

Earthtones

Spring 2021

Marr Park Campground Upgrades

The Washington County Conservation Board (WCCB) is happy to announce several enhancements to Marr Park. As I type this article, a local contractor is working to install 50 amp electrical service to the original side of the 41 site campground. The original 30 amp service no longer met the needs of the current modern day camper. The new 50 amp service will have the necessary amps to run all the modern amenities that campers and RV's now possess. Although the old service was functioning properly, it had become a burden for park visitors as well as conservation staff.

When the 30 amp service was originally installed no one predicted that a camper would one day possess: a microwave, refrigerator, stove, a/c, hot water heater, and a TV all running simultaneously. Thus at times, issues would arise with our service simply not having the capability of providing the necessary amps required to operate all the above mentioned amenities. The electrical upgrade will bring the entire campground up to 50 amp service. As work continues on this project, the east side of the campground will be closed to the public. We apologize for the inconvenience as we know camping numbers will continue to increase as the temperature continue to rise.

The west side (16 sites) remain open to the public. The WCCB anticipates the project will be complete in the coming weeks. In addition to the campground electrical, the WCCB has made other investments over the winter to enhance the visitor experience at Marr Park. Twenty five new campfire rings will be placed within the campground at the sites that still possessed the hollowed out tire rims. The new fire rings will be much larger in size and possess a grill grate which

allows campers to cook over a wood fired open flame. Speaking of food, when prepping your meals table space is key. Therefore the WCCB continued purchasing the larger metal picnic tables that have proven to withstand the harsh winter elements much better than the wooden ones. Although the tables are little heavier, they can still be moved easily by two people. Ten more of these tables have been purchased and we hope to have the entire park outfitted with them in the near future.

Once you finish preparing and cooking your meal, finding a location to dispose of your waste is critical to being a responsible park visitor. In order to make cleanup more accessible, the WCCB will be placing several 55 gallon trash receptacles throughout the park. The receptacles are made from recycled material and possess a restricted access lid which will hopefully prevent overfilling and deter wildlife. These receptacles will be placed along our walking trails and near our facilities to help make waste disposal as effortless as possible.

Last but certainly not least, a new drinking fountain and water bottle filling station will be placed at the Mary Marr Lodge. This fountain was provided to the WCCB by funding secured by Washington County Public Health. The fountain will serve as an excellent alternative to unhealthy sugary beverages and will further promote our efforts to cut down on plastic materials by refilling water bottles. The WCCB is excited to showcase all these enhancements to park visitors in the coming weeks. On behalf of the WCCB, thank you for your continued support.

Zach Rozmus, Executive Director

DIY Native Seed Balls

Making seed balls is a fun, family-friendly activity you can easily engage in at home. The components are not hard to come by and the act of making them offers the chance to get your hands dirty, spend some time outdoors, and learn a thing or two about the importance of native plants! Check out the directions below to make your own seed balls.

1. Collect Materials

Wildflower seeds native to the area, or you can just purchase milkweed seed.

Soil, ideally with no additives, compost, and sand.

Water in a squirt bottle

Aluminum foil and a tray or cookie sheet

Measuring spoons: 1 tablespoon, 1/2 teaspoon

2. Mix Dry Base Components

Use a 3-to-1 mixture of soil to your other dry components.

Add 3 tablespoons of soil to your tray.

Add 1 tablespoon of compost to your tray.

Add 1 tablespoon of sand to tray.

Mix well with your fingers.

3 Add Seeds

It is important to use seeds that are native to your area.

Add a 1/2 teaspoon of seeds to your other dry components.

Mix in well with your fingers.

4. Add Water and Combine

Now it's time to get muddy!

Add a little bit of water and work it in with your fingers.

Strive for a consistency like cookie dough. The idea is to get the mixture to stick to itself enough to form balls.

Remember: you can add water but you cannot take it away, so be sure to add it sparingly. Try to form balls before adding more water.

5. Form and Dry

Hard as rocks and small.

Form the seed balls with your fingers; the size should be like a large marble or an almond M&M. You want them small enough that they dry fairly quickly and break down easily. This recipe should yield eight to ten seed balls.

Do not worry about getting them perfectly round. Seed blobs are also fine.

Once formed, place them on your aluminum foil sheet to dry.

Let them sit in a dry place for about 24 hours. You want them to be hard as rocks.

6. Distribute

Put them out in the world, and wait!

When your seed balls are ready to be distributed, make sure they hit bare ground and do not land on top of sod or other established plants. You want the seeds to have direct contact with the ground once rain and weather break them down.

You do not need to water, plant or otherwise tend to your seed balls. Just sit back and wait for your flowers or milkweed to bloom.

Native prairies provide many benefits to the environment. A part from being aesthetically pleasing, they are a source of habitat and food for many wildlife species, including songbirds, bees, and the Monarch Butterfly. Their deep roots help to maintain soil stability and filter our water before it runs into larger bodies of water. Additionally, they help to prevent flooding by taking in excess water from heavy rain or snow events. Specifically, there has been a drastic decline in our Monarch Butterfly populations globally. Their primary nesting habitat is milkweed, although they will utilize the nectar from other native plants for fuel. Spreading native seeds in our backyards is an excellent way to help mitigate habitat loss.



Wildlife Bingo

Go fishing at Marr Park or Crawford Pond.	I am the host plant of the Monarch Butterfly. What am I?	Take a selfie at a WCCB recreation area.	Watch or read the Lorax by Dr. Seuss.	Have a picnic at Fern Cliff. Hike the trails.
Go on a nature walk and reflect on what you saw.	Pick up trash outside (10 or more pieces).	Spend 15-30 minutes in silence outside listening to nature.	I like to gobble and puff up my chest. Who am I?	Plant a tree or native flowers in your backyard.
Hike at Brinton Timber. Take a photo.	Complete a nature scavenger hunt (you choose items).	Free Space	Download the Plant Net app. Identify a plant or tree.	Create a bird-feeder or house using recycled materials.
Research who created the National Parks and why.	Write a poem about your favorite wildlife in Iowa.	Find signs of wildlife outside. Draw or write them down.	Write a positive message in chalk at Marr Park.	Research endangered species in Iowa and how to help them.
Get pictures of scenes in nature (sunrise, sunset).	Name the most common turtle in Iowa.	Go for a bike ride on the Kewash Nature Trail.	Go for a night hike. Listen for signs of nocturnal animals.	Create a work of art with natural materials.

Arriving Soon: Springtime Babies

With the arrival of Spring, comes the birth of wildlife babies. As the weather begins to warm up, many species of wildlife begin preparing for the arrival of their little ones. Others are going to be entering their annual breeding season. While it can be a wonderful and exciting thing to observe, it is important that we keep our distance. Too often, we get caught up in the sight of them, that we forget we can do harm to them by interfering. Instead, it is best to stay back, and let mother nature take its course. Some of the wildlife babies you might see in Iowa this time of year, are chipmunks, fox, otters, swans, beavers, deer, turkey, raccoons, skunks, and many others. Those preparing to have babies are turtles, snakes, frogs, ducks, geese, butterflies, and more. It is important to understand, especially with fawns, that wildlife mothers may leave their young for a short amount of time to gather food. More often than not, they have not abandoned their babies. In fact, they are usually close by. Interacting with those babies can be harmful to them, and impact their ability to survive. As always, remember to leave them be.



Spring 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.

Wedns. April 7th 9:30 am- 11:00 am. CEC
Toddler Time

Join our Naturalist Megan for Toddler Time! This month, we will be learning all about the Eastern Wild Turkey. If the weather is nice, we will be outside. If we have to be indoors, face coverings are strongly recommended.

Thurs. April 15th Dusk Marr Park
Spring Prescribed Burn

Join WCCB staff as we host a live prescribed burn. Prescribed burns are incredibly important to the health of a native tallgrass prairie. They rejuvenate the prairie by eliminating unwanted species, such as weeds, shrubs and trees, and helps improve habitat for wildlife.

Wedns. May 5th 9:30 am- 11:00 am. CEC
Toddler Time

Join our Naturalist Megan for Toddler Time! This month, we will be learning all about bugs. Kids will get the chance to go outside and explore for bugs, as long as the weather cooperates. If we have to be indoors, face coverings are highly recommended.

Sat. May 22nd 8:30 pm. Shelter 3
Movie Night

Join us at Shelter 3 for movie night! To kick off summer, we will be playing *The Parent Trap* (1998). Please bring blankets and chairs, and your own snacks and drinks.

Wedns. June 2nd 9:30 am- 11:00 am. CEC
Toddler Time

Join our Naturalist Megan for Toddler Time! This month, we will be going on an alphabet hike! The goal will be to find objects in nature that start with every letter of the alphabet. If we have to be indoors at all, face coverings are highly recommended.

Sat. June 26th 8:30 pm. Shelter 3
Movie Night

Join us at Shelter 3 for movie night! This month, we will be playing *Heavyweights* (1995). Please bring blankets and chairs, and your own snacks and drinks.

Washington County Conservation Board

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Fritz Engel, Maint. Supervisor
Cody Smith, Ranger/Technician
Brett Johnson, Ranger/Technician

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.

Summer Camps 2021

June 14th- 18th 9:00 a.m.-12:00 pm.

Dragonfly Camp (1st and 2nd Grade)

Compete in the 2021 summer Wilderness Olympics being presented by Washington County Conservation. This camp will teach students about the wilderness, with fun-filled Olympic-themed activities. The camp is limited to 15 registrants.

June 23rd- 25th 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Archery Camp (4th -7th Grade)

New to summer 2021, this camp will give kids the opportunity to explore the sport of archery. Participants will learn the basic fundamentals of archery. The camp is limited to 15 participants.

June 28th- 30th 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Tadpole Camp (Pre-kindergarten)

Kids will learn all about Iowa's wildlife. They will explore the wilderness in search of tracks, scats, and signs of animals living there. The camp is limited to 15 participants.

July 12th- 16th 9:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

Mink Camp (5th- 7th Grade)

With a hunger games theme, preteens will learn about Iowa's landscapes, the wildlife who live there, and our role as conservationists. They may even learn to survive in the wild. The camp is limited to 15 participants.

July 26th- 30th 9:00 am- 3:00 pm.

Kestrel Camp (3rd and 4th Grade)

Kids will learn all about the wilderness with a magical twist. Students will explore Iowa's landscape with the help of Harry Potter themed lessons and activities. The camp is limited to 15 participants.

**Registration forms are located on the WCCB website & Facebook page.
(co.washington.ia.us/170/conservation)**

Burn Season is Upon Us

Native prairies are incredibly important to the health of our environment. Not only do they serve as a valuable food source and habitat for many of our wildlife species, their roots also provide soil stability, filter our water, and prevent flooding by taking in excess water from large rain and snow events. Like most things, native prairies cannot do their job unless they are properly taken care of. There are several management practices that can be used to maintain prairies. The most effective management tool is a controlled or prescribed burn.

Why a prescribed burn? Fire prevents brush and trees from overtaking the prairie, prevents build-up of dead vegetation that encourages weeds and stunts new growth, and improves habitat for prairie birds, mammals and butterflies. Many "exotic" grasses such as bluegrass and smooth brome, threaten to overwhelm the native prairie community. These cool season grasses which grow quickly and flower in spring, can be set back by burns, allowing the summer flowering native grasses to flourish.

Research has shown that prairies thrive with fire. These perennial plants grow back quickly from protected root systems that often exceed 15 feet underground. Fires prevent brush and trees from invading the prairie; shade kills prairie plants. After a fire passes, the prairie grasses and other plants respond with a profusion of bloom. Fires also eliminate dead vegetation, encourage new grass growth, and control non-prairie plants like brome and wild parsnip. Burns should be completed every 3-4 years on native prairies, depending on the condition of the site.

Each spring, WCCB prepares burn plans for a majority of our wildlife management areas. Burns take place according to these plans and during safe weather conditions. As our staff begins the process, we encourage the public to visit any of the burned areas to observe the renewal of life! If approached with curiosity and a keen eye, native prairies have a lot within them to be discovered.

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
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Electronic Service Requested

Summer Center Hours
(Beginning May 1)

Tuesday-Thursday
8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Friday-Saturday
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Sunday–Monday
Closed

Education Updates

Over the course of the last year, COVID-19 took a lot from us. In particular, it significantly impacted the way we presented environmental education programs throughout the county. In the latter part of the 2019-2020 school year, we were no longer able to go into the classroom. May field trips were cancelled, and we were forced to close the Conservation Education Center. Four months later, we were able to host summer camps at a limited capacity. We felt it was exactly what our staff and the youth of our community needed. Especially in a time of social isolation.

Fast forward to the 2020-2021 school year, with the exception of one district, school districts were not allowing visitors into their schools. As a result, we turned to virtual programming, and hosted a couple

home school groups for field trips at Marr Park in the fall. Now that the school year is winding down, we have a handful of field trips scheduled for May, with hopes for an exciting summer.

With that being said, we are thrilled to be able to offer all of our camps this summer, with the addition of Archery Camp. We have also restored our participant limit to 15, with a plan of course to maintain COVID-19 safety measures. Registration forms are now available on our Facebook page and website. Give us a call at 319-657-2400 with any questions or concerns. Additionally, if interested in scheduling a program, feel free to email me at wccbnaturalist2@gmail.com.

By: Megan Jorgensen, Naturalist