Clinton County Conservation

The Heron

Quarterly Newsletter of Clinton County Conservation
Volume 32 Number 2 Spring 2010

Eco Tourism Center Moving Forward

3M Foundation Gives to Eco Center

by Walt Wickham, Executive Director

Over the past four years, volunteers, businesses and industry have come together to make the Mississippi Eco Tourism Center more than just a dream. With a recent generous, donation from the 3M Foundation, we are now one step closer to making the dream a reality. On March 18th, Cordova, Illinois 3M plant manager Pat Thornton and quality assurance manager Andy Isenhour presented representatives of the Clinton County Conservation Foundation with a $100,000 check for the Eco Center! That brings the total fundraising for the project to just over 1.9 million dollars!

The Cordova, Illinois 3M plant lies just across the Mississippi River and is less than 1.5 miles from Rock Creek Marina & Campground, the planned site of the Mississippi Eco Tourism Center. After several phone calls, emails and meetings with our neighbors to the east, the Cordova 3M staff became strong supporters of the Eco Center project and said they would be happy to help the Conservation Foundation make a grant application to the 3M Foundation. After months of waiting, word came that our grant application was approved and a check was soon to follow! I think the local 3M folks were just as excited about the news as we were!

Through their strong support of the Eco Tourism Center, 3M has demonstrated a commitment to awareness of local environmental issues and the protection of, and education about, the river that borders their manufacturing facility. We owe a very big THANK YOU to the good folks of 3M.

While the Conservation Foundation now has the dollars needed to begin construction of the facility, fund raising efforts are not over yet. An estimated $250,000 to $350,000 is still needed to pay for educational displays and furnishings for the facility. The 9,000 gallon aquarium that will be the centerpiece of the facility is estimated to cost another $250,000. Please show your support by sending the Conservation Foundation a check today. Donations of any size can be made to the Clinton County Conservation Foundation, P.O. Box 68, Grand Mound, Iowa 52751.

From left: Don Bartels, Judie Petersen, Jim Haring, Mark Roberts, Norlan Hinke, Patrick Thornton, Andy Isenhour, Marty Murrell, Walt Wickham, John Schnack.

What the Mississippi River Ecotourism Center (MRETC) means to me.

by Jim Haring, President, Clinton Co. Conservation Foundation

As a new member of the Clinton County Conservation Board (CCCB) way back when, there was talk about building a new facility at Rock Creek. An architect had been hired to make a conceptual drawing through a grant from the Clinton County Community Development Commission (CCCDC). There was talk about a new camp store, and then a nature center and then a dining hall, and when discussions were getting serious an environmental education classroom was added. That's when it got me to thinking, we really don't have a place for kids at Rock Creek unless it is on the Blue Heron, in a canoe on the water or maybe study along the river bank. What happens if it rains or some other form of inclement weather. Put them on the bus and send them back to school? To me this was not an acceptable way to treat kids. We must persevere in our efforts to close the gap on "No Child Left Indoors".

The public school system has failed in its endeavor to teach environmental education, primarily because of dollars. And bussing for field trips has gone the same route. The Clinton County Conservation Foundation (CCCF) has been a tremendous help with its program to provide reimbursable grants to county schools that travel to county parks. Don't think for a moment that environmental ed does not impact our younger generation. I personally have experienced what it can do.

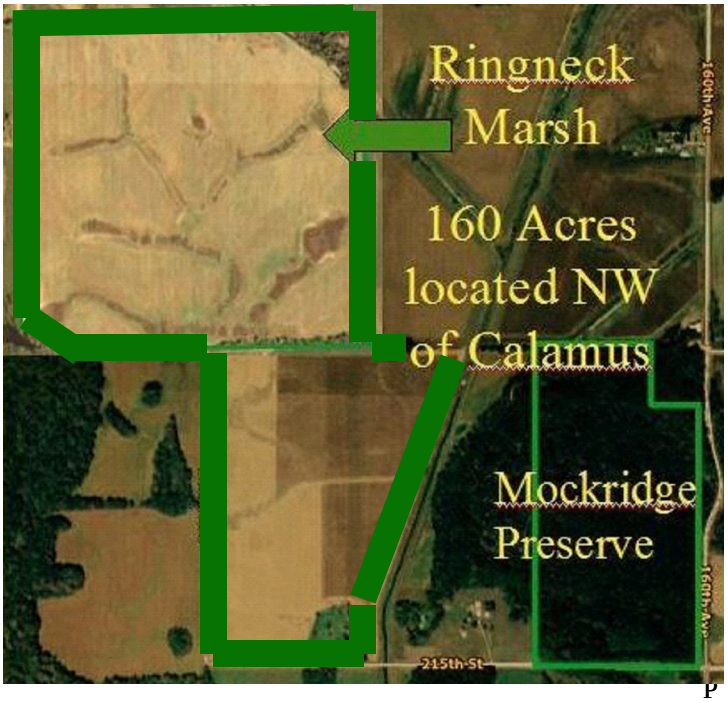
Yes, it has been many years in the making. We now can see the end of our endeavors. Many people in Clinton County have worked hard to raise the $2 million and we have persevered. Raising that much money has been a great experience for me and taught me many things. You cannot believe how many nice and generous people there are. I am sure that within the next year you will see a new MRETC rising from the ground at Rock Creek.

Yes, we need a new camp store. Yes we need a new dinning space where people can gather. And yes, a nature center will be nice, BUT A NEW ENVIORMENTAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM HOORAY!!! Rock Creek Park and the new Mississippi River Eco-Tourism Center will be Clinton County's "FIELD OF DREAMS" and someone whispered in my ear "if you build it they will come".

It's All In A Name...Ringneck

by Jessica Steines, Interpretive Naturalist

We'll start with our latest land acquisition appropriately named Ringneck Marsh. Many people have asked why ringneck? How many times do you see a ringneck duck? It is a wetland complex so surely ringneck pheasants will not call it home, right? Or, what are ringneck snakes? The name comes easily after a little reasoning. There is a beautiful migratory duck named ringneck duck. Let's not forget to mention the most common nesting duck in Iowa, the mallard with the drake having a bold white ring around its neck below its emerald colored head. Plus this is a grassland too and sees the likes of the ringneck pheasant. There could also be ringneck snakes too for all we know.



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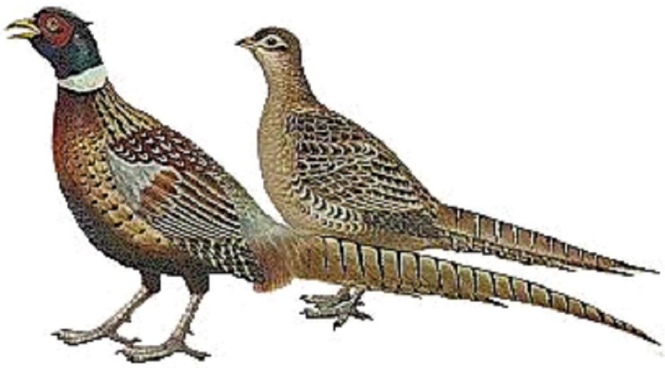
For ducks, Ringneck Marsh is going to be a much needed resting spot for not only the ringneck duck but also the other migratory waterfowl. Eastern Iowa is part of the Mississippi Flyway, a corridor that is full of resting spots, cover, and food for all sorts of migrating birds like songbirds. And with the Wapsipinicon River next to the marsh it is a nice resting spot along this bird highway. It is amazing how nature works. With the spring thaw and floods, all the wallows that were created at the marsh will be full and ready for the migrating birds. Ringneck Marsh is 160 acres; a mosaic of 117 acres of prairie, 40 acres of wetlands, and 3 acres of trees. Last spring, county conservation burnt as much as they could to stimulate prairie plant growth and create a more diverse habitat into an already complex area.

Looking at Ringneck Marsh, this will be a great place to raise game birds. The area has thick cover to hide from predators. It offers protection from the winter elements. It has areas with sparse grasses that are good for young birds to hunt for insects and seeds. Sparsely covered areas also make good spots for young chicks to warm up in the early morning sun.

This winter a gravel parking lot was installed near the center of the property. It is in the plans to install a parking lot on the northwest corner of the property, the south edge and a viewing platform near the center parking area for visitors to get a better view of the marsh. This past January the Iowa Habitat Stamp Committee Awarded to the Clinton CCB a grant to help purchase an additional 100 acres to the south of the current marsh. Once it is restored, it will be very similar to the rest of the wetland.

Ringneck ducks are a medium sized diving duck and is said to be the most common diving ducks on small ponds during migration. A fast flier which never migrates in big groups, these ducks undertake a longer migration than most other diving ducks. They over-winter in the southern United States and Mexico. Then they migrate to the northern United States to breed and spend their summer in Canada. Nests are bowl shaped on dry land near bodies of water. This bird dives shallow for plants, mollusks, insects and small fish. It has a bump or peak at the back of the head with a bold white ring around the bill, which is more conspicuous than the narrow purple band around the already dark neck for which it named. Males have a black head, chest, back and rump with gray sides and a white stripe up the shoulder. Like most female ducks they have a more earthy brown color to blend in but have a white eye ring with a faint white ring around a black bill.

The ringneck pheasant was introduced into North America from Asia and is established over much of the continent, especially in agricultural lands. Many of us know what these birds look like but just to make sure I'll continue. The birds are a medium chicken-like bird with a long tail, often held cocked up at an angle, with wings long and rounded in flight. Their flight is usually low with a flap, flap and glide pattern and their call sounds like opening a creaky fence.



The male is very colorful and is a popular game bird. The males have a bare, red face with an iridescent green neck with lighter tufts above and behind eyes. There is a white ring around neck, hence its name. Its breast is maroon with its flanks orange with a grayish rump. The tail is long and pointed, brown with dark barring. A spur halfway up leg is used for sparing with other males during breeding. In short, females are a mottled brown with small black spots on their back and a shorter tail. While scratching on ground, it digs with its bill for food. They eat seeds, especially cultivated grain, grasses, leaves, roots, wild fruits, nuts and insects. They prefer agricultural land, especially cultivated lands interspersed with grass ditches, hedges, marshes, woodland borders, and brushy groves. They nest on the ground, in tall grass or weeds. The nest is sparsely lined with vegetation with a few breast feathers from the female. An important need is bare ground to take frequent dust baths. With the last few years of deep snow, numerous floods, plus the removal of fence rows, waterways and other habitat lining agricultural property, the number of pheasants has decreased in the area. Hopefully with land being enrolled in habitat building programs and having conservation managed public lands this favorite game's numbers will rebound even with unfavorable weather.

Ringneck snakes are common throughout nearly all of Iowa except for parts of north central Iowa. Like the majority of Iowa's 27 species of snake, they are protected under state law. This particular snake is a small Iowa species that ranges from 10 - 15 inches in length. It is plain brownish, black, bluish black, or slate colored above. It has no back or head markings except for a usually yellow or orange ring around the neck, though rarely, the ring may be incomplete. The belly is orange and has many small, black spots. The underside of the tail is bright red. When alarmed, they may coil their tails into a tight spiral showing the bright red underside. Generally in nature, red means STOP, I taste bad or poisonous, but with this snake it is just a clever ploy. Ringneck snakes are a woodland species in Iowa.

These snakes are very secretive and spend their days hiding under debris. They are generally active at dawn or dusk. Ringneck snakes eat earthworms, soft-bodied insects, salamanders, frogs, small snakes, lizards, and newborn rodents. This is Iowa's smallest constricting snake. The female lays four or five eggs under rocks or rotting logs in summer. The young are about four inches in length at hatching. These snakes are completely harmless and rarely attempt to bite. If they do try to bite, their mouth would be too small and the skin on our palms to thick to puncture. There are some woodlands around Ringneck Marsh but I am unsure if these snakes are located in the vicinity. If not, they are close by because they call Clinton County home. This last summer the county conservation obtained a couple specimens of these snakes to share with the public. Look in our calendar of events for a Snakes of Iowa presentation or visit one of our nature centers to sneak a peak at these small and beautiful creatures.

I encourage you to get out and explore the many other creatures that inhabit (not just the ones named ringneck) the Ringneck Marsh. It is located just northwest of Calamus, just look for the brown signs starting on the county road heading north of town.

Spring, A Sign of Change

by Eric Wright, Park Officer, East District

With spring finally here signs of change can be found in our parks. Some major changes are starting to take place once again at Rock Creek. These changes are visible to visitors as soon as they come into the park. Several projects are happening to better serve the public and enhance their experience at the park.

The four small cabins that had originally sat on the right hand side of the main road when you entered the park have been moved to a new location and placed on poles above ground to prevent potential flood damage. The cabins will have decks and heaters installed to allow for a more comfortable stay.

The new temporary store will be open and ready for business in late April. The old store will no longer be used and is set for demolition this summer to make room for the construction of the new Mississippi River Eco-Tourism Center.

The upgrade to campsites one through twelve should be completed by May. The new 50-30-20 amp pedestals and upgraded wire and electric supply panel is a much needed improvement to these sites and should be able to handle power loads of the new campers on a full weekend.

When the above mentioned projects are completed, construction of a new dump station will begin. Plans for the dump station are for the location to be moved to the former location of cabins one through four. This should allow for less congestion of the road and easier access for the campers.

To our future visitors I would like to take the time to apologize now for any inconvenience that may occur from the construction that is going to be taking place at Rock Creek. Planning has been done to lesson the impact that the construction will have. Along with construction of the Eco Center, Brad and I hope to renovate the interior of the Wood Duck cabin.

Thank you for your continued support of our dreams. With your support you are making Clinton County a better place to live. Our parks are for you, the public, to enjoy and ultimately bring a better life to those that get out and experience it.

See you in the park!

Water Trails Everywhere

by Chuck Jacobsen, Interpretative Naturalist

On April 17th we will be opening a 55-mile water trail on the Wapsipinicon River. Its dedication has been a long-awaited event and marks not the final step of the work that goes into such a thing but merely the completion of the first stages.

The first step was realizing the need. The river already existed and has been used as a trail for thousands of years. So how could there suddenly be a need? The need comes through human use and abuse. The issue with use is safety while the abuse factor spans the river's entire watershed from its ridge tops to its bottoms including industrial, agricultural, domestic and recreation users. With use we must consider safety and with abuse we must expose the sources and illuminate them to restore the stream's health and preserve public health.

From its conception the Clinton County Conservation Board realized the fact that we use the Wapsipinicon. And has since endeavored to create public access to the river. But just building boat ramps isn't enough. People can then get to the resource but may not know how to use it properly. In this case the not knowing can put people in jeopardy. Moving water is relentless and ever changing and users should be guided, trained and experienced before they risk a trip down any stream. Even experienced travelers can find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings which can add to the risk factor. The conservation department does what it can to educate and even train the public in boat safety through informational pamphlets, clinics and guided expeditions.

With the water trail we have added informational kiosks with maps and descriptions of the river, wildlife and surrounding areas. There are also way-finding signs both along the river and roadways. This signage points the way, recognizes amenities (drinking water sources, toilets, trails, camping/no-camping, etc.) and gives important distance information. Doing so we've created a water trail; an information system to generate knowledge and a concern for safety while using the river.

From locating the public accesses to a paddler out on the trail and in need of assistance; maps, signs and descriptions of the river are important and can be a life saver. Landowners near access points have noticed the signs going up and some are less than thrilled with the idea of inviting more use of the river and the public roadways that lead to it. We've even had a couple instances of road-signs being pulled down and even stolen. This could have terrible implications. Imagine some day a rescue team trying to get to someone in trouble on the river. That sign along the roadway directing rescuers could give them the seconds they need to save lives where its absence could be all it takes to cost lives. Please help us to keep the trail system in tact and report any missing signs or mischief.

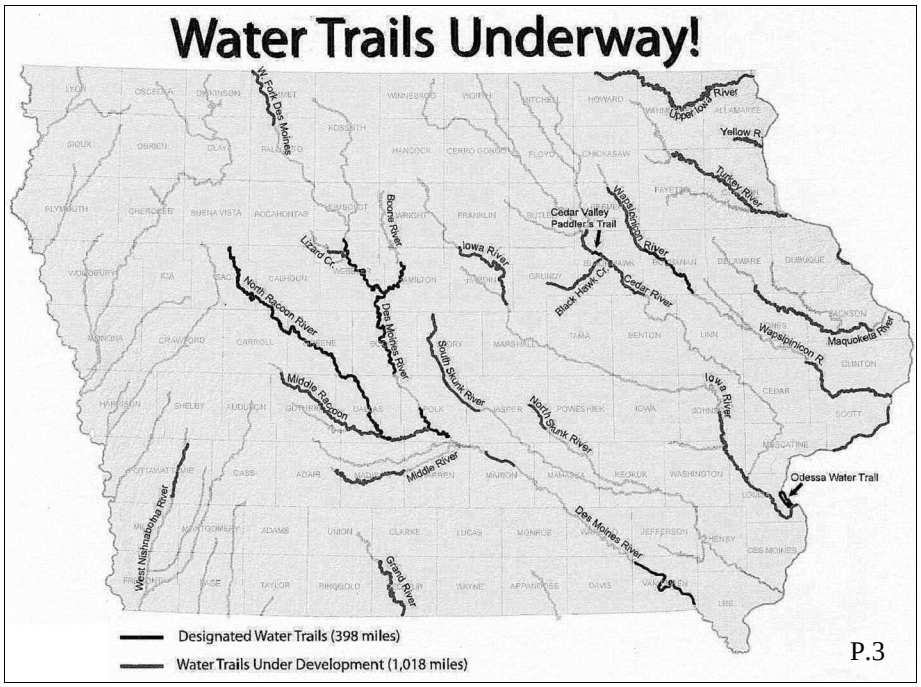
Other Designated Water Trails in Iowa include:

- The Raccoon River – In Sac, Carroll, Calhoun, Green and Dallas Counties.
- The Des Moines River – In Webster, Boone, Polk and Van Buren Counties.
- The Boone River - In Hamilton County.
- The Wapsipinicon River - In Buchanan County.
- Lake Odessa Water Trail in Louisa County.
- The Cedar Valley Paddlers Trail in Waterloo.

Water Trails that are still underway include:

- The Upper Iowa river in Howard, Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties.
- The Yellow River in Allamakee County.
- The Maquoketa River in Delaware, Jones and Jackson Counties.
- The Mississippi in Scott County.
- The Iowa River in Johnson, Washington and Louisa Counties.
- The Cedar River in Black Hawk County.
- Black Hawk Creek in Grundy and Black Hawk Counties.
- The North and South Skunk Rivers in Jasper County.
- Lizard Creek in Webster County.
- The Middle Raccoon in Guthrie and Dallas Counties.
- The Raccoon in Dallas and Polk Counties.
- The Middle River in Adair and Madison Counties.
- The Des Moines River in Marion County.
- The Grand River in Decatur County.
- The West Fork of the Des Moines in Emmet and Palo Alto Counties.
- The West Nishnabotna River in Pottawattamie County.

In years to come, the trails will be improved and maintained through the cooperation of government agencies and most importantly through the many volunteers who see their value and want them to shine. We invite you to be a part of this effort first by joining us for the opening celebration on April 17th (RSVP at 563-847-7202 by 4-10-10) and then by joining in the effort to keep them clean and well maintained. Please volunteer on upcoming clean-ups and report all vandals. Thanks!



Find Clinton County Conservation of Facebook!
Keep up-to-date on events, improvemnts and news about the "outback" of Clinton County. You can go to Facebook and search for us or type in this long string:

http://www.facebook.com/pages/Grand-Mound-IA/Clinton-County-Conservation/252922727324?v=wall

Once you find us. Join the group as a fan and bookmark it!

EnviroKids

Clinton County Area EnviroKids Summer 2010 Events for kids grade 3-5. Explore the world around us from 9 AM—Noon on Saturdays this summer! Kids may sign up for any or all of the events. Cost is $5 one time registration fee and includes a free T-shirt. Call Judie @ 563-357-6932 to register and if you have questions.

- **June 12 ~ Clinton County Master Gardeners and Clinton County Extension.** Learn about planting and harvesting vegetables at Bickelhaupt Arboretum.
- **June 19 ~ Felix Adler Children's Discovery Center, Clinton.** Learn about Space at the Discovery Center.
- **June 26 ~ LyondellBasell Plant Tour.** See how plastic is made, check out the lab and see the plant's emergency vehicles.
- **July 10 ~ Rock Creek Marina & Campground.** We will use the Blue Heron Eco Cruise Pontoon to conduct a clean-up of some camping sites and beaches along the Mississippi River. We will also be hiking, catching water critters and making S'mores over a campfire!
- **July 24 ~ Soaring Eagles Nature Center (the Nature Barn).**The Nature Barn will host fun and games that teach teamwork, self confidence and problem solving skills.
- **August 13 ~ Clinton LumberKings "Going Green Night".** Free Tickets and EnviroKids will be honored on the field!
- **August 14 ~ Clinton County Solid Waste Agency.**
- **August 28 ~ Clinton Izaak Walton League.** Fishing, canoeing, muzzleloader tradition and more!
- **September 4 ~ Bickelhaupt Arboretum.** Monarch Butterfly Tagging.

Operation ReLeaf

Once again, Clinton County Conservation Board is partnering with the Iowa DNR and Alliant Energy to offer shade trees to Alliant Energy Customers through Operation Releaf. The Operation ReLeaf program has three basic goals:

- Provide low-cost, high-quality and diverse landscape trees from local nurseries.
- Promote long-term community reforestation and energy conservation through efficient landscaping.
- Be flexible and responsive (on a residential basis) to communities and counties hard hit by storm damage.

For more information, go to *www.alliantenergy.com/Community/ProgramsPartnerships* and click on the *Operation Releaf* link.

Habitat Tips

Clinton County Chapter of Pheasants Forever

When planting grass mixtures with the goal of providing the best possible wildlife habitat in mind, there are several wildlife management tips to consider. By considering these general habitat tips before you purchase your seed, you can provide years of improved, productive wildlife habitat.

1. More Diversity = Better Habitat. The more species you include in your planting mixture, the better wildlife habitat you will have in the future. Consider using a high diversity mixture that includes plenty of forbs (Wildflowers) and legumes whenever possible. By putting some time and effort into the design of your grass mixture, you will extend the years of wildlife habitat benefits you will see in the future.

2. The Main Ingredient is Time. If you haven't planted a grass & wildflower mixture before, be prepared to have plenty of patience. Not all species in these mixtures become established quickly. Have patience and enjoy the process.

3. Future Management. Where wildlife habitat is concerned, you never will be able to plant something, walk away for years and expect it to still be great habitat. If you want to produce more wildlife, you need to be managing your planting every 3 to 5 years. There are many conservation programs that can help you manage your grasslands for wildlife.

4. Planting Depth. If you are using a no-till grass drill to plant your grass mixtures, make sure that planting depth is considered. The goal should be to place the seed in the ground no deeper than a 1/4". Seed that is planted deeper than 1/2" will have reduced germination and may lead to stand establishment failure. Planting too shallow is rarely a problem, planting the seed too deep is always a problem.

Think Habitat!

Clinton County Conservation in conjunction with Clinton County Pheasants Forever is offering seed for corn or sorghum wildlife foodplots and corn snow fences at no cost to landowners. We can also order prairie seeds at a reduced rate through PF's buying power. PF also offers cost-share assistance on seed purchases.

Clinton County Whitetails Unlimited and Pheasants Forever are loaning out, free of charge, equipment especially designed to be pulled by an ATV. We don't loan tractors or ATVs. Call 563-847-7202 to reserve equipment to create your own little slice of wildlife heaven

Round-up Ready Corn, Regular Corn & Grain Sorghum (provided by *Pioneer & PF*)

✔ Foodplots	*Free*
✔ Living Snowfences	*Free*
ATV Drawn Equipment (PF & WTU)	
✔ Prairie Drop Seeder	*Free*
✔ Culti-packer	*Free*
✔ Disc	*Free*
✔ Broadcast Seeder	*Free*
✔ Brush Mower	*Free*
✔ Trailer	*Free*
Tractor Drawn Equipment (CCCB)	
✔ 10' "No Till" Prairie Grass Seeder	$10/Acre
✔ 6' "No Till" Prairie Grass Seeder	$10/Acre
✔ Kaylor Tree Planter	$20/Acre

Springing in the Rain!

April

8th ~ Woodcock Watch ~ 7:30 PM ~ Sherman Park ~ Watch the dynamic display of the American woodcock at Sherman Park's north entrance. This is our 25th year watching the woodcocks' courtship "Skydance", and they usually give a good show. Walking over rough terrain may be involved.

10th ~ Spring Volunteer Workday ~ 9 AM - Noon ~ Wapsi Center ~ The Wapsi River Center will host a spring workday. The workday will focus on habitat clean-up and sprucing up the facilities for upcoming field trips. All skill levels are welcome, so bring the whole family and invite a friend! Afterwards, enjoy a light lunch provided by the Friends of the Wapsi Center. Call to register at 563-328-3286.

10th ~ Kite Flying ~ 1 - 3 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Up, up and away! Come to the Wapsi River Center to learn how to create a two-stick bow kite the old-fashioned way. Using sticks, paper, glue and string make kites like your grandfather did. There is a $2 material fee for each kite. Please call to pre-register and reserve your supplies; 563-328-3286.

10th ~ Whitetails Unlimited Banquet ~ 5:30 PM ~ Millennium Ballroom, Goose Lake ~ Help provide public hunting, wildlife habitat and support the future of the hunting tradition. Also see the largest trophy deer display in the county. Children are encouraged to attend and each will receive a special prize. Call Mark for tickets at 563-659-2422.

15th ~ Nighttime Prairie Burn ~ 8 PM ~ Malone Park ~ Clinton County Conservation's Prescribed Burn Team will light up the night during this educational program. Fire is a natural part of a prairie's life cycle. Along with a spectacular show, the team of trained staff will explain the how, why and when of prairie burns. Malone Park is located 4 miles east of DeWitt on US 30, on the south side of the road. The rain/wind date is the 20th.

17th ~ Volunteer Workday ~ 9AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Call 563-357-0759 to lend a hand.

17th ~ Water Trail Dedication & Wapsi River Float ~ 9 AM ~ Walnut Grove Park ~ Get an early start on the festivities by joining the Clinton County Conservation Crew for a 9 AM Float on the Wapsipinicon from the start of Bends & Beaches Water Trail at Massillon Park to the Muhl Bridge Site before the afternoons festivities begin. **we'll meet at Walnut Grove Park and shuttle up to Massilon Park** to paddle the 4.5 back to Walnut Grove and on another 5 miles to the Muhl Bridge Site if time allows. Back at Walnut Grove around noon we'll have a short ceremony and enjoy food and games. We're also celebrating the opening of our new shower house there so you may want to grab a campsite for the whole weekend. All paddlers must wear a PFD when on the water and remain in site of the leader if paddling with the CCCB group. You must RSVP for the Burger/Brat lunch. Register today by calling 563-847-7202.

20th & 24th ~ Hunter Education Course ~ 7-9 PM (Tue.) & 8 AM-4 PM (Sat.) ~ Arrowhead Hunting Club, Goose Lake ~ Visit *www.iowadnr.gov/training* for required sign-up.

22nd ~ Celebrate Earth Day ~ Find your personal way to show the earth you care.

22nd ~ Nighttime Prairie Burn ~ 7:30 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Join the prescribed burn teams of the Wapsi River Center and Clinton County Conservation and learn how fire is an important tool in managing prairie ecosystems. A portion of the Center's prairie will be burned to promote new growth. The rain/wind date is Tuesday, April 27.

24th ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Opener ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ The Nature Center will be open from 1-4 PM on Saturdays, now through October. Take a wildflower hike at 1:30 PM to explore the spring colors. As always, we are looking for volunteers to open the Nature Center on Saturdays. No experience is necessary. Call 563-847-7202 for information.

24th ~ Star Party ~ 8:30 PM ~ Sherman Park ~ Join the Quad Cities Astronomical Society at Sherman Park's north entrance to explore the night sky. Check *www.qcas.org* for last minute sky conditions.

30th ~ Arbor Day ~ Did you know that Arbor Day is the only federal holiday that looks to the future? Planting a tree shows faith in that future! It's also a great way to commemorate a birth, death, anniversary or other special event.

May

1st ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ The Nature Center will be open by volunteer hosts. The center features live local reptiles, rocks & minerals, Iowa habitats & artifacts.

1st ~ Wildflower Hike ~ 5-6:30 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Join us for a hike to identify some spring woodland wildflowers like rue anemone, hepatica, Dutchman's breeches, Jacob's ladder, spring beauty, dog tooth violet and many more.

1st ~ BYOP – Bring Your Own Picnic ~ 6:30-7:30 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Join us for an outdoor feast at the Pine Ring. Please bring your picnic food items and we'll provide the fire, forks and fun!

1st ~ Moonlight Frog Chorus ~ 7:30 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Experience the sounds of the season, in search of the frogs and toads which inhabit the Wapsi River Center. Please bring a flashlight and waterproof footwear.

6th ~ Spring Prairie Walk ~ 6 PM ~ Manikowski Prairie ~ The beautiful pale pink and purple hues of shooting stars will be abundant as will bird's foot violet and hoary puccoon. This limestone prairie provides an excellent opportunity to explore part of Iowa's heritage. Meet at Manikowski Prairie's south entrance. Turn north off Highway 136 on the east edge of Goose Lake onto 370th Avenue, then north 1/8 mile.

8th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

8th ~ Menke Astronomical Observatory Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi Center ~ The lack of a Moon this evening makes it great for observing deep-sky objects like star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies through telescopes. The planets will of course be prominent as well, with Saturn almost due south after sunset.

15th ~ Volunteer Workday ~ 9AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Call 563-357-0759 to lend a hand.

15th ~ Woodland Terrariums ~ 10 AM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Come join AmeriCorps naturalist Amy Newman in a plant-tastic project! Learn how to create a terrarium and take home your own "garden under glass". All materials will be provided by the Friends of the Wapsi Center, Inc., but if you have an interesting glass container; feel free to bring it. The whole family is invited to attend, but supplies are limited to 15 terrariums. To register for your terrarium, please call 563-328-3286.

15th ~ Rock Creek Water Trail Float ~ 1 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Reserve you canoe to explore the new backwaters trail with a guide.

15th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

15th ~ Native Iowa Snakes ~ 1 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Come learn all about Iowa's different species of snakes from Katie van der Linden, AmeriCorps naturalist. There will be many different live specimens available for viewing.

22nd ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

22nd ~ Owls, Bats & Moths – Oh My! ~ 7 PM ~ Wapsi Center ~ Learn more about nature's night shift as we look for nocturnal creatures at the Wapsi Center. See firsthand how owls, bats and moths survive and thrive in the woodlands along the Wapsipinicon River. Participants should bring a small flashlight.

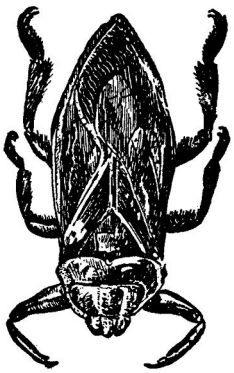
29th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

29th ~ Star Party ~ Dusk ~ Sherman Park ~ Join the Quad Cities Astronomical Society at Sherman Park's north end to explore the night sky. Star parties are dependent on the weather. To confirm a party will be held, check *www.qcas.org*, after 4 PM on the day of the party.

June

4th-6th ~ Free Fishing Days ~ Let's go fishing! During these three days, Iowa residents may fish and possess fish (within legal limits) without a fishing license.

4th ~ Pond Life Adventures ~ 10:30 AM ~ DeWitt Community Center ~ This nature program, which builds on awareness of the environment, focuses on our young county residents, three to five year-olds, but all ages can come! We are bringing the wet outdoors to the indoors with fun pond activities that will include live pond animals, a boat, stepping stones, fun snack, fishing and craft. The DeWitt Community Center is located across from the library at 512 10th Street. This event is free of charge.



5th ~ Stream Stomp ~ Clinton County Waterway Cleanup ~ Join volunteers in the morning to participate in a county-wide land-based cleanup of local waterways. There will be sites in Clinton, DeWitt, and near Calamus. Volunteers will meet in the morning at their chosen work site, pick up refuse, and help sort recyclables. Individuals and teams welcome! Registration required - contact Brad Seward at 563-243-4749 ext. 101 or ccaswa@gmtel.net.

5th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

5th ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Good times aboard this ½-hour, ranger-guided hayride around the park. Continuous rides offered till dusk.

5th ~ Night Hike & Moon Party ~ 8:30 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ Meet at the Nature Center for a hike into the back valley. We'll explore the darkness as it comes and take a look at the night sky through powerful telescopes from the observation tower hill top. The bunkhouse will be open for those who wish to take a break or warm up. We'll have hot water and drink mixes there. Later there will be an outdoor fire, smores and music.

11th ~ Pond Life Adventures ~ 10:30 AM ~ Children's Discovery Center ~ This nature program, which builds on awareness of the environment, focuses on our young county residents, three to five year-olds, but all ages can come! We are bringing the wet outdoors to the indoors with fun pond activities that will include live pond animals, a boat, stepping stones, fishing, craft and a fun snack. The Children's Discovery Center and is located at 332 8th Avenue South in Clinton, near Hy-Vee. This event is free of charge.

12th ~ Free Canoeing ~ 10 AM-6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Rock Creek's 10 canoes will be available to use free of charge all day in the Mississippi Backwaters surrounding the park.

12th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

12th ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 7 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ Good times aboard this ranger-guided hayrack ride. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

15th & 19th ~ Hunter Education Course ~ 7-9 PM (Tue.) & 8AM-4PM (Sat.) ~ Clinton Izaak Walton League, Six Mile ~ Visit *www.iowadnr.gov/training* for required sign-up.

18th ~ Tracking Tikes ~ 9 AM-Noon ~ Westbrook Park, De Witt, Iowa ~ K-2nd grade children will be entertained and educated through nature exploration and crafts. Register by calling 563-847-7202.

18th ~ Pond Life Adventures ~ 10:30 AM ~ Children's Discovery Center ~ This nature program, which builds on awareness of the environment, focuses on our youngest county residents, three to five year-olds, but all ages can come! We are bringing the wet outdoors, indoors with fun pond activities that will include live pond animals, a boat, stepping stones, fishing, craft and snack. The Children's Discovery Center and is located at 332 8th Avenue South in Clinton, near Hy-Vee. This event is free of charge.

18th ~ Tracking Tikes ~ 1 PM-4 PM ~ Soaring Eagle Nature Center, Clinton, Iowa ~ K-2nd grade children will be entertained and educated through nature exploration and crafts. Register by calling 563-847-7202.

19th ~ Kids' Fishing Tournament ~ 9 AM - Noon ~ Malone Park ~ Kids, ages twelve and under, are invited to test their angling skills. Sunfish are thick in the 10-acre lake, with bass, bullheads and catfish in good numbers. Plaques will be awarded for the greatest weight of fish in two age groups, ages 10-12 and ages 9 and under. There will also be door prizes for all. Registration starts at 9 AM, with fishing from 9:30-11 AM; weigh-in and casting contest will follow.

19th ~ Volunteer Workday ~ 9 AM ~ Soaring Eagle ~ Call 563-357-0759 to lend a hand.

19th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

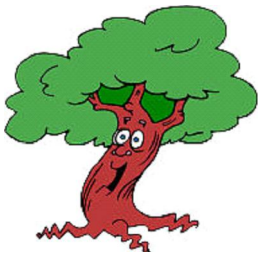
19th Blufflands Float ~ 1-5 PM ~ Bulgers Hollow ~ Meet at Bulgers Hollow Recreation Area off US 67 North of Clinton. Shuttle to South Lake Park in Sabula. Float the Mississippi backwaters past towering bluffs, islands and wildlife. We'll do some pollywogging and water sampling along the way and explore the mouth of Elk River. Upon our return to Bulgers Hollow you may stay if you like for a cook fire, stories and music after the float. You may bring your own equipment or use our county canoes, paddles and PFD's. Regardless you must register for the event by calling 563-847-7202 by June 18th.

19th ~ Menke Astronomical Observatory Open House ~ Dusk ~ Wapsi Center ~ The Moon will be near First Quarter tonight, making the sky a little too bright for viewing deep-sky objects. But this is the best time to see the Moon through binoculars or a low-power scope, as the shadows make its mountains and craters show up particularly well. And the Moon's light won't harm the planets, especially Venus, which is about as high in the southwest sky as it's going to be this year.

Constellation Orion

19th ~ Saturday Night At the Movies ~ Dusk ~ Eden Valley ~ The campground at Eden Valley is showing family movies on the big screen for campers and park visitors.

21st - 24th ~ EDIWILD 2010 ~ Educators in the Wild Workshop ~ Where the Wild Woods Are ~ Discovering Iowa's Woodlands ~ This is a 4-day workshop (including evening activities) to facilitate the incorporation of environmental education into the school curriculum. The workshop will use an interdisciplinary approach of teaching and will emphasize Iowa's woodland habitat.



This year's activities, tours and topics include: Iowa's woodlands past, present and future, history of Arbor Day, participate in a tree planting, tree personality test, grist mill tour, fern hike, timber management, woodland systematics, tree & leaf ID, woodland flora & fauna, orienteering, Bats-Moths-&-Owls-Oh-My!, woodland invasive species, native woodland cultures, woodland soils, Project Learning Tree activities, *The Lorax*-based curriculum and much, much more!

Cost for the workshop is $65. If you are interested and would like to register, contact the Wapsi Center at 563-328-3286. A brochure will be sent to you which includes a registration form, daily activities and locations, plus other details.

25th - 27th ~ Hunter Safety Camp ~ 6:30 PM (Fri.)-5 PM (Sun.) ~ Wapsi Center ~ Standard hunter safety courses are 10 hours long. In this event, we will go far beyond the basics. In addition to all of the hunter education standards, we will be teaching advanced shooting techniques, bowhunter safety, trapping, waterfowl, turkey & raccoon hunting, dog training, caring for game in the field, first aid, wildlife ID, calling and a whole lot more! All these activities will allow students to actually participate, not just listen to speakers or watch films. The course is open to kids, age 11-16. They don't need to have received the Hunter Education Certificates already. Cost per student is $10 for dorm stay, meals, ammo and targets thanks to donations from Clinton County Pheasants Forever ($500), Clinton Area Whitetails Unlimited ($500) and Scott County Pheasants Forever ($500). Overnight chaperones will be provided by participants' parents. Space is limited to 50 kids, so sign up early by calling 563-847-7202.

26th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

26th ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Good times aboard this ½-hour, ranger-guided hayride around the park. Continuous rides offered till dusk.

26th ~ Snakes of Eastern Iowa ~ 7 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ We will have a collection of more than 10 species of non-venomous snakes at the Nature Center.

26th ~ Star Party ~ Dusk ~ Sherman Park ~ Join the Quad Cities Astronomical Society at Sherman Park's north end to explore the night sky. Star parties are dependent on the weather. To confirm a party will be held, check *www.qcas.org*, after 4 PM on the day of the party.

30th ~ Pond Life Adventures ~ 2 PM ~ Children's Discovery Center ~ This program is for elementary school age children. We are bringing the wet outdoors to the indoors with fun pond activities that will include live pond animals, a fish casting, craft and snack. The Children's Discovery Center is located at 332 8th Avenue South in Clinton, near Hy-Vee. This event is free of charge.

July

Summer Sneak Peak ~ more events to come in the summer newsletter.

10th ~ Free Canoeing ~ 10 AM-6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Rock Creek's 10 canoes will be available to use free of charge all day in the Mississippi Backwaters surrounding the park.

10th ~ Nature Center Open ~ 1-4 PM ~ Eden Valley

10th ~ Hayrack Rides ~ 7 PM ~ Eden Valley ~ Good times aboard this ranger-guided hayrack ride. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

23rd ~ Wilderness Music ~ 7 PM-8 PM ~ Thomson Causeway, Thomson, Illinois ~ Sit and be entertained by the musical talents of naturalist Chuck Jacobsen as he presents the music of John Denver, John Prine, Peter Mayer and several others.

24th ~ Canoe Clinic ~ 9 PM-12 PM ~ Thomson Causeway, Thomson, Illinois ~ A demonstration of elementary paddling skills will be followed by open paddling in the protected waters of the causeway, then a guided tour of Pool 13 north of the park.

24th ~ Pool 13 Float ~ 1 PM-6 PM ~ Thomson Causeway, Thomson, Illinois ~ We'll meet at Thomson Causeway for this trip through Thomson Slough and along the eastern shore of pool 13. We will explore these mainly shallow waters taking breaks by wading for freshwater mussels and exploring open shorelines. Depending on the skill levels, weather, lock availability and our progress we may lock through Lock and Dam 13 or portage the levee east of the Lock & Dam into Johnson Creek and out to the Mississippi. The portage is a short lift over rip rap across a paved roadway through rough grass and a narrow timber one half mile west of the main channel. We'll pull out at the Fulton Marina. Participants must wear a PFD when paddling and remain in close proximity to the leader. Canoes and paddling gear are available free. Call 563-847-7202 to register today.

Plant Profile ~ Common Blue Violet

By Mike Granger, Naturalist, Wapsi Center

Let me introduce to you a common spring wildflower most people are familiar with, the violet. Violets are small plants with heart-shaped leaves growing no more than ten inches tall. The common blue violet (*Viola pratincola)* is found across the state of Iowa and throughout the eastern half of the United States. Worldwide there are some 500 species of violet and 60 of these can be found in the United States. Iowa's species of violets can be found in a variety of settings including prairies, woodlands, meadows and even moist lawns. Up to 26 species of *Viola* occur in the state and identification is at times difficult due to color variations, hybridization and the variety of violets found in non-native garden plantings. Here at the Wapsi River Center, violets may be found along the wooded trails overlooking the Wapsipinicon River. The common blue violet is infrequently found, but if you look you may find a few other species growing amongst them like the downy yellow violet *(Viola pubescens)* and the hairy blue violet *(Viola sororia)*. I have also seen a white- and lavender-colored violet known as the confederate violet *(Viola sororia f. priceana)*; although many sources believe it is a color variation of the common blue violet. For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on the common blue violet.

Downy Yellow Violet

The common blue violet is easy to identify by its heart-shaped leaves which are lightly toothed. On a single plant the leaves will radiate out from the base of the plant. The plant is perennial and new leaves will originate from buried underground roots. Violets produce runners which help them spread along the forest floor often creating a dense violet vegetative mat. They also reproduce by flowering from the middle of April through June. Only one or two blossoms will be present on each plant. The flower, ¾-of-an-inch wide, has 5 lavender or blue colored petals. The lowest petal has lines radiating out from the flower's center. These lines serve as a landing pad for insects which are directed to sweet nectar contained in a spur at the back of the flower. The spur points upward forcing small bees to turning upside down to obtain the sweet nectar. This ensures pollinators will be given a healthy dusting of pollen to be carried to the next flower visited. Upon pollination, the flower will develop into a capsule-shaped fruit. The dried fruits split into three sections and each contains a row of minute seeds. Violets also produce flowers without petals (cleistogamous) that produce seeds without the aid of pollinators. This occurs mainly during the hot summer months when pollination is less frequent. The seeds are then dispersed as the tri-parted capsules dry and split open.

Many animals are attracted to violets for nectar and sustenance. Flies and bees are attracted to violets for their sweet nectar. Certain butterfly larvae prefer violets as a food source. Turkeys, bobwhite quail, mourning doves and white-footed mice feed on the minute seeds. White tailed deer, turkeys and rabbits will also consume violet leaves.

Violets have been used throughout history for greens, soup thickeners and teas. In Europe, violets are used regularly in salads and soups. The leaves are rich in vitamins A and C. Common blue violet flower blossoms are delicious in salads as well; however, eating yellow violets is not recommended. The blossoms can also be candied or jellied. It is also known that the Romans frequently enjoyed violet wine. Several books have great recipes for using violets in cooking. One book, Billy Joe Tatum's Wild Foods Field Guide and Cookbook, has an extensive section on cooking greens along with several recipes. To prepare violet greens; harvest plenty of leaves, pull off the course stems and wash in three rinses of water. The leaves can then be put in a sauce pan and barely covered with water. Cook over medium to high heat flipping them or stirring them with a fork for 10-15 minutes. Violet greens usually are an additive to a recipe, but small portions can be seasoned with salt and enjoyed. To make candied flower blossoms, the flowers are washed, painted with egg white and dipped into sugar. After the blossoms have dried, they can be added to cake decorations or eaten alone.

Upon researching and learning about the common blue violet, I am looking forward to seeing them on my frequent outings in the woods. I now have a new appreciation for this frequent forest inhabitant, and hope to try some recipes soon.

Editor's Note: In addition to the woodland species Mike wrote about, there is also the Bird's Foot Violet (Viola pedata). The large, flat-faced flowers with prominent orange stamens and the very finely cut leaves distinguish birdfoot violet. It grows at Manikoski Prairie and blooms in the spring. To see this violet, join us on the Manikowski Prairie Walk on May 6th (see Springing in the Rain).

Wildlife Profile ~ Northern Water Snake

by Katie van der Linden, AmeriCorps Naturalist, Wapsi Center

I have encountered many northern water snakes (*Nerodia sipedon*) in my short career as a naturalist and found them to be a very intriguing creature. During many canoe floats, boat rides and walks along the river, I have spotted them basking on logjams only a few feet from me, or swimming silently through the water, with their head sticking out and then disappearing under the water inches from my paddle. These experiences have prompted me to write on a subject that some may find "icky".

The northern water snake is a heavy-bodied, medium-sized snake. They are 24 to 42 inches in length. They are darker in color on top usually a brown, reddish brown, or gray with banding of darker coloration of brown on the neck that turns into patterns of blotches down the back. The underside is white with red or brown moon-shaped blotches. Females are typically larger than males. Patterns can vary greatly between individual water snakes. The young are typically gray or light-brown in color with black blotches. The crescent shapes on their belly are usually solid black or brown.

The northern water snake is often mistaken for the venomous cotton mouth (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*) commonly known as the water moccasin. Cotton mouths are not found in Iowa, their range extends up to central Missouri. The northern water snake is a non-venomous snake; however, they are known for their aggressive tempers. If disturbed, they will slide off their branch and into the water where they hide under logs or rocks until the danger has passed. If cornered, they flatten their bodies and strike. Their saliva contains anticoagulant properties which cause the blood at the wound site to not clot immediately and it may bleed excessively. They may also release a stinky musk and fecal matter; some snakes may also regurgitate their last meal.

The northern water snake is found statewide except the northwest part of the state. They inhabitant most any body of water: ponds, streams, marshes and river backwaters. Their optimal habitat is anywhere with thick vegetation, shrubs, and/or trees along the bank. This provides good basking locations. Northern water snakes are active both night and day. They hunt many different prey items that live in or near the edge of the water. Fish, amphibians, crayfish, small mammals, young turtles and other young snakes are all on the menu for this snake. Herons, minks, raccoons and certain species of fish will prey on water snakes. Bullfrogs will even eat young water snakes.

The northern water snake is not the only species of water snake in Iowa. The diamondback water snake (*Nerodia rhombifer*) and plainbelly, also known as the yellowbelly water snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster*), are the two other species found in Iowa. This snake is a threatened species in Iowa. This snake is brown- or olive-colored with brown- or gray-shaped blotches that are connected with bars. Their bellies are cream- or yellow-colored and checkered with half-moon shapes. The half-moon shapes are more prevalent towards the edge of the belly. The plainbelly water snake is endangered in Iowa. They are dark brown or black in color with a plain red or orange belly.

Water snakes are active April through October and hibernate during the winter in rock crevices. Mating takes place in the spring and the young are born in late June into early August. Anywhere from five to sixty young may be produced per litter. The young are roughly 6 to 10 inches in length and have the same aggressive temper as their parents.

Did you know that all snakes in Iowa are protected by law except the garter snake and the timber rattlesnake which is protected only in certain counties? This means that you are not allowed to collect or kill these species in the state of Iowa.

I had another interesting encounter with one in late October of this past year. I was down at the Osprey Aquatic Lab, here at the Wapsi River Center, with a group of students doing pond study. In the middle of our study, I hear a student shout "snake!" Near the corner of the building in a small patch of sun, was a little water snake. I picked him up and showed him to the class. He now lives in the "herp" room at the Eagle View Eco Center, and I encourage you to come out and visit him.

Clinton County Conservation
P.O. Box 68
Grand Mound, Iowa 52751
Phone: 563-847-7202
Email: conservation@clintoncounty-ia.gov
Website: www.clintoncounty-ia.gov or
www.mycountyparks.com/County/Clinton

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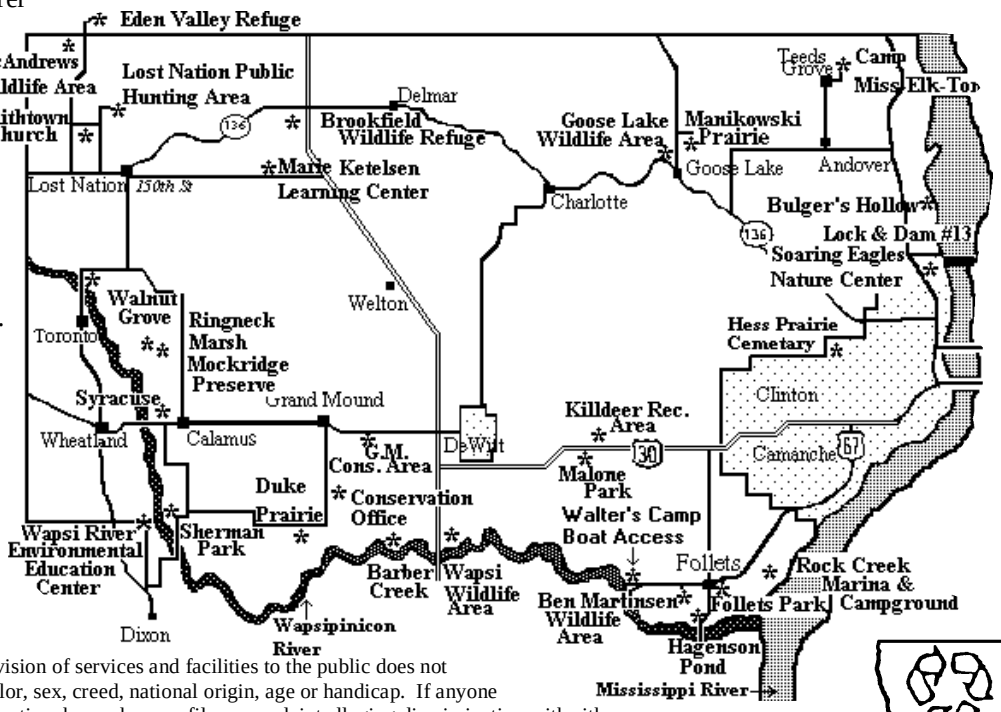
BOARD MEETINGS

The Clinton County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. The Board meets the second Tuesday the month, 6 PM, in the Conservation Office, located 1 mile south of Grand Mound at 230th Ave. and 255th St. Please note, this date can be changed.



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