



Memorandum

To: Story County Board of Supervisors
From: Michael D. Cox, Director
Date: February 24, 2026
Re: Consideration of Bird Friendly County Reapplication

We are asking for your consideration of maintaining our status as a Bird Friendly County through the required annual reapplication process.

Story County received designation as a Bird Friendly County in 2020, celebrating the good work we are doing to protect and restore valuable habitat, reduce threats to birds, and educate and engage people in birding and conservation. The designation was a statement that Story County values, policies, procedures, and educational efforts promote conservation of birds, and that we'll continue to find additional ways to be bird-friendly in the future.

This year, Story County was officially recognized with HIGH FLYER STATUS. by Bird Friendly Iowa's highest level of bird friendly achievement.

Staff urges your approval.

Approval

Disapproval

Date

Date

Bird Friendly Iowa (Story County)

Part of the Bird City Network ACHIEVEMENTS (DRAFT APPLICATION)

1. Habitat

1.1 – Promote best management of community habitat

1.1.1 – Community has prepared a habitat assessment or management plan for one or more of its natural areas or parks, and is implementing the plan.

Story County Conservation manages and protects Robison Wildlife Acres, which is a 78-acre park near Maxwell, Iowa. The wildlife refuge has a large variety of habitats including remnant prairie and savanna, upland forests, riparian forests, shrubland and a man-made pond. The County was awarded Wildlife Diversity Grants in both 2011 and 2018 to conduct habitat assessments and implement habitat improvement. In 2011, Dr. Tom Rosburg was contracted out to do a baseline study for the area. For this study, he established four permanent plots from which plant and bird communities would be inventoried over time. He identified 135 plant species between the four sites. For these plant species, he provided statistical analysis of plant density and frequency along with basic ecological information to help guide future management. Thirty bird species were also observed at the study sites.

After seven years of management (2018), Dr. Rosburg returned to the four permanent plots to replicate his prior habitat assessment. He discovered an additional 39 plant species that were not present in 2011 which brings the total plant species for the area up to 174. Of the total plant species, 19 were of the non-native variety. With this new set of data, the land managers were able to see how the plant communities became healthier over time in three of the four sites – they increased in total native species richness and decreased in non-desirable plant stem density. One site didn't show significant improvement or decline. For this site, a new method of disturbance from the historic regime will be implemented.

All management that was conducted between 2010 and 2017 was recorded in Dr. Rosburg's final report. These management activities included mechanical woody clearing, goat grazing, and fall and spring controlled burns.

This habitat assessment has been an extraordinary resource to justify that staff time, money and resources applied to this area have been beneficial and that the County is on the right track to restoring the Robison Wildlife Acres area to its native state. The County has and will continue to manage the area using the proven beneficial management techniques as well as utilizing additional land management recommendations that were outlined in the habitat assessment. It should be a priority to conduct an

additional bird survey at the park to see if the bird species abundance has increased due to the overall habitat improvement.

Dr. Tom Rosburg's final report is attached.

2022 - Breeding bird surveys were completed by volunteer Tyler Harms at Carroll Prairie and the Deppe Family Area. Results from these surveys will help guide the management of the areas. Conservation Corp Iowa was contracted to do several habitat improvement projects that will benefit birds. Tree clearing as part of grassland/prairie restoration projects was done at Jennett Heritage Area, Doolittle Prairie Preserve, Carroll Prairie and the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail. Timber stand Improvement (TSI) for savanna restoration was done at Christiansen Forest Preserve and Robison Wildlife Ares. TSI work was also performed at McFarland Park and Hickory Grove Park.

Over \$15,500 worth of local ecotype prairie seed was hand and combine harvested at local prairies. This seed was used along with other seed for prairie plantings at Sleepy Hollow (3 ac.), Osheim Prairie and Slough Preserve (6.5 ac.) and Jennett heritage Area (11 ac.). Staff conducted 27 prescribed fires across the county totaling 258 acres.

2023 - The Natural resource Specialist and their seasonal staff conducted over 1,800 hours of invasive species removal, TSI, and tree removal work at multiple locations across the county. In addition, \$23,000 was used to contact Conservation Corp of Iowa to conduct tree removal at Jennett Heritage Area and the Prairie Rail Trail, and timber stand improvement work at Jordan Wildlife Area and Christiansen Forest Preserve. Prescribed fires were conducted on 439 acres of prairies and woodlands. 42 volunteers conducted two native tree plantings at the Tedesco Environmental learning Corridor and Dakins lake. One acre of prairie planted with local hand harvest and combine run seed at Prairie Valley and goat grazing was used to control invasives at Christiansen Forest Preserve and Hickory Grove park.

1.1.2 - The Community follows sustainability principles as recommended by natural resource professionals, for land use planning and resource management recommended by aligned organizations such as the County Conservation Board, Iowa DNR, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Program.

Land use planning is driven by the goal of returning land to its native condition or by improving the condition of the land which may already be in its predominantly natural state. Story County recognizes the internal and external strengths and resources available for developing plans and managing resources. Story County regularly partners with other agencies to develop the best plans and means possible to manages resources. A few examples of partners include the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa State University, Drake University, the USDA NRCS, and to a lesser extent, the USFWS.

1.1.3 - Indicate how Community public land management and/or acquisition provides native habitat for birds, plants and other wildlife.

Story County recognizes the sparsity of undeveloped land in Iowa. Natural resources—both plant, animal, and water suffer greatly as a result. Significant efforts are taken to increase the amount of land managed for its natural resources and to improve the natural resource condition of land previously protected. This goal is accomplished through a variety of methods with a variety of partners. Protection/improvement of land whether by easement, title, agreement, or landowner assistance, always results in that land being placed on a path toward sustainable native plant and animal communities. Within approximately the last ten years 1,300 acres have been permanently protected and many more are on that trajectory.

1.1.4 - Community has created (or adopted) and implements a local or regional land use or habitat master plan focused on creating, protecting, managing natural areas and connecting corridors (e.g. Smart Growth plans or similar) or can otherwise document that current community planning seeks to provide additional bird habitat.

Story County adopted a comprehensive plan in 2016. This plan improved land development and zoning protections for natural resources. These improvements have manifested natural resource improvements across the county. [Future Land Use Plans | Story County, IA - Official Website \(storycountyia.gov\)](https://www.storycountyia.gov/land-use-planning)

1.1.5 - Community forms/maintains a diverse team that supports and manages participation in the Bird Friendly Iowa program including working with community members and managing the application and renewal process. Please UPLOAD a current list of project team members including official contacts and community partners.

Submitted

1.1.7 - The Community, or one of the towns within a county, is currently designated as a TREE CITY USA.

Three communities in Story County are designated as a Tree City USA: Ames (for 35 years), Nevada (for 17 years), and Story City (for 23 years). These communities not only adhere to but exceed the four core standards of sound urban forestry management: maintaining a tree board or department, having a community tree ordinance, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrating Arbor Day.

1.2 - Create and protect habitat

1.2.4 - A substantial portion of the Community's land has legal protection through public ownership or conservation easement. These lands include managed native habitats that support at least 10 Greatest Conservation Need Iowa native bird species. The applicant must justify why it feels this protection is "substantial".

Story County, Iowa, contains 367,127 acres of land area. In the unincorporated area, outside of city corporate limits, there are 344,775 acres. There are 4,780 acres (1.3%) of publicly owned and managed lands countywide for conservation purposes. In addition to lands owned and/or managed by Story County Conservation, the 4,778 acres includes almost four acres owned by the City of Slater, one acre owned by the City of Cambridge, and 12 acres owned by the City of Maxwell that are part of the Heart of Iowa Nature Trail. It also includes areas owned by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources—the Bob Pyle Marsh, Hendrickson Marsh, and Interstate 35 Prairie—and parts of the Colo Ponds, Doolittle Prairie, and Skunk River Flats owned by the IDNR and Story County Conservation. And it includes several acres of land owned by the United States Army Corps of Engineers in the Skunk River Greenbelt for which Story County Conservation has a conservation easement. Not included are 494 acres of land owned by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. In total, with the land owned by the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, there are 5,274 acres in public ownership or management. While this is 1.2% of the county's land area, it is almost as many acres as are owned by Iowa State University and the Board of Regents. The University and Board have ownership of approximately 5,912 acres in Story County for its campus, research park, and research farms. Based on this comparison, there are a substantial number of acres that are publicly owned or managed in Story County.

Beyond public management, natural resources in Story County have several different types of legal protections through the Story County Land Development Regulations (the County's adopted zoning code for the unincorporated area) and future land use plans. First, under Chapter 88.05 of the Story County Land Development Regulations, in areas designated as natural resources areas in the County's Cornerstone to Capstone Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map, no more than 15% of a natural resource may be removed without mitigation requirements. If an area is proposed to be subdivided, a 60-foot wide stream easement is required to be dedicated to Story County Conservation as part of the subdivision. The chapter also requires buffers for construction activities from natural resources ranging from 50 feet for streams and 100 feet from wetlands, lakes, and reservoirs. These standards would also apply to areas designated as Natural Areas in the Ames Urban Fringe Plan Land Use Framework Map, which serves as the future land use plan for areas within two miles of the City of Ames. Further, regarding restrictions on new development in these areas, a principle of the Ames Urban Fringe Plan is that new non-farm residential development is not supported. A principle of the C2C plan is to "generally discourage development within these areas. In unique circumstances where appropriate development types may enhance the area, recognize and encourage such approaches." Finally, the Story County Land Development Regulations Chapter 92 do not permit the rezoning of a parcel with 50% or more of its area designated as a natural resource area unless it is a rezoning to a more restrictive district, such as the Greenbelt Conservation District or Residential Conservation Design Overlay District, where the areas cannot be developed, or an easement protecting the areas is provided. In total, the acres protected by these natural areas designations is 41,406—12% of the land area in unincorporated Story County.

Finally, Story County has a zoning district, the Greenbelt Conservation District, that provides further protections for the Skunk River Greenbelt north of Ames by restricting certain uses. The

Statement of Intent for the district is:

"to provide special regulations for resource conservation of lands containing sensitive environmental conditions. These regulations permit reasonable economic use of property and at the same time protect the natural resources and recreational assets of the area. This District is designated to promote water quality and conservation, to protect aquifers, alluvial soils and slopes; and to protect areas which possess outstanding scenic, vegetation, wildlife habitat, and travel corridors, geological, historic or recreational values. Structures inconsistent with the permitted uses shall not be allowed in the Greenbelt-Conservation District."

Permitted uses of properties in the district include agriculture (no clear cutting permitted), truck gardening, nurseries, orchards, apiaries, tree farms, livestock grazing, but not including feedlots and poultry farms, sustained yield forestry, wildlife preserves, soil and water conservation activities, cultural and historic restoration, drainage and water retention, water measurement, and water control facilities, recreational uses such as canoeing access, boat launching ramps, swimming areas, primitive camping, hiking, horseback riding trails and similar open space uses. Parking and other accessory uses are also permitted in conjunction with permitted uses. Mineral extraction may be permitted through a conditional use permit approved by the Story County Board of Adjustment. There are 2,042 acres in this zoning district.

There have been 327 species of birds documented to exist on the 4,780 acres of publicly owned and managed lands in Story County. Importantly, 147 of these species have nested in Story County, with at least 140 of these bird species nesting on public land. There have been 106 Species of Greatest Conservation Need documented in Story County, with 103 bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need documented on Story County public land, especially benefitting from the well-managed native (and restored to native) habitats that exist on these lands. Many area sensitive species and most of Iowa's Endangered and Threatened bird species exist on these lands, as well. There are few (if any) other counties in Iowa that have documented this many bird species, this many nesting bird species, and this many bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need on lands that have legal protection within the county. Much of the protected land in Story County exists in riparian corridors, where there is excellent habitat connectivity; and much protected land exists in substantially large landscapes of particular habitats that are now rare on privately owned land. These public land habitats include large blocks of forest, large blocks of wetlands, large blocks of grasslands, and some significant size blocks of savanna. It is the quality of these public land habitats, their size, and their connectivity that enables these habitats to support the lives of so many birds, including 103 Species of Greatest Conservation Need birds, and these are the main reasons why these public and legally protected lands of Story County are "substantial." See attached.

1.3 - Promote native plants

1.3.3 - HIGH FLYER - The community has an ongoing program to incorporate native trees and native shrubs in its public landscaping (for cities that do not choose to meet Tree City criteria).

2022 - Approximately \$5,000 in materials and labor went into planting native trees and shrubs in three areas. Trees were planted at Hickory Grove Park and along the Praeri Rail Trail in McCallsburg, IA to replace dead ash trees. A variety of trees and shrubs were planted in an old alfalfa field at Sleepy Hollow Park to create habitat for birds and other wildlife. These efforts are a result of the county philosophy to manage land consistent with its native land cover. Plantings only consist of native species, not cultivars or non-native species.

1.4 - Control invasive plants

1.4.1 - Community offers public information about controlling or removing invasive plant species.

Each year during National Invasive Species Awareness Week, Story County Conservation includes invasive species content in their social media posts. Many of these posts get engagement and facilitate conversations. For an example of one of these posts, see photo: "National Invasive Species Awareness Week Post".

Invasive species have also been a focus of several annual volunteer workdays. In 2019, Story County Conservation partnered with Weed Wrangle on a garlic mustard pulling event. This partnership brought more awareness and visibility to this growing problem. See "Weed Wrangle Volunteer Event" photo. Story County Conservation has also partnered with a local brewery on several "Mustard Pull and Pints" events where volunteers are rewarded with discounted pints after a garlic mustard pull. These informal events foster more conversations with staff and help broaden the target audience of our outreach efforts.

Christiansen Forest Preserve in Huxley, IA has a significant problem with invasive oriental bittersweet. Surrounding landowners were given a brochure detailing the issues surrounding oriental bittersweet so they can be monitoring for the plant on their properties as well. Story County Conservation is educating park visitors through an audio stop as part of the Dial and Discover Program <https://storycounty.oncell.com/en/12-oriental-bittersweet-137724.html>.

2023 - A landowner options guide was added to our website to assist private landowners in finding contractors to help with habitat restoration work.

1.4.4 - HIGH FLYER - The community (especially the county) promotes the health of native trees and native shrubs in the landscape with an ongoing program that removes non-native invasive

trees, shrubs, and forbs from at least 5 acres of public forest, woodland, or savanna annually, on average.

2022 – Seasonal and full-time staff spent over 1,800 hours removing invasive species such as honeysuckle, buckthorn, multiflora rose, garlic mustard, wild parsnip and oriental bittersweet from various county owned and managed areas. Three trained and certified Natural resource Steward Volunteers spent 888 hours removing invasive woody vegetation mostly at the Deppe Family Area, Robison Wildlife Acres and Christiansen Forest Preserve. In addition to this manual labor, Story County Conservation used goats at McFarland Park and Hickory Grove Park to graze down invasive species regrowth in areas previously cleared.

2023 – Seasonal and full-time staff spent over 2,000 hours removing invasive species such as honeysuckle, buckthorn, multiflora rose, garlic mustard, wild parsnip and oriental bittersweet from various county owned and managed areas. Three trained and certified Natural resource Steward Volunteers spent 619 hours removing invasive woody vegetation mostly at the Deppe Family Area, Robison Wildlife Acres and Christiansen Forest Preserve. In addition to this manual labor, Story County Conservation used goats at McFarland Park and Hickory Grove Park to graze down invasive species regrowth in areas previously cleared.

1.5 – Provide nesting habitat

1.5.2 – HIGH FLYER – The community facilitates Scout or other conservation groups in such bird projects as establishing nest boxes for Iowa Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN): like Eastern Screech Owl, American Kestrels, or Barn Owl; as well as for non-SGCN species, such as Eastern Bluebird.

2022 – Story County Conservation’s IRVM program has long been installing and maintaining nest boxes for American Kestrels in county road rights-of-way. Barn Owls are another SGCN species for which SCC has installed nest boxes; two boxes were built and placed at Hickory Grove Park near Colo. These boxes have been monitored and the data reported to the Iowa DNR. Volunteers monitor over fifty bluebird nesting boxes in placed in appropriate bluebird habitat on Story County Conservation managed public land all season long. Volunteers collect data regarding nesting habits and submit to NestWatch online to be used by real-life researchers, as well as removing unwanted nests like tree sparrows to prevent competition with bluebirds. (Roughly 10 volunteers involved).

1.5.3 – The Community strongly discourages destruction and removal of bird and wildlife native habitat during nesting seasons (i.e., through its permitting process).

Story County has a well-developed and active Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) program. IRVM maintains a safe travel environment on the county rights-of-way with an emphasis on conservation – much of the staff time is spent

planting and managing prairie, and educating Story County citizens about the importance of quality roadside habitat. Presence at community events, distribution of brochures, articles in the conservation department's newsletter, and press releases regarding the value of this habitat are some of the ways in which Story County's IRVM program spreads a conservation message.

1.5.4 - The Community has ordinance language or other means for enforcing state law regarding time constraints for mowing roadsides.

2022 - The following press release was sent out in early June.

Roadside Mowing Prohibited Until July 15

SCC's Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) unit reminds Iowans to protect roadside habitat for nesting game birds and song birds this spring and early summer by holding off on roadside mowing until after July 15.

According to Iowa Code 314.17, mowing roadside ditches is restricted until July 15, to protect young pheasants and other ground-nesting birds until they are ready to fledge. The law, which applies to county secondary roads as well as state primary and interstate highways, also protects habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects, including crop-pest predators.

Non-essential mowing, including cutting for hay, is strictly prohibited. Exceptions for visibility and weed control are built into the law. Exceptions can be [viewed here](#).

1.7 - Ensure clean water in natural waterways

1.7.1 - A storm water management program is established within the Community that reduces polluted runoff and ensures protection for wetlands (including riparian and other aquatic ecosystems) and also promotes use of native plantings to accomplish management goals.

Story County recently adopted a stormwater management program through its amended stormwater management and erosion and sediment control ordinances. The stormwater management ordinance requires development that disturbs one or more acres of land to submit a stormwater management plan. The plan must illustrate how criteria for stormwater management area met, including that a site:

•Is designed to manage the water quality volume of rainfall depth of 1.25 inches and to manage corresponding recharge volume through infiltration practices.

•To protect stream channels, is designed to provide 24-hours of extended detention of the channel protection volume determined for the 1 year, 24-hour storm.

•Is designed to limit the post development rate of runoff from the site area during the 5- year through the 100-year, 24-hour storm events to the lesser of the following values: runoff rates equivalent to those from a storm event of the same intensity and duration based on pre-development conditions or runoff rates equivalent to those from the 5 year storm event based on conditions which exist as of the date of the proposed improvement plans (row crop agriculture cover, contoured in good condition and surface soil types as identified from County Soil Maps; unless otherwise approved).

The stormwater management plan must include maintenance provisions for practices and must be prepared by a professional engineer.

The County's new erosion and sediment control ordinance includes requirements for development under one acre in size--the State of Iowa's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit applies to sites over this threshold. Erosion control requirements include minimizing the disturbed area, having an appropriate concrete washout and stabilized construction entrance, and stabilization of exposed soils if work will not continue on an area for 14 days. Special requirements also apply to sites with natural areas including construction buffers and additional controls.

The City of Ames also has a Regulated Stormwater Program with a stormwater permit (MS4-- Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System) from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to discharge stormwater to the water of the State. As required by the permit, Ames has a Construction Site Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance for runoff from construction activities that disturb one acre or more and a Post-Construction Stormwater Management Ordinance that applies to sites that disturb over one acre or create 10,000 square feet of impervious surface. The Construction Site Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance includes a quarterly review of sites by the City to inspect practices. The Post-Construction Stormwater Management Ordinance encourages Low Impact Design and Green Infrastructure, requires rates of runoff from the site are equal to or less than the runoff prior to development of the site (pre-developed conditions), requires water quality measures to remove pollutants from runoff prior to leaving the developed sites, and requires a maintenance plan. As part of the permit, the City has a Good Housekeeping program for municipally-owned properties including spill prevention plans, the inspection of catch basins and City-owned stormwater management facilities, and staff training on fertilizers and pesticides. The City has an adopted Illicit Discharge Ordinance to prevent discharge of pollutants into the storm sewer system and has several public education, outreach, and participation efforts, including rebates for homeowners who install stormwater management practices and education programs in schools and for contractors/builders.

2 . Threats to Birds

2 . 2 - Address collisions with glass

2 . 2 . 3 - The Community uses strategies to reduce window collisions on public buildings.

Bird anti-collision film was added to most of the windows at the Conservation Center (at McFarland Park), and several interpretive signs (explaining the window collision prevention system) are placed throughout the conservation center.

2 . 4 - Address direct human-related threats

2 . 4 . 1 - Community supports and provides information on bird-friendly construction and placement of communication towers.

Both commercial and noncommercial communication towers are required to meet standards in the Story County Land Development Regulations (the County's zoning ordinance), including lighting standards. Towers are not permitted to be lit, unless required by the FAA. The FAA requirements must be provided in writing from the FAA to allow lighting for commercial towers. The FAA typically requires lighting on structures 200 feet above ground level or if in a location may impair aviation safety.

Further, for commercial towers, the application is routed to County Departments, including Story County Conservation and the permitting process allows the recommendation of conditions on a tower if concerns are raised about environmental impacts. The Board of Adjustment must approve the permit and any conditions as well.

2 . 4 . 2 - The Community has receptacles for used fishing line at one or more fishing areas on public land.

Fishing line recycling receptacles were built and installed by volunteer groups at our major fishing spots in 2018. The receptacles continue to be monitored by volunteers and the collected fishing line is dropped off at a local sporting goods store to be sent to Berkley's fishing line recycling program. See photos: "Fishing Line Recycling Receptacle" and "Map of Existing Receptacles" (blue line indicates future location following the completion of a lake restoration).

2 . 4 . 3 - Community has regulations on infrastructure lighting to reduce risk to birds.

Both commercial and noncommercial Wind Energy Conversion Systems (wind turbines) are required to meet standards in the Story County Land Development Regulations (the County's zoning ordinance), including lighting standards. Noncommercial wind turbines are not permitted to be lit, unless required by the FAA. Commercial wind

turbines are also not permitted to be lit “except to the extent required by the FAA or other applicable authority. Lighting, including lighting intensity and frequency of strobe, shall adhere to but not exceed requirements established by Federal Aviation Administration permits and regulations. Red strobe lights are preferred for night-time illumination to reduce impacts on migrating birds. Red pulsating incandescent lights should be avoided. Exceptions may be made for meteorological towers, where concerns exist relative to aerial spray applicators” (Story County Land Development Regulations 92.08).

Further, for commercial wind turbines, the application is routed to County Departments, including Story County Conservation and the permitting process allows the recommendation of conditions on a tower if concerns are raised about environmental impacts. The Board of Adjustment must approve the permit and any conditions as well.

2.4.4 - HIGH FLYER - The community regulates construction and siting of communication towers to mitigate their risk to migrating birds.

Towers and turbines require conditional use permits. CUPs are reviewed for impact to natural resources like wetlands, native prairies and savannas, waterways, etc. Impacts are either not allowed in the case of towers or, in the case of turbines, are either not allowed or require mitigation.

2.5 - Address the threat of pesticides and other toxins

2.5.2 - The Community has requirement(s) for non-toxic ammunition use on public hunting areas.

Traditional lead ammunition has been known for decades to pose significant threats to nontarget birds and other animals. The Story County Conservation Board is cognizant of the unintentional effects of this ammunition on humans and wildlife. As a result of these effects, the conservation board required the use of non-toxic ammunition on all county-owned hunting areas. This rule took effect in 2018. An emphasis has been placed on education. Conservation staff worked with partner NGO's and 2 local firearms retailers to offer discounts on the purchase of non-toxic ammunition.

3. Education & Engagement

3.2 - Increase awareness of birds and their habitats

3.2.2 - Community staff and volunteers actively educate about birds, which includes providing information about identification, natural history, habitat needs, and/or environmental and human threats to bird populations.

The Story County Conservation environmental education unit provides several classroom and outdoor experiences about bird identification, natural history, habitat need,

and threats to bird populations. This year we have five 2.5-hour Birding Bonanza scheduled for 225 1st and 2nd grade students. During this experience, students scour different habitats to learn about bird adaptations, practice using binoculars, and identify birds by sight and call. Twenty-eight 2.5-hour Bird Nerds! are scheduled for 700 students. First graders will discover how adult bird behaviors help young birds survive and thrive. Students will design a safe nest, protect and feed their "nestlings," and hike to meet the birds in their habitats. A one-hour Birds of a Feather classroom program where pre and kindergarten classes discover how birds use their special adaptations are scheduled for 25 classes (570 students.) Story County Conservation also uses a resident raptor from a local rehabilitation clinic to conduct 13 raptor classroom visits for 560 students. Participants will learn about raptors and their special adaptations that allow them to function and survive. In 2019, we will have conducted over 120 hours of bird related education and contacted over 2,000 students.

2022 - The Story County Conservation environmental education unit provides several classroom and outdoor experiences about bird identification, natural history, habitat need, and threats to bird populations. This year we had ten 2.5-hour Birding Bonanza outdoor experiences scheduled for 329 3rd grade students and adult chaperones. During this experience, students scour different habitats to learn about bird adaptations, practice using binoculars, and identify birds by sight and call. Twenty-eight 2.5-hour Bird Nerds! were conducted for 836 students and chaperones. First graders will discover how adult bird behaviors help young birds survive and thrive. Students will design a safe nest, protect and feed their "nestlings," and hike to meet the birds in their habitats. A one-hour Birds of a Feather classroom program where pre and kindergarten classes discover how birds use their special adaptations were presented to 21 classes (333 students.) A bird feeding program was presented at a local senior living facility and a bird watching hike was led for the ARC of Story County for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. All totaling, 257 adults and 1,276 youth were educated about birds.

2023 - School program numbers are similar to 2022.

3.2.4 - A program is in place to help students and Community members, in general, take part in developing a community bird species checklist.

The Jennett Heritage Area (Jennett HA) is a 171-acre property in Story County that has been surveyed for birds in 2010 and 2019. See attached: "2010 Breeding Bird Survey for Jennett Heritage Area" and "Breeding Bird Survey of Jennett Heritage Area: Final Report to Story County Conservation-2019" on page 85. The Jennett HA holds diverse habitats and includes 25 acres of remnant prairie, oak savanna, woodlands, two streams, two ponds, and a shallow wetland. After a decade of habitat restoration work on the property, Story County Conservation was interested to learn what bird species are utilizing the area compared to before restoration work began. While 57 species were detected during the 2010 bird surveys (in ~22.5 hours of field time), 101 species were detected during 2019 (in ~13 hours of field time). More importantly, there were 15 SGCN (Species of Great Conservation Need) breeding birds documented in the 2010 survey,

increasing to 28 SGCN breeding birds documented in the 2019 survey. During 2010, probable and confirmed evidence of breeding occurred for 20 species, and in 2019, probable and confirmed evidence of breeding occurred for 80 species. The results of these two surveys provide strong supportive evidence that habitat restoration work (by Story County Conservation) on Jennett HA is responsible for a dramatic increase in the number of species that nest on this property, and that the large scale of the restoration, particularly prairie, has increased the quality of the vegetation (as well as the space) that is needed for nesting by SGCN. For instance, several area-sensitive grassland birds, including state threatened Henslow's Sparrow, was found during 2019 surveys and not during the 2010 surveys. Jennett HA has become an area of critical importance to breeding SGCN grassland birds; particularly to Sedge Wren, Field Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, Dickcissel, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark.

Ada Hayden Heritage Park is a 430-acre complex that includes two lakes, several wetlands, much grassland, and some wooded areas. Wolfgang (Wolf) Oesterreich, who lives beside the park, has kept a bird list for this area every year since 1997. The area is owned by the City of Ames; Story County Conservation has helped with some management. From 1997 through 2018, Wolf has documented 274 bird species at the site. It seems safe to say that no other 430-acre area in this state has had as many species of birds documented. The water quality of the lakes is some of the highest in Iowa, and much effort has been made to manage and restore the entire area of the park to native vegetation.

3.3 – Educate and engage all ages

3.3.1 – Schools in the Community are implementing "Flying WILD", or similar curriculum, to help insure students learn about the full life cycle conservation needs of birds.

Story County Conservation works with Big Bluestem Audubon to provide Audubon Adventures Classroom kits free of charge. Ten grade levels in seven different schools will have received 55 classroom kits total this year. This partnership has been ongoing since 1998.

3.3.2 – The Community provides age-appropriate public programming on one or more bird information topic. This may include field trips, speaker series, displays, or other media.

Story County Conservation offers a handful of public programs related to birds each year. O.W.L.S. (Older Wiser Livelier Souls) programs are offered once each month (September –May) at the conservation center. These one-hour free programs are followed with an optional lunch. Usually one of the presentations each year is about birds. Presenters have covered topics such as the raptors of Iowa and peregrine falcons.

Other public program offerings include an annual night hike designed for families. The experience includes information about owls and allows participants to try their hand at hooting. In June 2019 Story County Conservation held their first Get Outdoor Day

celebration and Iowa Young Birders was present to teach youth and adults about bird identification and lead bird viewing walks.

3.5 – Involve the community in conservation and stewardship

3.5.1 - The Community has a program that involves schools, garden clubs or other organizations in habitat development or butterfly & bird conservation activities.

Story County Conservation environmental education staff helped three schools transform mowed grass into a flower-filled pollinator habitat. Students at Nevada Central Elementary, Collins-Maxwell and Roland-Story elementary schools grew native plants in classroom mini-greenhouses and planted them in their schoolyard. Throughout the school year, Story County Conservation naturalists and project partners taught students about the vital relationship between plants and their insect visitors. Story County Conservation received a Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program grant to fund the projects.

Children have opportunities to investigate native plants from seed to flower along with the diversity of insects drawn to their habitat. Story County Conservation naturalists present educational programs to the schools. The pollinator program, developed for the schoolyard projects, introduces students to pollination and highlights their schoolyard's place in the "Monarch Highway," a federal effort to increase pollinator habitat along the I-35 corridor. Prairie Rivers of Iowa staff helped students design the habitat. Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge provided students with seeds to grow in mini-greenhouses in their classrooms, and Story County Conservation coordinated planting the habitats. Story County Conservation shares lesson plans through www.teachersgoinggreen.com.

Beyond the schoolyard, the habitats also model how individuals, community organizations, and businesses can provide shelter and food to pollinators within towns. Collins-Maxwell Elementary has involved a variety of community members by expanding the project on their own. They created an outdoor classroom and vegetable garden alongside the pollinator habitat. Through donations of materials and labor, they built a seating area, outdoor whiteboard, and examples of shelter boxes for birds and bats.

More text

3.5.3 - HIGH FLYER - The community maintains a birding trail, viewing site or platform, or birding "hot spot" location that includes educational signage and/or literature.

Story County maintains many areas for bird viewing. Some of these are multi-function areas and some are specifically designed for viewing. McFarland Park has two specific bird viewing areas which are utilized extensively by student and the general public. **Both bird viewing areas at McFarland Park offer educational signage and/or literature for a**

variety of ages to help with bird ID. The Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor has several bird viewing areas over different habitat types.

3.6 – Promote scientific research and monitoring

3.6.1 – The Community is represented in at least one bird monitoring program such as the Great Backyard Bird Count, Audubon Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, or other actively coordinated citizen science project.

The Ames Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in Story County has occurred every year since 1923. The CBC area surveyed includes a 7.5-mile radius circle that is centered in south-east Ames (approximately where Highway 30 intersects with I-35). Sponsored by Big Bluestem Audubon Society, each year as many as 43 participants contribute a total of up to 104.5 hours on the day of the event, counting every bird (up to approximately 27,000 individuals) seen while driving roads, walking (in fields, parks, and wildlife areas), or sitting while observing birds at feeders. The data collected by observers allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations. This collected data provides a picture of how bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years, it informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and it helps identify environmental issues with implications for people, as well.

The Christmas Bird Count is the first citizen Science Project of this continent and began in 1900. Ames Christmas Bird Count (Story County) has occurred annually since 1923, documenting 50 to 75 species of birds each year. Sponsored by Big Bluestem Audubon Society, as many as 43 participants contribute a total of up to 104.5 hours on the day of the event, counting every bird (up to approximately 27,000 individual birds) seen while driving roads, walking (in fields, parks, and wildlife areas), or sitting while observing birds at feeders. The data collected by observers allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations (both locally and across North America). When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, this collected data provides a picture of how bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years, it informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and it helps identify environmental issues with implications for people, as well.

In 2016, National Audubon Society's climate scientists piloted a new research project to see how climate change is affecting birds. Volunteer birders and community scientists from across the country run specific survey routes, twice a year (at the same time) to primarily count bluebirds and nuthatches. The goal is to see how both species are moving across the landscape to adjust to global warming. While bluebirds and nuthatches were selected as the focal birds, all birds observed at the predetermined survey sites on the route are recorded into the database. Starting in the May 15 – June 15, 2019 survey window, Climate Watch Survey volunteers were asked to also focus their search for goldfinches, towhees, and painted buntings. Currently, Story County has 2 established Climate Watch Survey routes that are being run twice each year, since 2016.

3.7 – Mobilize support / funding for community bird conservation

3.7.1 – Provide an officially-enacted resolution supporting your community's designation as a member of Bird Friendly Iowa. Please do not submit a proclamation. The resolution must be voted on and passed by the appropriate council/board and submitted with the initial application. (County resolutions must be approved by the Board of Supervisors)

Submitted

4. Sustainability

4.1 – Educate residents about climate impacts and renewable energy

4.1.1 – HIGH FLYER– Describe your community's efforts to educate residents about climate change and solutions, particularly as it relates to impacts on birds.

A study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has found that rising global temperatures are affecting the timing of bird migration and breeding, resulting in a mismatch between the start of spring and birds' readiness to reproduce. Anything we can do to stop or reduce the rising global temperatures will benefit birds. We submit monthly "green" themed articles/graphics for the county's monthly employee newsletter promoting positive things employees can do at work and home that help combat climate change. SCC held four public programs educating people on how to start a climate change conversation with friends and neighbors and help them develop stories and strategies based on personal experience to share with others. Climate change messaging was incorporated into the Garbologist (4th grade) and Biodiversity Bonanza (5th-8th grade) in-class programs reaching over 400 students last year and we added an electric vehicle to the environmental education vehicle fleet.

Bird Friendly Iowa

Application Invoice



Please include a copy of this document with your check

Annual Application Fee for Bird Friendly Iowa Community Designation	
2/17/2026	
Story County	\$100.00
Mike Cox (conservationoutreach@storycountyiowa.gov)	

Mail to:

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Attn: Bird Friendly Iowa, 505 5th Ave. STE 444, Des Moines, IA 50309

For any questions regarding payment, please contact us at birdfriendlyiowa@gmail.com.