly, do live downstream.

ICC has always sought collaborative solutions. However, given the stakes we feel that it was time to broaden our message, which brings us to our first newsletter. Our hope with this newsletter is to raise awareness regarding some of these issues, and to hopefully magnify the scope of what we can do. In this volume, our immediate past president, Tom Murray discusses watershed partnerships. Our treasurer, Dave Jones explains Beaver Dam Analogs, which is a great example of a tangible conservation practice in the Iowa Driftless. Moreover, Cam Aker, Trout Unlimited's Iowa Driftless Engagement Coordinator provides examples of what donations to ICC can do.

Throughout its history ICC has partnered with organizations such as the Iowa DNR, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Trout Unlimited, the Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association, and the Northeast Iowa RC&D to provide education and collaborative solutions to the environmental challenges that Iowa's Coldwater streams face. We ask that you forward this newsletter to your friends, and if possible, donate to ICC so that we can continue with our work. From the brook trout tucked away in the headwaters of an Allamakee County trout stream to the tap water coming out of a rural well, we all do live downstream of our friends and neighbors.

Happy Fall,

- Mike Biderman, ICC Board President

ICC Newsletter

The ICC Newsletter is published quarterly by the Communications Committee of the ICC. If you would like us to include your event, news item, or photos, please email us at andy.hosmanek@iowacoldwater.org

OUR MISSION:

Iowa's Coldwater Conservancy (ICC) works as a facilitator and partner in collaborations with educators, businesses, other NGOs, public agencies, and landowners on projects to protect and improve the ecosystems that sustain our coldwater rivers and streams while expanding public access to these vital and unique natural resources.

OUR VISION:

Iowa's Coldwater rivers and streams will be complete, healthy eco-systems that improve our natural environment and enhance the lives of everyone who has the opportunity to experience these examples of our natural heritage.

LEARN MORE:

About Us:

<https://iowacoldwater.org/#about>

Our Board of Directors:

<https://iowacoldwater.org/board-of-directors/>

