

# CONSERVATION *Showcase*



## Hanson Improves Monroe County Wildlife Habitat

**Albia, IA** – Steve Hanson’s forestry and wildlife expertise is helping to turn rough, hilly, often marginal, southern Iowa cropland and unmanaged timber into a wildlife haven, as land manager for more than two dozen farms. He also manages 600 of his own acres.

Hanson holds a forestry degree from Southern Illinois University. He moved to southern Iowa from Illinois in 1997. His full-time staff of three helps him oversee and improve habitat on 25 farms totaling more than 3,000 acres in three southern Iowa counties (Monroe, Appanoose and Wayne) and Putnam County, Mo. He manages land for outdoorsmen, who live as far away as New York and New Jersey.

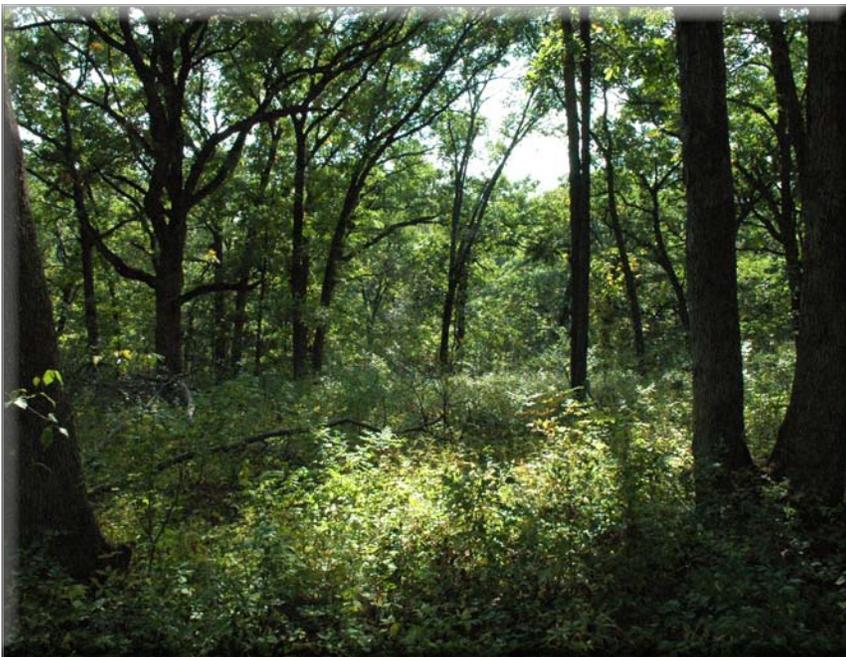


*Hanson is a native of Illinois, with a forestry degree from Southern Illinois University.*

According to John Frieden, Monroe County district conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), non-resident landowners typically purchase property for recreation, and have limited time to be actively involved in the day-to-day management. “Steve is their local contact who manages their farms and takes care of business they don’t have time to do,” he said.

Wildlife is the primary interest for most of the out-of-state landowners, “but we’ve moved into timber production and biomass production as well,” says Hanson.

Frieden says these landowners are fortunate to have an individual such as Hanson available to them. “His background in forestry and wildlife management makes him a valuable resource, not only for his expertise, but



*Hanson’s timber stand improvement objective is to increase oak tree reproduction for wildlife food and timber production. He does this by removing some undesirable species, which allows sunlight to reach the forest floor needed for oak regeneration.*

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for the application of conservation practices on their land,” he said.

According to Stacy Schlader, NRCS soil conservationist in Monroe County, Hanson often utilizes two NRCS conservation programs to increase wildlife habitat acres, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). WHIP is a voluntary program that provides financial assistance to landowners to establish wildlife habitat, such as tree plantings or prairie restoration. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to install or implement structural or management practices on eligible agricultural land, such as terraces, grassed waterways or filter strips.

Hanson often promotes NRCS programs to his out-of-state landowners. He currently manages land with seven WHIP or EQIP

forestry contracts. “We’re glad to see Steve take advantage of NRCS programs,” says Frieden. “With his expertise and interest, we’re seeing a tremendous number of practices that support forest and wildlife management.”

In addition to NRCS conservation programs, Hanson utilizes the local expertise of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Private Lands Biologist Kevin Andersen (Fairfield) and District Forester Duane Bedford (Chariton) with the DNR routinely provide

Hanson wildlife and forestry plans.

Frieden says Hanson’s work in the county is somewhat sensitive to local residents because he buys and manages land taken out of cropland and pastureland production. From Frieden’s perspective, however, Hanson’s work is good for the land. “Steve makes good use of the land. It nearly eliminates the potential for soil erosion,” he said. “Good land users come in many shapes and sizes, which may not resemble your traditional farmer of corn, soybeans, hogs or cattle, but regard wildlife, trees and native vegetation as farm commodities.”

“Yes, Steve is in the business to make money and a living, just like anyone else,” says Frieden, “but he does it with a genuine interest in treating the land with respect, with stewardship in mind, and according to its capabilities.”

To learn more about a conservation plan to protect your natural resources, and conservation programs to assist you, visit your local USDA Service Center or go online to [www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov).

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## **Monroe County Leads in Switchgrass**

In 2007, NRCS offered southeast Iowa landowners incentive payments through EQIP to seed down switchgrass for use as a biomass energy crop and for other alternative energy uses. Since then, landowners have enrolled more than 2,250 acres in the program through 57 contracts. Monroe County landowners hold 18 of those contracts, including about 1,000 acres.

Between the land he owns and manages, Hanson seeded down more than 400 acres of switchgrass in the 2007 and 2008 EQIP signups. He said a number of his customers invested in ethanol, so when the EQIP switchgrass incentive was offered, it all clicked. “They had the interest and knew the biomass production market could eventually go that direction,” said Hanson. “EQIP gave



*Hanson uses various types of forest management to achieve his goals and objectives.*

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us a good financial incentive to start producing switchgrass. Hopefully it will bring some industry here to utilize it.”

For more information about seeding down switchgrass for biomass production, go to [www.iowaswitchgrass.com](http://www.iowaswitchgrass.com).

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*Jason Johnson, Public Affairs Specialist  
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October 2008*



*Steve Hanson (center) talks to NRCS Soil Conservationist Stacy Schlader (left) and District Conservationist John Frieden (right) about his first-year switchgrass stand, which Hanson plans to use for hunting land and eventually for biomass production.*