

Naturally LOUISA COUNTY

Rich in Nature, History and Culture

WINTER 2024
VOLUME 17
ISSUE 4

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EDITED BY
Lana Artz-McComb

From the Director's Desk

By Jacob Ewart, LCC Executive Director

As the warm, humid summer draws to a close, the bitter Iowa winter has made its return to Louisa County. With the change of season, so do some of the tasks and thoughts of Louisa County Conservation employees!

Thinking back to the summer and fall of 2024, we have had so many great memories and activities to reminisce on. From camping on the Iowa River, to talking with and teaching nearly *five-hundred* people at organized events, we have all had a blast during this past season.



What does that leave us coming up this winter? For the maintenance staff, it means trail and forest maintenance and construction projects. For the education staff, it means school field trips and planning for next year's awesome

activities. Also during this time, we are hiring seasonal employees for next year's adventures. There will also be a new version of mycountyparks.com with a new user interface and easier campsite reservation process coming in early 2025.



Louisa County Conservation would like to thank the citizens of Louisa and nearby counties for all their work and dedication to our department. With your support, we will be able to continue hosting year-round activities for adults and children alike, keeping properties available for hiking, skiing, hunting, and cycling for all to enjoy.

We look forward to another great winter working both in the field and in the office to prepare our next best year yet! Stay warm out there!

www.LouisaCountyConservation.org

Migrate, Hibernate, Insulate- How Animals Survive Iowa's Harsh Winters

By: Sarah Martinez, LCC Naturalist

As Iowans, we are all too familiar with temperatures dropping below freezing during the coldest months of the year. However, we aren't the only ones trying to get through Iowa's frigid winters the warmest way possible. While winter coats, hats, and boots are the uniform for us, animals are not as fortunate and instead take winter on with one of three different approaches—migration, hibernation, or insulation.

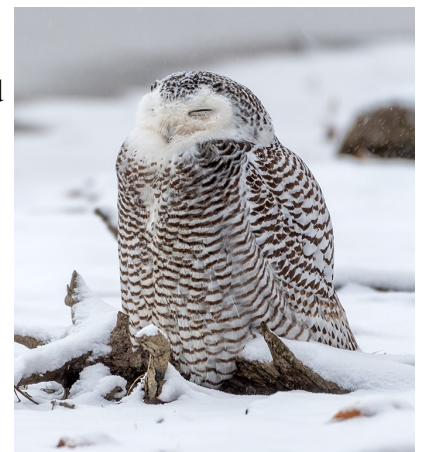
Maybe the most obvious tactic employed by many bird species is to ditch the impending cold and flee to warmer climates. This migration to warmer regions in the Southern Hemisphere is driven by several factors, including food availability (insects), plants, and areas for nesting. These primary resources become scarce in the winter, prompting birds to travel to wintering grounds in Central and South America. However, birds are not the only Iowa natives that migrate. Most notably monarch butterflies take part in a mass migration to the oyamel forests of Mexico, flying up to 3,000 miles!

Of the remaining species who choose not to migrate, hibernation is the next logical response. If I were to ask you what hibernation is, you would most likely respond, "It's when animals eat a bunch of food and sleep through the whole winter.". And you would be half right. Hibernation is a means of energy conservation that helps the animal survive the winter. Don't think of it so much as simply sleeping for months at a time. Hibernation is a form of *torpor* or state of physical or mental inactivity.

During this time, the animal has a significant drop in body temperature, heart rate slows, and breathing becomes increasingly shallow. This puts the animal in a state of minimal consciousness, with very little movement. So how exactly does the animal survive the cold? Because of decreased food availability, the individual relies on stored fat reserves from increased food intake prior to hibernation and a carefully selected hiding place to wait out the winter.



So what about the animals that stay and don't hibernate? These species use a variety of adaptations to stay warm throughout even the coldest Iowa winters. Animals in cold climates often rely on having thick layers of fat, or blubber, to insulate them from the elements. This combined with their ability to grow thicker coats in the winter, which allows them to trap in their own body heat. However, it is not just mammals. For the many common Iowa bird species that stay, they carry out their own strategies for surviving the winter. Some birds are able to grow a heavier coat of plumage for the winter, while others roost in groups to share body heat. One of the more interesting tactics is the use of fluffing up their feathers to trap heat close to the body, creating an insulating layer of warm air under the feathers. And believe it or not, shivering plays a large role in keeping species all over the animal kingdom warm in cold temperatures (even humans). By shivering, you increase your body's heat production through muscle contractions, helping you keep just a little bit warmer!



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Friend of Conservation Award

The Louisa County Conservation Board presented the Friend of Conservation Award to Tom Wahl at the annual picnic held in October.

Tom has been instrumental in the revitalization of the pawpaw grove at Chinkapin Bluffs Recreation Area. Tom took time to train the LCC staff on the art of grafting plus donating genetic stock from the pawpaws at Red Fern Farms. Tom met with LCC Naturalists and Columbus High School students in Spring of 2024 to give a hands-on lesson about native fruit trees and grafting.

Thank you, Tom, for all you have done and will continue to do for Louisa County Conservation!



Jacob Ewart, LCC Director, presents the Friend of Conservation Award to Tom Wahl at the annual picnic.

Hunter Education Program Award

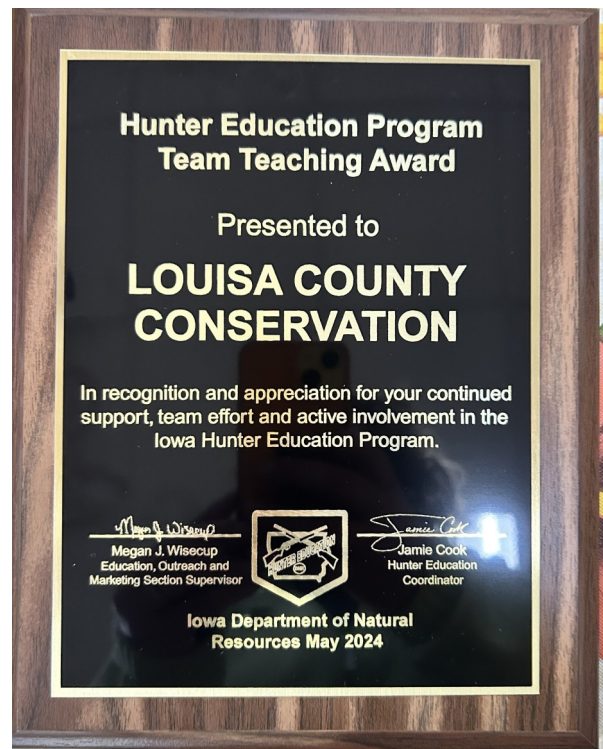
Jamie Cook, Hunter Education Coordinator with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, presented the Louisa County Volunteer Hunter Ed Instructors with the Iowa Teaching Team of the Year Award at the annual picnic held in October.

Jamie spoke on how the Louisa County instructors go above and beyond the minimum requirements for Hunter Ed. Louisa County’s instructors present a safety trail, live fire, archery, and tree stand safety, all of which provide students an opportunity for hands on learning that is not required to pass the test but makes for more safe and experienced hunters.

Louisa County’s Hunter Ed program would not be what it is without these instructors. Thank you!



Hunter Ed Instructors (left to right): Doug Brown, Tracy Lott, David Boysen, John Guyer, Mike Todd, Jerry Heater. Not pictured: Greg Terry, Eric Tackenberg.




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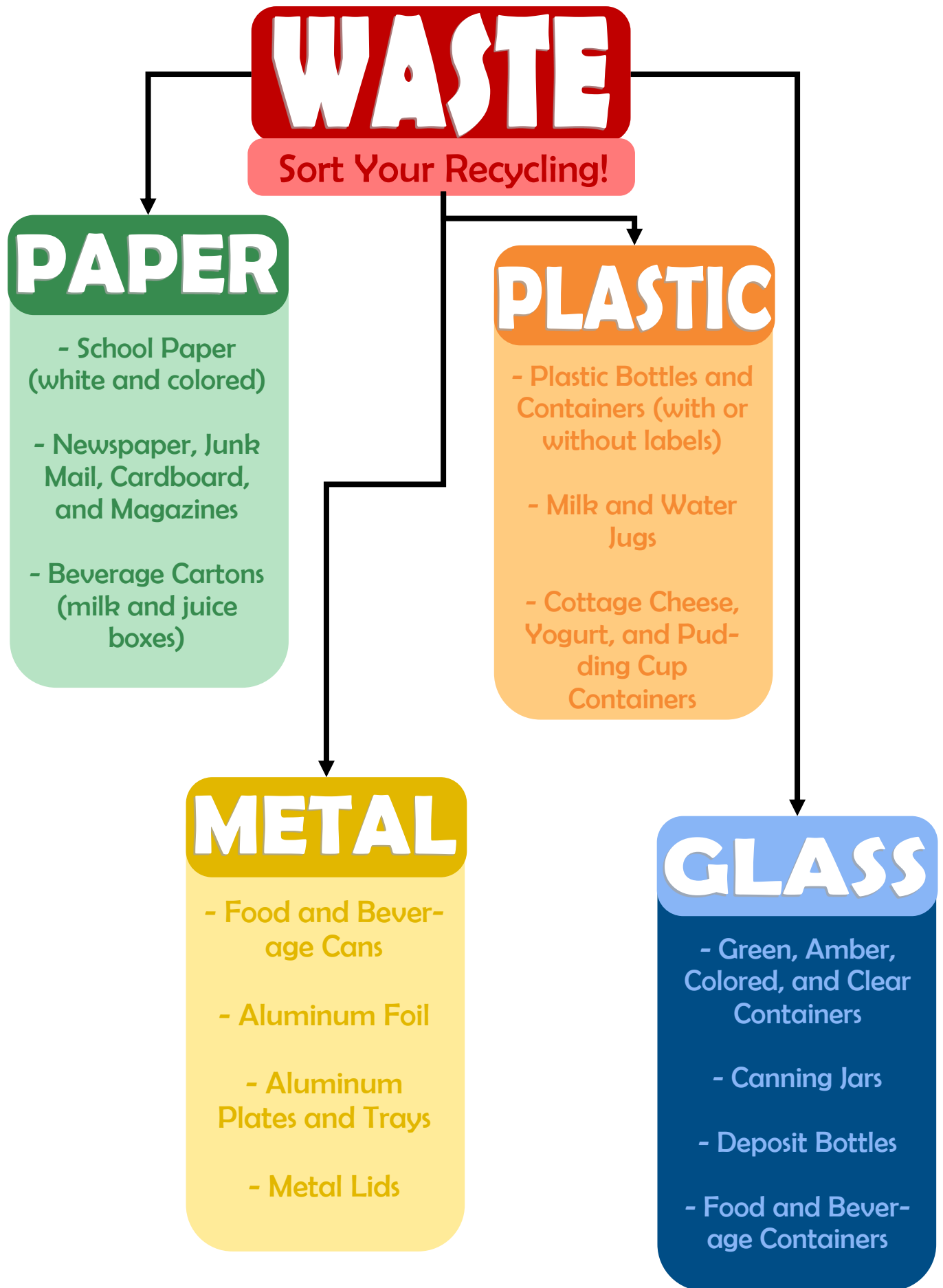
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Noah's Nature Nook

Hi! I'm Noah, and I love animals and insects!

There are seven species of chickadees in North America, two of which can be found throughout the state of Iowa (the Black-capped chickadee and the Boreal chickadee).



Here are five interesting facts about our backyard neighbors, the Black-capped chickadee:

❖ **They have a unique way of communicating with each other.**

Chickadees communicate unlike any other bird. The more “*dee-dee-dee*’s” in their signature “*chickadee-dee-dee*” call, the more dangerous and higher the threat.

❖ **They know how to handle the cold!**

Black-capped chickadees can conserve energy at night by dropping their body temperature 10-12 degrees below the daytime’s temperature. They shiver to maintain minimal body temperature, increasing the length between shivers to survive even the coldest nights!

❖ **The Mad (chickadee) King!**

Chickadees live in small groups with established pecking orders. Each bird is ranked within

these groups by its degree of aggressiveness, leaving the most aggressive bird in charge of the flock.

❖ **They have excellent memories.**

The Black-capped chickadee is excellent at hiding seeds from other individuals, to eat at a later time, but how does it remember so many hiding spots? Chickadees are able to grow new cells in the brain during colder months of the year to remember hundreds of hiding spots!

❖ **The chickadee’s diet changes by season.**

Their summer diet consists mostly of caterpillars and other insects, while in the winter they tend to eat more seeds, berries, and small fruits.



The Black-capped chickadee is a year-round resident in Iowa, making it one of the most recognizable backyard species in the state. The next time you go outside keep a lookout for this not-so-ordinary little bird!



Louisa County Transfer Station
 Drop Off Recycling and Waste Disposal
 Monday thru Friday...8:00am – 4:00pm
 Saturday...9:00am – 12:00pm
 14048 70th Street, Wapello, IA 52653
 Questions? 319-523-5013
 louisacountyia.gov

LOUISA COUNTY CONSERVATION EVENTS

Wreath Making

Monday, Dec. 9th

6:00pm - 8:00pm

Langwood Education Center

\$10/wreath

[\(prepay on MyCountyParks available\)](#)

Get into the winter spirit by making a natural wreath to bring some holiday cheer into your home for December! Wreath base, greenery, and decorations will be provided along with hot cocoa and popcorn.

All are welcome to explore the trails at Langwood before or after making their wreath.



Registration Required by Dec. 6 at Noon



E.E. Book "Sale"

Monday, Dec. 16th to Friday, Dec. 20th

Louisa County Conservation Office

LCC has a plethora of field guides, activity books, and nature books that have been collecting dust for years and they are ready for a new home!

Subjects include mushrooms, wild flowers, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, insects and spiders, archaeology, and so much more!

Pay-what-you-want, take them for free, or free-will donations will be accepted. All proceeds will go towards LCC's Environmental Education Animals.

Follow the Facebook Event for photos and more information!



Noon Year's Eve!

Monday, Dec. 30th

10:00am - Noon

Langwood Education Center, Free!

Bundle up and join us for our favorite annual tradition! Celebrate 2025 with indoor and outdoor crafts, nature activities, snacks, and more.

We will gather together to countdown to a noon birdseed toss and lemonade toast to the New Year!

Let others know on the Facebook Event!

Winter Nature Camp

Let's have a Winter Nature Camp "camp out" - everything we love about camping without spending the night in the cold. We will set up tents, cook snacks over a campfire, use flashlights to explore, make a craft, and more!

Geared towards children K-6th grade. Campers are welcome to attend both days. \$5/child. Parents welcome to stay or drop off



Thursday, Jan. 2nd

12:30pm - 2:30pm

Chinkapin Bluffs Recreation Area

Friday, Jan. 3rd

10:00am - 12:00pm

Virginia Grove Recreation Area



Registration Required

Unless otherwise stated, all registration and program information can be found at:

LouisaCountyConservation.org

Online reservations are available for most programs:

MyCountyParks.com/County/Louisa.aspx

LOUISA COUNTY
CONSERVATION



12635 County Road G56, Suite 101

Wapello, IA 52653

319-523-8381; Conservation@louisacountyia.gov

LCC STAFF

Jacob Ewart
Lana Artz-McComb
Dani Boysen
Sarah Martinez
Tanner Hollingsworth

BOARD MEMBERS

Elizabeth Kling
vacant
Joellen Schantz
Shawn Maine
Josh Hardin

Grant Round-up

By: Lana Artz-McComb, Naturalist

Louisa County Conservation would like to take a moment to recognize the grant organizations that have funded projects in 2024 or will be funding projects in 2025.

A donation in memory of Robert and Harriet Fuller constructed a drinking fountain and water bottle filling station at Chinkapin Bluffs Recreation Area. This project was completed in Fall of 2024.

An accessible fishing dock and sidewalk renovation at Virginia Grove Recreation Area was completed thanks to grant funding from the Community Foundation of Louisa County (CFLC). CFLC also provided funds for the purchase of native Iowa animal furs and 3D printed skulls for use in environmental education programs.

LCC received two grants from the Community Foundation of Louisa County, to be completed in 2025.

A grant for \$3,306.41 will go to purchase materials for Iowa habitat education conducted during field trips, public programming, summer camps, and more.

LCC received \$6,876.92 for accessibility improvements at Langwood Education Center. Improvements will include paving an accessible loading area at the parking lot and creating a sand beach with accessible platform docks. The sand beach will replace the existing rocky shore. The docks will run parallel to shore and provide an even surface for fishing and aquatic education programming.

The Columbus Junction United Fund granted LCC \$835 toward finishing the overlook deck at Chinkapin Bluffs. Grant money will be used for interpretive panels and bench seating at the newly constructed overlook east of the main shelter.

A \$1,000 grant from the Iowa Communities Assurance Pool will fund safety equipment including prescribed fire gear and radio equipment accessories.



Chinkapin Bluffs Recreation Area Improvements

shelter and bathroom refurbishment, new picnic tables, new overlook

Drinking fountain donated in memory of Robert and Harriet Fuller (Heckathorn) and her three children Susan L. Simmons (Schooler), Christine Simmons (Ragaller) and Patrick Henry Simmons.



Accessible Fishing Dock and Sidewalk Renovation
Virginia Grove Recreation Area

Completed Summer 2024

Made possible through a grant from the Community Foundation of Louisa County!



Native Iowa Animal Furs and 3D Printed Skulls:

Thank you to the Community Foundation of Louisa County for supporting Louisa County Conservation's Environmental Education programming!



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Community Foundation
of Louisa County

An affiliate of
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PORT LOUISA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Building Healthier Refuge Forests

By: Nathan Barnett, Wildlife Biologist

Much of the land that falls under Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge is owned by the Army Corps of Engineers. While most regular management is left up to refuge staff, forestry is an area of interest for the Corps. Refuge staff and foresters from the Corps have always been partners in forest management, but newly available funding sources from the Corps have ramped up efforts on the Louisa Division of the refuge. The Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program, or NESP, is a Corps program that aims to fund projects that benefit both ecosystems and the river navigation system. On the refuge, these projects take the form of forest establishment and improvement. Like many places along the Upper Mississippi River, Port Louisa

has lost most of the bottomland forest that previously existed at low elevations. Land use and climate impacts on the flood cycles of the Mississippi River have made areas that previously supported diverse floodplain forests uninhabitable to most trees. The challenge for refuge staff and Corps foresters has been to identify areas of slightly higher



One of two truckloads of 8 different species of trees for the planting

elevation that offer the best opportunity for establishing sustainable floodplain forests going forward. This strategy can create some lofty goals, but NESP now provides the resources to make these visions happen. So far, 35 acres of old field on the Louisa Division has been planted to native hardwood species, with many more tree and shrub plantings on the way!

Similar treatments are in the works for the Horseshoe Bend Division of the refuge, but these come from different funding sources. Since the land that falls under the Horseshoe Bend Division is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, improvements are being planned, funded, and accomplished through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA); which also seeks to address climate impacts. This division of the refuge does not have so low an elevation that trees cannot survive, but reed canary grass infestations, limited seed sources, and increased flood frequency has limited the health and diversity of these stands of forest. Tree plantings, timber stand improvements, and invasive species control are slated for 172 acres of forest on Horseshoe Bend to make them more resilient to flooding, inundation, and other climate impacts.

Follow us on Facebook to learn more about our efforts to improve the habitats of Port Louisa NWR and what that means for the wildlife that call the refuge home!



September 2024 tree planting on the Louisa Division

PORT LOUISA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



10728 Cty Rd X61
Wapello, Iowa 52653
319-523-6982

Office Hours:
M-F, 7:30 - 4:00 PM

[fws.gov/refuge/port_louisa](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/port_louisa)
facebook.com/portlouisaNWR

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service.

For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.

Join the Christmas Bird Count!

The 125th Christmas Bird Count will take place from December 14, 2024 to January 5, 2025.

The Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 when Frank Chapman suggested that teams change their tradition of shooting birds as Christmas sport to simply taking a census of them. In the ensuing years, the idea has grown and the CBC has become a winter tradition for many birders across the country with friendly competitions among counters.

As the first citizen science project, the CBC has captured enough data over the years that results are now used by scientific organizations to document changes in bird populations.

CBC is a program of the National Audubon Society that has grown to cover much of the Western Hemisphere. The CBC relies 100% on donations and is free for participants.

Audubon has archived summaries of data, 1901 through the present on their website, [Audubon.org](https://www.audubon.org).

The Iowa Ornithologists' Union has compiled and published a summary of each year's data since 1937. You can view the results [online](#) or in their publication *Iowa Bird Life*.

What Does a CBC Look Like?

CBC programs involve counting birds in circles within a 15-mile diameter radius. Circles are coordinated by one person who arranges volunteers to cover specific sections of the circle throughout one 24-hour period of time.

Volunteers can drive or walk, counting the number of birds of each species that they see or hear. Often participants will rise early to count birds at sunrise and stay up late to count owls at night.

Counts are given to the coordinator who compiles and submits the data.

What is CBC Data Used For?

CBC data tracks long-term bird trends, is used to inform policy on bird conservation, and understand the effects of climate change on populations.



Join the Christmas Bird Count! Louisa County Y

Louisa County's CBC will be held
Thursday, December 19th, 2024.

The count circle is centered over the Columbus Junction area and covers from the river west towards Washington County.

Anyone is invited to participate for as long as you'd like. The count happens over a 24-hour period so there is a lot of flexibility.

If you are new to birding, there are opportunities to be paired with a more experienced birder. We can also accommodate volunteers who want to hike vs. those who would prefer to count from cars.

Interested in Participating?

Contact LCC at 319-523-8381 or via email.

We will put you in touch with the Louisa Y CBC Coordinator, Jason Momson.



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SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Farm the Best, Conserve the Rest

By: Bryn Hogue, Pheasants Forever

As autumn comes to an end, it is a great time to think about what areas of your cropland have not been as productive as you had envisioned. One of the best ways to make the most of your land is to take a look at your marginal acres, including edge of fields, timber edges, and wet areas. Taking those acres out of crop production and putting them into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a great way to focus your most productive land for farming while improving water quality and creating wildlife habitat. While CRP is not currently open for enrollment, take the time now to run the numbers on your cropland to make a plan for where CRP can improve your farm's profitability.

Crop prices have dropped to the lowest they've been in four years, while input costs are high. The price of corn in Southeast Iowa was \$3.86/bushel on 11/7/24 (Iowa Dept of Ag Market News). That number may increase slightly as the marketing season progresses, but it still makes for a tough year for corn to pencil out on anything but the best land (CSR2 greater than 90 for a farmer who is cash renting).

For context, the 10- and 20-year average corn price in Iowa is right around \$4.30/bushel according to the USDA statistics service (USDA NASS), so this latest price downturn is part of the usual trend of peaks and valleys for crop markets. Input costs are expected to remain about the same in 2025 (University of IL farmdoc daily). Crop prices may stay low, judging by historic price patterns. As you plan for the coming

years, consider what areas on your farm don't break even at that longer average of \$4.30/bushel. That can guide you to farm your best and conserve the rest.

Enrolling partial fields encompassing just the marginal areas will bring up your APH and lower your risk. CRP provides a wide range of great options for areas of all sizes and shapes, allowing you to tailor the area to fit your operation. Edge of field and buffer-like practices include prairie strips, quail buffers, tree

plantings, and filter strips. For larger areas of land, CRP offers practices from tall and shortgrass prairies, tree plantings, and combinations of both! It can be tailored to fit your goals for habitat and productivity. Native seeding mixes provide the best habitat while also helping filter water, slow runoff, and reduce erosion. Resources to help you consider options and compare scenarios

are available! Stephanie Nelson is the Precision Ag & Conservation Specialist for Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever here in Iowa. She can help run the numbers for your land to help you identify changes to reach your goals. Your local Farm Bill Biologist, Brynn Hogue, is available to help navigate the CRP process and create the best habitat possible. Pheasants Forever has a special incentive right now to support farmers to farm their best when they conserve the rest! Get in touch with Stephanie and Brynn for more information.




snelson@pheasantsforever.org, 712-266-3977
bhogue@pheasantsforever.org, 319-430-3934

***Disclaimer:** As of Oct 1, 2024, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) has no authority to deliver new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollments and is currently not accepting offers. Feel free to contact me or your local USDA office to check about future availability of CRP.

Break-Even Corn Yields Matrix

The 10- and 20-year average price of corn in Iowa is \$4.30/bushel. If you have an area that consistently yields lower than the break-even point shown below for that price with your input cost, consider an alternative like CRP on those acres.

| | | Corn Input Cost (\$/ac) | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|-------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| | | \$450 | \$550 | \$650 | \$750 | \$850 | \$950 | |
| Corn Market Price (\$/bu) | \$3.00 | 150 | 183 | 217 | 250 | 283 | 317 | Profitable Corn Yields at \$4.30/bu |
| | \$3.50 | 129 | 157 | 186 | 214 | 243 | 271 | |
| | \$4.00 | 113 | 138 | 163 | 188 | 213 | 238 | |
| | \$4.30 | 105 | 128 | 151 | 174 | 198 | 221 | Break-Even |
| | \$4.50 | 100 | 122 | 144 | 167 | 189 | 211 | Unprofitable Corn Yields at \$4.30/bu |
| | \$5.00 | 90 | 110 | 130 | 150 | 170 | 190 | |
| | \$5.50 | 82 | 100 | 118 | 136 | 155 | 173 | |
| | \$6.00 | 75 | 92 | 108 | 125 | 142 | 158 | |
| | \$6.50 | 69 | 85 | 100 | 115 | 131 | 146 | |
| | \$7.00 | 64 | 79 | 93 | 107 | 121 | 136 | |

 Break-even Corn Yields (bu/ac)

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
260 Mulberry St., Suite 2, Wapello, Iowa 52653
319-527-8068



SWCD Commissioners:

Jonathon Ball
Kathy Dice
Dan Vogeler
Tim Knutson
Drew Yotter

Prairie Outdoor Classroom Project

Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation received a grant from the Community Foundation of Louisa County for \$7,500 towards the future Prairie Outdoor Classroom Shelter at Langwood.

This shelter will be placed at the trail head/parking area for the Wetland Interpretive Trail located in the prairie east of Langwood Education Center. The shelter will be available for public use and as an outdoor classroom space for Louisa County Conservation's environmental education programming.

The goal is to provide a central gathering space in the prairie, near the parking lot and perfect for a family picnic before exploring the Wetland Interpretive Trail or fishing at the nearby pond.

Thank you to Community Foundation of Louisa County for joining in our efforts to enhance the prairie, wetland, and pond at Langwood by providing comfort to visitors through the new shelter.



Rendering of the future Prairie Outdoor Classroom Shelter



**Community Foundation
of Louisa County**

An affiliate of
Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine



12635 CR G56, Suite 106,
Wapello, Iowa 52653
319-523-8381

tri-rivers@louisacountyia.gov

www.tri-rivers.org

The Mission of Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation is to provide funds for the protection and enhancement of the natural resources in the environmentally rich area of the confluences of the Cedar, Iowa and Mississippi Rivers in eastern Iowa. The Foundation will employ enjoyment and use of these resources to educate and instill an appreciation for good land stewardship. It will seek to distribute these funds to carefully chosen public, civic, institutional and quasi-public programs.

MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN LOUISA COUNTY

Enclosed is my donation for:

\$25 \$50 \$100 \$250
 \$500 \$1,000 Other _____

Name or Business _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Return this form and payment to:

Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation
12635 County Road G56, Suite 106
Wapello, IA 52653

Please earmark my donation for:

- Langwood Education Center
- Louisa County Trails Council
- TRCF Scholarship
- Environmental Education
- Use my donation where needed most
- Other: _____

General Donations are payable to:

Tri-Rivers Conservation Foundation

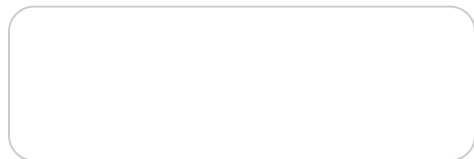
Endowment Funds are payable to:

Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine (for Iowa Tax Credit)

- Tri-Rivers Endowment Fund
- Trails Endowment Fund
- Paris Scholarship Endowment

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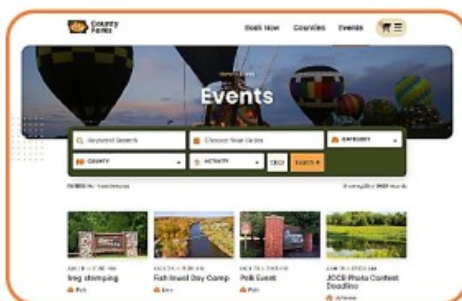
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“Snow falling soundlessly in the middle of the night will always fill my heart with sweet clarity.”
—Novala Takemoto



Stay Tuned for the NEW
MyCountyParks.com
coming early 2025!



***Naturally Louisa County* Newsletter is now entirely digital and delivered straight to your inbox**

Printed copies of this edition can be found at partnering organizations including the LCC office, SWCD, PLNWR, and local libraries.

If you know of an organization that would like to have printed copies for people to pick up, please let us know at conservation@louisacountyia.gov or 319-523-8381.

Naturally Louisa County is published quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

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