

Earthtones

Spring 2013

Celebrating 50 Years: Acquiring Land & Building Up

At one time there were many private woods and fishing areas along streams that owners gladly offered for the public to use or, at least, put up with. There aren't many places like that anymore.. thus, the park system.

- by Chuck Hotle, 6 May 1980

Hotle may have had these thoughts in mind during the five years he served on our charter conservation board. In fact, one of the very first properties purchased for the newly created park system was Sockum Ridge, an area already popular for picnicking and hiking.

The Board must have had high hopes for that area, complete with fishing pond, picnic shelter, and even a shooting range. However, vandalism prevented the second idea and public outcry stopped the third. The pond itself is still there, in a very scenic location halfway up the ridge. Unfortunately, that same location prevents it from being a very good fishing pond with all the leaves that fall into it each year. On the positive side, the park gets high use from mountain bikers, hunters, hikers, and even the occasional school group. As one of the few large tracts of timber available to the public, Sockum Ridge is well worth a visit.

A few years later, another large tract of timber would be purchased, this one near Brighton. Brinton Timber borders the Skunk River and thus has lowland areas prone to flooding. This area has demonstrated the need to document clearly important information for future boards and staff. After a misunderstanding, we have made sure to include in our history and management plans for this area that this is area is a preserve. No active management

will take place here except in the parking/picnicking area and for trails. This is a favored park for horse-back riders, bird watchers, and spring wildflower hikers.

An interesting note about Brinton Timber is that back in the 1970s, the Iowa Conservation Commission (now the DNR) released turkeys there. Turkeys had been rare throughout the state and often required assistance to return to their historical range. The old board minutes reflect this program's success, specifically noting a few years later that turkeys were reproducing on their own within the timber.

During those same first five years, the board would acquire, by purchase or donation, several other properties. In less than a decade after the very first board meeting in 1963, we would already have roughly half of the properties we now manage today. Little by little, the board improved these areas for public use. They built picnic shelters, latrines and a few ponds. They carved trails and printed park brochures. They publicized their activities, garnering public support. They didn't shy either from new ideas - in 1971, we began raising catfish for our ponds, a practice so successful that we kept it up until just this last year.

By the end of our first 25 years, most of our existing properties and acreages were under our management. The early board did their best to meet many different needs in locations across the county, a practice I would hope that has been successful.

By Pamela Holz

Washington County Conservation Board

From the Director: 50 Years!

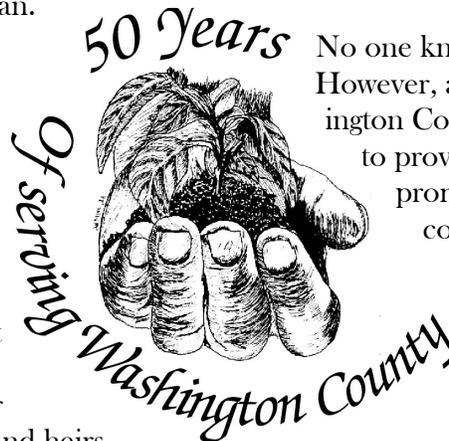
WCCB is turning that “nifty 50.” Our agency has employed “slow and steady” progress throughout our existence, and this year’s planned programs and events are no exception. Grandiose is rarely what we do. Instead, we invite you and yours to attend as many of these smaller events as you can.

It has been my extreme pleasure to serve as the Director for 29 of those 50 years as of October. I was hired as only the second Director, replacing the retiring John Davis. Of course, I had little opportunity to work directly with John, but continue to have both appreciation and respect for all that he and his family accomplished during the WCCB’s “younger years.” Many of his surviving family and heirs live in fairly close proximity to this day, and we occasionally still chat. Many of the things they accomplished continue to benefit us all.

At the time of my transfer here, there was a DNR person who acted as the liaison between all of the CCB’s in Iowa. That agent, when he found out I had been hired, congratulated me and stated that he challenged me to make this program grow. Our program has both grown and evolved, but I certainly feel like I am but a very small factor in making anything at all happen. Great volunteer conservation boards, excellent staff, and humbling community support have provided the motivation, direction, and even the funding. My role has been, and is, to do my best to bring it all together.

As much fun as it is to look back, I want everyone to know that I continue to look forward with as much excitement and enthusiasm as I ever did - even if my hair turned gray and is falling out. When I came here, those first boards directed me towards expanding the acreage and diversity of their land holdings. Together, we got pretty good at that

until we began to realize our staffing was going to be the limitation. Since that time, we have been shifting our focus towards property development & management on the acreage with which we are already entrusted.



No one knows exactly what the future holds. However, as the Executive Director of the Washington County Department voted into existence to provide for your local conservation needs, I promise to continue to do my best to accomplish just that.

By Steve Anderson

Thanks to.....

Mike Zahs for providing us with Washington County timeline dates for our Story of the Tree.

Craig Capps for creating the stand for the large white oak tree slice, now in the Center hallway

Mose Levy Co Inc for metal and donated rebar

Other Exciting News

The Story of the Tree: the large tree slice in the center will soon have a story of its life to go along with it. Learn about significant events in Washington County and Iowa history through the “eyes” of this grand white oak.

Prairie Girl Trail: we will be adding an extension of the new paved trail at Marr Park from just south of the center directly to the campground.

Digital Treasure Hunt

Get outside and get moving! Help the Washington County Conservation Board celebrate its 50th anniversary by visiting a few of its 2,000+ acres and enter a chance to win prizes. All you need to do is visit the following eight parks, take a picture of yourself or a family member at the spot designated below, and bring your set of photos to the Conservation Center at Marr Park to enter into the prize drawing.

Rules:

1. All photos must include at least one member of the family. Photos may be self-portraits.
2. Photos may be submitted by print, digitally (flashdrive/CD/e-mail), or shown via camera/cell phone.
3. Submissions may be received during open hours of the Conservation Education Center.
4. One entry per family.
5. Deadline for submission is August 1. Winners will be drawn and announced at the August board meeting.
6. All participating children will receive a Park Pal sticker.
7. The WCCB reserves the right to display winners' photos and other contest images.
8. Board members, staff, and their families are ineligible for the drawing.

Required parks and image needed

- ◆ Marr Park - snake hibernaculum
- ◆ Brinton Timber - bridge crossing first creek, at end of Grandfather Trail
- ◆ Foster Woods - naming rock
- ◆ Clemons Creek W'life & Rec. Area - large marsh
- ◆ Sockum Ridge - pond
- ◆ Hayes Timber - wooden carved entrance sign
- ◆ Kewash Trail - Crooked Creek bridge
- ◆ Schmitter Heritage Area - view from the crest of the trail head at beginning of park (at end of access trail)

Prizes

All completed entries will be entered into a drawing for the following prizes. All prizes valid through 2014.

1. Week camping
2. Lodge rental
3. Shelter 1 rental

Washington County Conservation Board

Office: 319/657-2400

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E-mail: wccb@iowatelecom.net

Website:
co.washington.ia.us/departments/conservation

Members: Lyle Moen
Liz Kaufman
Craig Capps
Bill Nickell
Barb Donkersloot

Staff: Steve Anderson, Exec. Director
Bob Bellmer, Park Ranger
Pamela Holz, Naturalist
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician
Kathy Dolan, Center Coordinator

Washington County Conservation Board meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Conservation Education Center. Visitors are welcome.

The WCCB is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in larger print, please contact our office.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.



Mystery Park! Name the location of this picnic shelter for a bonus entry in the prize drawing.

Spring Calendar

The Washington County Conservation Board meets the second Wednesday of each month. Meetings are held at the Conservation Education Center in Marr Park at 4:30 p.m.

The Conservation Education Center will be closed for the following holidays: March 31, May 27, and July 4.

Marr Park Pond improvements are scheduled to begin on July 8. This project includes draining the pond. Expect it to be empty for the remainder of the year.

Fri., April 5 **7:15 p.m.** **Marr Park**

Prairie Fire Program and Night Burn

The evening will begin with a presentation within the Conservation Center on prairie fires, their role in the past, and their role today. Then, at 8:00 p.m., we will head to the front of the park to see the north prairie being lit. Note: this fire could burn very quickly; latecomers could miss it.



Sat., May 4 **1:00 p.m.** **Marr Park shop**

Recycled Tire Birdfeeder

Surprise Mom this Mother's Day with a one-of-a-kind birdfeeder made from an old tire. Meet at the Marr Park shop (head straight south upon entering the park and turn left into the shop area across from the residence). You will design, cut, assemble, and paint your personal creation. Pre-registration is required. Ages 10 and up; children must be accompanied by an adult. Material fee: \$5.



Sat., June 8 **8:30 a.m.** **Marr Park**

Go Fish! Young Person

Introduce your child to the life sport of fishing and outdoor fun. Geared toward preschoolers and lower elementary students, this program will cover the fish of Iowa, the excitement of fishing, and then spend most of the morning cane pole fishing. Adults will also have a brief session on fishing and water safety. All children must be accompanied by an adult. This even takes place during the DNR's free fishing days so fishing licenses are not required during this weekend.

Sun., June 23 **8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.** **Clemons Creek Wildlife & Rec. Area**

Clemons Creek Shoot

Both the Washington CCB and the Washington Archers will be on hand to direct participants on the archery and shooting range. Whether you are a beginner, amateur, or just curious, you will be able to try your hand at different target practices, learn a bit about gun and bow safety, and proper form. All ages are welcome to this public event.

Upcoming events to watch for: Perseid meteor shower watch (August 12), Halloween Hike (October 19), craft program, toddler-adult program, and more. Let's make our 50th year the best yet!

Summer Day Camps

These nature camps will be designed around the natural world at Marr Park and will be fun as well as educational. Activities will include hikes, games, crafts, fishing, and exploration. Students will also create their own camp t-shirt. Refreshments will be served each day.

Each camp is limited to 12 students. Camp runs from 9:00 a.m. till noon, Monday through Friday. Camp fee is \$25 per student. (Exception is Tadpole Camp: see below right).

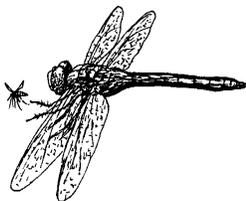
Pre-registration is required for all camps.

Dragonfly Camp: This camp will focus on awareness of the natural world.

For students entering 1st–2nd grade

Dates: June 24–28 or

July 22–26



Tadpole Camp: This camp is for 4-5 year olds who have yet to start kindergarten. We will focus on exploring the natural world with our senses. Parents or other adult friends are welcome as well.

Dates: M-W: June 10-12 or

M-W: July 1-3 or

M-W: August 5-7

Times: 9:00 - 10:30 a.m.

Limit: 8 Cost: \$15

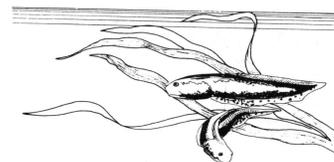


Kestrel Camp: Discover the natural communities at Marr Park and investigate the mysteries of the natural world.

For students entering 3rd–4th grade

Dates: June 17–21 or

July 8–12



Mink Camp: This camp will focus on in-depth exploration of the ecosystems at Marr Park. Exciting activities for these older students include canoeing and survival.

For students entering 5th–7th grade

Dates: July 29–August 2



For more information on these camps or to receive a registration form, please call the Naturalist at 319/657-2400 or e-mail wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net If your child has special needs, please let us know when you register.

Scholarships Available

The Washington Noon Kiwanis is offering scholarships for those with financial need.

Volunteers are Needed

For safety and liability reasons, we would like at least one volunteer to assist in each camp. Anyone 14 and older can assist. *Anyone volunteering for a week will receive a paid registration for the child of their choice.*



WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Return Service Requested

Center Hours after May 1
Mon Thur Fri Sat
10:00–6:30 p.m.

Sunday
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Tues Wed
Closed

Meet Tuck and Squish

The Conservation Education Center has two new permanent residents: Tuck the painted turtle and Squish the spiny soft-shell turtle. These juvenile turtles most likely hatched in 2011 and were obtained last summer.

Painted turtles are commonly seen in Iowa and are found in a variety of water habitats that offer sunning spots and yearround water. They are also not picky in their diet, eating plants, animals, and even carrion. Because their tongue is fixed within their mouth, they need to eat in the water.

Spiny softshell turtles are shy and rare to see in the wild. They differ from other turtles because they have no hard scutes or scales on their shell; rather their shell is more leathery in appearance. Their unusual nose resembles a snorkel. They swim fast and will bite and scratch protectively.



Note: the Conservation Board does not endorse the removal of turtles from the wild for pets. Tuck and Squish are educational animals, joining the snakes Deb and George, and like them will be used for formal programs.