INTRODUCING CATHY MABRY, FRIEND AND DIRECTOR FROM DES MOINES, IOWA

I've always wanted to study ecology for a living, and I started my career working in the Loess hills studying amphibians and reptiles. About 10 years ago, while working in Massachusetts, I discovered a passion for plants, and I've been studying the biology and natural history of plants and natural plant communities ever since, as far away as Taiwan. I'm from Iowa though, and when I decided to get a Ph.D., I passed up a chance to study in the Rocky Mountains to come back to Iowa. I wanted to work in a place that I had a connection to, and where the information I gathered could be used for conservation, as well as be of theoretical value to the interesting, but relatively small world of academic plant ecologists.

I'm now in my third year of a Ph.D. program at Iowa State University, studying the ecology, conservation and restoration of woodlands in Iowa. I work in places as big as Ledges State Park to postage stamp size woods scattered around central Iowa. Regardless of the size, I see some of the best natural areas we have remaining, and I know first-hand how beautiful Iowa can be.

In Iowa we often hear that we have to choose between environment and economic growth. But we are starting to recognize that preservation promotes a strong economy, particularly over the long-term. For example, intact ecosystems help retain soil and water, beneficial insects pollinate crops and native birds eat harmful insects and weed seeds. We are also hearing more about quality of life in Iowa and the need to attract high quality jobs and young people back to the state. In Oregon protection of spotted owl habitat has been credited by some with spurring economic diversification and growth. I believe Iowa would see the same benefit by preserving and restoring our native plant communities.

Sprawl type growth in the last years has not increased the beauty of Iowa or our quality of life. The rolling hills where I used to ride my horse outside Des Moines have become Glen Oaks and other subdivisions. Rich farmland has become fields of concrete. Two lane roads have become four-lane roads and divided four-lane highways with more to come with the extension of sewer lines across the Raccoon River and beltways around Des Moines. Des Moines-area residents used to be proud of having the best of two worlds -- being in a city, yet five minutes from enjoying open country and rural ambiance -- but we are losing this character.

To preserve our natural areas, farmland, rural communities, and cities we all need to work together, from conservationists to farmers, from business people to planners. The cooperative approach used by 1000 Friends groups in other parts of the country works, and I'm looking forward to being part of it here in Iowa.
AL GORE WEIGHS IN ON SPRAWL

In a December 4 speech delivered to the 75th Annual Congress of Cities, Vice President Al Gore spoke strongly about the need to curb urban sprawl. In excerpts from his speech reprinted in The Des Moines Register on December 11, Gore says that sprawl "means that precious resources are drained away from city neighborhoods left behind to build new parks, police stations, roads and sewer lines in these new communities. Meanwhile, air and water quality go down; taxes go up; there are no sidewalks; and, even if there were, there is nowhere to walk."

But as Gore rightly points out, "Suburbs and cities are not at odds, they're connected. No one in a suburb wants to live outside a dying city. No one in the city wants to be trapped by surrounding rings of parking lots instead of thriving, livable suburban communities ... Livable communities and regions will also be the economically powerful communities."

While much of the debate on urban sprawl has focused on the state level, Gore acknowledges that "the federal government has a role to play to encourage and strengthen smarter, more livable, sustainable growth ... [and] can help by re-examining well-intentioned federal policies that encouraged the wrong kind of growth."

Land use has become a hot issue at the state and local level in Iowa. Perhaps it will also be discussed in the upcoming presidential caucuses!

KFOI LAUNCHES WEB PAGE

To make it easier for members to keep up with what 1000 Friends of Iowa is doing — and to get involved — we’re going online!

Our web site will grow as we add members, slowly at first while we work on program and content, and then faster as we get stronger.

If you know of someone with web page design experience who would like to be on our volunteer web page team, let us know at 515-288-KFOI (515-288-5364).

www.kfoi.org

CURTIS JOHNSON VISITS DES MOINES

On November 17, the Polk-Des Moines Taxpayers Association hosted a luncheon with Curtis Johnson, chair of the Metropolitan Council in Minneapolis-St. Paul. With 100 people in attendance, Mr. Johnson stressed the importance of regional cooperation to address urban sprawl. He colorfully described urban sprawl as "pouring a pitcher of water on a table and just letting it go where ever it wants."

Yet Johnson sees a turning tide. He pointed out that across the nation, recent state and local elections saw 200 measures to address a wide range of land use options, including urban growth boundaries, green space protection, and purchase of development rights. Seven billion dollars was authorized for open space and farmland protection, $1 billion in New Jersey alone.

Johnson also talked about the importance of designing neighborhoods in a manner that builds community. He told of one couple who had moved to a New-Urbanism style development called "Kentlands" after living in a conventional subdivision. They said, "We lived in a neighborhood in Miami for nine years and knew only nine people. We've been here [in Kentlands] for just 18 months and we already know 150 people in our neighborhood."

Sprawl Sends Hewlett-Packard Packing

Many who attended the luncheon represented downtown business interests, for whom Johnson had this message: curbing urban sprawl improves a city's quality of life and thus the climate for economic development. He cited the example of Hewlett-Packard, which recently canceled a contract planned for Atlanta, Georgia for fear that urban sprawl was causing the region to become unlivable.

Our New Phone Number!

515-288-KFOI (515-288-5364)
In mid-November a delegation of six left Iowa to get a firsthand look at land use in Oregon. Twenty years ago the Oregon State Legislature adopted innovative land use planning laws that are now widely acclaimed across the nation. Our goal was to meet with a broad range of Oregonians and call upon their experience with these laws and their effect on Oregon’s citizens, environment, economy and quality of life — and to share this information with interested parties back home.

Geographically, Oregon is a little larger than Iowa, although our populations are comparable. Portland, the largest city, has a metro area that includes 24 cities in three counties. For comparison, the Des Moines metro area has 17 cities in three counties.

Among those we met were the executive officer of Portland’s regional land-use planning authority, a lobbyist for the Oregon Building Industry Association, a Portland city councilman, a suburban mayor, two farmers, residents of a small town and the staff of 1000 Friends of Oregon. These individuals represented a diverse range of land-use interests, and although opinions and observations differed, we heard a consensus from everyone we talked with – the results of Oregon’s land-use laws have been good for the state and its people.

To our delegation of Iowans, descending upon Oregon for a brief but intensive study, things seemed to be working right. The city of Portland was vibrant. People were walking on busy downtown streets well after dark — in the rain, no less. Lights were on, not only on the street level, but in the upper stories of every building. Small towns we visited were filled with activity. One even had city ordinances against chains or franchises; all businesses were locally owned.

With regard to farmland preservation, we learned that between 1982 and 1992, Oregon lost only 1.1% of its farmland. Compare that with the following losses in other states over the same period of time:

- Idaho 3.2%
- Washington 4.5%
- California 9.9%
- Indiana 4.1%
- Illinois 5.1%*

*US Census of Agriculture figures

Learning We Can Work Together

In addition to learning about Oregon, the six of us learned about each other. We saw that those involved with government at the state, county and city level — as well as those involved with non-profits such as 1000 Friends of Iowa — could work together in a cooperative spirit to study the subject of land-use. The camaraderie and understanding we all developed should serve us well in the future as we struggle with the land-use debate here in Iowa.

KFOI SPEAKERS BUREAU

Since 1000 Friends of Iowa organized in late 1997, members of the Speakers Bureau have logged countless miles and many hours making presentations to Iowans throughout the state. At last count, they had made over 150 presentations and visited over 40 counties.

It is KFOI’s goal to have at least 10 volunteer speakers on board by the end of 1999. If you know of a dynamite speaker who’s passionate about some aspect of land use issues and who might be willing to join the volunteer Speakers Bureau, let us know where we can hear him or her speak, and we’ll schedule a visit.

Do you need a speaker? Let us know, and well set you up with a presentation by someone from our Bureau.

To Think About ------

We read/heard this:

"Without land to build upon, there can be no new housing."

How Would You Respond?

Send us what you think about this statement, and help us understand our membership.

(200 words or fewer, please!)
Iowans May Benefit from American Planning Association Study - Growing Smart™

American communities and the surrounding countryside are changing, and Iowa is no exception. Some places are declining while others find it hard to keep up with growth. And despite many legislative models and studies of the shortcomings of planning statutes, many states are still using standard planning acts from the 1920's as their basis for local planning.

Iowa’s educated citizens know that quality of life is largely influenced by one’s physical surroundings. Therefore, in November, 1000 Friends of Iowa sponsored a program featuring Stuart Meck, Principal Investigator with the American Planning Association, to explain the Growing Smart™ project, a major initiative aimed at helping states thoughtfully modernize statutes affecting planning and the management of change.

The first phase of this initiative, started in 1994, focused on a study of what currently exists in state, regional, and local planning efforts. The second and third parts of the study provide model planning legislation for states to use as a resource when determining how to manage change.

Public support has been growing to modernize the old statutes — to create new legal and institutional systems capable of addressing today’s issues and the issues we know are ahead.

The APA lists seven interrelated local, state, and national interests which Growing Smart™ is intended to address:

1. Economic productivity and competitiveness
2. Social equity
3. Development of a balanced, multi-purpose transportation system
4. Housing affordability and housing/jobs balance
5. Protection of the environment
6. Conservation of energy
7. Sound investment in public and private infrastructure

Can You Help? Call Kirk Grau at 712-754-2523 or Email at ocdec@rconnect.com

Learn more about Growing Smart™ on the World Wide Web (www.planning.org).
On December 1, Iowa’s State Land Use Commission formulated its final report on protecting farmland and natural areas and curbing urban sprawl. The Commission signed off on a set of general recommendations as well as a rough draft of a bill, which the 1999 Legislature could consider.

The bill calls for the establishment of a State Strategic Development Planning Council composed of the heads of several state agencies. The Council would establish statewide development goals and assure cohesion among agency decisions affecting land use.

Cities and counties would be required to complete comprehensive plans, in some cases jointly, but would not be required to set up urban growth boundaries. An expanded state board would be authorized to review and approve all comprehensive plans and all annexations, both involuntary and voluntary. Additionally, any city proposing an annexation would have to provide a schedule for extending public services within three years to the area targeted for annexation.

Finally, Iowa State University would be asked to develop and maintain land use inventories to keep abreast of land use changes throughout the state (see article elsewhere in the Bulletin for more information). While the commission’s bill draft represents an excellent start, most commission members acknowledged that a lot more work will be needed if this legislation is to effectively control urban sprawl.

(NO T E: One Thousand Friends of Iowa intends to closely monitor all land-use legislation, and will send regular updates to members. If you are interested in these updates and are receiving this publication but have not yet joined 1000 Friends, please do. Sorry, but we can only afford to send regular legislative updates to contributing members.)

Volunteer Opportunities: Tasks we need help with range from the simplest to the most complex. If you have the time and the inclination, there's probably a way you can help.

Collating, folding, stapling, etc. - We need people every time we send a bi-monthly newsletter.

Folding, stuffing, etc. - We send occasional large mailings

Writing, proofreading - *The Land Use Bulletin* is published bi-monthly.

Helping with the new web page - We're hoping for a team of web builders.

Setting up a land use list-serve - This is pretty ambitious, but someone out there must know how to do this.

▷ Please send in your donation and help us reach our goal of enrolling 1000 Founding Friends by the end of 1999. A donation of $100 or more designates a Founding Friend, but any donation is welcome !!!!

Clip and mail with your check, payable to 1000 Friends of Iowa

1000 Friends of Iowa

Enclosed is my check for $

**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES**

Student/Senior $20  Patron $250

Individual $35  Silver $500

Family $45  Gold $1000

Organization $100  Steward $2500

Founding Friend $100  Other

Name ___________________________
Address ________________________
City/State/Zip ___________________
Phone __________________________
FAX ____________________________
E-mail __________________________

1000 Friends of Iowa
104 Southwest 4th Street, Des Moines, IA 50309

January/February 1999

The Land Use Bulletin
Last spring, the State Land Use Commission granted Iowa State University $35,000 to conduct land use inventories in seven pilot counties. The study’s stated purpose was "to determine the extent to which land in this state has been converted from agricultural use to residential, commercial, industrial, or public uses, and to report on the quality of agricultural land converted to these uses." Principal Investigator Stu Huntington’s research extended beyond the required pilot project and included a telephone surveys of county zoning administrators and assessors in all 99 counties. Some of the key findings include the following:

- Between 1986 and 1997, 40,050 acres of farmland were converted to non-agricultural uses each year.
- During the same period, 13,820 acres of non-agricultural land were converted to agricultural uses for a net loss of 26,230 acres each year. (This shows a much higher rate of conversion than earlier research done by American Farmland Trust, which found a total loss of 50,000 acres for the ten year period from 1982 to 1992)
- Forty-eight percent of the converted farmland was classified as prime.
- Half of all the land lying within the corporate boundaries of Iowa’s cities is still zoned agricultural.

ISU’s research should prove very helpful as efforts to address urban sprawl pick up momentum.

SAVE THIS DATE ON YOUR CALENDAR

KFOI and Plymouth Church in Des Moines will co-sponsor a land use forum at the church on Sunday, April 18, 1999 from 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Details about program and presenters will be included in the March/April issue of The Land Use Bulletin.

1000 Friends of Iowa
104 Southwest 4th Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED