

Earthtones

Winter 2022

School of the Wild

In the fall of 2019, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop for environmental educators. I attended a session from the University of Iowa on their program called School of the Wild (SOW). SOW is a week-long outdoor experience for students. Rather than a one day field trip, SOW provides students an opportunity to do school outside for an entire week in the fall or spring.

Typically, the program is offered to upper elementary or middle school students. What is unique about the program is that, with help and support from their local naturalist and university staff, teachers lead the instruction throughout the week. The program was initially implemented within the Iowa City Community School District. In the last few years, the success of the program has allowed it to be expanded across the state. After learning about the program, I immediately knew it was something I wanted to bring to Washington County.

To bring the program to Washington County, I reached out directly to Jay Gorsh, Director of SOW, to learn more, and create a plan for moving forward. We reached out to the Mid-Prairie Community School District first. Fortunately, their staff was excited about the opportunity, and their 6th grade class quickly became our pilot group. To implement the program, there was a significant amount of planning and preparation involved.

There was quite a bit of a learning curve, as all of us learned what it took to be successful. For example, each teacher had varying levels of experience teaching about the outdoors. In May of 2021, approximately 120 students traveled to both Marr Park and Lake Darling State Park to participate in SOW. The theme for the week was habitats. Each day, they learned about a different habitat, with lessons and activities that would help them grasp new concepts and grow in their knowledge of the natural world.



By the end of the week, it was obvious that the students had enjoyed SOW. It was also apparent that the week had had a positive impact on each and every student who attended. It is so easy to take for granted the experiences I had growing up and the adults in my life

who made it possible. To see many students experience the outdoors, some of them for the first time, was incredibly powerful.

After that week, it was clear to me that SOW was a program I wanted to bring to even more students in Washington County. Following the spring of 2021, we reached out to Highland Community School District and the WACO Community School District. Both had their first experience with SOW in the fall of 2021 and the spring of 2022 respectfully. We look forward to continuing to offer SOW to these schools, with the ultimate goal of reaching every district in the county.

Megan Jorgensen, Naturalist

Tin Can Bird Feeder

Now that winter is upon us, our wild birds who do not migrate are going to be frantically searching for food. Because most plants and trees are dormant, the food source for our backyard birds is scarce. One way to mitigate this problem is by providing them with bird seed. Don't have a bird feeder? Check out the easy to follow steps below to create your own tin can bird feeder.

Supplies:

Tin Can (size does not matter)

Wooden dowel or skewer

Hot glue or super glue

Paint (optional)

Cord or string for hanging

Nail and hammer (for poking holes in can for hanging cord)

Directions:

1. Take a nail and hammer two holes towards the top of the can on both sides. This is how you will attach your cord for hanging.
2. Decorate your tin can with paint. Paint it however you would like to. Decorating it is not necessary but adds a little creativity to the project.
3. Glue the wooden dowel to the bottom of the inside of the can.
4. Tie the cord through the nail holes on the can.
5. Fill the can up with your favorite bird seed. Hang it from a tree or hook.



The Mighty Bald Eagle

If you have driven Highway 92 east of Washington recently, then you've probably seen the massive eagle's nest nestled in the large pine tree just north of the highway. If you're lucky, you will see Mom and Dad nesting. If they are not in the nest, they are usually hunting near by, and can sometimes be spotted in the neighboring fields. The Bald Eagle has made a celebratory rise from endangered status to being common. In fact, only three counties have not had a recorded nest. With winter migration in full swing, Iowa is experiencing a population uptick. Here are some fun eagle facts you may or may not already know!

Bald eagles are not born bald. Until they reach maturity at age 4 or 5, their head is varying shades of black and brown. An eagle can lift and carry items up to half their body weight! Its leg muscles, tendons and bones give them super strength. Combined with the strength of their talons, this allows them to grip their prey for long periods of time without getting tired. Likewise, they can fly at speeds of 35-44 mph or 30 mph while carrying food. They can dive at speeds reaching 100 mph! Moreover, they are family-oriented birds. Eagles can raise anywhere between 1-3 young. An eagle will begin incubation in February, after focusing on nest building from November to January.

Finally, you can help keep track of them. There are several ways to do this! You can become a wildlife monitoring volunteer with the Iowa DNR. There are also several online resources for reporting eagle sightings. Journeynorth.org and iNaturalist.org are two websites that allow you to report animal sightings by location. If lucky enough to catch a photo, you can upload images as well. Both websites provide you with the opportunity to become citizen scientists. Without citizen scientists, we would not have a lot of the data used to monitor many of our wildlife species, but more importantly, those of special concern. I encourage all of you to get out there, take a drive, take the opportunity to view and observe wildlife, you will not regret it!

Megan Jorgensen, Naturalist

Winter 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.

Sat. January 21st **8:30 a.m.- 10:00 a.m.** **Marr Park**
Youth Ice Fishing Clinic

In collaboration with Washington County ISU Extension & Outreach, we will be hosting a youth ice fishing clinic. Participants will have the opportunity to learn all about ice fishing. They will receive their own equipment! The event is limited to 30 kids. Registration is required with a \$20 fee. Give us a call at 319-657-2400 if interested in registering.

Sat. January 21st **11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.** **Marr Park**
Snow Shoeing and Sledding at the Park

Join us for a fun day of snow shoeing and sledding at Marr Park. Have you ever wanted to try snow shoeing but don't know where to start? This is the perfect opportunity! We will also do some sledding. We will meet at the gravel parking lot by the boat ramp and walk a short distance to the sledding hill. Hot chocolate will be provided. Questions? Give us a call at 319-657-2400.



Thurs. February 9th **8:30 a.m.—4:00 p.m.** **CEC**
Prescribed Fire Workshop for Landowners

The Prescribed Fire Workshop for landowners will cover a brief history of fire in Iowa, the benefits of prescribed fire on prairies and woodlands, how to set management goals and objectives for your area, as well as tools and techniques to get the job done efficiently. This one-day class is not a certification, but rather a training to help participants gain more knowledge about fire and how it interacts on the landscape. Cost is \$25 and will include a catered meal. Please contact WCCB or Louisa County Conservation to get registered.

Sat., March 25th & 26th **8:00 a.m.** **CEC**
Hunter Education Classroom Course

Washington County Conservation will be sponsoring a FREE Hunter Education Classroom course on Saturday, March 25th and Sunday, March 26th. The first day will be spent in the classroom, while the second day will be a field day with live fire. Students must be 11 years old or older to attend. Please note, certificates do not become valid until their 12th birthday! Give us a call at 319-657-2400 to register.

Washington County Conservation Board

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Members: Craig Capps
Bill Nickell
Barb Donkersloot
Stan Stoops
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Staff: Zach Rozmus, Exec. Director
Megan Jorgensen, Naturalist
Randi Brase, Activities Director
Fritz Engel, Maint. Supervisor
Cody Smith, Ranger/Technician
Brett Johnson, Ranger/Technician
Jacob Adrian, Maintenance 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.

Special Thanks

We would like to extend a special thank you to the following individuals and families for their generous donations to the Washington County Conservation Board. Their donations will help to fund important conservation projects and improvements in the future.

Linda McNeil
Ed Brinton and Family



The weather was beautiful for our annual Halloween Hike; it was the perfect evening to learn about nocturnal animals. This is the largest public event we host every year, as an appreciation of the support we receive from our local communities. This year, we had nearly 300 individuals attend our event! With that being said, the event would not be possible without the generosity of our donors and volunteers.

Thank you to the following local businesses for your donations:
Culligan, Fareway, Hills Bank, Hy-Vee, Sass Family Farms, Walmart, Duane Hammen, SACHA Club, and Pizza Ranch

Thank you for the following volunteers for dedicating time helping the event run smoothly:
The Donkersloot Family, Craig Capps, and Jim Blakeney

We look forward to hosting our annual Halloween Hike next year! We are always looking for volunteers for the hike. If you or someone you know is interesting in joining our volunteer list, give us a call at 319-657-2400!

New Rental Rates

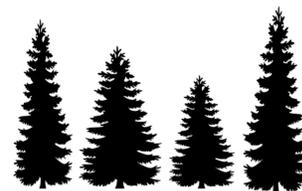
Marr Park offers 1 indoor rental, 2 enclosed shelters, and 3 open shelters for daily rent.

The **Steinbeck Conference Hall** is \$200 to rent with a required \$200 refundable deposit. This room located inside the Conservation Education Center has heating and air, a kitchen with oven, refrigerator, and sink, table and chairs to fit 128 people, and restrooms down the hall.

Shelter 1 located at the front of the park is our first enclosed shelter. This rental facility is \$40 to rent with a required \$40 refundable deposit. Amenities include a wood burning stove, 8 picnic tables, a covered awning, and year-round restrooms located just to the east of the building.

The **Mary Marr Lodge** is our larger enclosed shelter situated between the pond and Thomas Marr Mini Lake. This rental is \$60 to rent with a required \$60 refundable deposit. Amenities in this shelter include a wood burning stove, 10 picnic tables, a covered awning, and restrooms located outside the main doors. If you would also like to reserve the Gazebo that overlooks the pond, it is an additional \$20 to the rental and deposit fee.

Shelter 2, 3, & 4 are open shelters that are free to rent. You can call the Conservation Center to reserve a shelter otherwise they are first come, first serve. Each shelter has outlets, lighting, and 6 picnic tables. Shelter 2 is located at the front of the park near Shelter 1 and the playground. Shelter 3 is located near the old soccer fields. Shelter 4 is located just north of the Campground with a playground and restrooms nearby.



WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Electronic Service Requested

Winter Center Hours

Monday- Friday
8:00 a.m. — 4:00 p.m.

Closed
Saturday- Sunday

Spring Hunter Education Classroom Course

Are you interested in hunting but do not know where to start? Or maybe you have gone hunting before with a group, but want to go by yourself? The first step is to obtain your Iowa Hunter Education Certification. Washington County Conservation will be hosting a traditional classroom course on Saturday, March 25th, with a field day on Sunday, March 26th.

Hunter education is a mandatory program that is designed to introduce students to several life-long skills that are important to the many different types of outdoor recreational opportunities. The course teaches students basic survival and first aid skills, water safety, wildlife identification, and the basics of wildlife management, hunting laws, and fire-arm safety. Hunter education also stresses the importance of individual responsibility and outdoor ethics.

Iowa law requires that anyone born after January 1st, 1972 must be certified in hunter education before they are eligible to purchase an Iowa hunting license. A person who is 11 years old or older may enroll in a course, but those who are 11 and successfully complete the course will be issued a certificate. Classes are typically held from March 1st until November 15th.

Day 1 of our class will be spent in the classroom. Following the completion of the class curriculum, students will take a final exam and receive their certificate. Day 2 of our class will be a field day. Students will have the opportunity to shoot rifles, shotguns, and bows. If you or someone you know is interested in the class, give us a call at 319-657-2400. We will provide you with assistance registering for the class.