



Pathways to Nature

Winter-Spring 2006 Issue

Newsletter of the Webster County Conservation Board

A Reason To Celebrate

by Matt Cosgrove, Director

As I look back over the past year, one word comes to mind almost immediately--“celebration”. The 2005 season was a banner year to celebrate milestones in the County Conservation System.

In 1965 the Iowa Legislature passed the law that established the County Conservation System. This law allowed each county to establish a local Conservation Board to provide recreation and resource conservation on a countywide basis. The system started with humble beginnings, and now after fifty years has developed into one of the greatest local conservation programs in the nation. This system continues to grow and provide a local voice for outdoor recreation, resource conservation, environmental education, habitat establishment, and quality of life. A big “thank you” to the citizens of Webster County and the State of Iowa for making this choice to have a local conservation system that compliments the state and federal programs! I look forward to the promise of the next fifty years in County Conservation!

The County Conservation Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) also celebrated a 20th Anniversary of providing law enforcement training and networking for over 120 County Conservation Officers throughout Iowa. Webster County currently has four certified officers that belong to the ranks of this professional law enforcement organization.

Locally, Kennedy Memorial Park celebrated forty years of providing outdoor recreation for citizens and visitors of Webster County. The Conservation Board recognized the event with a series of free public programs called “A Season of Celebration”. The programs included fishing tournaments, maple syrup festival, wildlife programs, canoeing programs, and a Des Moines River clean-up. The final event of the season was a birthday bash held on October 1st. The event consisted of free camping, live raptor programs, trumpeter swans, chain-saw carving, canoeing, dragon boat rides, Indian games, kids activities, and food. The event was a huge success that really captured the true purpose of Kennedy Park – family outdoor recreation. Thank you to everyone that attended the celebration and donated time and money to make the birthday a success!



With 2006 upon us there is no need to stop the celebration. The County Conservation System is alive and well in the hearts and minds of citizens all over Iowa. Quality of life issues are becoming increasingly more important as businesses and cities work to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. County Conservation will certainly play a major role in the next fifty years to make Iowa communities a great place to live, play, and raise a family. We are up to the challenge!

Conservation News

WCCB Update

Local news about the Webster County Conservation Board

Thank you Board Members

Two board members have recently retired from the Webster County Conservation Board. Joan Harp served on the board for 18 years and Dave Cramer served 7 years. The Webster County Conservation staff and remaining board members would like to thank these two special people for their dedication to conservation and interest in the environment. Their time and commitment to the board's mission is much appreciated.

"Volunteers are not paid—not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless." Unknown

Invasive Species Control

If you've hiked the trails at Kennedy Park, you may have noticed the piles of trees and branches and wondered what we're doing. The north side of Badger Lake for decades has been overtaken by a couple of small tree species in particular, namely Honeysuckle (*Lonicera tartarica* and *maackii*) and Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*). These trees change the makeup of our native woodlands by out-competing with the native saplings in the under story. So, those little oaks and hickories that should be growing under the canopy of the very tall trees NEVER see daylight. In the end, the woodlands becomes a Honeysuckle/Buckthorn forest rather than an Oak/Hickory forest that it should be. Just try walking through an area dominated by Honeysuckles and Buckthorns....no one can!!!! Neither can many animals.



Our goal over several years is to cut out these invaders, pile them into huge brush piles, treat the stumps with a herbicide, and burn the area to restore the native species that were once present. If this sounds like fun to you, please let us know. We are looking for volunteers willing to work on a work crew or at their leisure individually. A sturdy pair of loppers may be all one needs.

What are we trying to preserve? Very little of Iowa's native habitat remains since pre-settlement. The authentic woodlands, prairies, and wetlands with their unique features and diversity will be gone. If we can regain control and keep it, we will have something to pass on to future generations. Be a part of passing on some of Iowa's REAL habitat. It's very rewarding!

REAP

REAP (Resource Enhancement And Protection) is a way to invest in our outdoors, our heritage, and our people. REAP could have legislative funding as high as \$20 million per year, but has averaged far less. The need for REAP funding by local communities throughout Iowa has been more than 3 times the available money. REAP's \$20 million investment will enhance rural and urban economies and quality of life; retain young people and expand our quality of work force; diversify education for students of all ages; and provide stewardship of our land and water.

Attend the REAP public assembly on Thurs., March 16 at 7:00 pm at Kennedy Park's Heun shelter, located 5 miles north of Fort Dodge. Stay informed! Be a voice!

Partners in Conservation

Friends of Webster County Conservation

Become a Steward of the Land



Mission Statement

The mission of the Friends of Webster County Conservation is to provide awareness, appreciation, and the preservation of Webster County's natural resources for future generations.

What is the Friends Group?

The Friends of Webster County Conservation is a non-profit organization of people, like you, who are concerned about providing opportunities for people to interact and learn about our natural environment. The Friends group was established in 2005 by a group of concerned citizens who care about conservation and recreation issues in Webster County. The group provides a valuable link between local citizens and the conservation board.

The general purpose of the Friends group is to provide an opportunity for local citizens to participate in recreation and conservation issues in Webster County. The group also provides an avenue to accept donations and gifts and conduct fundraising activities.

Why should I become a Friend?

If you are a person who:

- Cares about the natural environment and would like to help preserve it.
- Cares about expanding the educational & recreational programs for Webster County.
- Wants to develop a network of supporters and volunteers.
- Wants to secure supplemental finances to help support local recreation and conservation programs.

What are the benefits of becoming a Friend?

- You will be part of shaping the recreation and conservation programs in Webster County.
- You can participate in annual activities and programs for Friends.
- You will receive free admission to environmental programs and events.
- You will receive a newsletter on upcoming events.
- You will ensure a legacy of land stewardship for future generations.



Board of Directors

Kirk Seltz – President
Brad Luke – Vice President
Laura Gurnett – Secretary
Jerry Beck – Treasurer

Membership Levels

Individual	\$15.00
Family	\$25.00
Business	\$250.00

If you are interested in becoming a Friend, or would like additional information please contact the Conservation Office (515) 576-4258.

"A Friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Thank You

A warm and generous thank you to EVERYONE that helped with 2005's Birthday Bash, Maple Syrup Festival, & River Clean-up. And thank you to the Friends Group members for their hard work. Many of these programs could NOT happen without volunteers!!!

Public EE Programs

Winter-Spring 2006

Webster County Conservation

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

Nest Box Building

Sun., Feb. 5
2:00 pm



Kennedy Park
Cost listed below

Building nest boxes for our wild birds and mammals is a fun and memorable pastime shared with family. Because of habitat loss, nest boxes have become very important. Call or e-mail your choice of boxes and a pre-cut nest box will be ready for you to build.

The choices are: Wren, Bluebird, Chickadee \$7; Robin, Barn swallow \$10
Bat, Screech Owl, Saw whet Owl, Kestrel \$13 Flicker \$16

Cross-Country Skiing & Snowshoeing

Sat., Feb. 11
10:00 am-3:00 pm

Kennedy Park
Free



Cross country skiing is a great aerobic exercise and an environmentally friendly winter activity. If you tend to hate winter, one of the ways to make it go faster is to bundle up and try to enjoy it. No charge for this program.

Rental Info.: The public may rent the skis & snowshoes on weekends upon availability. Equipment will be picked up no later than 4:00 pm on Friday and returned no later than 4:00 pm the following Monday. Ski packages and snowshoes rent for \$10 per adult, and kids under 18 with a parent are FREE. Damage deposit is \$100 per set.

mentally-
best ways to

Night Hike

Sat., Feb. 25
Sat., May 6

6:00 pm
7:00 pm

Dolliver Park (watch for signs)
Dolliver Park (watch for signs)

Free
Free

Bring the family and friends for an evening of tracking and owling. Learn about the interesting characteristics of owls and then brave the elements for owl calling and tracking with special effects. Dress warmly in hopes of seeing or hearing some silent fliers and other nighttime wildlife. Flashlights welcome but not necessary.



Afternoon with the Whitetail

Sun., March 12
1:00 pm

Kennedy Park's Heun shelter
Free

Come hear a whitetail deer program by the DNR deer biologist and bring your deer rack to have it scored. Learn more facts about deer populations in Iowa and management practices.

REAP Assembly

Thurs., March 16
7:00 pm

Kennedy Park's Heun shelter
Free

For residents of: **Calhoun, Hamilton, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Webster, Wright counties.** REAP is a legislative fund that provides soil and water quality protection; parks, trails, and wildlife areas; conservation education; historic resource protection; roadside beautification; and public land management. To learn more about REAP and your county, go to www.iowareap.com

Maple Syrup Festival

Sat., March 18
1:00 pm



Enjoy the sweet, simmering family to learn about how and how yummy it tastes. Bring the whole family for hands-on activities and a tasty maple syrup treat.

Kennedy Park's Heun shelter
Free

smell and taste of homemade maple syrup. Bring the family to learn about how ancestors used sap long ago, how trees are tapped, how sap is cooked, and how yummy it tastes. Bring the whole family for hands-on activities and a tasty maple syrup treat.

O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors) program



(3rd Tuesday of even numbered months—Feb., April, June)

Tuesdays—Feb. 21 / April 18 / June 20

11:00 am

Kennedy Park's Heun shelter

This program targets our active seniors. An environmental program will precede a noon lunch. Weather permitting, the group will take part in an outdoor activity. Always wear good walking shoes. Topics are yet to be determined. Pre-registration for lunch is required by 4:30 pm the Friday before each program. If interested, call or email Karen at 576-4258 or khansen@webstercountyia.org



Earth Day Cache In -Trash Out

Sat., April 22
10:00 am

Brushy Creek SRA—meet at the beach
Free

Learn how to geo-cache (find a prize hidden in nature using GPS units) and take out the trash as you go. Bring a GPS unit, gloves, and a trash bag. Old clothes and shoes are recommended. Some GPS units will be available on loan from us; we'll have some garbage sacks too.

(Cut & Clip)

Conservation Calendar



Sun., Feb. 5—Nest Box Building Workshop — Kennedy Park; 2:00 pm

Sat., Feb. 11—Cross Country Skiing — Kennedy Park; 10:00 am-3:00 pm

Tues., Feb. 21—O.W.L.S. program — Kennedy Park; 11:00 am

Sat., Feb. 25—Night Hike — Dolliver Park; 6:00 pm

Sun., March 12—Afternoon with the Whitetail — Kennedy Park; 1:00 pm

Thurs., March 16—REAP Assembly — Kennedy Park; 7:00 pm

Sat., March 18—Maple Syrup Festival — Kennedy Park; 1:00 pm

Tues., April 18—O.W.L.S. program — Kennedy Park; 11:00 am

Sat., April 22—Earth Day Cache In-Trash Out — Brushy Creek; 10:00 am

Sat., May 6—Night Hike — Dolliver Park; 7:00 pm

Tues., June 20—O.W.L.S. program—Kennedy Park; 11:00 am

The Trumpeter Swan "Roller Coaster" Ride

by Patrick Shehan



Year 2005 has been an eventful, yet disappointing year for the trumpeter swans at Moorland Pond. Our resident female swan died during the time her eggs were hatching. We were able to get out to the nest early enough to rescue two hatched cygnets and take the remaining three eggs to an incubator. Happily, all five swans survived and are now part of the free-flying population of trumpeter swans.

The DNR placed a new female (H65) onto Moorland Pond in January. Our resident male (2E0) took a quick liking to his new arrival and the courtship was underway. After we removed the wintering swans in March, we moved the nest to the middle of the pond. Time and care was taken to ensure a proper nesting platform complete with willow branches and straw. But to our disappointment, the new female was not impressed enough to use it. We figured there would be no cygnets.



Just as our hopes of cygnets were dashed, a surprising sighting was found. What appeared to be a large goose nest or a muskrat hut near shore was actually a swan nest. This was very exciting! Because of concerns about predators being more able to attack a nest so close to shore, our staff actually had mixed emotions about this "authentic" nest. I braved my way past leery and aggressive adult swans to count the eggs and discovered 7 eggs on the nest! Our hopes were back up.

I monitored the nest closely and as the "due date" came and went and no eggs hatched, our hopes dashed once more. However, Dave Hoffman with the Iowa DNR swan project had two orphaned cygnets needing foster care. Our hopes had risen again!

Dave and I attempted to place these young birds in the nest for the swans to adopt. But after countless mosquito bites and numerous attempts to convince the adult pair that this was a good idea, we decided to remove the cygnets for their own safety. Our hopes had once more fallen for the last time.

We have great expectations for the swans this upcoming spring. Maybe next year there will be 6 or 7 more trumpeters flying around the state that originated in Webster County.

Helping Hunters With Disabilities

Local Eagle Scout Josh Lowery is making it possible for hunters with disabilities to enjoy the great outdoors. Josh and a group of scout friends recently constructed a hunting blind that is designed for people with disabilities. The project is a partnership with the Webster County Conservation Board that will allow people with disabilities to reserve the blind by calling the conservation office. The blind is portable and will be used on county and state hunting areas. Thanks Josh and friends!



Beisser's Lumber, Webster County Ducks Unlimited, and the Webster Co. Conservation Foundation donated the material for the blind. Park Ranger, Dave Scherff, helped with the design and construction. If you are interested in reserving the blind, call the conservation office 576-4258.

Conservation Clippings

Plant Some Shade

Residential Tree Program



In October 2004, MidAmerican Energy, the Iowa DNR Bureau of Forestry, and the Webster County Conservation Board conducted the Plant Some Shade Tree Program. This program was very successful and Webster County is fortunate to be holding it again this spring.

Residential MidAmerican Energy customers in Webster and surrounding counties can have the opportunity to purchase trees that will help cut energy costs and spruce up your home landscape. These trees will add greater diversity throughout the community, which should reduce the risk of disease wiping out a whole neighborhood with one main species.

The potted 6 to 8 ft. trees will cost approximately \$25, will be suitable to Iowa's climate, and will be purchased from local nurseries. The tree species for this spring program are yet to be determined.

Trees will be available for pickup on Saturday May 13, 2006 at John F. Kennedy Park, 1415 Nelson Ave, Fort Dodge. There is a limit of 2 trees per person and are purchased on a first-come, first-ordered basis. Any remaining trees will be sold at the end of the day. Watch for upcoming information for this spring's Plant Some Shade Residential Tree Program.

Moorland Pond

Improvements

by Pat Shehan

Last winter, the WCCB was approved for a Fish Habitat Stamp Grant for a lake-shore-armoring project. Since Moorland Pond is located in a very windswept area of Webster County, the south and east shoreline has sloughed away as waves pound the shore. Thus, it was decided to install riprap on the south and east shoreline to reduce erosion and create a more gradual slope.



This spring, the Webster County Conservation staff will be laying erosion-control fabric on the shoreline. A private contractor will then haul limestone to be placed on top of the fabric to absorb wave action.

Because trumpeter swans reside on the pond, willow trees and deep-rooted native plants will be planted on the remaining shoreline. This will create more diversity and a more natural habitat for these endangered birds.



The Demise of Scots Pines

Pines have established a niche in America's landscape due to their diversity, adaptability, and beauty. However, a disease called pine wilt has killed so many Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*) over the past 20 years that this species is no longer being recommended in plantings.

This disease has hit Kennedy Park and the clean-up work on dozens of dead pines will linger for years. The Children's Forest at Kennedy Park currently looks like a tornado clean-up event.

Pine wilt typically kills Scots pine within a few weeks to a few months. The needles may turn shades of green, gray, and brown or turn brown all at once. Needles usually remain on the dead tree for a year or more. A good website to learn more is: www.forestry.iastate.edu/ext/woodland

In the Midwest, more than 90% of the trees killed by pine wilt have been Scots pine. Native pine species are usually not susceptible to pine wilt, so if planning to plant an evergreen, choose a species besides Scots pine, preferably a native species like white pine and red cedar.

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Webster County Conservation
1415 Nelson Ave.
Fort Dodge, IA. 50501

Webster County Conservation

www.webstercountyia.org

STAFF

Matt Cosgrove	Director
Dave Scherff	Park Ranger
Pat Shehan	Park Ranger
Andy Hockinson	Park Ranger
Karen Roosa Hansen	Naturalist
Erin Meehan	Naturalist Aid
<i>Vacant</i>	Vegetation Specialist
Cindy Knickerbocker	Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS

Jim Eslick	Gowrie
Jim Kersten	Fort Dodge
Brad Luke	Fort Dodge
Orville O'Connell	Fort Dodge
Mark A. Thompson	Fort Dodge

Email: conservation@webstercountyia.org

Five Year Plan

The Webster County Conservation Board is currently working with Midas Council of Governments to update the Capital Improvement Plan for county conservation facilities. The plan will help the conservation board and staff focus on improvements and projects for the next five years. If you have any suggestions or comments about future plans and ideas for the board, please contact the Conservation Director or any of the board members. We are interested in your input! (515) 576-4258 or conservation@webstercountyia.org

"Within the web, all forms of life are struggling, not only to survive, but to expand." Unknown

THE WEBSTER COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD IN THE PROVISION OF SERVICES AND FACILITIES TO THE PUBLIC DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST ANYONE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, SEX, CREED, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE OR HANDICAP. IF ANYONE BELIEVES HE OR SHE HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO SUCH DISCRIMINATION, HE OR SHE MAY FILE A COMPLAINT ALLEGING DISCRIMINATION WITH EITHER THE WEBSTER COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD OR THE OFFICE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, U.S. DEPT. OF INTERIOR, WASHINGTON D.C. 20240