

CONSERVATION NEWS

A newsletter of the Iowa County Conservation Board

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FALL 2011

Explore Iowa County's Parks

How many of the Iowa County Conservation Board's 14 properties with nearly 1,600 acres have you visited? Lots of Iowa County residents have gone fishing at Lake Iowa Park, spent a few nights in the campground or competed in a Dummy Board Tournament at one of our special events, but most are probably less familiar with our 13 other preserves, recreation areas and public hunting grounds. Beginning with this edition, each newsletter will feature a different area managed by the ICCB. Hopefully this will encourage you to get out and explore areas of Iowa County that you may not have visited before. Photos of and directions to all of the ICCB's areas are available on our website at: www.mycountyparks.com/county/iowa.aspx



Patches of fall color can still be found at Lake Iowa Park. The campground is open all year, but the water has been turned off for the winter.

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Part 1: Big Bend Conservation Area

By Lee Sorenson, Director

On April 11, 1984 the Iowa County Conservation moved to purchase 320 acres from C.P Rohde and Catherine Rohde. The asking price was \$175,761 or \$549 per acre. The Conservation Board put \$100,000 down on the project and entered into a contract agreement with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation for a period of 5 years for the remainder of the funding.

This property is 110 acres of broken up parcels of agricultural land interspersed with shallow ponds, marsh, willow bats, tall grasses, a creek and a dike. Another 210 acres is continuous bottomland timber adjacent to approximately 1 ¼ miles of the Iowa River. The land was purchased to serve as a conservation/recreation area open for public hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking and general use.



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Director's Note:

By Lee Sorenson, Director ICCB

Well here we are at the end of another camping season. I am sure that for most of us the summer seems to have come to an end way too soon. At the end of the summer we like to reflect on questions and subjects that came up through the summer. One of those such questions that we get asked on a regular basis is how is the fishing. Well overall it was a good fishing season, of course with some days being better than others. In stating that we try to avoid the saying, "you should have been here yesterday."

A lot of campers ask about camping numbers with the economy in its condition. We did see a slight decrease in camping numbers, but not enough to cause a great deal of concern. What we did see were a lot of new campers that had never visited Lake



The campground pond project is nearly complete.

progress to get people at least aware of where we are located.

We have completed or are still finishing up several different projects at many of our conservation areas. This year we received a Urban Youth Corp grant to help us with transportation related projects. One of those projects was at the

English River Wildlife Area's parking lot where they laid fabric down and then covered it with new gravel. This doesn't sound like much of an achievement, but it really helps us with time management. Before this project the weeds would get several feet high each month and the public would not be able to drive in the parking area. Another project was clearing the brush above the campground pond. This helps in maintaining water quality going into the campground pond and gives a beautiful scenic view from the nature center. Work at Big Bend Conservation Area north of Marengo was also a great project that we receive many thanks on. The road back to the Iowa River was rutted and torn up from high water and 4 wheel drive vehicles. We graded the road and gravel was added as a base, then we installed a gate that we can close when road conditions are not drivable. This will hopefully deter the all terrain vehicles from tearing up the road and making it impassable.

Another project that has been a two year process is the excavation, expansion and shoreline protection of the campground pond. The pond work is completed and now we are going to move on to completing the walking trail that will go around the entire pond and back up to the nature center.

As you can see, some pretty large projects have been completed throughout last season. We are always looking for more wonderful ways to enhance your visit to all of the Iowa County Conservation Board's areas.



View of the pond from the campground.

Iowa Park. Over the last few years we have tried to spread our wings and cast a wider net to try and get the public to know we are here, from getting the sign on the interstate to joining the statewide web page of mycountyparks.com. It does seem to be making

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In September of 1985 the County Conservation Board submitted a request to the State Conservation Commission to construct 6 shallow ponds at the north end of the property and to also reconstruct and renovate the existing levees which were originally built to keep back flood waters. The estimated cost was \$13,000 with the Hawkeye Chapter of the Wetlands for Iowa Program donating 50 man hours and \$5,000. This proposal was approved on October 2, 1985.

In March of 1993 the District Forester completed an inventory on Big Bend for Timber Harvest. The total growing stock value was estimated at \$121,022.00.

In 1978, the property was identified as an important area along the Iowa River corridor for wood duck breeding habitat, as well as mallard and teal resting and loafing habitat on the north and south migrations.

This area also contains forest game in deer, turkeys, and fox squirrels. Bald eagles are frequently seen in the area during spring and fall migrations. Another benefit from this area is public access to the Iowa River, where there is good fishing for catfish, walleye, bass and rough fishes.

This area is managed for wildlife habitat and provides a place for public hunting, bird watching, and environmental education activities. An access road and parking area are provided. The entrance will be closed when there is high water to prevent damage to the road. To find Big Bend, drive 1 mile north of Marengo on V-66, then 1 mile east on Hwy F-15.



Next Issue: Gateway Park

If you happen to visit Gateway Park and Preserve on the north side of Marengo, you will notice many trail users walking, running, and biking. These trails are highly used even through the winter months. So if you're interested in anything from taking a light stroll through the arboretum, to a jog around the picturesque pond, or a hike down the adjacent levy to Highway 212 and back, the trails at Gateway Park are great for people of any fitness level.

Save the Date

The Friends of Iowa County Conservation Foundation will be holding their annual dinner banquet on
Saturday, April 14

in the evening at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. More Details will be available in the next newsletter. All proceeds will benefit the Nature Explore Playscape project.

Deer Hunt Update:

By Mike Bode, Park Ranger



I have been getting a lot of questions lately about the lower number of deer specifically at Lake Iowa Park. This is the fourth season of our Deer Management Hunt. By nearly everyone's measure, there are noticeably fewer deer in and around Lake Iowa Park. This also seems to be the case throughout nearly two-thirds of the state. Management efforts seem to be making progress in many overpopulated areas. We have recently been able to pull wire cages off of the small trees throughout the park without fear of losing them to deer. Heavily used and highly erodible deer trails are finally at a minimum. Our plan is to re-evaluate the number of deer and the measurable impact that they are having on our resources and will adjust our approach as needed for next season.

The archery hunt at Lake Iowa lasts from Oct. 22 until Dec. 25. The muzzleloader hunt will take place from Dec. 26 until January 29.

Nature Explore Playscape Project

By Laura Stephens, Naturalist ICCB

If you have driven past the Lake Iowa Nature Center recently, you may have noticed some activity taking place on the east side of the building. What looked like a mess of surveyor flags, paint, and huge holes in the ground is now taking form as a Nature Explore Playscape!

This project officially began this spring when the Iowa County Conservation Board was awarded a grant by the Iowa County Community Foundation as well as a pledge from the Friends of Iowa County Conservation Foundation to cover the cost of materials for the area. Their initial support jumpstarted enthusiasm for this project, and now what began as a modest nature classroom has turned into the development of what will be a premier Nature Explore Playscape.

The Friends Foundation generously contributed funding to enable the space to be professionally designed by Abundant Playscapes and Backyard Abundance, both of Iowa City. Their design team was phenomenal to work with throughout the entire design process. They created a dynamic play space that incorporates not only the elements of sound playground design, but also several areas of native plantings as well as permaculture concepts that will prevent excess runoff and erosion in the area. Upon final completion, the area will be open and accessible to children and adults of all ages and abilities.

The staff at Lake Iowa (all 3 of us!) have been hard at work preparing and laying out the site as well as constructing a few basic components of the playscape. The goal is to have as much work done as possible before winter, so we are that much ahead of the game this spring. Once we near the end of winter, we will begin scheduling community build days to complete the remaining portions of the project. Community projects will likely include cutting and planting living willow tunnels, building the music stage, constructing the two-level tree house, installing willow fence, building entry

features, putting in native plant beds and any other odds and ends that need to be finished up.

Volunteering at a build day is a great way to get your family involved in a meaningful community project. My dad and I helped build a local playground when I was in elementary school, and I still remember the exact pieces we worked on. The kids of my hometown would not have an overhead glider without us!

Nature Explore Playscape community build days will be included in the next newsletter, posted on our website and facebook pages and put in the local newspapers. If you would like to be contacted directly once the dates are scheduled, please call (319) 655-8466 or e-mail lstephens@co.iowa.ia.us to be put on the list.

In addition to volunteer labor at the community build days, financial support is also needed for the playscape to reach its full potential. Local businesses, organizations, and interested families/individuals have the opportunity to sponsor an area within the playscape. Donors will be recognized with a sign at the entry to their sponsored area. Sponsorships range from \$1,200 to \$7,000 depending on the amount of equipment and materials contained in the area. The sponsorships will also help cover the cost of installing a concrete sidewalk throughout the playscape, increasing the ease of accessibility for visitors with wheelchairs or walkers. A brochure detailing sponsorship opportunities is available at the nature center, or call (319) 655-8466 or e-mail lstephens@co.iowa.ia.us to have one sent to you directly.

Everyone here at Lake Iowa is incredibly excited with how this project is coming together, and we hope that you are willing to join us in this truly unique endeavor. The opposite page highlights the work that has been taking place this fall. If you have a chance, stop by and check out the progress for yourself!

Lake Iowa Park



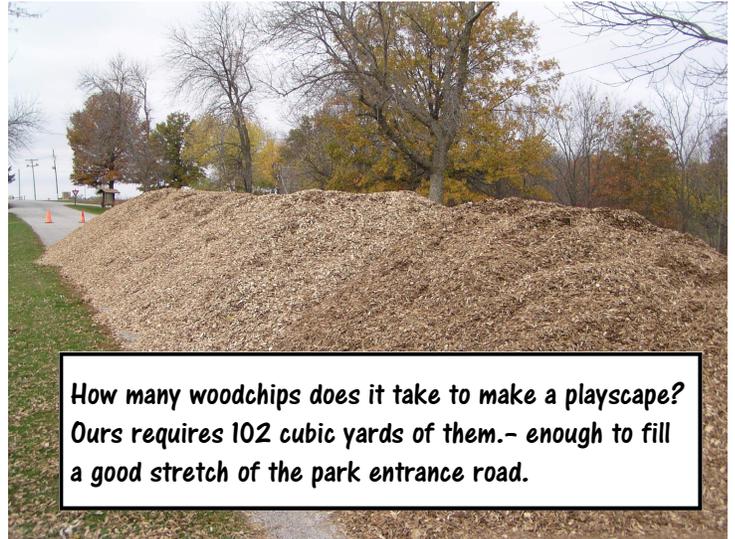
Mike Bode, Park Ranger, has been our key supplier of large rocks, transporting them from his hometown in northern Iowa.



Three large 'sand traps' will allow for individual and group play. In many places the sand is over two feet deep. We suspect this area will be very popular!



The 'Messy Materials' area will contain a few large logs as well as many smaller branches, tree cookies and other loose parts that children can move around.



How many woodchips does it take to make a playscape? Ours requires 102 cubic yards of them.- enough to fill a good stretch of the park entrance road.



Flags and paint mark the locations of the music stage and tree house.



Flagstone will be installed to form the base of the building and nature art areas.

Winter Program Calendar

Lake Iowa Nature Center

Snowshoe Hikes

Winter Break Snowshoeing:

Get out of the house and spend the afternoon exploring Lake Iowa Park by snowshoe! Each 1 hour hike will travel through a different area of the park.

Tuesday, Dec. 27 2-3PM

Wednesday, Dec. 28 2-3PM

Thursday, Dec. 29 2-3PM

All hikes will meet at the Lake Iowa Nature Center. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early to get set up with snowshoes. Equipment is available for ages 6 and up. Please call ahead as programs are dependent on snow conditions.

Tracks & Traces Snowshoe Hike:

Learn how to identify tracks and other winter animal signs around the park.

Saturday, Jan. 14 1-2:30PM

Winter Birds Snowshoe Hike:

Watch Iowa's cold weather birds and learn how they survive the winter months.

Saturday, Feb. 11 1-2:30PM

****Even if snow is not deep enough for snowshoes, the tracks & birding program will still take place.****



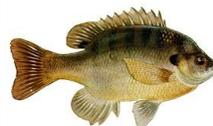
Reclaim Your Holidays

Saturday, December 10

1:00-2:30 PM

Come to learn practical ways to create meaning this holiday season while being more environmentally-friendly. The 'Reclaim Your Holidays' program materials, organized by UNI's Center for Energy and Environmental Education, encourage minimizing stress, strengthening meaning, and focusing on what's really important during the holidays. Participants will leave with ideas for creating new traditions as well as a few homemade "green" gifts for family and friends. Please call to register by Dec. 8 at (319) 655-8466.

Ice Fishing Clinic



Saturday, Jan. 28

9:30am-noon

Lake Iowa Boat Ramp

Are you interested in ice fishing but have never had a chance to try it out? This is a great way for children and adults to be introduced to the sport of ice fishing. The clinic will begin in the parking lot of the boat ramp to learn about equipment and safety. Then we'll head out onto the ice to fish for the rest of the morning. All fishing equipment is provided, but please bring something to sit on and be sure to dress for the weather. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Anglers age 16+ must have a current fishing license. Program is dependent on weather and safe ice conditions.

Iowa's Prairie Heritage on Display this Summer

Americans and millions of people around the world will sit down to a meal sometime today courtesy of the prairies that once covered much of Iowa. The Lake Iowa Nature Center invites visitors to experience the story of our prairie heritage through the exhibit "Tallgrass Prairie- Past, Present and Future"; on display at the Lake Iowa Nature Center from May 24 to July 19, 2012.

What a thousand acres of compass plant looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never again to be answered, and perhaps not even asked.

- Aldo Leopold (1949, *A Sand County Almanac*)

The "Tallgrass Prairie" exhibit was produced by the Iowa Association of Naturalists with funds from the Resource Enhancement and Protection- Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP), Living Roadway Trust Fund, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Trust for Local Conservation, the Tallgrass Prairie Center- UNI, and Truax Company. Locally, the Friends of Iowa County Conservation Foundation also supported the project.

Hands on displays and interactive components will engage visitors in learning about the prairie landscape and native plant species. Area residents are also invited to become personally involved in the preservation and restoration of the prairie ecosystem through a series of public programs to be held in May, June and July. More details will be available in the Winter/Spring newsletter.



2011 Jr. Naturalists

Congratulations to the 4 budding naturalists that have completed the Jr. Naturalist program requirements this year.

Kyla Mason
Cody Mason
Alayna Setala
Brock Crane

All four Jr. Naturalists attended at least 3 public programs and participated in at least 2 independent nature-related activities. It's not too late to turn in your forms for this year!

Extra copies are available at the nature center or online at www.iowanaturalists.org

Prairie Tales...

Cozy up with a good book this winter to learn more about our prairie heritage!

Sarah, Plain & Tall *Little House on the Prairie*
by Patricia MacLachlan by Laura Ingalls Wilder

My Antonia *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*
by Willa Cather by Joanna Stratton

Bluestem *My Face to the Wind: Diary of Sarah Jane Price,*
by Frances Arrington *a Prairie Teacher* (Dear America Series)

2011 Iowa County Conservation Board

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Iowa County Conservation News

Iowa County Conservation Board

Lake Iowa Park

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- Gateway Park Improvements
- Environmental Education materials & equipment
- Conservation News newsletter
- Habitat improvement/development on ICCB areas
- Nature Explore Playscape Project
- Use my donation where needed most

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