

Pathways to Nature

Newsletter of the Webster County
Conservation Board

Winter—Spring 2003-2004



Introducing.....A new WCCB area!

Miller Marsh

The newest area owned by the Webster County Conservation Board is a 40 acre area located near Vincent in a region historically presenting wetlands and prairie habitat. The area is currently not in its prime habitat state because it is being reconstructed back to its original habitats.

The WCCB voted to name the area after our current director, Charlie Miller, who has been an employee with Webster County Conservation for over 25 years. It was felt that naming a public area after a hard-working, devoted employee with a passion for conservation was a fitting token of appreciation. Restoration and preservation of Iowa's original habitat is very important to Iowans.

Miller Marsh was purchased in 2003 with grants from the Webster County & State Council Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Iowa DNR Wildlife Habitat Stamp fund. Two wetlands have been restored as well as the planting of a pristine native prairie mix. A windbreak will be planted next spring on the north and west boundaries of the property to provide adequate cover for a variety of animals.

This area is open to the public for all types of recreational uses that are compatible with wildlife habitat such as nature study, bird watching and hunting.

Directions to Miller Marsh are as follows: From Vincent, go 1 mile North on P71 and 1 mile north on P71, then 1 mile west on C56. The site is on the north side of the blacktop.



Electronic Newsletter

In order to cut costs and save a few trees, the county would like to encourage the public to receive the "Pathways to Nature" newsletter via e-mail. To subscribe, send an email to: wccnewsletter@webstercountya.org Enter SUBSCRIBE in the Subject line. Your email address will be added to our mailing list.

This newsletter can also be downloaded and shared with others. Tell those with internet access to check the web at: www.webstercountya.org

Invasive Species

Spotlight on: Honeysuckles



Bush Honeysuckles (*Lonicera tartarica* & *Lonicera maackii*) are plants that are very familiar and common to many landowners because throughout the 1900's they were extensively planted and were even recommended for planting to benefit wildlife. These multi-stemmed, tree-like bushes are actually native to Europe and Asia, and for that very reason, they are now an exotic nuisance.

The irony lies in the fact that the bushes are actually detrimental to wildlife because they lack nutritional value and they ruin our native woodlands.

The effect it has on woodlands is subtle, but profound.

- The plants shade out tree seedlings such as oaks, maples, hickories, & other natives because:
 - this plant leafs out very early and keeps its leaves very late.
 - it's a very dense plant that reproduces and spreads quickly (lots of berries spread by deer and birds).
- Once it spreads, it changes the architecture of the woodlands
- It has very little nutritional value in any part of the plant.
So, when animals eat it, they're filling up on "junk food".



Lonicera tartarica

It's control is manageable through:

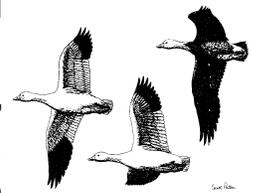
- Hand pulling when plant is small.
- Cutting & treating with appropriate chemical to avoid resprouting.
- Fire.

Like nearly all introduced species of plants and animals, if it's not native to the area, it should not be brought in because the chance of it becoming an invasive is great. A common example is the English house sparrow or the Canada thistle. Let's not repeat our mistakes. It's not worth the risk!!

Wildlife Watch

Reward for shooting Trumpeter Swan

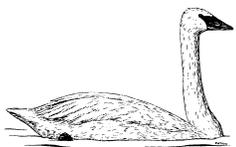
Disbelief & Disappointment—both words to describe the feelings this fall after hearing that at least 8 trumpeter swans were shot in the wild in Iowa, 2 more being suspicious shootings. My first question is.....How can this happen? Misidentification is a hard-to-swallow excuse since a swan has a 58-65" wingspan and a snow goose has a 28-32" wingspan. The size alone should be an obvious difference. If it's not obvious, no shot should be taken! Of course there is the chance that it was not a mistake. This is even more horrifying.



Snow goose in flight

Trumpeter swans are the largest free-flying waterfowl in North America and until recently, through the great efforts of many conservation groups and individuals, these majestic birds were extirpated (completely wiped out of the borders of Iowa) for approximately 100 years. There were only 69 pairs left in the U.S. until the 1990's. Much time, money, energy, and emotion has gone into restoring swans to Iowa. The 500 swans released and 13 wild nesting pairs now in Iowa is a success story in itself. Unfortunately, this program has suffered downfalls, such as power line collisions, including one this Dec. 2003 in southern Webster County, and lead poisoning deaths. However, it's very upsetting when so much effort is literally shot down by uncaring humans. Honest mistakes I can accept, but intentional shootings are heart wrenching.

There have been TIP calls about swan shootings in the past, but not yet this fall. Currently, the reward for conviction of a swan shooting is \$2100. The TIP number is 1-800-532-2020. Our local conservation officer contact number is 515-571-0127.



PROJECT A.W.A.R.E.



Project A.W.A.R.E., a week-long event to make Iowans more *aware* of water quality, started when Brian Soenen with the state's IOWATER program wanted to try something similar to the Mississippi River's Living Lands and Waters program instituted by Chad Pregracke. The first Project A.W.A.R.E. took place in 2003 on the Maquoketa River and is now a cache of awesome memories, but the incredible journey has just started.

Overview of 2003 Project A.W.A.R.E.

Over 100 people, at various times, hauled out 109 tires, 16 chairs, 91 bags of trash, some methamphetamine lab items, and an EasyBake Oven, to name just a fraction of the garbage. Water monitoring was done at every starting, midway and end point along the trip. Each night presentations were offered ranging from botany, history, poetry & philosophy. The common thread was the health of a particular watershed, the Maquoketa. It rained & hailed, and several canoes dumped, but a fun time and great memories were shared by all.

Overview for 2004

WHAT—Canoe trip on the Des Moines River from Gotch Park in Humboldt County to Jester Park in Polk County that focuses on water quality and river cleanup. The expedition will include free camping, low-cost meals, and educational programs.

WHEN—June 19-26, 2004; Participation the entire week is not required—Spend one day, the whole week, or anywhere in between on AWARE.

WHY—Focus on checking Iowa's water quality, cleaning up the river, and HAVING FUN!

WHO—For anyone who is interested, co-hosted by the IOWATER Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Program and the Department of Natural Resources KEEPERS OF THE LAND Volunteer Program

To register for this event contact Brian Soenen at 515-281-6640 or Brian.Soenen@dnr.state.ia.us

Don't Veer for Deer

The Department of Public Safety has organized an effort, in conjunction with insurance companies, AAA Minnesota/Iowa, local law enforcement, and many others to educate the public about the deer vehicle crash problem and to equip them with information that will help them to prevent serious injury or death.

In vehicles, you are more at risk of death or serious injury if you veer (swerve) to avoid hitting deer. It is generally safer to hit a deer than to risk hitting another motorist.

If you are about to hit a deer, your best action is to BRAKE firmly, STEER in your lane, STOP with control.

But DO NOT VEER out of your lane!

Swerving (veering) can be worse because:

- Oncoming traffic may collide with your vehicle.
- Vehicles roll easily when swerving and braking.
- Hitting a fixed object such as a driveway, telephone pole, culvert, etc. are possible.

These consequences of veering have a high risk of serious injury or death.

Adults, and parents in particular, please tell young drivers how to avoid more serious injury by remembering.....DON'T VEER FOR DEER

Visit the website at www.dps.state.ia.us/deercrashes for more info. and photographs.

Public EE Programs

Winter-Spring 2003-04

Webster County Conservation

For more information, contact Karen at 576-4258 or khansen@webstercountytia.org

Cross-Country Skiing & Snowshoeing

Date: Sat., Jan. 10, 24, 31, Feb. 21 Location: Kennedy Park Reception Center
Time: 10:00am—12:00pm with instructor
12:00pm—2:00pm on your own Cost: \$7 skis / \$5 snowshoes



Join the naturalist for lessons in the morning if you like or ski on your own on the park's groomed trails. Meet at 10am or anytime between 12—2pm to rent skis. Cross country skiing is a great aerobic exercise and an environmentally-friendly winter activity. If you tend to hate winter, one of the best ways to make it go faster is to bundle up and try to enjoy it.

Snowshoe Building

Date: Sat., Jan. 31 Location: Kennedy Park Reception Center
Time: 12:00 pm Cost: \$ 140 (including bindings)

If you enjoy making things and are up for a challenge, building snowshoes may be just for you. Used to keep from sinking through deep snow, these have a practical purpose. However, they add the outdoor look to a home when merely hung on a wall. With guidance, we will lace snowshoes together. Or a person may construct them completely at home. Call or email Karen to order.

Ice Fishing Clinic

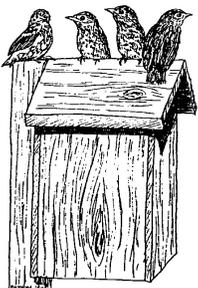
Date: Sat., Jan. 24 Location: Badger Lake at Kennedy Park
Time: 2:00—5:00pm Cost: \$2 per participant

Learn from experienced fishermen about ice safety and general basics of ice fishing. Following safety precautions, ice fishing is a great way to spend time with family and friends and it creates lasting memories. Meet at the boat ramp at Badger Lake and use our equipment or bring your own. Call Karen at 576-4258 to pre-register any age. Adult supervision required.

Nest Box Building

Date: Sat., Jan. 24 Location: Kennedy Park, Bob Heun shelter
Time: 6:30pm Cost: See below

Building nest boxes for our wild birds and mammals is a fun and memorable pastime shared with many family members. Because of habitat loss, nest boxes have become very important. Call or e-mail your choice of boxes and a pre-cut nest box will be ready for you to build.



The choices are:

Wren, Bluebird, Chickadee \$5;
Robin, Barn swallow \$8;
Bat, Screech Owl, Saw whet Owl, Kestrel \$12
Flicker \$15
Wood duck, Merganser, Raccoon, Squirrel \$20

Public EE Programs *Winter - Spring 2003-04*

Webster County Conservation

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For more information, contact Karen at 576-4258 or khansen@webstercountya.org

Full Moon Night Hike

Date: Sat., Feb. 7
Time: 6:00pm
Location: Dolliver Park (watch for signs)
Cost: free

Bring the family and friends for an evening of tracking and owling. Learn about the interesting characteristics of owls and then brave the elements for owl calling and tracking with special effects. Dress warmly in hopes of seeing or hearing some silent fliers and other nighttime wildlife.



Afternoon with the Whitetail

Date & Location to be announced

Come hear a whitetail deer program by the DNR deer biologist and bring your deer rack to have it scored. Learn more facts about deer populations in Iowa and management practices.

Habitat Workshop for Landowners

Tentative date set for March 20 or March 6. Details to be announced.

This workshop will be helpful for landowners and tenants who have land they'd like to develop for optimum wildlife habitat. Topics may include: land management options, government programs, cost-share programs, and individual assistance from conservation experts.



Prairie Rescue Day

Date: Sat., April 17
Time: 1:00-4:00pm
Location: Carlson Recreation Area prairie
Cost: Free

The purpose of this event is to remove the invasive species (mostly small fast-growing trees) of the upland prairie of the Carlson Recreation Area in order to restore the integrity of the diverse prairie community. Cutting and piling the invader trees then treating the stumps will facilitate future management techniques through mowing and burning. The purpose of using volunteers is to educate and inspire a connection with the earth. This Earth Day event will be under the direction and supervision of Webster County Conservation. Directions to the area are as follows: Follow Hwy 175 through Dayton, turn south on Taylor Ave.; go 1.5 miles and turn east on 390th St. (toward Hidden Acres) and follow the signs. If you or an ambitious group would like to work "with the earth", **please call** Karen at 576-4258 to inquire or volunteer.

Earth Day Program

Date: Tues., April 20
Time: 7:30pm
Location: Izaak Walton League Chapter House
Cost: Free

Larry Stone, a famous Iowan with particular talents in photography and writing and a real passion for the earth and our environment, will be presenting this evening in conjunction with Earth Week and the upcoming Earth Day on April 22nd. This will also help kick-off the upcoming Happy Trails clean-up in Fort Dodge on April 24th.

Prairie Rescue at Carlson Recreation Area



With winter in full force, I'll give you something else to ponder: Imagine working in a prairie and woodland in the fresh spring air, surrounding yourself with the new life that's just starting to awaken from a long winter dormancy. The thought of cutting and dragging small trees through tall grass may not sound very appealing, but imagine the chorus of spring frogs and migratory birds some people seldom hear. There's often a refreshing feeling after a good workout and a sense of accomplishment!

In an effort to reclaim our prairie that invaders have taken from us, we will be sponsoring a Prairie Rescue Day at the Carlson Recreation Area south of Dayton on Sat., April 17th. The purpose of this event is to remove the invasive species (mostly small fast-growing trees) of the upland prairie of the Carlson Recreation Area in order to restore the integrity of the diverse prairie community.

Cutting and piling the invader trees, then treating the stumps will facilitate future management techniques through mowing and burning. Using volunteers will help educate about prairies and inspire a connection with the earth. This Earth Day Event will be under the direction and supervision of Webster County Conservation. Directions to the area are as follows: Follow Hwy 175 through Dayton, turn south on Taylor Ave. for 1.5 miles; turn east on 390th St. (toward Hidden Acres) and follow the signs.

If you are interested or know of an ambitious group that would like to work with the earth, please call Karen at 576-4258 to inquire or sign-up to volunteer for as much as you can offer.

Critter Corner

The staff here at Webster County Conservation Board often gets questions about different kinds of snakes. People are most concerned about poisonous snakes. Four venomous snakes are found in the state of Iowa, and none are known to inhabit Webster county. The prairie rattlesnake is found in a floodplain area along the Missouri River in northwest Iowa, and the copperhead, although rare, is found in the far southern tip of Lee county. The timber rattlesnake and massasauga both inhabit similar ranges along the Mississippi River and the southern three tiers of counties in the state, although the timber rattler is more common in its range.

We have a fox snake here in our nature center, and it is often confused with a rattlesnake because of its ability to rattle its tail. Fox snakes are common in Webster county. They are easily distinguishable from other Iowa poisonous snakes because they are not as wide bodied. The timber rattlesnake also has a head larger than its body, while the head of the fox snake is small, and about the same size as its body.

For information, contact us at 576-4258; e-mail at khansen@webstercountya.org

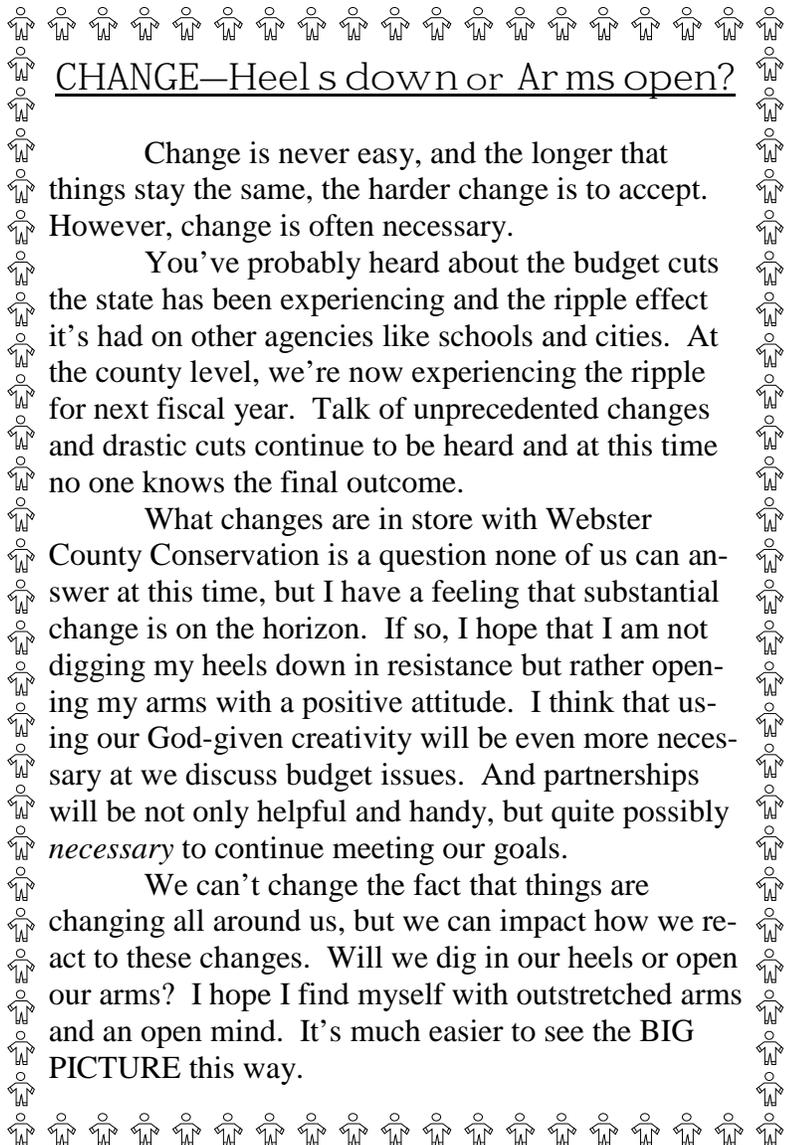
CHANGE—Heel s down or Arms open?

Change is never easy, and the longer that things stay the same, the harder change is to accept. However, change is often necessary.

You've probably heard about the budget cuts the state has been experiencing and the ripple effect it's had on other agencies like schools and cities. At the county level, we're now experiencing the ripple for next fiscal year. Talk of unprecedented changes and drastic cuts continue to be heard and at this time no one knows the final outcome.

What changes are in store with Webster County Conservation is a question none of us can answer at this time, but I have a feeling that substantial change is on the horizon. If so, I hope that I am not digging my heels down in resistance but rather opening my arms with a positive attitude. I think that using our God-given creativity will be even more necessary at we discuss budget issues. And partnerships will be not only helpful and handy, but quite possibly *necessary* to continue meeting our goals.

We can't change the fact that things are changing all around us, but we can impact how we react to these changes. Will we dig in our heels or open our arms? I hope I find myself with outstretched arms and an open mind. It's much easier to see the BIG PICTURE this way.



Tracks to Learning.....

News for Educators of all types

Karen Roosa Hansen, naturalist

khansen@webstercountya.org

515-576-4258

Programs offered by the Environmental Education program :

Year-round (indoor):

If you are teaching formally or informally about a conservation or environmental topic, contact me to see if I have a program I can offer. If I don't, I may be able to work a program together for a certain topic. A few I've been doing repeatedly are: Owls, Owl pellet dissection, Animal Groups (of Iowa animals), Birds, Snakes, Bats, Nature's Unhuggables, Nest Boxes, Bugs, Trees, Outdoor Survival, etc. Most of these can be adapted for outdoor classrooms too. A couple nice features are that nearly all of the programs are free and that because I have access to special permits, I have some unique props. Also, I believe in hands-on learning and try to incorporate this as much as possible.

Seasonal (outdoor):

Iowa offers us great seasonal changes and a wealth of teaching opportunities to go with them.

Spring & Fall — popular times for field trips or what I like to term Outdoor Classrooms because they are truly structured for learning about the environment. I try to work with staff to enhance school curriculum.

Winter—not a popular outdoor time, but certainly should be. We offer cross country skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing, snow tracking, hiking, & bird watching to name a few. There is a student fee for the cross country ski equipment of \$3.50 and snowshoes of \$2.50 per person.

If expenses are keeping your class from attending an outdoor classroom or from taking part in something I am offering, please let me know. Though I may not be able to do anything immediately, these concerns are important to me, and with partnerships or other sponsors, we may be able to make a difference.

Trumpeter Swan Activity booklet—Though the birds and these booklets have been around now for a few years, the whole program is still very exciting. Since I'd like all students to learn more about these birds and other endangered animals, I want your school or agency to have a booklet and I can present a slide program too. Check with your school & town library for "Iowa's Trumpeter Swan Restoration Program" booklet. Contact me for a free copy.

Stuff book—I have a few extras of these small, yet humbling books about daily consuming and what we do with our STUFF. An eye-opening look at consumer waste and the environment. Teachers covering the topic of waste management will want this book.

Bird Workshop for Educators—I'd like to offer a bird workshop for educators where free materials (including a bird call identification CD), fun activities, research, etc. can be utilized. Please contact me with your level of interest and best times. The outcome will be determined by the response I get.

I would like to get a data base of teachers in my email system so I can forward info. that you may find useful in some way. Please email me with your name, school, grade level, and subjects.

Thank you!

Karen Roosa Hansen, naturalist for Webster County Conservation (at Kennedy Park)

1415 Nelson Ave., Fort Dodge, IA 50501

phone 515-576-4258

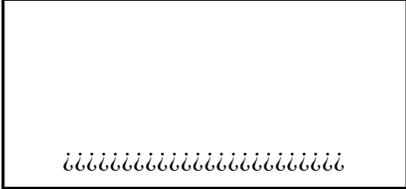
fax 515-574-3763

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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Webster County Conservation

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Books of Interest

A Bird's Eye View—This short booklet details migrant birds, habitat loss, protecting land, management plans, partnerships, and success stories, on a local scale. Colorful and easy-reading makes it a great book for many readers.

Iowa's Groundwater Basics—A colorful, Iowa-specific book that takes a statewide, in-depth look at Iowa's groundwater resources and provides basic information about the occurrence of groundwater in Iowa. Understanding this information is in the best interest of all Iowans.

Iowa's Living Roadway—This plant profiler published by the Iowa Dept. of Transportation is a colorful, concise book that offers an understanding into the state's roadside management programs. For those spending time on the road and observing ditches, it's a great choice aiding in the identification of flowers, grasses, shrubs, and even trees.