



Conservation Efforts

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Honoring Conservationists

By UMRI's Outreach Coordinator, Christine Curry and Iowa's Conservation Director, Mike Delaney, and other Iowa Izaak Walton League chapter members

We're back at it again, sharing more stories of phenomenal natural resource stewards.

Worth repeating...Obviously many land owners are protecting their "natural capital" but most are not. We know that our water quality continues to decline as silt, bacteria, phosphorus, and nitrate continue to be problematic. Our hope is that our positive examples will be contagious and encourage others to get involved and take action so that eventually the entire Upper Mississippi River watersheds will flourish with healthy landscapes, soil and clean water from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico.

Conservationist at work—A Watershed Heroine



Ann Wolf works to clear mud out of her Iowa DNR's Goose nest smack in the middle of her 1.8 acre wetland which is part of the USDA's (Natural Resource Conservation Service) programs. Photo by: Mark Chambers

We met Ann Wolf a couple years ago at the [Raccoon River Watershed Association](#) (RRWA)'s annual conference, "Life in the Raccoon," at the [Hotel Pattee](#) in Perry, Iowa. We have had several conversations and meetings with her since. Ann owns a 300 acre farm along the Mississippi River which she has managed to transform into a model conservation farm during the past two decades.



IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE'S
UPPER MISSISSIPPI
RIVER INITIATIVE

Ann is a member of several conservation and agricultural organizations. She represents the estimated 60% of women who are farmland owners in Iowa. “I believe it’s important for both women and men to work together to solve and communicate effectively regarding farm-related issues in Iowa that more directly impact their farm’s operations,” she says. “Whether they’re actively living on their farm, operate as an absentee landowner or are a beginning or seasoned farmland owner, networking and communication is essential and vital.”



Ann Wolf’s poetic farm landscape. Photo provided by Ann Wolf

I recently had a conversation with Ann and would like to share a little bit of her story with you in this issue. It seems these days everything from mask wearing during the pandemic to conservation and land stewardship are politically charged. Ann transcends any political bias when it comes to being a true example of an excellent conservationist.

Like many of the active people involved in conservation, Ann had an early connection to the land. She grew up in Clinton, Iowa and spent much of her childhood time outdoors near the Mississippi River. She was blessed to inherit her family farm along the Mississippi River, located in the High Bluff area in Jackson County. The land was purchased by her grandparents in 1943 as a land investment. As a young kid she really did not spend much time at the farm. However, that has dramatically changed. Ann and her partner, Mark built a beautiful cabin on the farm a few years back and these days they spend most weekends on her farm away from their home in Des Moines.



Ann Wolf and her significant other Mark Chambers featured with a Paddlefish as they volunteered to monitor and tag fish with the Bellevue's Iowa DNR at Mississippi River's Lock and Dam 12, near Bellevue. Photo provided by Ann Wolf

Since taking over the family farm, Ann has taken an active role and manages state and federal conservation programs to improve soil health, water quality and wildlife habitat on her land. Over the past several years, Ann has been working with Iowa's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and through the [USDA's Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP) to improve her land with conservation wetlands and stream bank soil restoration projects.

The non-profit world has been part of her career since an adult, but now Ann's focus is dedicated to agriculture conservation efforts full-time. She serves as the Executive Director of [Iowa Heartland Resource Conservation and Development](#) (IHRC&D) and she has formed her own company called Clear Stream Solutions LLC where she serves as a consultant for businesses, nonprofits, and farm organizations. Recently, Ann joined [MidwestHealthyAg.Org](#) as Co-Program Director. This project is fully funded by the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and is also the result of Ann's and other project team's grant writing contributions. The Midwest Healthy Agriculture currently represents five states: Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Kansas. So the regenerative agriculture and the demographic focus is very similar to UMRI's with the exception of Kansas.

Ann is very optimistic about the future of conservations efforts, improving soil health, water quality, and food production. However, she totally understands that there is so much work to do in convincing others in the watershed to implement solid proven practices in order to shift the current trend of losing our natural resources. Ann believes that if landowners are incentivized they are much more likely to participate in sound practices. "The natural environment needs to be respected and nature is always going to win, so we need to work with her. What we have here is worth protecting," Ann stated.
