

Pathways to Nature

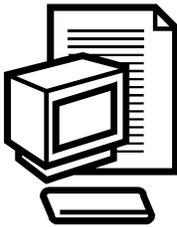
Summer-Fall 2003

Newsletter of the Webster County Conservation Board

From the Director's Desk.....

By Charlie Miller

As of May 1, I have been working for the Webster County Conservation Board for 25 years. Reflecting back on those 25 years brings many memories as well as a lot of changes. When I first started in 1978, our shop was in a little 20' X 30' room with two small light bulbs, no telephone, no running water and no bathroom facilities. We barely had room to get any equipment in to work on it so most of the equipment repairs were made in the parking lot. The office was in the residence at Kennedy Park and Bob Heun, the Director at the time, would have to put in 90 to 100 hours per week because there were no office hours for the doorbell or telephone. There was also no air conditioning in the residence and I remember many times seeing Bob dripping sweat over the paper he was trying to work on using the typewriter. In 1978 we had 4 full-time people on staff, the Director, two park rangers including myself, and one full time maintenance person. The Director's wife, Lucy, helped clean the campground shower building and shelter and we had a seasonal maintenance person, two seasonal night patrol, and several lifeguards. In 1978 the Conservation Board owned and managed 7 county areas with a total of 550 acres scattered around the county.



My, how things have changed. Our old shop is now a storage shed and the present shop is 50x50 with room to work on many projects at the same time. We actually have a telephone with two lines, running water, and bathroom facilities as well as a small Nature Center. We now have six full time people, the Director, three park rangers, a naturalist and a resource coordinator as well as a part time secretary whose offices are all connected to the shop. All of the offices are air-conditioned and equipped with a computer to do their paper work as well as having access to the Internet. If the park rangers or other staff worked the 50 or 60 hours per week like we did in 1978, the federal government says they must be paid overtime or given compensation time off so we try to hold the hours down to 40 per week. We can no longer employ seasonal night patrol so we must now do that ourselves. We didn't replace the full-time maintenance person when he retired but instead we hire three college kids as interns during the summer months to help us out as well as giving them college credits. The Conservation Board is in the final stages of purchasing its 19th area bringing the total to 1072 acres. We are now also in charge of the management of the vegetation in the 1200 miles or 6,800 acres of road ditches throughout the county as well as the old county home cemetery.

Yes, things have definitely changed over the past 25 years. I believe that with the Conservation Board's support and guidance over all these years, things have changed for the better for all of Webster County's residents.

Thank You Thank You Thank You Thank You Thank You Thank You Thank You

There is great appreciation for the many people that help out with various events we hold. We are very well aware of how critical volunteers are in our ongoing success and we want to extend our gratitude publicly. The following people assisted with environmental education and we greatly appreciate their commitment: Erika Anderson, Jeanne Baugous, Steve Bell, Jennifer Berte, Doug Breyfogle, Cindy Bush, David Carlson, Matt Cosgrove, Meggan Daniels, Lyle Ewing, Scott Gebers, Deann Haden-Luke, Tyler Hofer, Vern Hoover, Angie Kiefer, Heather Koch, Mina Landes, TC Loving, TJ Lynn, Charlie Miller, Leah Ober, Scott Patton, Dave Scherff, Shelly Schossow, Mary Lou Secor, and Pat Shehan.

Plant in Particular

By Pat Shehan

As spring begins its warming trend towards summer, many nature lovers venture out into Iowa's wild areas. With the relatively new problems such as West Nile Virus and Lyme disease many people will be taking numerous precautions to lessen the threat of contracting these ailments. Almost everyone knows about poison ivy, poison oak, and stinging nettles and the problems they cause, but most are unaware of another troublesome plant. This plant is wild parsnip.

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa* L.) is a European biennial forb that is common throughout the state in grasslands, timber edges, and road ditches. It is sometimes mistaken for golden alexander because of its yellow flower and similar leaf structure. The primary problem with wild parsnip is that the leaf contains the chemical psoralen, which is an irritant to human skin. If you brush up against the plant the chemical will be transferred to your skin. Since psoralen is sensitive to ultraviolet light, an irritation of the skin develops when you skin, sunlight come together. The rash that results from the contact is irritating at the least and could prove quite painful in extreme cases. Permanent scars are a possibility from the development of the rash. During the flowering stage of the plant's cycle is the most dangerous time for developing a rash. The chemical is still present in the plant throughout the year so it is never completely safe to handle.



Now that I have scared you all enough that you won't feel safe walking in the prairies anymore, I will give you the good news. The best way to combat wild parsnip is avoidance. Become familiar with what the plant looks like so you can simply walk around the individual plants. Wear long pants, long sleeved shirts, and gloves to reduce the amount of exposed skin to the plant, especially when mowing or while operating a weed-eater. If you do happen to brush up against wild parsnip try to keep the exposed area out of the sunlight to lessen the reactivity of the psoralen. Once you get the chance, wash your exposed area thoroughly with soap and water. Eradication of wild parsnip from your favorite area is also a way to avoid any possible exposure, but be prepared to work at it for awhile. The most effective way of destroying wild parsnip is by pulling each individual plant. This is very time consuming, especially when you need to take so many precautions in the handling of the plant. Spot spraying the individual plants with chemicals such as Roundup and 2,4-D is also very effective, but many times chemical application is not feasible due to the presence of other desirable plant species.

It is my hope that this quick article helps you out in the future and maybe even explains some previous rashes that went unexplained. This isn't a new species that just appeared on the landscape; it has been around for many years. Knowing these new facts will make your outdoor experiences more enjoyable for you and your friends.

Wildlife Watch

Mountain lions in Iowa? Yes really! Maybe you have read or heard about the big cat in our state. There have been confirmed sightings in Fremont, Shelby, and Carroll counties. Tracks have been confirmed in Lyon, Cherokee, Ringgold, and here in Webster County. But mountain lion sightings are still rare in Iowa. As habitat destruction continues, the cat is forced to cover larger and larger territories to find food. Our state's large deer population has no doubt been a factor in the cat's movement farther east of its primarily western range. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources tracks such reports, but they must have confirmation. The tracks are large--4 to 6 inches across--and like domestic cat prints, they do not show claw marks as members of the dog family typically do. Plaster casts are made from the print impressions. If you think you have discovered mountain lion tracks on your property, or for more information, call our conservation board office at 576-4258.

Sources: Des Moines Register and Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources

Roadside Report—IRVM

By Scott Gebers, Roadside Manager

Hello to all and happy summer. In case you haven't noticed, spring has sprung and things are getting hectic here at Webster County IRVM. We have our spray crews out spot spraying for noxious weeds in all the county rights-of-way in Webster County. As has been the case for the past three years, the crews are concentrating on leafy spurge and Canadian thistle again this year and the herbicides we are using seem to be showing results. The crews are saying that patches they have seen in past years are getting smaller if not disappearing altogether.

If you are driving down highway 7 between Ft. Dodge and Manson, you may notice the grass turning brown. The state is doing exactly what we already do here in Webster County—reconstructing prairie in the ditches.

There is a real opportunity for landowners that would like to stop farming their wet spots to get them enrolled in CRP this year. We encourage this as much as possible. Some Webster county landowners are receiving payments of up to \$190.00 per acre. Also, general CRP signup 26 is going on right now. The scheduled cutoff date for sign-ups is May 30, but with enough calls to Washington DC, we can get that extended.

Webster County IRVM won't be doing a whole lot of new reconstructions this year. We have about 15 miles of new constructions from last year that need to be mowed and maintained so most efforts will be concentrated on getting those plantings established. However, if you would like to do a prairie reconstruction on your property or on the county right-of-way adjacent to your property, we'd be happy to help.

We will also be happy to help you with management plans for your property if you would like. With our staff, we can cover almost all habitat situations. If you just want to see more critters running around, give us a call. Ask for any of the wildlife professionals at the Webster County Conservation Board.



Invasive Species

Iowa is the most land-altered state in the country due to industrialization. In fact, only 4% of Iowa has its original vegetation intact. Of all the exotic plants made available to us, one exotic plant in ten will become established, and one out of ten established plants will become invasive. A plant becomes invasive when it enters a foreign system, prospers, and replaces native species.

The common characteristics among invasives are that they are habitat generalists (not specific to a certain area), have quick maturation time, have abundant seed production, establish easily on disturbed sites, and lack natural competitors.

Invasive species harm ecosystems by producing dense monocultures, crowding out native species such as oak seedlings, decreasing the land's economic value, reducing wildlife habitat, and shading out native understory plants. People are the species that is the common vector for most invasive species establishment. The "New World" was different and difficult for the pioneers. It was "tamed" by replacing natural systems with familiar plants from the old world.

Although there are dozens of exotics in Iowa, ISU is targeting 4 species in a survey: garlic mustard, bush honeysuckles, buckthorn, and multiflora rose. Other species of serious threat in Webster County are: leafy spurge, Canada thistle, wild parsnip, crown vetch, sweet clovers, reed canary grass, Japanese knotweed (bamboo), and pampas grass. Leafy spurge is a little known yet very serious threat to pastures especially. It will completely choke out forage plants and is toxic! It is spreading eastward from the grasslands to the west. Get to know these plants and educate yourself on how to control them! We can assist with technical help on control of the exotics.



There is a tendency for people to think of native plants as inferior and exotic plants as superior in form and function. But nothing could be further from reality. There is a perfect landscape plant, herbaceous or woody, for every situation. Native plants are adapted to place, attractive, and provide the type of structure appropriate for native wildlife. Please don't make the mistake of getting an invasive started because once established, it will probably never be eliminated again.

Public EE Programs

Summer-Fall 2003

Webster County Conservation

For more information, contact Karen at 576-4258 or khansen@webstercountytia.org

Canoe Trek

July 5

Location: Dolliver Park to Lehigh (meet at Dolliver boat ramp)
Time: 8:00 am

Experience the beauty and tranquility of the Des Moines River as we canoe with WCCB equipment. Any age is welcome but children must canoe with adult family members. The outing is free but pre-registration is required and limited.



Kalsow Prairie Walk

July 8

Location: Kalsow Prairie (see directions listed separately)
Time: 7:00pm

Naturalists from 3 counties will host this program unfold the life of the prairie through the interpretation of the amazing and unusual flora of this large native prairie. Learn some new plants and how they were used by people long ago.

Star Lab

July 29

Location: ISU Extension office
Time: 7:00 pm

View the night sky from inside the comforts of "dome" — climate mosquitoes! Crawl inside the blow-up dome, sit in the dark, and stellations as the naturalist "star-hops" around the dome walls. nomical folklore and amazing facts about our awesome universe. ing! The program is free and adult supervision is required.



controlled and void of locate nature's con-
Learn some astro-
Stargazing is so relax-
Call to pre-register.

Wild Wednesdays Day Camp

July 2 Kennedy Park
July 9 Dolliver Park
July 16 Brushy Creek SRA
July 30 Kennedy Park

Time: 1:00-3:00 pm
Participants: ages 5-10
Cost: \$5.00 per day
Pre-registration: Yes



Join the naturalist for some afternoons of fun and outdoor exploration. Adult supervision is not required but bug spray, sunscreen, and a water bottle are. Participants will play games, do nature activities and make crafts.

Carp Fishing Tournament

August 9 & 10

Location: Badger Lake at Kennedy Park
Time: Sat., 8:00am-5:00pm and Sun., 8:00am-4:00pm
Participants: Any age
Cost: Free
Pre-registration: Register day of contest

This annual fishing contest's goal is to improve the fishing quality of Badger Lake by reducing the large carp population and to encourage this fun recreational activity. Two age groups will provide plenty of prizes including cash. This activity is for all ages and would be a great family activity.



Public EE Programs Summer-Fall 2003 (pg. 2)

Webster County Conservation

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IOWATER Workshops

Level 1 Workshop

August 11 & 12

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Location: | Bob Heun shelter at John F. Kennedy Park |
| Time: | 5-10:00 pm |
| Participants: | Adults |
| Cost: | \$25.00 covers take-home materials and food |
| Pre-registration: | Yes — contact Karen at 576-4258 |

A variety of session settings, indoors and outdoors, will contain topics such as starting a monitoring plan, the “why-to” and “how-to” of water monitoring, what to do with the data, networking with others in your area concerned with water quality, and some muddy fun!

Water Ecology Workshop

August 22

| | |
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| Location: | South lodge at Dolliver Park |
| Time: | 6-10:00 pm |
| Participants: | Adults (Level 1 required first) |
| Cost: | \$10.00 covers program fees, meals, and testing equipment |
| Pre-registration: | Yes — contact Karen at 576-4258 |

This is an advanced training module which shows that commitment and caring for our natural resource is taken to the next Level!

Secondary Educators Module

August 23

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|-------------------|---|
| Location: | South lodge at Dolliver Park |
| Time: | 9:00 am-3:00 pm |
| Participants: | Adults (Level 1 required first) |
| Cost: | \$10.00 covers program fees, meals, and testing equipment |
| Pre-registration: | Yes — contact Karen at 576-4258 |

This is an advanced training module which shows that commitment and caring for our natural resource is taken to the next Level!

Kalsow Prairie Walk

September 10

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|-----------|---|
| Location: | Kalsow Prairie (see directions listed separately) |
| Time: | 7:00pm |

Witness the late-season bloomers like Big Bluestem, Indian grass, and Compass plant on the prairie and you'll understand why children long ago would get lost on the prairie. Experience the awesome wonder of the prairie and gain a better understanding of the ecology of the area.



Canoe Trek

September 13

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Location: | Kalo to Dolliver Park (meet at Dolliver boat ramp) |
| Time: | 8:00 am |

Experience the beauty and tranquility of the Des Moines River as we canoe with WCCB's canoes, paddles, and life jackets. Limestone bluffs, sandstone cliffs, and various wildlife can be seen on the way. Others with their own equipment may join the group venturing downstream. Any age is welcome but children must canoe with adult family members. The outing is free but pre-registration is required as canoe numbers are limited. Depending on the speed of the river and of the group, the trek could take 2-4 hours.



Directions to Program sites

To Kennedy Park—Located 5 miles north of Fort Dodge (north of the airport) on the west side of P56 or Nelson Ave.

To Liska-Stanek Prairie— Located on P51 south and west of Fort Dodge. Take Hwy 20 west of Hwy 169 for 2 miles; turn south on P51 for 2.5 miles. Park in the Bohemian Hall parking area.

To Kalsow Prairie—Located north and west of Manson. Take Hwy 7 to Manson and turn North onto N65 for approx. 3 miles, then west on gravel for 1 mile. Follow the brown preserve signs.

To Dolliver State Park—Located west of Lehigh. Follow signs from Hwy 50 or Hwy 20.

To Brushy Creek State Rec. Area—Located east of Fort Dodge and Lehigh, and south of Duncombe. Follow the signs from Hwy 20 and from 320th St. heading northeast out of Lehigh. From P73, turn east onto 270th St. and look for the handicapped accessible fishing dock.

To Webster County ISU Extension—From Business 20 going through Fort Dodge, turn onto 8th Street. Turn left at the stop light and make a quick right into the corner parking lot. The Extension office is on the second floor of United Bank of Iowa. Enter the door from the alley and follow the signs.

Critter Corner

Squirrels-- sometimes we love to hate them. They raid our birdfeeders, chew bark off trees, and if given the opportunity, will move into our attics to make our home their home.

The reddish colored squirrels with bushy tails we see cavorting in our trees are eastern fox squirrels, one of 60 different kinds of squirrels found throughout the United States. Although they are most often thought of as nut eaters, the fox squirrel may eat a diet of fruit and seeds from some 100 different plants. They can bury up to 50 nuts an hour and can find them later, even under a foot of snow, by using their keen sense of smell.

A squirrel uses its attractive tail in a variety of ways. It's used for balance when climbing and running along branches and as a small parachute when jumping from tree to tree. It can also be used as a warning by switching back and forth, and as a blanket to keep warm. The squirrel is the only animal that can sit in the shadow of its own tail.



Squirrels build several nests of leaves and sticks high in tall trees and will move from one nest to another to escape bad weather, storm damage, or predators. Several squirrels in a family will sleep in one nest at night.

Except during mating, tree dwelling squirrels like the fox squirrel live out their entire lives within about 200 yards from home.

The Diggings

Introducing.....A new WCCB area!

Donated to The Nature Conservancy by Susan Atwell in 1968, The Diggings was recently purchased by the conservation board to help preserve the sight of numerous coal excavation areas. Located on the eastern bank of the Des Moines River in the town of Fort Dodge, these 7 acres share a rich wildflower display in the spring. It is also dominated by black oak, red oak, white oak, hickory, black maple, ash, and basswood. An interpretive nature trail, established by Eagle Scouts, takes hikers on a scenic tour of the property.



Due to the wonderful management of the area by Howard and Barbara Jensen over the years, this area is a great example of how a native woodland should look. The bush honeysuckles will probably always be a problem because of neighboring woodlands loaded with this invasive, but with continued work, the area will continue to be a great place to enjoy the peace and quiet of nature.

To get to this quiet place, take N. 15th St. north (toward the airport). Turn west on 26th Ave. N., turn south at the T, go 1 block and turn right onto 25th Ave. N. The area will be approx. 5-6 blocks straight west. Look for the wooden sign.

Different Swan Pair Add New Hope to Restoration Program

The arrival of a new pair of trumpeter swans this spring to Moorland Pond has added a new glimmer of hope for more successful reproduction (more babies or cygnets), the real goal behind these swans in Webster County and throughout Iowa. Many residents have been following the trumpeter swan restoration efforts and may be curious about the status of these magnificent birds.

Iowa's only native nesting swan, the trumpeter swan is the largest North American waterfowl, weighing up to 35 lbs. with up to an 8 ft. wingspan. They nested historically throughout Iowa, the last time in 1883 in Hancock County. The loss of precious wetland habitat and overhunting caused their decline. Today, a few Iowa counties have witnessed wild nesting trumpeter swans again for the first time in over 100 years, and Webster County will hopefully see the same results some day.

In Webster County, the restoration hot spot is Moorland Pond, the borrow pit near the town of Moorland. In the fall of 1997, the DNR released the first group to spend the winter at this pond which is one of just a few sites in the entire state set up to sustain swans throughout the winter. Then every spring all the swans except the bonded pair are caught, either in the catch pen or on the water, and are transported to a place where a large migrating flock is established. These swans will become free-fliers, and hopefully will find a mate and a nesting site, with the end result being wild free-flying nesting trumpeters, a repeat of history. Capturing the swans every spring is time and labor intensive but it decreases the territorialism and increases reproductive success.

The floating nest structure at Moorland Pond is sporting a new female (pen) with a new male (cob) not far away. Over the past five years, the original swans had hatched out 3 young total (1 per year the first 3 years and none the last 2 years). In 2002, the DNR slipped an incubating egg into the nest resulting in the rearing of a "foster cygnet" at Moorland Pond. However, due to our moderate (at best) reproductive success with the original pair, the DNR decided to grant us a new bonded pair that hopefully will produce more young. She began setting on the nest recently and gave our staff a breath of new hope toward reaching our goal in the trumpeter swan saga. So, be watching for birth announcements in early July or better yet, head out to the pond with binoculars in hand and get a close-up look for yourself.



Swan Nesting, 2003

Over the past five years, several people have given assistance to the program. Steve Johanson of Johanson Feed & Milling in Badger has donated corn storage, provides great service and has great interest in the swans. Roger Doster of Moorland has donated his time and labor in helping feed the swans on a regular basis and has even mowed portions of the trail. Other volunteers have included Rosemary Thompson, Larry Thompson, Jerry Richman, Kenny Thompson, and Floyd Ferrin. And our local Pheasants Forever group donated half the cost of the aeration system for winter use of the pond. Thank you all!



Swan family at Moorland Pond, 2002

The trumpeter swan restoration program is more than bringing back these endangered swans. It's greater mission is to "trumpet the cause for wetlands". The trumpeter swans can only be as successful as their habitat provides them. The return of wild nesting trumpeters to Iowa would be an awesome sight, especially right here in Webster County. Help us trumpet the cause for wetlands.

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NEW BOOK—*Sylvan T. Runkel Citizen of the Natural World*, a biography of Iowa's foremost naturalist by Larry A. Stone & Jon Stravers, has hit the book stores, and for conservation enthusiasts this is exciting news. He was a gentle, patient man who had a great perception of the natural world. He captivated 3 generations of Iowans as a conservationist, musician, adventurer, teacher, writer, WWII veteran, TV personality, humorist, scout leader and pilot. Read it and add this important Iowan's life to your bookshelf.