

## Diane Voss

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**From:** Pease, James [NREM] <jlpease@iastate.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, August 31, 2020 10:55 AM  
**To:** City Council and Mayor  
**Cc:** Keith.Abraham  
**Subject:** Rose Prairie land

[External Email]

31 August 2020

Dear Mayor Haila and City Council Members:

Adjoining Ada Hayden Heritage Park on the western boundary is a 170-acre parcel of ground that developer, Matt Eller, called *Rose Prairie*. There are signs on the property that it is for sale. Several of us with Friends of Ada Hayden Heritage Park believe this is a golden opportunity to acquire the property and expand the park. There are several good reasons for doing this:

- Storm water runoff from this property continues to flow into Hayden Park carrying silt and nutrients and degrading the wetlands that were designed to protect the lake, Ames' back-up water supply.
- Converting this property to native prairie and other perennial vegetation would help ensure that the water quality in Hayden Park lake remains high.
- Expanding the park would remove some of the growing pressure of public use that is already beginning to show effects on the wildlife.
- At least three developers have attempted to build on Rose Prairie spanning nearly 20 years and failed. The most recent developer intended to locate a convenience store over or right next to the creek that flows through the property. A store with underground storage tanks would pose a long-term threat to the park.

In 2001, as a Commissioner for Story County Soil and Water District, Erv Klaas was successful at getting funding for the Hallett's Quarry watershed to implement soil conservation practices on farmland in the watershed. Several farmers north of 190<sup>th</sup> Street participated, and the District installed grass waterways and helped the farmers develop nutrient management practices. We quickly became aware that the land south of 190<sup>th</sup> and adjoining the park to the west was crucial to protecting water quality in the park. That area, in fact, had the highest potential for sediment loss on the whole watershed. However, the property was owned by a developer who did not wish to participate in government programs. Sean McCoy, who conducted the watershed assessment on behalf of the Conservation District, stated that conservation practices on the Rose Prairie property were crucial because surface water drainage from the farmland to the north flows through the Rose Prairie property via a small creek which then enters directly into the park on the west side. When the city of Ames later annexed and zoned the property, they rightly placed an overlay requirement that all development next to the park be developed with Low-Impact Designs (aka Conservation Designs). Rose Prairie has been farmed for many years without soil conservation practices. The constructed wetlands within the park undoubtedly are being impacted by silt deposition from Rose Prairie that will shorten the effective ability of the wetlands to remove nutrients and other impurities from surface run-off before the water enters the lake. This serves as Ames' critical secondary drinking water supply.

In addition to surface water runoff, the lake at Ada Hayden is fed by groundwater in the porous landscape. Since 2006, Dr. Bill Simpkins, a professor in groundwater and geochemistry from ISU, has conducted studies on wells surrounding the park and found that a plume of water-soluble phosphorus was migrating toward the lake from the west, likely sourced from agricultural land and the fertilizers applied to it there. While most phosphorus is known to come from

surface waters where it is attached to soil particles, this phosphorus is in an ionic, water-soluble form that moves in groundwater. As a result of the particular geology of the area, it is a potential threat to the water quality in the lake, adding nutrients which promote algae growth. Putting the Rose Prairie area under perennial vegetation rather than row-crops would help address this problem.

Rose Prairie has changed ownership at least three times since the park was formed. None of these developers have been successful in designing a residential development that would be compatible with protecting the park and give them their desired return-on-investment. We don't expect the next owner to be any more successful.

Based on nearly 20 years of biological surveys, Ada Hayden Heritage Park is a microcosm of biodiversity in the midst of an expanding urban area. We have documented over 360 winged species—birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies—using the park, and the list is growing. In addition, it is a haven for mammals, including river otters, mink, badgers, beavers, deer, and many other species. The possibility to see these species enhances the lives of Ames citizens and brings them outdoors to the park.

Hayden Park has been extremely popular with the public who owns and uses it. Many are concerned about the increased public use that would be added with further development that would come from Rose Prairie. Thus, park expansion would help to preserve additional habitat for the wildlife that people enjoy so much and provide additional recreational space for an expanding population. Having the land in perennial vegetation would also help maintain water quality in the lake by reducing surface water runoff from impermeable surfaces (roads, houses, etc.), by absorbing more water and reducing stress on the constructed wetlands designed to protect the lake's water.

One potential source of funding to acquire the land would be a loan from the State Revolving Fund for Source Drinking Water Protection. The payback would be over 20 years likely at zero percent interest, we believe. There may be other sources to acquire a right of first refusal on the property to give us some time to organize funding for acquiring the property. We would happily assist city staff in connecting with those entities. We believe this would be a forward-looking acquisition for the City of Ames that demonstrates the City's ongoing concern for water quality and the health of its citizens.

We believe that it is imperative that the city takes steps to preserve and enhance the park, adding to the rich heritage that Ames City Council and Ames citizens created in 2004 when they dedicated the park in August of that year. The Friends of Ada Hayden Heritage Park has been a partner in ongoing efforts to enhance, manage, and educate our fellow citizens about the park. We hope you will partner with us in 2020 to help ensure the park's future and acquire this 170-acre addition to the park.

Sincerely,

Jim Pease, President  
Board of Directors, Friends of Ada Hayden Heritage Park  
Erv Klaas, Past President and Friends Founder  
Wolf Oesterreich, Vice President  
Stephanie Fox, Secretary-Treasurer  
Paul Domoto  
Kevin Kane  
Robert Klaver  
James Patton  
Tana Tesdall

James Pease, Ph.D.  
Emeritus Assoc. Professor, Natural Resource Ecology and Management, ISU  
Environmental, Interpretive, and Wildlife Consulting  
3840 Stagecoach Road

Ames, IA 50010

Phone: 515/232-5381

Cell: 515/480-7858

"I'm glad I shall never be young without wild places to be young in. Of what avail are forty freedoms without a blank spot on the map?"

--Aldo Leopold