

Earthtones

Autumn 2014

Trouble with Stowaways

Believe it or not, you have transported aliens at one time or another. But then, you regularly pick up hitchhikers. Most of these fail to thrive, but some take roots and grow. A small minority have the insidious plans to take over, spread even further, and dominate at all costs.

While not a paranoid description of illegal immigration, it does describe another, serious problem: that of invasive species.

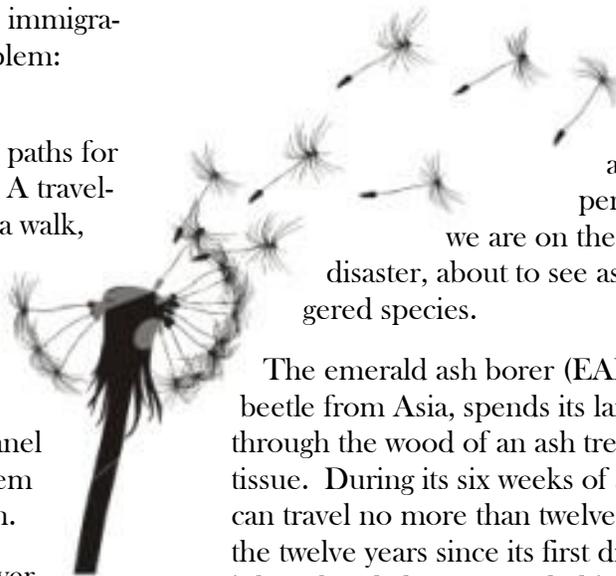
With global trade and travel the norm, the paths for other species to travel is many and varied. A traveler may inadvertently pick up seeds during a walk, seeds that brush off elsewhere. A hobby gardener may discover an interesting plant he wishes to place in his yard and brings it (legally or not) home. A shipment of lumber may harbor a new woody parasite eager to munch. Maybe even a panel of experts struggle with a perplexing problem and introduce a new species as the solution.

Whatever method, most species will discover the new land inhospitable. Only about ten percent will be able to establish small, stable populations at their port of entry. Roughly ten percent of those species will be able to adapt fully to the new environment and spread, or invade, new places.

Although that one percent chance may be small, those that survive the odds are often able to wreak a lot of havoc. Think of all the struggles against dandelions, thistles, house sparrows, or pigeons. Think of the damage wrought by the tiny zebra mussels, clogging pipes and ruining the native mussel economy. Or the loss of a fisheries because someone illegally dumped fish in a new location (yes, those

flying fish videos are fun to watch; too bad they also outcompete native fish). Millions of dollars are lost each year in the fight against invasives.

Sometimes, the damage can be devastating. Back in the '50s, Dutch elm disease marched across the states, wiping out row after row of scenic elm trees. Those towns did not just lose a bit of beauty, but also shade and temperature control. Now we are on the brink of another tree disaster, about to see ash become an endangered species.



The emerald ash borer (EAB), a penny-sized beetle from Asia, spends its larva stage gnawing through the wood of an ash trees, disrupting living tissue. During its six weeks of adult life, the beetle can travel no more than twelve miles. However, in the twelve years since its first discovery in Michigan, it has already been recorded in Iowa. Despite quarantines and restrictions, EAB-infested wood has been transported to unaffected areas.

Unless we want a world that all looks the same, with the same pesky birds and the same weeds, the same fish and the same trees, we ourselves are going to have to step up. It is much easier not to introduce another species than it is to eliminate it. Because you can never tell exactly which ones will thrive, we will need to be more conscious of following transportation laws and more aware of possible stowaways. Otherwise, our ash trees may not be the last serious victim.

By Pamela Holz

From the Director's Desk

"It has been quite a summer" as the saying goes for the 29th time for me here in Washington County. In all of that time, never has the team efforts and results been more apparent nor successful. It is a thrill for all of us every day to experience the record crowds, and to do all that we can to make everyone, including visitors, staff, volunteers, and board members have an outstandingly pleasant experience.

The summer of 2014 will set yet another new record for camping as well as shelter usage at Marr Park. The same is true for most of the other measurable user groups, from shelters to the rifle range and beyond. As you can imagine, a great deal of our 5-person staff time is spent in an effort to keep things clean and safe. Citizens assist us whenever they notice the need, and notify us when a need is there too big for them to handle. We hugely appreciate this!

The few remaining available staff hours for developments were spent towards planning and implementing many exciting projects, each of which are geared to further improve the quality of the experience of our visitors within the financial limitations available to us. A few of these projects are summarized here:

Mary Lodge Proximity Upgrade: The Washington County Riverboat Foundation partnered with us on this project, which spanned two years. It included huge donations by Iowa Bridge & Culvert as well as All American Concrete. Varying other donations of labor, materials, and time added hugely to the quality of the final product which upgraded Mary Marr Lodge, reconstructed the pond (thanks to all fishermen as your Fish Habitat Dollars funded 90% of this), and added both Sarah's Haven and an amazing new playground.

Kewash Nature Trail: Efforts were made to improve the challenging slope where the trestle was removed from the trail years ago. It is certainly not perfect, so we will keep working on it, but it is the

"best it has ever been" and most patrons have expressed appreciation.

Memorial Projects: Several outstanding Memorial Donations were received and the WCCB continues to implement the improvements these thoughtful people made possible.

Trail Amenities: Community Visioning is leading to both unique and outstanding amenities, just starting to be implemented, all along the trail from where it enters Marr Park from Ainsworth, and all the way to the Conservation Center.

Campground & Shelter #4: The WCCB's highest priority for our next major improvements are to replace the shower house (with the goal of it doubling as an essential storm shelter), upgrading that playground, replacing the shelter there, and finalizing the paving of the road back to the Center.

Of course, there are a myriad of other exciting projects in the infancy of planning. As one exciting example we hope to one day partner with the City Of Washington and other great community entities to create a loop trail off the existing Kewash Trail.

It is exciting to see our other projects mature and begin to be utilized by our patrons. Examples, of which there are far more than we can name, include both Willow & Foster Ponds are yielding keeper catfish for the first time since we renovated them and our expanded campground resulting in those record crowds referred to earlier.

As fall approaches and our efforts and user groups go through their seasonal evolution, we want to assure you that our staff remains active and dedicated to serving the local conservation needs of the people of Washington County. Continue to visit us often!

By Steve Anderson

Annual Report Highlights

During the past fiscal year, the Conservation Board continued its dedication to maintaining and improving our parks and recreational areas for the public. Here are just a few of the highlights from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014.

- ◆ Camping revenues continued to break records. The increase was over \$10,000 this last year. That's a lot of campers!
- ◆ The Marr Pond and Vicinity upgrade was mostly completed this year (with only sod and a few touch ups for this current year). The upgrades included lodge renovations, the new Sarah's Haven gazebo, pond reconstruction, and a new playground area. Increase use of this area by weddings (reservations made before completion, showing the faith the public has in us) and by children demonstrates the project's success.
- ◆ The old Lodge playground was moved. The sand shovel went to the front playground and wooden seesaw and slide to the playscape area in the pines. Both saw high summer usage.
- ◆ We reinforced the Kewash Bridge over Crooked Creek.
- ◆ We brought a Smithsonian traveling exhibit, *Listening to the Prairie*, to the Conservation Center, resulting in several new spring field trips.
- ◆ The education program won the state's Environmental Education Program Award for counties with 2 or less naturalists.
- ◆ With Public Health's assistance and wellness funds, a trail map brochure was created and new trail map signs were installed at Brinton Timber, Sockum Ridge and Fern Cliff, courtesy of a grant with Public Health.
- ◆ Trees Forever awarded the Conservation Board funds for its Visioning Project along the Marr Park-Ainsworth trail. Work has already begun to provide shade, visual screens, and aesthetics to this well-used trail.
- ◆ Of course, we had the usual small projects and several memorials to improve your experience.

Thanks to the Following

Summer camp help

Addie Pacha Olivia Pacha Samantha Holz
Anna Holz Andi Klein Susan Davis

Jeffrey Boshart for sculpture
US Fish & Wildlife for ERWA habitat improvements



Jeff Boshart (far right) stands with the Birneys at his newly installed "Lil Bit" sculpture.

Autumn Calendar

The Washington County Conservation Board meets the second Thursday 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: November 27–28, December 24–26, and January 1.

Sat., Oct. 18 6:45–8:30 p.m. Marr Park
Annual Halloween Hike: Aliens Among Us
See back page for more information.

Sat., Nov. 8 1:00 p.m. Center
Nature Crafts: Wood and Burlap Wreath
Come out to the center to create your one of a kind Wood and Burlap Fall Wreath. This will be an easy craft for anyone age 10 or older (younger children may be accompanied by an adult). A great craft for the fall or holiday season! Material fee of \$10. Please call Kathy at (319) 657-2400 to register, class size will be limited.



Sat., Jan. 24 1:00 p.m. Marr Park
Ice Fishing Clinic
This fun family event will feature a relatively warm shelter and pre-drilled holes. You will have the chance to catch fish from a five-inch hole in the ice and learn some tips and tricks. Also, see the fish in action with an underwater camera. Hot cocoa will be served in the Center. Families welcome.

Washington County Conservation Board

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Mark Even, Park Ranger

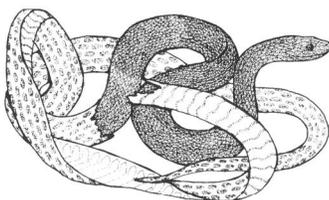
Washington County Conservation Board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Conservation Education Center. Visitors are welcome.

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.

Coming Up



For the second winter in a row, the Conservation Center will be hosting a traveling exhibit. The Grand Opening of this display—*Snakes, Rattles, and Holes*—will be scheduled for late January. Learn about the fascinating and oft-misunderstood world of snakes. Then, take a peek (or more) at the Center's live educational snakes. This exhibit has been made possible by Dallas County Conservation Board. The Center will host the exhibit for six months.

Snakes Gone and Snakes Here

The Conservation Board's education program bid goodbye to one of its snakes this past August. Deb, the Baird's rat snake, died most likely from old age. These snakes are native to Texas and Mexico, but Deb was brought from Madison as an adult snake in 2006. She, and her accompanying corn snake George, moved to the conservation Center in 2008 when their owner, the late George Miller, no longer could care for them.

During her eight-year career as an educational snake, we estimate Deb to have met with over 15,000 people. These include visiting schools and other sites, being shown at public programs (such as the Halloween Hike and Kidsfest), and entertaining visitors to the Center. Deb demonstrated that snakes need not be scary, were not slimy, and had personalities just like people.

Since we have discovered two snakes work best for the education program, we are currently hoping a native fox snake will be able to replace Deb. Originally used for a one-time program, she is currently becoming accustomed to Deb's former cage.

In related news, the Conservation Center will be honored to be hosting a traveling snake exhibit for six months, beginning in mid-January. Visitors will be able to walk through an oversized snake skeleton while learning about different snake adaptations. More information will be available in the winter edition and through local media.



Deb being shown to Keota Kindergarten

Trees Here and There

Center snakes aren't the only changes at the Conservation Board. Several projects have been completed or begun lately, having to do with trees.

Thanks to two different grants, Marr Park will be seeing some tree additions. Trees Forever is supporting its visioning project for the Ainsworth-Marr Park Trail. Two eagle scouts will be taking the lead in planting three areas along to the trail with native trees. These trees will provide much needed shade as well as serve as visual screens. Several of these trees have already been planted along the mini-lake portion of the trail.

In another grant, the Native Fruit Association will be doing some experimental plantings at Marr Park of pawpaws, honeyberry, and dwarf sour cherry. This two-year project will hopefully demonstrate the feasibility of growing these fruit trees as a viable crop. Should the plantings prove successful, hopefully in a few years, park visitors will be able to sample the results as they hike the trails.

The Nolan addition to the English River Wildlife Area will be seeing some changes in regards to its trees as well, although a bit differently. The US Fish and Wildlife Service has offered to provide wildlife habitat improvement to the area. One improvement is the removal of "weedy" trees from the area.

Lastly, at several of our timbers, you'll be better able to "see the forest for all the trees." Finding one's way through Brinton Timber, Sockum Ridge, or Fern Cliff can sometimes be tricky. We hope our new directional maps will help you, located at trailheads and trail intersections. These signs are provided for the public under a wellness grant with Public Health.

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Return Service Requested

Winter Center Hours
Mon Thur Fri Sat
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Sunday
1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Tues Wed
Closed



We are taking a look at invasive species during our annual Halloween Hike. This event is a not-so-scary alternative to traditional Halloween activities.

The challenges will begin at the Lodge, head around the mini-lake, and finish at the Conservation Center. You'll face four stations to help you learn about invasives, what is being done and what you can do. Face off against the emerald ash borer, participate in the struggles of aquatic animals, and prevent the spread of garlic mustard. The trail will be lit by luminaries. However, since moonrise won't occur till hours later, you may wish to bring flashlights to help you on your way.

Halloween Hike: Aliens Among Us
Saturday, October 18
6:45 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.
Marr Park

Finally, at the Center, you'll create your own craft, ID some common invasives, and, of course, have refreshments.

Enter the trail anytime between 6:45 – 8:00 p.m. Center activities will continue till 8:30.

Volunteers are also needed for this event. Call if you would like to volunteer.

For more information, contact 319/657-2400 or wccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net.

