



THE Heron



by Karri Rutenbeck,
West District Park
Supervisor

Winter Serenity: Eden Valley's Cabins and Snowy Trails

As the winter chill settles in, I can't help but get excited about the unique opportunities that Eden Valley Refuge and Campground has to offer for those looking to break free from the winter blues. As the temperatures drop and snow blankets the landscape, there's no better way to escape "house" fever than by staying in one of our

cabins and embarking on a snowy trail adventure.

Eden Valley has two 170-square-ft. cabins equipped with heat, ensuring you have a warm and comfy stay. Each cabin sleeps up to four people and provides a microwave and mini fridge. The cabins are conveniently located near the Nature Center's heated shower facility.

For those craving a slightly different experience, our 400-square-ft. Eden Valley Bunkhouse with a 140-sq. ft. loft awaits. A quarter mile walk from the back valley trailhead, this more spacious facility accommodates up to twelve guests. Pack your essentials, traverse the snowy trail and arrive at a retreat that lacks some of the comforts of home—heat/AC, firewood, microwave, mini-fridge and a few other kitchen essentials are provided.

All three cabins are available at an affordable \$50/night, a steal for the priceless memories you'll create. Check out mycountyparks.com for more details or to reserve your spot.

For those with their own campers, tents or hammocks, our electric and primitive campgrounds are open year-round, snowfall permitting. Access to the Nature Center's shower facility is available upon request to self-registered campers at \$12/night.

Although the allure of Eden Valley isn't confined to just overnight stays, fresh snowfall creates a unique scene that transforms the trails into a wonderland waiting to be explored. The limestone bluffs, usually hidden by foliage, stand out proudly against the snowy backdrop, offering a breathtaking view that only winter can unveil.

The outdoors welcomes you with open arms. So, grab your coat, gloves, and a sense of adventure. Whether you choose a cabin, the bunkhouse, or opt for the rugged charm of a pack-in primitive site, winter at Eden Valley promises you an unforgettable escape. Embrace the chill, explore the trails and let nature's winter symphony serenade you.





Building my Skillset through 900 HOURS as an AmeriCorps Naturalist

Hello, my name is Brittany Costello and I served as the AmeriCorps Naturalist for summer/fall 2023. This experience was filled with unforgettable learning moments, connecting with people and engaging with animals. I truly had a lot of fun while building valuable skills like teamwork, communication and leadership.

Growing up, I always admired the natural world. As a born-and-raised Clintonian, memories of my parents and grandparents taking me to Rock Creek, as well as school field trips to other Clinton County Conservation properties, are etched in my mind. I've cherished visits to the Rock Creek Campground, where I engaged in fishing, camping and exploration. It's truly a full-circle moment to witness the next generation enjoying the same activities I did at their age, particularly Survival Skills, Archery, and Blue Heron cruises—core memories of my childhood.

Additionally, I've participated in the Miss America Opportunity for 14 years, starting at the age of 8. This experience has allowed my passions to flourish, heightening my appreciation for education, community service and self-development. Combined with my preexisting love for nature, this journey led me to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Sciences with an emphasis on Life Sciences and a minor in Earth Science from the University of Northern Iowa, from which I graduated in May.

While my goal is to obtain a PhD in Marine Biology, I possess a deep love and respect for Iowa's natural resources. My role as an AmeriCorps Naturalist allowed me to learn more about what our state has to offer, especially in the realm of water quality, a primary passion of mine. My participation in the Miss America Opportunity provided me with the chance to create my own initiative titled "Watersheds: Think Global, Act Local," focusing on improving water quality through enhancing the health of

our watersheds. Last year, I dedicated an estimated 1,300+ hours to water quality improvement through advocacy, waste reduction and education. I've spoken to well over 12,500 people, collaborated with numerous organizations, taught my curriculum in schools, secured a proclamation for Iowa Watershed Awareness Week, published a coloring book and even launched a podcast. I genuinely believe it's these experiences, my unwavering dedication and my interests that have led me to become an AmeriCorps Naturalist Intern at Clinton County Conservation. I've playfully joked with my family and friends that this internship is essentially a paid version of what I've done in the Miss America Opportunity, plus some! I have truly enjoyed every moment working here, making the 900 hours pass by incredibly quickly.

During the summer, my main tasks included animal care, providing coverage for the Eden Valley Nature Center, conducting programming, educating others and leading rotations during field trips and camps. Clinton County Conservation is home to various Iowa native species, and this experience has allowed me to establish a unique connection with these animals, something I hadn't had the opportunity to do before. Creatures like the Red-Tailed Hawk, Barred Owl, Ornate Box Turtle, Eastern Tiger Salamander, Gray Tree Frog, various snakes and more have become part of my daily interactions. As an animal lover, this has been one of my favorite aspects of my experience. I especially cherish my close encounters with the big birds of prey, which I otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to experience. These encounters kind of make me feel like a real-life Disney princess... except for when we must clean up after their waste, if you know what I mean.

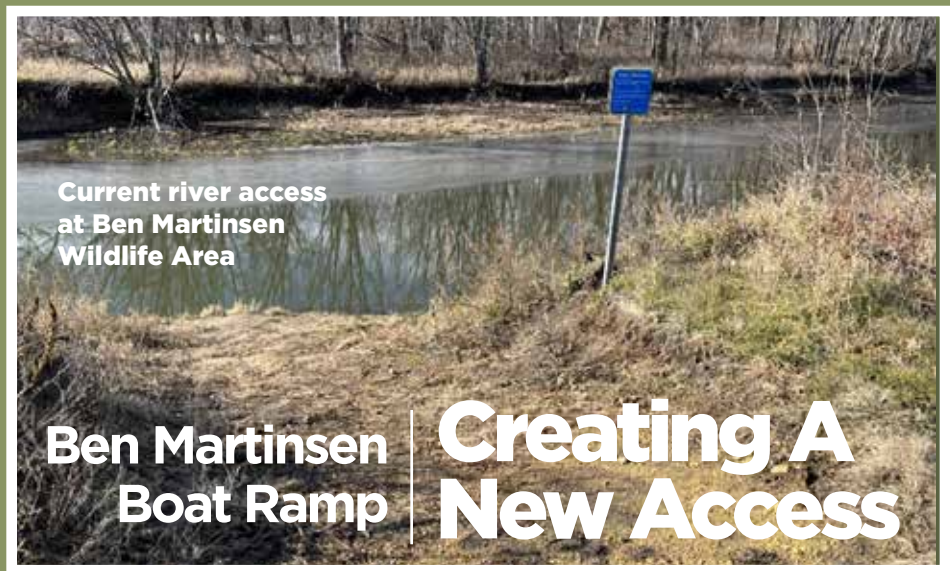
Throughout the fall, my main tasks were animal care, creating shadow boxes, making new microscope cards



and assisting with field trips! While I really enjoyed creating shadow boxes for the Cottonwood Tree in the Nature Gallery, a big highlight of my fall was getting into classrooms. Every time I visited a class, I couldn't help but think about myself at their age, whether it was preschool, high school or anything in between. I remembered Naturalists visiting my classroom and teaching me about all sorts of things, but this time it was my turn! Each child in each class had me perplexed by their knowledge and willingness to learn more. I couldn't help but think about how impactful my presence was to them, while their presence was just as impactful for me. Not only did I learn how to effectively educate these students of different ages, but I learned how to think like a kid again. I learned to ask questions and embrace my curiosity to absorb more and more information. If you take anything away from this article, this should be it: don't ever stop learning and most definitely do not stop asking questions!

As someone who thrives on learning and exploration, this internship has been an absolute delight. It continually expanded my knowledge and skills. My background in the Miss America Opportunity and my education have already equipped me with a toolbox of skills that will undoubtedly benefit my future career. However, this hands-on AmeriCorps position has further enriched my toolkit, making me a more well-rounded individual. These are skills that I will carry with me wherever I go, from effective communication with various age groups to the physical handling of animals and everything in between.

What I have learned throughout these 900 hours will stay with me for a lifetime. I am profoundly grateful for this experience and am saddened it is over. But I can't wait to continue my journey and bring all of these lessons with me along the way! Thank you, Clinton County Conservation!



Ben Martinsen Boat Ramp | Creating A New Access

BY KYLE REDMOND, EAST DISTRICT PARK SUPERVISOR

This past fall Clinton County Conservation applied and received a grant for a new boat ramp through the Iowa DNR. The main purpose of this grant was to gain and add additional water access ramps throughout the state. The location that was chosen for the boat ramp was the Ben Martinsen Wildlife area which is one mile down the road from the little town of Follis, right off Highway 67, located just north of the Little Wapsi bridge. This area consists of 420 acres of Wapsi floodplain timber, oxbow ponds and river frontage. The primary activities in this area are turkey, deer and waterfowl hunting, trapping and bank fishing on the Wapsi River.

The southern parking area currently consists of a 65' x 70' gravel parking lot with a gate opening to a mowed maintenance path. The path leads back to what is currently a dirt/emergency boat ramp meant mainly for canoe access but can be used for motorboats if needed for emergencies. This project will allow emergency personnel easy and quick access to this part of the river for rescues and emergency calls. The public will also

benefit from this new addition as it will be a safe and convenient access to the Iowa water trail on the Wapsipinicon River. It will also be the last access onto the river before it meets the Mississippi River. This will allow the distance to the Mississippi to be cut nearly in half from the current access at Walters Camp near McCausland. Local fisherman and hunters will be able to access public lands easier for recreational activities located near and around this boat ramp.

The project we are going to be implementing will extend the current gravel parking lot an extra 60' x 65' to allow room for boat parking, making the parking lot 125' x 135' after the extension to the current parking lot is done. There will be a 10' x 300' driveway connected to the parking lot leading back to a 10' x 40' circle turnaround, and a 12' x 60' concrete boat ramp. The lane back to the boat ramp will be for drop off only and all parking will still be in the same area next to the highway where it currently is. There will also still be the current maintained equipment trail leading to the northwest part of the property.

This boat ramp will be a great addition to the Ben Martinsen Wildlife area and the Wapsipinicon River water trail system. We look forward to seeing how this additional access allows people to utilize this area and the river.



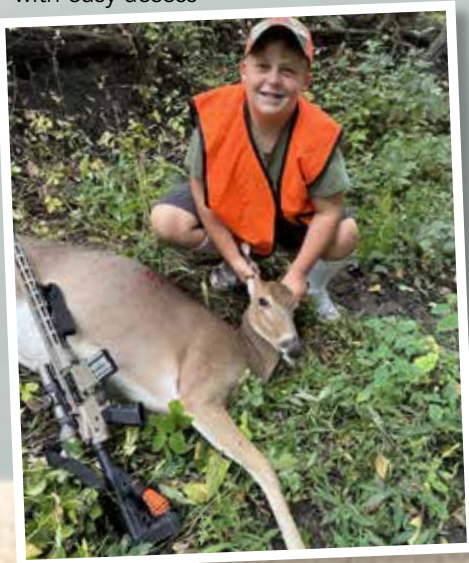


by Jill Schmidt,
Environmental
Education Coordinator

Lessons a Deer Blind Has to Offer

I think most people would agree that life's pace continues to speed up. Days go by fast and years go by faster...and for me, the combination of my career and parenting seems to be the force behind my speed. It can be difficult to find time to just sit in peace and think. When is the last time you were surrounded by complete and almost eerie silence? The kind of silence that allows you to hear your own heartbeat. The kind of silence that allows you to hear your own thoughts as loud as if they are being read to you. I feel we need more of this silence, and I have found that sitting in a deer blind on a cool fall morning before the sun rises, is where my silence is.

I agree most people will not take up deer hunting to find their inner peace, but I have been fortunate to have found a hobby that has multiple meanings in my life. This past September I was able to provide my ten-year-old son, Hudson, with his first hunting experience. I was excited for him to experience the lessons a deer blind has to offer. We were lucky enough to have found a generous landowner in northeast Iowa who had predation tags he wanted to share with children for youth season. We were able to head up there on a rather warm Saturday morning in September. Set up with easy access



Lessons learned looking through the blind window on this hunt:

- 1 | A ten-year-old cannot sit still longer than 3 minutes.
- 2 | Blue Jays are the tattletales of the forest, they always let you know something is nearby.
- 3 | Squirrels are the loudest eaters in the world.
- 4 | The call of a white-breasted nuthatch could be used as a torture method.
- 5 | You see a lot of nature impersonating nature, i.e., tree branches looking like deer.
- 6 | When in sport mode, crocs can be worn as hunting shoes.

to a well-built, stationary deer blind, positioned along a clover food plot, we were set up for success.

It was an afternoon hunt. The plan was to hunt through the legal shooting time, which was roughly a five-hour window and hope for the best. When it comes to hunting, the best is what we had. We were in the blind for four minutes before we saw our first deer. Now, if you have ever deer hunted you know that this is a rarity. I have sat ALL day and have never seen a deer; I was very excited. I will never forget how calm Hudson was when he leaned back and whispered "deer". This is the opposite of how I react when I see a deer while sitting in the blind. My heart immediately begins to race and my legs start to quiver. I was unprepared for his calmness. Hudson studied the deer through the blind window and acknowledged the fact that the deer was small, most likely a yearling and he debated on shooting. He had a shot, but "it was too small to take" for his liking. Now, as a novice hunter myself, this was a proud Mom moment. I've never been a trophy hunter and ethical hunting is very important to me, so when Hudson recognized the deer to be young, I was pleased with his understanding. The deer seemed to linger long enough that Hudson began to debate on shooting it or not. I can relate to his uncertainty, you never know if you'll see another deer or not, but he was very fortunate to see one so soon on his sit. He decided if it was there in 15 minutes, he would take the shot. Fifteen minutes passed and he was preparing himself to shoot, gun up and

with the click of the safety, the deer ran off. The mix of emotions he felt as it ran off was obvious. He was disappointed, confused and frustrated that it didn't go as planned, but I explained that it wasn't the right deer and that it was time to wait patiently for the next. To make a long story short, we saw multiple deer on that sit. Time was running out and Hudson was getting bored in the blind, he was regretting not taking the first one he saw but it was too late for that. About an hour before sunset, we both were feeling a little defeated and the realization that he might not get a deer that day was sinking in. Then it happened. Two does made an appearance and like clockwork, all the stars aligned and Hudson had a shot. Calmly he aimed, took a deep breath, exhaled and squeezed the trigger. The doe kicked up and I knew right away that he had hit her.

The twenty minutes after the gun fires is the longest twenty minutes of your life. Daylight was running out and we anxiously left the blind to track his first deer. Thankfully it was an easy track. Hudson was able to find blood and track her to where she lay about 40 yards away, he was ecstatic!

Needless to say, his first hunting experience was a great one and he is now hooked. We will be venturing out to fill his youth tag later this season and just like me, he will learn the new lessons the blind has to offer with each new experience. Some will be good and some will be bad, but all will help turn him into an excellent outdoorsman.



CALENDAR OF Events

Cross Country Skiing and Snowshoeing

As weather conditions allow, we will schedule some events, including beginner's clinics, at various locations throughout the county. Write to jschmidt@clintoncounty-ia.gov and place yourself on our "Adventurers" list. You will receive a short message whenever pop-up snow events are planned.

Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center & Camp Store Winter Hours

8 AM to 4 PM Wednesday - Sunday

Winter Rates ~ Effective through March 31

Eden Valley Camping ~ \$12, any site • Rock Creek Camping ~ \$15 any site • Community Hall, Rock Creek ~ \$250 per day • Pintail Cabin, Rock Creek ~ \$100 per night • Cabin at Camp Miss-Elk-Ton ~ \$100 per night

January Events

1st ~ Happy New Year!

All Conservation Buildings are CLOSED

12th ~ Animal Patterns ~ 10:30 AM ~ Discovery Center

Did you know that mountain lions and sharks have a dark back and light belly to blend in with their environment? At this presentation, there will be many pelts for your child to see and touch along with live animals!

13th ~ 40th Annual Bald Eagle Watch ~ 9 AM-2:30 PM ~ Clinton Community College

This is Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge's 100th year and the 40th year for this event, so we have some big things planned for this year's event! Come to see LIVE bird of prey events with a LIVE Bald Eagle and other friends, along with Clinton County Conservation Booth and a live reptile and amphibian presentation.



17th ~ Starry Skies ~ 5 PM ~ Eden Valley

If you're interested in the night sky, come learn about the constellations! We will be exploring the constellation stories using the Stellarium program to get a new perspective on the stars. We will finish by making a constellation you can take home! All children must be accompanied by an adult.

21st ~ Animal Tracks ~ 1:30 PM ~ Rock Creek

Animals leave all sorts of signs to let us know they were around, scat, leftover food scraps and tracks!

Join a Naturalist as we learn about the different ways to identify animal tracks. We will be going on a short hike to investigate the tracks around us, so please dress accordingly. Registration is not required but is appreciated. Please text or call 563-349-0956 to sign up. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

22nd ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek

Join this fun little group that does big things for Rock Creek!

31st ~ Eco Printing on Silk Scarves ~ 5:30 PM ~ Rock Creek

This is a contact dye technique using leaves and metal salts. After we bundle the scarves and leaves, the process needs to simmer for 1.5 hours. You can either stick around for that time to learn about turmeric sun printing and how to make a purple/gray dye from blue spruce, or you can go home and pick up your scarf at a later date. You must register for this \$30 class at mycountyparks.com

February Events

Hidden in Plain Sight ~ Through the second week of April

This is an interactive hiking/hide and seek game played using shed deer antlers. Rules and clues will be posted on our Facebook page and a prize will be awarded weekly. Rules and guidelines.

1. Shed antlers will be placed and clues posted on Facebook every Monday by 1 PM unless posted



otherwise. 2. If not found by Friday of the week, another clue will post in the Facebook original post. 3. Shed antler must be returned to receive that week's prize. 4. Special rules may apply from week to week. Please respect the rules so the game can continue.

3rd ~ Clinton County Whitetails Unlimited Banquet

Doors open at 4:30 PM, dinner served at 6:30 PM ~ Vista Grande, Clinton ~ Contact Jeff Beckwith for tickets, 563-249-7358.

12th ~ Star Lab Planetarium ~ 5 PM-7 PM ~ Rock Creek

Join us for a night under the stars, inside the warmth of the star lab! We will learn about the different constellations and some mythology! Registration is not required but is appreciated. Please text or call 563-349-0956 to sign up. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

13th ~ Animals in Love ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek

With Valentine's Day around the corner, come learn about what love looks like for local wildlife. We will explore the different courtship strategies for animals in Iowa and around the world. We will be reading a story and doing crafts. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

20th ~ Homeschool Field Day ~ 9:30 AM-2 PM ~ Rock Creek

Spend the day exploring nature in winter! Homeschool aged children 5-18 are welcome to join us for a winter field trip filled with both indoor and outdoor activities. Activities for ages 5-10 will include: animal track hike, animals into winter program, ice fishing (if conditions allow) and Star Lab. Activities for ages 11-18 include: ice fishing, Star Lab, winter survival, cross-country skiing/snowshoeing



(if conditions allow). Cost is \$5/person and registration is required by scanning the QR Code and paying online.

24th ~ Winter Fun Day ~ 9 AM-12 PM ~ Rock Creek

We will be loaning our equipment and expertise for you and your family to ice fish, cross country ski, snowshoe and possibly ice skating! There will also be warming fire and inside activities like crafts and live animals to continue the family fun, no matter what the weather! If there are not good snow/ice conditions, we will have other fun outdoor activities planned.



24th ~ Freezin' for a Reason ~ Polar Plunge ~ 1 PM ~ Rock Creek

Being outside and experiencing nature is a vital component for a healthy life! The Clinton County Conservation Foundation is a non-profit that supports environmental education for the people in our area! They provide bus scholarships to schools for field trips, help fund the Blue Heron Eco Cruise, enhance our nature centers and much more! Help us support this organization and keep nature in the lives of our children and neighbors by raising money and taking the plunge! Pledge to raise \$100 to be donated to the Foundation. Registration opens January 26 call or text Jill at 563-349-8680 to sign up! Check us out on Facebook for more details!



27th ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~

Rock Creek Join this fun little group that does big things for Rock Creek!

March Events

2nd ~ Wildness Art Project Opening Reception ~ TBD ~ Rock Creek

Over a year in the making, we are excited to share with you the true colors of nature brought to you by artist, Gabriella Torres and Naturalist, Jessica Steines. Mingle while enjoying hors d'oeuvres among the 65+ silk panels colored by natural materials collected in Clinton County. Brought to you by REAP and other generous donors.

3rd-31st ~ Wildness Art Project Exhibit OPEN ~ Rock Creek

When the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center is open, feel free to completely immerse yourself in the 65+ large panels of natural dyed silk with the creative renderings of local abstract artist Gabriella Torres using natural pigments!



3rd ~ Tree Tapping ~ 11 AM ~ Rock Creek

Are you interested in tapping trees but don't know how to start? Join a Naturalist and learn all about the steps of tapping a tree successfully and even get

a taste test of syrup tapped from trees around us, as long as weather permits. This program will be outside so please dress accordingly. Registration is not required but is appreciated. Please text or call 563-349-0956 to sign up.

13th ~ Birds of Prey ~ 2:15 PM ~ Camanche Public Library

Come learn about the Birds of Prey we have here in Iowa! You'll even get a chance to meet our live education birds! All children must be accompanied by an adult.

20th ~ Animals After Dark ~ 6 PM ~ Eden Valley

Come learn about all the animals that come out at night! Since they're active in the darkness, these animals have special adaptation that help them to survive. We will explore our senses and see how well we would be as nocturnal animals. All children must be accompanied by an adult.



23rd ~ Cedar-Wapsi Chapter of Pheasants Forever Banquet ~ 5 PM ~ Cedar County Fairgrounds, Tipton

Contact Chip Brown at 563-357-5624.

26th ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek

Join this fun little group that does big things for Rock Creek!

27th ~ Woodcock "Sky Dance" ~ 7:30 PM ~ Sherman Park, north entrance

We will look and listen for the courtship display and try to get up close! Wear long pants in case we have to go through brambles.

29th ~ Clinton County Ducks Unlimited ~ 6 PM ~ Buzzy's ~ Welton

Contact Brian Huling at 563-357-8830.

30th ~ Clinton County Pheasants Forever Banquet ~ 5 PM ~ Millennium Ballroom, Goose Lake

Contact Brad Taylor at 563-221-1214.

April Events



6th ~ Trivia Night ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek ~ Doors open at 6 PM, trivia starts at 7 PM

Come for a fun night of trivia to raise funds for the Friends of Rock Creek and Fishing Has No Boundaries organizations. FORC are the eyes and ears of the visitors while promoting the park through volunteering and hosting events.

FHNB now hosts two fishing events at the county parks for disabled youth and adults that might not otherwise have the opportunity to fish. Register your table of 8 for \$80 or \$15 for individuals, just call or text 563-349-8680 to reserve your spot.

7th ~ Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC) Practice Begins ~ 1-4 PM ~ DeWitt Ikes

Children ages 11-18 are invited to practice for the state YHEC competition that is held on June 1, 2024, at Rock Creek. Competitions include wildlife ID, orienteering, safety trail, knowledge base exam, archery, .22 rifle, muzzleloader and shotgun. All equipment is provided. Contact Jill Schmidt at 563-349-8680 with any questions. Registration is not required.

13th ~ Spring Fling ~ 10 AM ~ Eco Center, Rock Creek

Spend the day celebrating spring! At 10 AM there will be a FREE egg hunt for ages 1-12 in and around the Eco Center. Join Naturalist Jill Schmidt at 10:30 am for a fun activity about Bees and learn how to make your own bee hotels! This day is always filled with fun things from crafts to live animals, celebrate spring with us at Rock Creek!



18th ~ Young in the Wild ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek

Fawns, kits, cubs, chicks, and many other baby animals will be starting to make their appearance. Come learn more about these little ones and how their parents care for them. All children must be accompanied by an adult.



22nd ~ Earth Day Celebration ~ 5 PM - 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

Earth Day is here! Join us in celebrating one of the best days of the year! We will have crafts, games and even some sweet treats to help celebrate our amazing earth! All ages are welcome, and children must be accompanied by an adult.

23rd ~ Friends of Rock Creek ~ 6 PM ~ Rock Creek

Join this fun little group that does big things for Rock Creek!

25th ~ Spring Wildflower Walk ~ 5 PM ~ Eden Valley

Enjoy an evening in the bluffs of Eden Valley Refuge as we search for the spring wildflowers starting to bloom. This hike will remain on the trails.

Clinton County Conservation

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2308 255th Street
Grand Mound, Iowa 52751
Phone: 563-847-7202
Email: conservation@clintoncounty-ia.gov
Web: www.mycountyparks.com

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MAILING LIST

Clinton County residents may receive this newsletter at home, free.
Others are charged \$5 annually. "The Heron" is on our website or emailed, free of charge.

BOARD MEETINGS

The Clinton County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. The Board regularly meets the third Tuesday the month, at 6 PM, in the Conservation Office, located 1 mile south of Grand Mound at 2308 255th St. Please note, date and location may be changed.

Clinton 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 Clinton C.C.B. or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

