

# WOODLANDS & PRAIRIES

MAGAZINE

with Mrs. Woods

Winter 2011-2012 \$6.00



Special reprint  
featuring a letter from  
Dave Bartemes,  
tree farmer



“Dear Friends.”  
Letters from the land

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
Written by Readers



About Caring for Your Piece of this Good Earth



# WOODLANDS & PRAIRIES MAGAZINE

About caring for your piece  
of this Good Earth.

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*A sweet lady, but don't push her too far!*

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***There can be no  
purpose more inspiring  
than to begin the age of  
restoration, reweaving  
the wondrous diversity  
of life that still surrounds  
us. ~ E. O. Wilson***

# Letters from the land then and now

## Dear Friends,

Welcome to this special issue written by readers. It's our third such issue written in first person, and once again readers outdid themselves with letters about stewardship.

Do you have a story to tell? We'd love to hear from you. Important stories are springing from the grassroots about what some call a quiet revolution in land management. A mission of this magazine is to give wings to those stories.

Pioneers who preceded you on the land touched off an earlier revolution. In less than 100 years they converted the prairie into America's breadbasket. And they told stories about it, often heroic. Their letters and diaries fill shoeboxes in attics and line shelves in the archival sections of libraries. The stories tell of hope and despair, and success and failure as the pioneers put down roots and made their way in what was for them a new land.

## The new pioneers

Stories in this issue are of another revolution fostered by a new wave of pioneers on the land. If you've reforested a slope, cleared cedars to revive a prairie, created a wildlife sanctuary in your yard with native plants or engaged in other such restoration, it's fair to say you're one of the new pioneers.



It would be too simplistic to say that you're repairing the damage done by the first wave. Repairing the land began in earnest in the '30s with the birth of the soil and water conservation movement. One of the letter writers this issue, **Stan Meyer**, recalls the work by the Civilian Conservation Corps to repair a gully on the farm where he grew up (page 12). Back then, as now, this approach to conservation centered on fixing the land to conserve soil and water for the production of food and fiber, as well as preventing pollution from runoff. Today as a new pioneer Stan is practicing another kind of conservation on his 440-acre ranch in Montana. He's restoring ecosystems, among them a marsh that was filled with muck and cattails. Its waters once again run pure and the wildlife has returned.

In central Iowa, meanwhile, **Cindy Hildebrand** and **Roger Maddux** are restoring parcels of land in the heart of the Corn Belt back into the tallgrass prairie ecosystem that made the Corn Belt possible.



Other new pioneers are reforesting land that the first wave cleared for pastures and crops. **Dave Bartemes**, for example, is restoring the health of 60 acres of abused pasture, hillsides, and creek bottom in the rolling hills of southern Iowa. He and his wife, **Cora**, have planted more than 30,000 trees over the years. They've also established a 10-acre prairie. Like the stories of the first pioneers, theirs is a human story. It's about family and facing life's challenges. The story starts on page 24.



## Restoration history

Restoration defines the new pioneers. We humans have practiced restoration in one form or another for thousands of years as we tinkered with the land. Then the practice matured into a science. It happened during the last century or more, built on the findings and conclusions of several generations of botanists, biologists, naturalists, ecologists, and other thinkers. They formed the Ecology Society of America in 1915. A separate field of ecology--restoration ecology--didn't emerge as a science until the 1980s. Native plant societies, The Nature Conservancy, and other environmental groups came into being along the way. When restoration ecology is put into practice on the land ---which is the stuff you might be doing---it's known as ecological restoration. The Society for Ecological Restoration was formed in 1987.

## Now a movement

Like its cousin, soil and water conservation, ecological restoration has become a movement. The movement isn't about restoring ecosystems such as the tallgrass prairie to all of their former



glory. But it is about landowners, land managers, and volunteers enduring blazing sun and biting insects to save priceless examples of prairie and other ecosystems as part of our natural heritage. It's also about the environmental services these ecosystems provide in the way of enriching soil, purifying water, sequestering carbon, and providing habitat for wildlife. And then it's simply about doing the right thing. As expressed in the land ethic advanced by Aldo Leopold, ecological restoration is about saving all parts of these ecosystems---from the largest trees, plants, and animals to the tiniest insects and microorganisms. They have an intrinsic value as members of the natural world that we share. Then there's the spiritual value. **Bill Witt** writes about that in his letter on page 19.

### High stakes

When applied to the planet's life-support systems writ large, the stakes of ecological restoration have never been higher. The health of biomes such as the South American rain forests and the Florida Everglades remain a concern. Grasslands are under threat. Grinnell College student **Kayla Koether** spent five months living with nomadic herders on the steppe of Mongolia. In her letter beginning on page 28 she writes about forces threatening this vast grassland. Meanwhile, global warming is affecting the stability of three major biomes that come together in north-central Minnesota. That's according to **Peter P. Bundy**, who urges reforestation to offset the warming effect of greenhouse gases. His letter begins on page 14.



Such issues underscore why ecological restoration should be a top national priority.

The beauty is, we can do it at the grassroots. The principles of ecological restoration apply to managing nearly any piece of land, whether it's our back yard, a neglected cut-over woodland in the back 40 or a natural area in need of volunteers to remove buckthorn.

### Inclusive

The movement applies to the buffer strips that Iowa farmer **Rex Gogerty** installed to protect a stream from runoff from his crop fields. We can debate whether the CRP practice meets the strict definition of ecological restoration. However, the mix of native species in the buffer reflects a change in government thinking on cost-share programs over the years. Time was when Eurasian species were all farmers could get under such programs. But ecology informs more and more USDA policy these days.



Rex farms the land settled by his great grandfather, making him a direct descendant of the first wave of pioneers. But in his letter on page 38 he writes about the wildlife in the buffer strips, and of the grace and beauty that the grasses and prairie flowers add to his crop rotation. It makes you think he was always a new pioneer.

### From longhand to online

The first pioneers wrote their letters and journals in longhand. The letters we received were e-mailed. How times have changed.



Some of you are posting your letters online. The Internet is a popular outlet for bloggers who are showing how native plants can breathe new life into the turfgrass wastelands of residential areas. Two contributors in this issue write about native plants in their yards, and they also maintain blogs: **Linda Gurgone**, Woodstock, Ill., (page 8), and **Betty Hall**, Lexington, Ky., (page 34).



### New knowledge

Some of the first pioneers were astute observers of the land and kept detailed notes; the new pioneers even more so. We've reported on several, including Sibylla and Bill Brown, the southern Iowa landowners who are leaders in oak savanna restoration. Meanwhile, Marcie and Mike O'Connor are taking an old farm in Wisconsin back to its pre-settlement roots. The Browns and the O'Connors number among the citizen scientists who are adding to the knowledge base of ecological restoration. You can follow the Browns and the O'Connors on their blogs at: [www.timberhilloaksavanna.com](http://www.timberhilloaksavanna.com) and [www.aprairiehaven.com](http://www.aprairiehaven.com). We are posting links to other blogs of note by the new pioneers on our own Website: [www.woodlandsandprairies.com](http://www.woodlandsandprairies.com)

Meanwhile, let this magazine be another outlet for letters from the land for bloggers and non-bloggers alike. There's so much to write about: the joy, the frustrations, the lessons learned, the hope, the magic moments. As with the first pioneers, these are letters written from the heart by people who love the land. And you can hold this magazine, and the stories, in your hands.



A hundred years from now, someone might find copies of this magazine under a pile of old papers and read your stories. I hope the person won't say, "Too bad we didn't listen to them."  
~ *Rollie Henkes*







**Family ties. Fifteen reasons why Dave and Cora Bartemes came back to Iowa.** In white shirts: Brian and Maria with daughters Elena and Cecelia and sons Theodore and Joshua. In yellow shirts: Paul and Kathy with sons Benjamin and William and daughter Julia. In blue shirts: Kevin and Barbara with daughter Jessica and son Joe. Dave and Cora seated in front.

## PROFILE:

**A CHANGE IN PLANS.** “Children and grandchildren have a way of interrupting the most carefully laid plans.” So writes Dave Bartemes in his letter on the next page. He and his wife, Cora, had planned to spend their retirement years living in the mountains of their home state of West Virginia. Instead, they find themselves tree farming in the hills of southern Iowa. Here’s a quick look at how that happened.

West Virginia natives Dave Bartemes and Cora Perrine meet as students at West Virginia State University. They marry; Dave gets a job in sales and management with Honeywell, Inc., in West Virginia; Cora teaches English and French in high school.

They move to Iowa in 1977 when Dave becomes branch manager for Honeywell in Des Moines. Cora gets a master’s degree in counseling at Drake University. Their three sons come of age in Des Moines. Dave retires from Honeywell in 1991; he and Cora go back to West Virginia to be with elderly family members. Dave becomes program director for West Virginia Advocates, a non-profit agency that speaks for the human and legal rights of people with disabilities. After their elders pass on, Dave and Cora have no family left in West Virginia. Meanwhile, their sons have graduated from colleges in Iowa and Minnesota; married, have taken jobs in both states, and are raising a crop of nine grandchildren for Dave and Cora to spoil. And so they move back to Des Moines.

If not the mountains of West Virginia, Dave has another mountain to climb as a cancer survivor. And this winter he was to tackle a real mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania as a member of the Above and Beyond Cancer Survivor Trek. This is the same program that last spring saw 13 cancer survivors reach the base camp of Mount Everest. Dr. Richard Deming, medical director of Mercy Cancer Center, Des Moines, led that Trek, as well as the one this winter to Mount Kilimanjaro. “It’s about reaching the summit of their cancer journey,” says Dr. Deming. At 73, Dave was the oldest of the group which left for Africa as this issue was going to press. <http://www.mercydesmoines.org/cancercenter/AboveandBeyond.cfm>

# MY PIECE OF WEST VIRGINIA IN IOWA

## Dear Friends,

I lived on the edge of the Monongahela National Forest for two of the best years of my life. My dream retirement was to go back to the mountains; to sit by a stream and to drink in the beauty of the trees and other flora of the area. But that wasn't to be.

Children and grandchildren have a way of interrupting the most carefully laid plans. We were transferred to Iowa by my employer in 1977. Our children grew up here, married, and gave birth to a new generation of Bartemes' in Iowa and Minnesota. West Virginia was just too far away for me to realize my retirement dream.

One Saturday afternoon in the fall of 1999, I drove south. I drove through Lucas, Marion, Decatur, and Wayne counties. In Wayne county, I liked what I saw. I saw rolling hills, wood-lined streams, eroded pastures, and grassy ridgelines. It was a little piece of West Virginia, albeit out of place. When I returned home that evening my wife asked me what I did all day. I answered in a low hesitating voice: "I bought a farm."

We had talked about the possibility



*It isn't West Virginia, but then... Dave Bartemes stands by one of the 30,000 trees that he and his wife, Cora, have planted on their Iowa tree farm.*



*From the forests of West Virginia to the woodlands of southern Iowa.*

of owning and operating a tree farm for some time, but neither of us thought that we would actually buy 60 acres of abused pasture, hillside, and creek bottom and then convert it into a tree farm. Yet, that's exactly what we have been doing for the past 11 years.

We called the district forester and developed a plan for the tree farm to be. We divided the farm into five stands and proceeded from there. By 2005 we had planted over 30,000 trees on 30 acres of the best land. In addition we have established a 10-acre prairie, and a one-acre walnut orchard. The remaining land is as we found it, seeded heavily in brome grass.

We were deliberate in choosing a diversified array of native hardwoods; with some white spruce and Norway spruce for color and wildlife cover. Our hardwoods are heavy on walnut and mixed oaks. Some of the more interesting species are: yellow poplar (a carryover from my West Virginia heritage), northern pecan, and sugar maple. We also planted 100

bald cypress near the creek, along with two bushels of swamp white oak acorns. Only 16 of the cypress and none of the swamp white oak have survived due to an infestation of reed canary grass so thick you can barely walk through it.

Make no mistake, we love our native state of West Virginia with its hills, mountains and woodland vistas, but we have come to love Iowa and Iowans equally. Home is where you are, not necessarily where you want to be.

*Dave Bartemes*

4404 72nd St., Urbandale, IA 50322

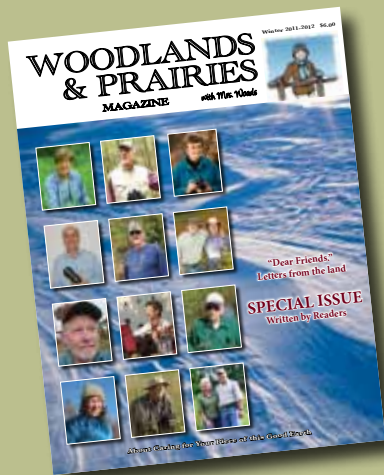
*Dave and Cora, share ownership of the tree farm with their three sons, Kevin, Paul, and Brian. It is organized as an LLC under the name Dave's Hardwood Trees, LLC. [dwbartemes87@q.com](mailto:dwbartemes87@q.com)*

*Dave is also current president of the Iowa Woodland Owners Association. His farm will host a field day on May 12 as part of the Iowa Woodland Owners Association spring meeting. More details at: [www.iowawoodlandowners.org/index.shtml](http://www.iowawoodlandowners.org/index.shtml)*



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The Iowa Woodland Owners Association (IWOA) was founded in 1987 to promote the value of Iowa Woodlands to the economy of the state and to the welfare of its citizens. We foster wise use of Iowa's woodlands and other natural resources, and we're committed to developing public appreciation of these resources.

For information regarding membership, please contact:  
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 (319) 325 8871

For more about IWOA, please visit our Website at  
[www.iowawoodlandowners.org](http://www.iowawoodlandowners.org)

*Please come to our  
 spring field day!*

May 12th,  
 Allerton Civic Center, Allerton, Iowa

Registration begins at 8:30. The morning sessions will feature discussions on soils, prairies, and tree farming in southern Iowa.

In the afternoon we'll tour the tree farm of IWOA President Dave Bartemes. His reforestation not only includes walnut and oak, but also bald cypress, northern pecan, and Norway and white spruce. And there will be a prairie burn, weather permitting. Dave's farm is at the intersection of 105th and Filmore, southeast of Allerton.



The \$20 fee includes a lunch of smoked turkey by The Smoke Shed of Allerton.

*The fee includes a year's membership in IWOA if you're not yet a member!*

More details at:  
[www.iowawoodlandowners.org](http://www.iowawoodlandowners.org)