

# HARTMAN RESERVE...

*triples in size, manages green space, and fights budget cuts.*

*by Steven Hansen*

Hartman Reserve Nature Center has been a favorite of nature lovers since the late 1930s. Its combination of unspoiled woodlands and close proximity to Cedar Falls and Waterloo has made it a natural for people interested in photography, walking, skiing and birdwatching.

Back in 1938 the YMCA purchased the original John C. Hartman Reserve. It was named after the *Waterloo Daily Courier* publisher who made its purchase possible and was well known for his interest in nature. Hartman Reserve was used for camping and other programs until the mid-1970s, when the Black Hawk County Conservation Board purchased it to establish an environmental education center.

On October 1, 1990, the Black Hawk County Conservation Board added 180 acres of land north of the previous boundary of Hartman Reserve, extending to the Cedar River and enlarging the center to 260 acres, 35 of which are water. The land is owned by the Manatt Corporation and was originally purchased for gravel mining. However, Manatt's had no plans for mining in the next 10 to 20 years so the conservation board was able to lease the land.

The new addition is one of the last large green spaces left in metropolitan Black Hawk County, and was identified in the master plan for the Chain of Lakes. The conservation board felt it was important to acquire the land to increase the size of the reserve and as a step toward completing the Chain of Lakes project.

Vern Fish, nature center director, said a grant from the Resource Enhancement and Protection program made the lease possible.

"Our long term management plan is to make the new land a clean, safe addition to the nature center," Fish says. "Long term development hopefully is going to be minimal—upgrading existing trails, connecting into our trail system that we already maintain in Hartman proper and, over time, putting in some sort of public access: a parking lot, and possibly a boat ramp on the small body of water." An

abandoned railway that runs through the property will be converted into a bikeway connecting with downtown Cedar Falls, George Wyth State Park and the new 218 bridge. However, according to Fish, the lease complicates development plans.



*Vern Fish, Director, Hartman Reserve Nature Center, with results of Earth Day cleanup.*

"We're hesitant to put any long term development into it because we could end up losing the property," Fish says.

According to Fish, any development plans are on hold for now because the REAP program may be denied by the Iowa General Assembly. If the REAP funds are cut, the Black Hawk County Conservation Board stands to lose about \$90,000 in funding. Compounding the funding problem is the continuing erosion of the local tax base, resulting in the conservation board suffering a 30 percent budget cut.

"In a span of about two weeks we've (the BHCCB) lost over \$300,000 in funding due to budget cuts," Fish says.

According to Steve Finegan, Executive Director of the BHCCB, those budget cuts will result in the initiation of higher fees, cutting equipment replacements and the elimination of two full-time staff members and four seasonal park workers

throughout the county parks. Program cuts include elimination of a wildlife conservationist, a roadside management position and a part-time naturalist.

The additional land along the river, like much of the Cedar River's flood plain, has long been used for illegal dumping. Used tires, scrap metal, appliances, steel drums and other debris littered the land when Hartman Reserve signed the lease.

"The Cedar Valley has always been used for dumping. People think 'It's someone else's problem.' Well now it's our problem and Black Hawk County's problem," Fish says.

So to coincide with Earth Day, Hartman Reserve sponsored a clean-up operation on April 20. About 175 volunteers including a Marine unit, a four-wheel drive club, and the Mormon church helped gather much of the debris. "We brought in more than 10 tons of garbage, nearly 10 tons of scrap iron—which we sold for \$215—and 346 old tires, which are stockpiled until we can find a cost effective way of disposing of them," Fish says.

According to Fish, the clean-up job was successful, but it's not finished.

"We came very close to completing the clean-up. The only places we didn't get to were the flooded areas. Maybe this fall when the water comes down we'll be able to clean up those areas."

Hartman Reserve offers a variety of programs enjoyable for everyone from youngsters to grandparents. Seasonal events such as apple-cidering, skiing, snowshoeing, maple syrup-making and spring flower walks are offered. Special programs are also available including presentations by guest naturalists, performances by visiting artists and trips.

The reserve also offers assistance to schools and youth groups. The nature center's naturalists conduct school field trips, programs for the general public and various special events.

To get to Hartman Reserve, follow the signs that begin at the intersection of Rainbow Drive and Laurie Avenue. □

*Photo by Randy Fratzke*