

CONSERVATION NEWS

A newsletter of the Iowa County Conservation Board
VOLUME 23 ISSUE 2

SPRING 2010



Lake Iowa Nature Center Grand Opening Saturday, July 24 Lake Iowa Park

Celebration Breakfast 7:00 am—10:00 am
Building tours start at 9am.



Naturalist, Laura Ritenour and soon-to-be husband Nick Stephens.

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A new building *and* a new naturalist!

by Laura Ritenour, Naturalist

It's not everyday that you get to start a job in the environmental education field with the promise of a brand new nature center, great parks, and a bustling campground, but that's exactly what I have to look forward to as the new naturalist for the Iowa County Conservation Board.

Originally from Indiana, I grew up on a 35 acre hobby farm in the northeast corner of the state. I found my love of nature early on and was a frequent visitor to our local state park and nature center. My interest in the natural world continued to grow as I became an avid 4-H member and signed up for any natural resources related project I could find.

After realizing I could turn my passion into a career, I attended Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN and graduated in 2008 with a bachelor's degree in wildlife science.

Following graduation, I delved into the field of environmental education by completing a one year internship as a naturalist educator at River Bend Nature Center in Faribault, MN. After my time in Minnesota I was hooked on being an environmental educator and have stayed in the field ever since.

I am still trying to decide what aspect of the naturalist position that I am most excited about. I think it will be a tie between being a part of the completion of the nature center, teaching programs in local schools, developing public programs and events, and getting to know the residents of Iowa County.

It's going to be a busy summer at Lake Iowa Park so be sure to check out pages 4 and 5 of the newsletter to see what we have in the works. Please feel free to stop by the office and say hello; I'd love to meet you!

Lake Iowa Nature Center Library wish list!

Help us build our library collection by donating a book from our wish list. Donating is simple, and very much appreciated! To donate follow these three easy steps:

1. Go to www.amazon.com
2. Click the 'wish list' link at the top right hand corner of the page. Find our wish list by searching for iccbec@netins.net
3. Select your favorite book, purchase, and your selection will be sent directly to the nature center.

We will recognize each book sponsor by placing a personalized book label inside the front cover of each book.

Have extra books at home?

We are also accepting donations of gently used nature-related books. Books can be fiction or non-fiction and for children or adults. Donations can be dropped off at the Lake Iowa Park shop Monday through Friday between the hours of 8am and 4pm.

Thank You!



Lend a Helping Hand

by Lee Sorenson, Director

Volunteering means something different to everyone, but it's always worth the effort. Today, millions of people are helping to make a difference in their neighborhoods and across the nation by lending their time and compassion.

Volunteering is about donating your time, energy, and skills generously. Volunteers generally express as a sense of achievement and motivation which ultimately is generated from the desire and enthusiasm to help. For others, volunteering may simply be a break in regular routine or an opportunity to create balance in their lives. Volunteering around a personal interest or hobby can be enjoyable, relaxing, and revitalizing. That energy and sense of fulfillment can even be carried over to other situations and sometimes help to relieve tensions and foster new perspectives for old situations.

When you volunteer you are giving something back to your community by lending a helping hand to people and organizations. What you may not realize is that volunteering also benefits you as an individual. There are many good reasons to get involved in the community, including learning something about yourself. Learn or develop a new skill. Be part of your community. Receive personal rewards and a sense of achievement. Create leadership and enhance career opportunities.

Volunteers connect people to hope and offer a new chance to build a stronger community. It usually starts with a single act of kindness, but it often leads to a lifetime of enriching experiences.

So here is your chance to enjoy all the aspects of this article. The Iowa County Conservation Board and the Friends of Iowa County Conservation Board have joined together in the recruitment of senior citizens, high school seniors, local college students, campers and the conservation minded, or anyone that wants to make a difference in their community to help manage the new Lake Iowa Nature Center and Iowa County Conservation Board land areas. If you are interested in lending a helping hand, call the office at (319) 655-8465 or send an e-mail to iccbec@netins.net to request a volunteer application.

Memorial Day Weekend Activities: May 28-29



Friday Night Movie

Movie will begin at dusk. Popcorn and pop will be provided for a free will donation. Be sure to bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit on. Movie screen is located across from the Lake Iowa Park office.

First Annual Outdoor Gear Garage Sale

Lake Iowa Nature Center
Saturday from 7am-noon

Are you looking for an excuse to buy new-to-you outdoor equipment?

Come satisfy your craving and support a good cause at our first outdoor gear garage sale. The sale will take place on the front porch of the new Lake Iowa Nature Center. All proceeds will go towards nature center displays and educational materials.

Have items to donate? We are in need of camping, hiking, fishing, biking, boating, bird watching, skiing, and any other outdoor items you wish to donate. All items should be in good condition. Donations can be dropped off at the Lake Iowa Park office Monday thru Friday from 8am-4pm.

Call if you have any questions at (319) 655-8466 or email iccb@netins.net



Saturday Morning Breakfast

Lake Iowa Nature Center

7:00-11:00 am

Menu Includes: biscuits and sausage gravy, eggs, sausage, muffins, bread, milk, juice and coffee

Free Will Donation

Proceeds will go towards the Lake Iowa Park Activities Fund.



Dummy Board Tournament

12:45pm registration, 1pm start

\$10 entry fee per team

Grab a partner and join our double elimination tournament. Two member teams will compete for bragging rights as well as a cash prize for the top two finishers.

Check us out online...

Become a fan on [facebook](#)
Search 'Lake Iowa Park' to get the latest on park news, photos, events and more!

New Website!

Visit our website at www.mycountyparks.com/County/Iowa to learn more about our parks, facilities, and events. Check for online building and shelter reservations later this spring!

Coming this Summer at Lake Iowa Park!



Night Hikes

Explore Lake Iowa Park in the dark this summer at our Friday evening night hikes. Each hike will take on a different theme including nocturnal animals, senses at night, astronomy, and more!

April 30	8-9pm
May 21	8:30-9:30pm
June 25	9-10pm
July 30	9-10pm

Movies on the Big Screen

Join us at Lake Iowa Park for Friday night outdoor movies. Popcorn and pop will be provided for a free will donation. Movies will begin at dusk. Call ahead or check out our website for start times and movie titles.

May 7	May 28
June 4	June 18
July 2	July 16



Nature Walks

Get to know new areas of Lake Iowa Park as we take a 1 hour guided hike at 2pm on Saturdays. Nature will be our inspiration as we select a new topic each week.

April 24	May 1	May 15
June 12	June 26	July 17

Family Campfires

Take a seat around the campfire as we tell stories, sing songs, and roast marshmallows. S'more supplies will be provided, but please bring your own roasting stick if available. All campfires will start at 8pm.



May 14	June 11	July 9
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Kid's Programs

Pack up the kids and head on out to the park for our series of kid and family programs this summer. All programs will take place on Saturday mornings from 10 -11:30 and are geared towards children ages 5-10, but other ages are welcome to attend! Each program throughout the summer will focus on a new topic. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

April 24	Fascinating Frogs
May 1	Signs of Spring Scavenger Hunt
May 15	Nature's Garbage Crew: Uncovering Decomposers
May 22	Who lives in the water? Pond and Lake Exploration
June 12	The Secret Life of Trees
June 26	Surprise Topic
July 17	Budding Birders
July 31	Pioneers: Life on the Frontier



May 7

Tour Pilot Grove 7-8pm

Join us on an off trail hike to learn about the management techniques used at Pilot Grove State Preserve. To get there, drive west of Williamsburg on V66, south to 260th St, then west 1/2 mile.

May 8

Recycled Papermaking 10-11:30am

Just in time for Mother's Day! Create beautiful sheets of handmade paper from paper scraps and natural materials. Open to all ages, but children must be accompanied by an adult.

May 22

Fire Starting Methods 2-3:30pm

Improve your campfire building skills while learning about a variety of fire starting methods. Fire structure, types of fuel, and survival fires will be discussed. Open to adults and children over the age of 12.

May 29

Camping Green On display from 1-4pm

Learn to protect the land you camp on! Stop inside the Lake Iowa Nature Center to discover new ways to make camping more environmentally friendly.

June 5

Breakfast with the Birds 9-10:30am

Join the naturalist for coffee and donuts at this informal birding program. Watch feeder birds come and go from the back of the brand new nature center. Binoculars and ID guides will be available, but feel free to bring your own.

Composting How-To 2-3:30pm

Learn the basics of compost piles and worm bins. Proper bin construction, maintenance, and uses of compost will be discussed. Leave with plans to build a compost or worm bin of your own. Open to adults and older children accompanied by an adult.

July 3

Family Geocache Course Available all day

Test out your GPS navigational skills by completing a multi-step geocache course around Lake Iowa Park. A limited number of GPS units are available to borrow— call to reserve yours at 319-655-8466.

July 10

Adult Dutch Oven Cooking 10am-1pm \$5 fee for supplies

Increase your camp food repertoire with this fun and tasty class. Learn to prepare 2 or 3 delicious entrees in cast iron cookware. Bring a side dish to share if you'd like, and don't forget your appetite! Space is limited— call to reserve a spot at 319-655-8466.

Camp Cooking for Kids 3-4pm \$5 fee for supplies

Kids can learn the fine art of pudgy pie making in this scaled down version of the adult cooking class. Young campfire chefs will whip up and sample pie iron pizzas and desserts. Space is limited— call ahead to save a spot at 319-655-8466.

Coming Soon... CHRISTMAS IN JULY July 23 and 24

Mark your calendars and join us for our annual Christmas in July event. Activities include lighted hayrack rides, family games, movies, and even a visit from Santa! Look for event details in our summer newsletter!



What's going on, down at the Campground Pond?

by Mike Bode, Park Ranger

Along with all the construction and earth-moving work being done in and around the new Lake Iowa Nature Center, you will soon notice major renovation work beginning at the Campground Pond. The Iowa County Conservation Board applied for and was awarded a Fish Habitat Grant for this renovation project. The pond has been losing valuable fish habitat at an alarming rate. Severe silting has caused the north third of the pond to have an average depth of only a few inches. This is due in most part to the growth of "scrub" brush and trees that block sunlight from reaching the ground in the main watershed valley. Without sunlight, there is almost no vegetation growing in the valley, leaving it virtually defenseless against the effects of water erosion. This has caused a gully that is over eight feet deep and 20 feet wide in spots, with all of this displaced soil ending up in the pond.

Our plan is to lower the water level in the pond to allow removal of the silt within the current pond area. We will also remove all the brush from the valley, and actually dig out areas that had previously been silted in. We're talking about silt that was deposited years before the pond was even constructed. This will double the current size of the pond! After that, we will plant vegetation in the valley and armor areas of the shoreline with rock, to nearly eliminate future erosion.



This project will greatly improve fish habitat in the pond, and other major benefits will also be noticed immediately. The biggest of these changes will be that nearly the entire pond will be visible from the Nature Center area. While talking with people fishing Lake Iowa, I have come to realize that most park users are unaware that the pond even exists. It is only visible from a vehicle when you are off of the paved road, traveling the back loop of the campground.

Another great benefit is that this will be a perfect opportunity to completely re-start the fish population in the pond. In recent years, we have confirmed the existence of a large population of undesirable, "rough" fish in the pond. They have been overrunning the pond, stunting the growth of the desired "game" fish. If you catch any fish in the campground pond prior to the pond being "killed off" and you are not going to eat them, please return the fish to the same pond. **Do not move the fish to another body of water.** Relocating fish has the potential of introducing un-noticeable diseases and/or parasites that could destroy the delicate balance in an aquatic system.

This pond has been, and will continue to be a great place to take children fishing, as they can easily get down close to the water, there is little structure near shore to get snagged on, and it is fairly protected from the wind. Stay tuned for more information on this project as it progresses.

2010

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Erik Chapman

Spring Time is Prairie Burning Time

by Dustin Graham, Americorps Volunteer

In the spring, farmers and conservationists grumble when the weather is wet. The farmers are hoping to get an early start in the fields; the conservationists are hoping to get the correct weather for spring burning. Most people are familiar with burning ditches, terraces, and gardens to control weeds and woody growth, but there are many additional considerations and benefits when using fire on natural systems such as prairie or oak savanna.

Two of the historically dominant Iowan ecosystems, tallgrass prairie and oak savanna, are considered fire-dependant. Meaning they depended on frequent fire to maintain their existence. Most research indicates that land which was tall grass prairie before settlement would burn every one to three years. Areas which were not inclined to such regular or intense fire, such as north facing slopes and locations near water, would likely grow into oak savannas. An oak savanna is a grassland with sparse oak trees. Without fire, a prairie is quickly overcome with scrub brush. Likewise, without fire a savanna quickly becomes low quality woodland. Conservationists call such areas 'degraded' because almost all plant and animal diversity is lost when community structure is lost.

Fire timing is an important consideration to achieve the management objective for an area. For example, on an area that ICCB is managing for game birds, we will want to burn in the fall. Such a burn will not interfere with the nesting season and will create a prairie with more forbs (spring flowers) which birds prefer. A general rule about fire management: If you burn while the spring flowers are growing, the prairie will contain more grass and late flowers. If you burn in the fall when the warm season grass is growing, the prairie will be steered toward spring flowers. A summer burn may be considered to destroy many of the non-fire adapted plants that invade native systems. Other considerations include rare plants and animals that are present in the area. To maintain the insect population present in an area, it is recommended that



one does not burn more than one third of an area with no adjacent habitat.

Although stories of the destructive wildfires of the west and campaigns such as 'Smokey the Bear' have caused most people to have a natural aversion to using fire as a tool, it is safe and effective when done by a serious and knowledgeable team. Fire is the most essential tool Iowa County Conservation possesses as we continue to create new and diverse wildlife habitat while being good stewards of the native, diverse and rare bits of nature with which we are entrusted. Next time you wander around a County Conservation property and find your self standing in a strikingly lush and diverse area, just check the ground, bet's are you will be able to detect the char from a recently conducted fire.

Want to learn more?

Join us for a short program on fire ecology and a demonstration night prairie burn on

Saturday, May 1 at 8pm

Meet in front of shelter #5 at 8pm.
Please wear long pants
and close toed shoes.

Iowa County Conservation News
 Iowa County Conservation Board
 Lake Iowa Park
 2550 G. Ave
 Ladora, IA 52251

For more information about the
Iowa County Conservation Board,
 please contact us 

Director/Park Ranger 319-655-8465
 iaconservation@aol.com
Campground Hosts 319-655-8465
Naturalist 319-655-8466
 iccbee@netins.net
Fax number 319-655-8400
Website www.mycountyparks.com/County/Iowa

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- Environmental Education materials & equipment
- Conservation News newsletter
- Habitat improvement/development on ICCB areas
- Lake Iowa Nature Center Project
- Use my donation where needed most

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