



Lora Friest, HFFA 2024 Banquet Speaker
“Casting a Lure to Catch Anglers”

Lora grew up in Iowa exploring the hills and streams of the Driftless Area but developed a passion for fishing and natural resource conservation as a young adult after dropping out of college to explore the streams, rivers and mountains of western Montana in the 1980s. After a ten-year hiatus, she returned to college in Iowa to secure degrees in Biology, emphasis in Natural Resource Management, and Earth Science, emphasis in Karst Studies. She then held temporary positions with USFWS out of McGregor, and at the DNR Fish Hatchery in Decorah. She notes those months stocking trout were arguably some of the most influential of her life as at that time there were only 2 or 3 streams in the Upper Iowa Watershed with natural

reproduction. “As I threw hundreds of trout into dozens of streams each week, I kept thinking, why don’t we just clean up the streams so the trout can reproduce naturally?” She accepted a position as the first Upper Iowa River Watershed Coordinator at NE Iowa Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), where she worked with 40 local, county, state and federal natural resource professionals from two states to implement one of the most successful HUC 8 watershed projects ever implemented in Iowa. Today, the majority of the streams in the UIR Watershed have natural reproduction and the entire watershed functions as a coldwater system.

Friest expanded her work and the RC&D team, serving over 20 years, first as the RC&D Coordinator and later as the RC&D nonprofit organization’s Executive Director. They implemented some of the most successful watershed projects in Iowa, helped secure hundreds of millions of dollars for dozens of watershed projects, stream restorations, dam removals, natural resource protection and restoration projects and innovative conservation cropping initiatives. Friest was a founding member of the Driftless Chapter of Trout Unlimited, the Upper Iowa River Alliance and the 4-state Driftless Area Initiative. She and her team helped establish 3 of the first Watershed Management Authorities in Iowa and coordinated, funded and implemented the most extensive and long lasting locally led water monitoring program in Iowa.

Today, Lora serves as one of two Tourism Liaisons for IEDA Iowa Tourism Office and administers the Iowa Tourism Grant. She provides direct support to tourism industry partners across Iowa and strives to expand partnerships with and between local leaders and citizen groups, including county conservation boards, scenic byway leaders, wildlife, birding and fisheries organizations, historical societies, cultural districts, local food and

farmers market leaders and other partner groups. With decades of relevant experience, Lora believes that attracting and retaining those who appreciate the outdoors is the surest path to long-term stewardship of Iowa's special places, places like the Driftless. She will share information about how tourism and marketing are vital to Iowa's future, Iowa's national brand, workforce recruitment and Iowa's natural resources, along with initiatives and tools, research data and insights, that explain why anglers should be engaged in and passionate about tourism.

"No matter what I'm doing for work, fishing and spending time on the water are still two of my favorite activities. My husband and I live on Canoe Creek and have a property that straddles a remote and beautiful section of Pine Creek. We take an extended fishing trip each year for our anniversary, last year was an amazing trip to the Rainy River."