


Iowa Nature Series

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SPEAKERS


Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Heidi Anderson, Olivia Hanlon

 **Christa Hartsook** 00:00
Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.

 **Olivia Hanlon** 00:22
In this episode I visit with Heidi Anderson, a Naturalist with Polk County Conservation. Today we are talking about the Iowa Nature Series Publications. I'm Olivia Hanlon Farm Food and Enterprise Development Education Extension Specialist, and we hope you enjoy the show. Heidi, welcome to our show. We're glad to have you joining us today.

 **Heidi Anderson** 00:36
Thank you.

 **Olivia Hanlon** 00:37
Heidi, this is your first time on the podcast. So why don't we start with you telling us a little bit about yourself and what you do in your job with Polk County Conservation.

 **Heidi Anderson** 00:58
Sure, I've been a Naturalist with Polk County conservation for over 24 years. I started working here right when I graduated from Iowa State and have enjoyed it ever since. But a little bit about what I do as a naturalist, it's quite varied. That's one of the things I like about my job as

I'm doing different things every day. But overall, my job is to teach others about Iowa's natural resources and how to enjoy the outdoors via outdoor recreation skills. So sometimes I might be in the classroom teaching students. Sometimes we have students come out into our parks on field trips, and we're doing outdoor activities. We also do a lot of programs and events for the general public. So for example, coming up this next week, I've got some storytimes with some preschoolers, and we're gonna be talking about dragonflies. But I also have something coming up or we're talking about fireflies, and that's just open to the general public. And so I do education with anyone from pre-k on up to senior citizens. And so speaking to lots of groups and doing education programs, but I also do some other types of interpretation via news articles. So I enjoy writing, and also help out with some of our social media channels that we use through Polk County Conservation to inform others about Iowa's natural resources.

O Olivia Hanlon 02:37

You have a lot going on over there, Heidi. 24 years is pretty impressive.

H Heidi Anderson 02:41

Yes, it has gone by fast.

O Olivia Hanlon 02:44

So as part of your role, you did some work on the Iowa Nature Series Publications. Could you tell us a little bit about what you did or what your role was in the publications?

H Heidi Anderson 02:55

Sure, this project was something that the Iowa Association of Naturalists wanted to support and revise a similar series, and so they asked for some naturalists who might be willing to serve on the editorial board and even author some of the the new publications. So I volunteered for that, because as I mentioned, I do enjoy writing. And so I was one of the authors on the plant article in particular, and then on editorial board, so I reviewed the content for all of the articles within this series.

O Olivia Hanlon 03:39

That's awesome. So let's dive into the series a little bit. Can you give us just a general overview for now on the series, how many publications there are, things like that?

H Heidi Anderson 03:49

Sure. There are 10 articles all together in this series. And they range from Iowa's landforms and geology, soils, prairies, forest, aquatic environments, vertebrates, invertebrates, plants, state symbols, and influential voices. So there's 10 altogether and the original series that was put

together 20 to 30 years ago contained over 40 different topics and so a lot of them were outdated, and they weren't in compliance with the American Disabilities Act. So part of the process when we tackled this project was determining which topics we wanted to focus on. We chose those 10 and thought those were the most useful and important information to update and and share with the public. Also, each article includes some original maps, color photos, some especially unique graphics that were illustrated by we have, I think, five different illustrators that helped work on the project to create some of those graphics. And we had color photography from lots of different people who contributed toward the project as well. So if we look at all of the articles, in general, it adds up to like 125 pages all together. So a lot of content to review.

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Olivia Hanlon 05:28

That is! So you kind of gave us an overview of what the publications cover. But could you dive in just a little bit deeper without giving it all away, and just kind of explain to us what these cover and how they can be useful to folks out there?

H

Heidi Anderson 05:43

Sure. I guess one thing that we wanted to focus on was, for example, I'm going to use the plants because that was one of the articles that I authored. We wanted them to be an introductory article to what plants are, how they work, some of the diversity, and so forth. But, you know, there are a lot of plants on the planet, and there are a lot of plants in Iowa. So how do we take such a big topic and narrow it down, and try to make it easy to read and understandable, but yet providing some good content. So the articles are, you know, anywhere from 10 to, I don't know, 15 pages, something like that. So and that's one of my jobs as a naturalist is to understand the science, and make connections for the general public in a relatable way so that we can understand it better. So each booklet has some of that basic information about what are vertebrates, what is soil, what are the landforms in Iowa, and then within that trying to pull out some kind of unique or interesting stories about maybe a particular animal, or plant to make it a little more relatable to help you understand it a little bit better. So within all the articles, we also didn't want to date, any of the information. So some of the the previous booklets and the previous stories had things that just became outdated, where we talked about maybe certain animal populations, and how their numbers, what their numbers are doing has changed over time. So we're really trying to make the information be timeless in a sense as to, here's what an Iowa forest is. And here's some of the different kinds. And so hopefully, this information will be available and useful for a long time. So I learned a lot by reading through and kind of editing a lot of the articles. And you know, I have a good background in science, but you know, I don't I don't consider myself a specialist on soil science by any means. So they were very useful for me. And I know they'll be useful for other naturalists, educators, teachers, and just people who are interested in learning more about Iowa's natural resources. And one thing I wanted to share that I learned that's in the plant article has to do with milkweed plants. And back in World War Two, they started using the fluff from the milkweed seeds. So you know, milkweed have pods, and the seeds open up and the fluff carries them out. So they started using the fluff from those seeds for life vests to use in World War Two. And researchers from Iowa State College back then before it was Iowa State University, they were really interested in studying milkweed plants in general. And were there other uses for that plant. So they particularly were interested in the oil that they could extract

from milkweed plants. And they discovered that it was very useful in making plastic and polyester materials compared to using soybean oil for those same types of products. And so that was a neat connection to learn that Iowa State was studying that back then. And nowadays no milkweed is not used for that purpose, but it is an important plant for the lifecycle of the monarch butterfly. But anyhow, just a neat little story like that is a little expert in that article. And you'll find that in a lot of the different articles.

O Olivia Hanlon 09:48

Yeah, that's really interesting and it's always good to hear things tie back to Iowa State.

H Heidi Anderson 09:55

Absolutely.

O Olivia Hanlon 09:56

So aside from the milkweed story. Did you have another like, favorite fact or favorite story that you learned throughout editing this series?

H Heidi Anderson 10:06

Yes, you know, I have, like I said, I have kind of a good background knowledge on our natural resources. But when we pulled in all these experts to help author, some of the articles, I think there's over 35 different authors in total over the 10 articles.

O Olivia Hanlon 10:26

Wow!

H Heidi Anderson 10:26

Yeah! So, a lot of people working together on the project. You know, when you have an expert that's so knowledgeable on a certain topic, and I'm going to use forest article as an example, having it spelled out in an easy, digestible way was really, really good. And in the forest article, they talked about the importance of keystone species in an ecosystem. And so a keystone species is an animal or could be a plant as well, that if that animal is removed from the ecosystem, it's going to cause lots of havoc and change in the ecosystem. So in the forest article, they talk about the importance of keystone species and highlight woodpeckers as a keystone species here in Iowa. And I know woodpeckers are important in the role they play, but I never really thought about them as a keystone species. So one of the reasons why they're a keystone species has to do with the holes that they create in dead trees. And the holes they create become homes, or ways for other organisms to get into the tree, wood ducks, different beetles, other birds. And those animals aren't able to utilize the dead trees unless the

woodpeckers make those holes. So I thought that was really interesting. And again, it was something I knew, but I didn't really think about. So that's a fun little tidbit there in the in the forest article. I will say in the influential voices article, this article features biographies of 20 different people from Iowa, that helped improve nature and conservation in Iowa. And so some of these names are names that I have heard of and knew a lot about, but there were some I didn't. And we also tried to make sure that there were some women represented in this list. And one of them happened to be a professor from Iowa State that I knew and actually had come lead a hike for me here at Polk County Conservation early on in my career. And her name is Lois Tiffany and Lois Tiffany is known as the Mushroom Lady in Iowa. And so she was a botanist at Iowa State, and she was well known across the state for if you had questions about mushrooms or fungi, she was who you wanted to talk to. And so since I personally knew her and had met her, it was really neat to see her highlighted in that article. Lots of other neat, neat people featured in that article as well.

O Olivia Hanlon 13:21

Yeah, definitely. Moving on, where are these publications located? How can people access them? And is there a charge to download them?

H Heidi Anderson 13:30

These publications can be found on the Iowa State University Extension store for free. And there's just a free download. And in addition to downloading the publications, you can also download some of the graphics. So these are all original graphics and artwork that we're creating for these articles. And they are available for free educational use. I know as a naturalist a lot of times I when I'm doing education programming I'm looking for oh, I really would love an image or graphic of something to help demonstrate a point and so there's over 50 different graphics that are also available for free download use as well. So if you find something there see something that you think you could use for educational use, it is there for you to use. So that's kind of a nice perk as well as part of the project.

O Olivia Hanlon 14:35

Yeah, that's really cool for people to be able to access those things. If people are wanting more information on the series or these topics, where should they look or who should they get in contact with?

H Heidi Anderson 14:46

Sure. A couple of things. Our coordinator for this project was Adam Janke with Iowa State University. He's our Wildlife Extension Specialist and his email is ajanke@iastate.edu. So he would be a great person to reach out to. But also, if there are specific, more topic-related questions from some of the articles, at the end of each article, it lists the authors and who helped write each one, and it lists our organization with our name. So you could do a little sleuthing and in contact to that organization, and reach out to that person that way. But like I said, there's over 35 of us that helped author these articles, and we're all listed listed on there.

But again, even anyone on the editorial board there, I think there were maybe six of us that really are very familiar with every single article because we reviewed it multiple times. So anybody on editorial board, would be a good person to reach out to as well.

O Olivia Hanlon 16:00

Okay, so it sounds like there should be plenty of people who would be willing to answer questions for anybody who has them.

H Heidi Anderson 16:05

Yes, absolutely.

O Olivia Hanlon 16:08

Is there anything that we did not cover today that you'd like to add Heidi?

H Heidi Anderson 16:12

Not that I can think of, I think this project was a very unique project in the sense that we really wanted to take what's special and unique about Iowa, and share that with others and provide some good background information about Iowa's natural resources. And hopefully, it's useful for other naturalists and educators and just the general public, if you want to learn more about Iowa's natural resources. So this is a great place to start. And, you know, we'd also love to hear your feedback too. And you could reach out again to anyone on the editorial board for that. So we hope that you enjoy them!

O Olivia Hanlon 16:59

Okay, well thank you very much for joining us today, Heidi and for explaining these publications to us and we look forward to hopefully having you on again in the future to talk about something else.

H Heidi Anderson 17:10

You're welcome Olivia!

S Speaker 3 17:12

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