

Earthtones

Summer 2013

Celebrating 50 Years: Dreaming Big

Ten to twenty years ago, Iowa was in the midst of a nature center building boom. Interest in environmental education (EE) was growing and buildings to expand a county's EE potential were in demand. The public was also interested in visitor centers and in meeting places in natural areas.

Roughly fifteen years ago, the Washington County Conservation Board considered its own EE program and decided to dream big. The naturalist position had just gone full-time and the need was seen for formal indoor spaces within our parks to help the EE program grow.

Once the Board decided on the goal to build a center, the process went extremely quick. Due to a few extremely dedicated people, the idea passed from paper to concrete in relatively short period of time, roughly five years (other counties have taken twice as long or longer to get their building off the ground).

This August, the Washington County Conservation Education Center (its official full name) will have been open for a full ten years. What an interesting fluke that it coincides with the 50th anniversary of the organization itself.

The path to realize this dream did not come easy. The Board and the then-newly created Foundation were faced with several questions before a building could even be designed:

- * What was to be the main purpose of the building? Formal education programs? Office space? Visitor center and public programs? Meeting space?

- * What, if any, was to be the secondary purpose?
- * Do we want a display space? Live animals?
- * How much office space did we need? How should we organize it?
- * How much storage and work space was needed?
- * How focused did we want to be on "green" construction?
- * Where was the best location for the building?
- * And, very importantly, could we even raise the funds for it?

After much thought, the following goal and objectives were finalized:

The Center will provide easier access to materials and resources to the public as well as improved facilities for school trips, park visitors, and programs. The primary purpose of the Education Center will be to promote conservation, environmental education, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Education Center will be used for the following purposes:

- * *To educate and create an environmentally responsible citizenry;*
- * *To broaden and further develop the Conservation Board's existing environmental education program as a focal point for the program;*
- * *To provide conservation and environmental education resources and interac-*

Continued on page 2...

Washington County Conservation Board

...Continued from page 1

tive opportunities for teachers, students, youth groups, civic organizations, and the public; and

- * *As a centralized operating center for the activities of the County Conservation Board.*

Overall, it quickly became obvious the Center was a success. The educational program alone tripled in a few short years and became much more efficient and flexible, with more potential opportunities.

In addition, it became easier for the public to reach conservation staff, reserve facilities at Marr Park, and also have a four-season meeting space for their own needs. Although the causation is harder to prove, campground receipts also increased in conjunction with the new building. (This would also eventually spawn another major “dreaming big” development: the expansion of the Marr Park campground, recently completed).

By Pamela Holz



Center recently completed 2003



Center today

Center Facts and Figures

Over the last ten years, the Center has made a difference in a variety of ways. Here are some quick facts to sum up that first decade:

- Total number of visitors: over 77,000
- Amount of direct revenue generated for the county: over \$44,000
- Number of traveling displays: 3
(4th scheduled for winter of 2014)
- Visitor origins: majority of Iowa counties, at least 35 states, and 5 countries
- Types of usage
 - ◊ Drop-in visitors
 - ◊ Conservation Office visitors
 - ◊ Field trips
 - ◊ Hunter safety classes
 - ◊ Reunions
 - ◊ Sports banquets
 - ◊ Teachers meetings
 - ◊ Funeral Luncheons/Memorials
 - ◊ Government meetings
(local, state, regional)
 - ◊ Church services/potlucks
 - ◊ Business meetings
 - ◊ Retreats
 - ◊ Workshops
 - ◊ Weddings/receptions
 - ◊ Showers
 - ◊ Graduations
 - ◊ Pesticide applicator testing
 - ◊ Birthday party
 - ◊ Surprise parties

Don't Forget
Digital Scavenger Hunt entries are due August 1. Get out and visit those parks!

Kewash Bridge Repairs Scheduled

The railroads came to Washington County in the latter 1800's, peaked in the early 1900's, and have since lost some of their transportation niche. A small portion of those railroads avoided abandonment by becoming public use trails. One of those is the 14 miles we now call the Kewash Nature Trail. Its only bridge crosses Crooked Creek. How well this 150+ year old structure has stood the test of time never ceases to amaze me!

Just one example of the amazing design of this bridge is how it handles high water events (plenty of times over the past few years). The normal flow goes under a completely open span created with large concrete pillars at each end. This serves many functions very well, not the least of which is to lessen the likelihood of debris getting wedged there.

As Crooked Creek rises during floods, the water flows under another span of the bridge held up by a series of large wooden pilings. This greatly lessens the restriction of stream flow that the railroad grade creates. This added bridge span has been adequate to handle every flood that has plagued Washington County except one during the WCCB's years of management. At that point, the railroad itself actually "blew out" at a designed location some distance east of the actual structure, effectively saving the bridge itself from damage.

As amazing as this bridge is, there are a couple of points of needed maintenance that we are preparing to deal with. The first will be to replace the upper sections of the retaining wall at each end of the bridge. These were constructed out of bridge planking against the pilings. It took all of these years, but they have now rotted and there is a void that allows the dirt to slough out of there (often aided by rodents). In the next few weeks our staff will be replacing these planks, and also taking that opportunity to pour short concrete approaches at each end.

The second maintenance item is to replace a couple of the wooden pilings supporting the west end of the bridge. We are blessed to have Iowa Bridge & Culvert in Washington County. They have given us an awesome quote, and we are excited to get this done.

Both projects will require that the bridge be closed for purposes of public safety and to allow crews to work. We will post the Kewash Nature Trail at the time of the closings, and barricade the actual construction sites for purposes of safety and to allow efficient working. We regret the inconvenience this will create, but are confident that you will support us on these improvements needed to assure the Kewash Nature Trail Bridge over Crooked Creek will continue to serve you for years to come!

Thanks to the Following

For help on field days and educational programs

Don Kline
Jeff Koepp
Jeff Prior
Keegan Richmond

Rick and Phyllis Hofer for plants and weeding at our wildlife feeding garden. Lyle Moen for his continued care of the garden.

Russ Parker for removing stumps at Marr Park.

Marr Lodge Remodel Project

Bill Nickell
Douglas Dee Donald
Jeff Prior

Riverboat Foundation for the grant to upgrade the Marr Lodge and proximity.

Summer 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: July 4 and September 2.

Mon., July 8 Marr Park Small Pond

Pond Draining

The small pond at Marr Park, located immediately next to the Lodge, will be drained in order for us to make improvements. This project is funded through a Fish Habitat grant and a riverboat foundation grant. When the project is finished, the fishing should improve immensely. In addition, improvements will be made in the lodge and around the pond as well.

Mon., Aug. 12 9:30 p.m. Marr Park

Starry Wonders

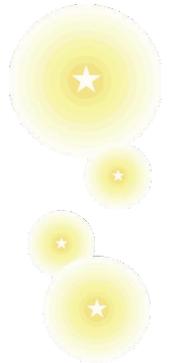
Listen to a variety of stories about the stars and constellations as you watch the peak of the Perseid meteor shower. Rate of meteors could be up to 40 or more per hour and could include brilliant color displays. This year the moon will not quite be at first quarter, making the night darker and more meteors visible.

Aug. 13 & 15 6:00–9:00 p.m. Marr Park

Aug. 17 8:00–Noon Marr Park

Hunter Safety Course

Pre-registration is required. Register online at: www.iowadnr.gov/training under Hunter Education classes. Or call the Center at 319/657-2400. Attendance is required at all three sessions and participants must be 11 years or older.



Sat., Sept. 21 1:00 p.m. Marr Park

Digging up the Past

In honor of Archeology Month, bring out the entire family and let's learn about archeology and archeological digs. We'll do a dig of our own and see what we can learn from the objects we find. We'll examine some authentic artifacts as well as pseudo-artifacts and discuss how weather in Iowa plays a part in what is and is not preserved.

Sat., Oct. 19 Evening Marr Park

Annual Halloween Hike: Be a Conservationist!

Save the date now for the WCCB's annual, fun and educational Halloween Hike. Volunteers are needed to help with this not-so-scary alternative to traditional Halloween activities. A group is also requested to carve jack 'o lanterns the week of the event (pumpkins provided). Contact Naturalist Pam Holz at ccbnaturalist@iowatelecom.net or 319/461-1664 for more information.

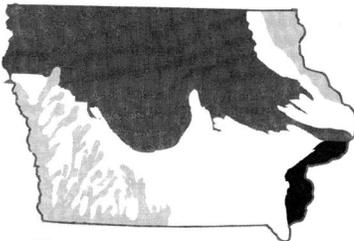
Here Be Gold

In honor of our golden anniversary, let's take a look at gold, and particularly, its presence in our state.

Beyond its relative rarity, gold has value for its unique and diverse properties. These include: does not tarnish under normal conditions, does not react to many chemicals and acids, highly malleable (can be pounded into near transparent sheets), conducts electricity, and much more.

Historically, gold was used for coins, jewelry, art and even medicine. Until the early 20th century, it served as the backing (gold standard) of many countries' money. It is also used in dentistry, electronics, manufacturing, and photography. It is useful for heat shields and the sun visors of space suits. It easily creates alloys with other metals and is also used as a protective layer of more reactive metals. It is estimated that nearly 200,000 tons of gold have been mined in all of history.

Gold is usually found in igneous rocks (formed by cooling magma). Largest deposits are in South Africa with most of the rest coming from Russia. Since most of Iowa's rock is sedimentary, and formed by oceans and swamps, we do not find gold in our bedrock. In fact, most of our gold deposits actually *traveled* to Iowa.



Four glaciers covered Iowa at one time: the Nebraskan, Kansan, Illinoian and the Wisconsinan.

Starting roughly a million years ago, the Earth passed through a series of ice ages. As the glaciers scoured the landscape, they picked up rocks, boulders, etc. and pushed them to warmer climates. When they retreated, they left behind deposits of

rocks from further north (the capital in Des Moines is actually built upon the terminal moraine, or end point, of the last glacier). These Canadian and Minnesota rocks occasionally contained gold, mostly in flake or dust form.

These light gold deposits can best be found along riverways, mixed in with river gravel and sand. Rivers, cutting through these glacial deposits, have the best potential to concentrate the gold in almost harvestable amounts. The best rivers are in north central and northeast Iowa.

Washington County Conservation Board

Office: 319/657-2400

Fax: 319/657-2500

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.

In 1853, we had our own gold rush (of 3,000 prospective miners) in Eldora on the Iowa River when an innkeeper found gold on his farm. Riches eluded all of them. We did have one commercial gold mining venture in Lyon County in the early 1900s, but overall we have little enough gold spread out too thin to make much difference.

A patient person might be able to pan for gold in our rivers. If you're really lucky, you might just be able to filter out \$25 worth of gold dust in one day.

PRESORTED STANDARD
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit No. 43
Keota, IA 52248

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Return Service Requested

Center Summer Hours
Mon Thur Fri Sat
10:00—6:30 p.m.

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

Tues Wed
Closed

Ainsworth Trail Amenities Design

Over the past several months, area volunteers have been working with Trees Forever professional planners. The goal of this committee has been to brainstorm landscaping and other features for the new Marr Park to Ainsworth Trail.

This trail, just finishing its first year, has already been highly popular and used by a variety of groups and individuals. The committee has come up with some amazing design features to overall enhance trail use, provide artful resting spots, as well as educate and encourage trail users.



A conceptual drawing of the proposed trail amenities design.

These designs can be viewed at the Conservation Center during normal open hours. In addition, committee members are available for civic groups presentations.

Now that design concepts are finalized, the next steps are to obtain funding and other donations to move these ideas from paper to reality.

If you would like more information on the design, a speaker for your group, or would like to help, contact Kathy Dolan at the Center at 319/657-2400 or wccb@iowatelecom.net.