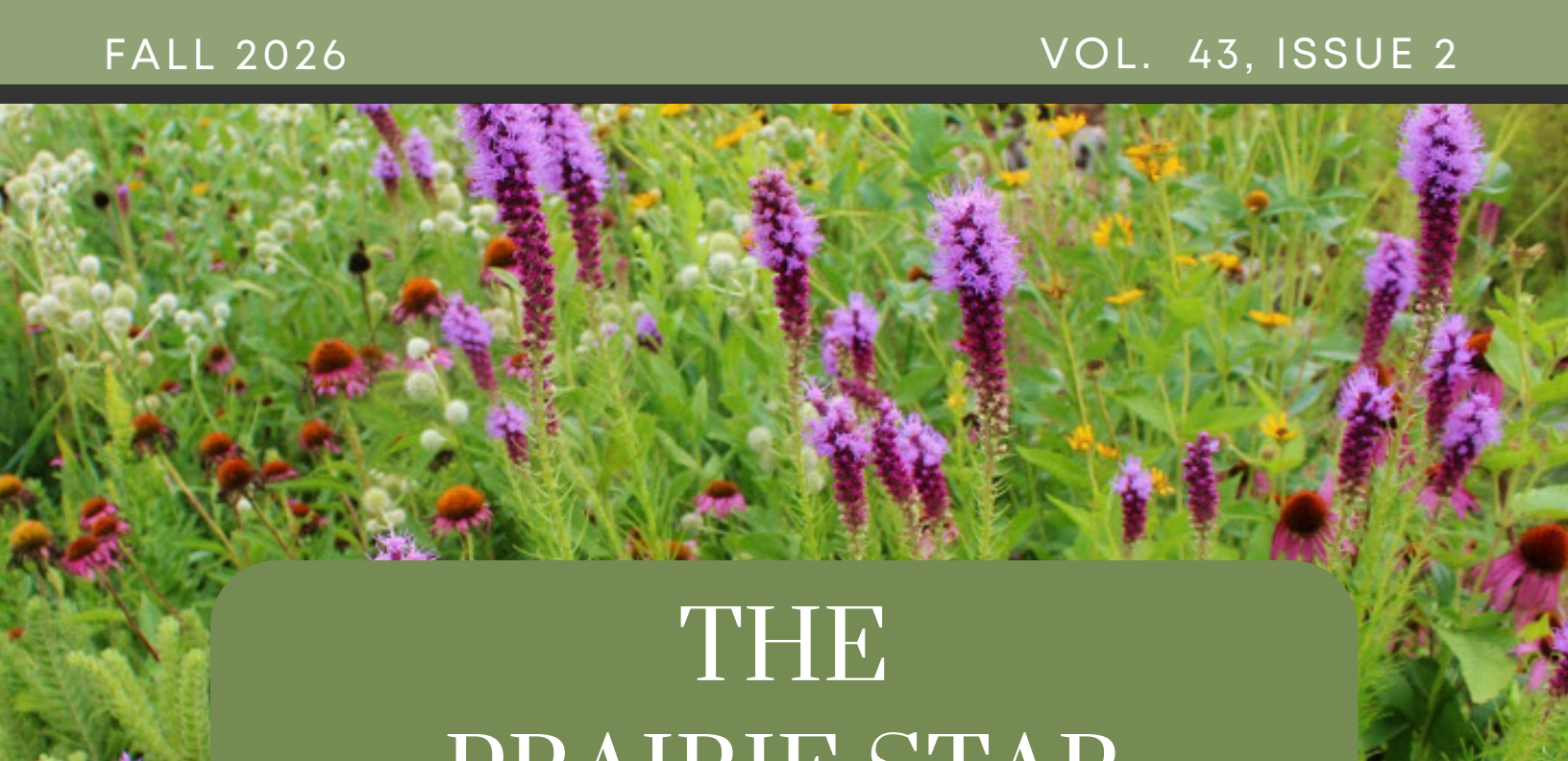




THE PRAIRIE STAR



Nature Playscape Draws Many Visitors

by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator

The oxbow wetlands near the Environmental Learning Center are now complete and are easily visible looking southwest toward Spring Creek. Formed from a former bend in the stream, oxbow wetlands create calm, shallow habitats that support a wide variety of plants and wildlife. They also act as natural water filters and help manage flooding, adding both beauty and ecological value to Caldwell Park. Feel free to step off the trail for a closer look—if you're lucky, you might spot wildlife such as frogs and turtles beginning to move in!

Inside This Issue

- 2 MCCB Updates
- 3 Nature Notes
- 4-5 Programs for All Ages
- 6 Youth Outdoor Field Day
- 7 Halloween Bash
- 8-10 Programs for Kids
- 11-12 Programs for Adults
- 13 B.A.R.K. Rangers
- 14 Volunteer News
- 15 Conservation Corner
- 16 County Park Addresses
- 17 Geocache Activity Page
- 18 MCCB Meeting Dates,
Board Members, Staff



The nature playscape continues to draw families looking to enjoy the outdoors this summer. On many nice days, visitors can be seen stopping by while biking along the MCRF Trail or bringing their children to stretch their legs and get some fresh air. The playscape is open daily from dawn to dusk.

MCCB UPDATES

Fish Habitat Structures are Now in Place at Popular Fishing Areas

by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator

This summer, Mahaska County Conservation staff and volunteers installed durable MossBack artificial fish habitat structures in White Oak Conservation Area Lake and Russell Wildlife Area Pond 1. Placed near popular fishing areas and in deeper water, the structures provide valuable cover for baitfish and predator species while improving fishing opportunities for years to come.

Maps showing the approximate locations of the underwater structures are available at Scanlon Bait & Tackle and the Environmental Learning Center. As more precise information becomes available, updated maps with GPS coordinates will be shared, along with a map for Russell Wildlife Area Pond 1.



This project was funded by an Iowa Department of Natural Resources Fish Habitat Grant. Thank you to the volunteers, partners, and supporters who helped make this project possible!

Volunteers Make A Difference

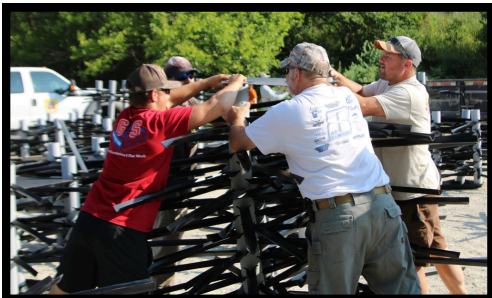
by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator



Volunteers have been an invaluable part of Mahaska County Conservation during the past year. From July 2025 through June 2026, volunteers contributed an impressive 2,082 hours! They assisted with park cleanups, constructed fish habitat structures, completed native plantings, hosted visitors at the Environmental Learning Center, supported educational programs and school field trips, and much more.

We are incredibly grateful for our volunteers' time, hard work, and continued support. Their efforts strengthen our parks and programs while helping protect Mahaska County's natural resources for future generations.

Would you like to volunteer with us? Please contact Mahaska County Conservation, and we will help you find a meaningful way to get involved! For more information about volunteer opportunities turn to page 14.



Building fish habitat structures.



Helping at educational events.



Park Steward projects at county parks.

NATURE NOTES

Signs of the Season: Whitetail Deer Rubs

by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator

Each fall, white-tailed bucks rub their foreheads and antlers against trees, leaving behind patches of freshly exposed bark. Early in the season, rubbing helps remove velvet from newly hardened antlers and strengthens neck muscles for future sparring with other bucks.

A rub is more than a visual sign—it also carries scent from glands on the buck's forehead and near its eyes. This scent communicates the buck's presence and social status to other deer.

Some trees are rubbed repeatedly, while others are marked only once. Look for fresh white or orange wood on small trees along deer trails, woodland edges, and routes between bedding and feeding areas. When you spot a rub, you have discovered one of the whitetail's fascinating signs of fall!



BUCKS OFTEN RETURN TO THE SAME "COMMUNITY RUB" YEAR AFTER YEAR. SEVERAL DEER MAY VISIT AND SCENT-MARK THE SAME TREE, TURNING IT INTO A WOODLAND MESSAGE BOARD!

Online Rentals

MYCOUNTY PARKS.COM

You can now rent cabins, shelter houses, and the ELC community room online!

<https://www.mycountyparks.com/County/Mahaska>



Eveland Access Cabins (Apple & Birch)

Address: 1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

To view pictures of the cabins and to find rental information, visit our website www.mahaskaconservation.com.



Park Shelter Houses

- **Eveland Access Campground** (electric)
- **Nicholson Park** (non-electric)
- **Russell Wildlife Area** (non-electric)
- **White Oak Conservation Area** (2 non-electric)



Community Room at Environmental Learning Center

Address: 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577

To view pictures of the community room and to find rental information, visit our website www.mahaskaconservation.com.

PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES



September

1 Volunteer Training

1:00-2:00 pm or 5:00-6:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

If you would like to join our volunteer team or renew your volunteer status, come to our fun one-hour training at the Environmental Learning Center. **Please sign up for one of two sessions by scanning the QR code at the top of the page, contacting our office at (641)673-9327, or emailing decook@mahakacountyia.gov.** Volunteers are asked to attend a training once every three years.

24 Birding With Ella “Fall Migration Watch”

8:00-9:00 pm

Maskunky Marsh

Spend an evening at Maskunky Marsh watching for birds traveling along their fall migration routes. This wetland is a popular stopover where migrating birds can rest and refuel. We'll help identify the birds we see and learn about their seasonal journeys. Bring binoculars if you have them; a limited number will be available to borrow. **Registrations are recommended. Please sign up with the QR code at the top of this page.**



October

9 Campfire & Creatures

7:00-8:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

Gather around the campfire for an evening of stories, discovery, and nighttime wildlife! Meet some of Iowa's nocturnal animals through pelts, skulls, sounds, and other hands-on items. Learn how owls, bats, raccoons, and other creatures use special adaptations to thrive after dark. This cozy, family-friendly program is fun for all ages. We suggest bringing a lawnchair or blanket to sit on. **Registrations are NOT needed. Parking available in campground parking lot. Look for a sign to direct you to a campsite.**



24 Halloween Bash

1:00-9:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

Join us for a favorite fall tradition! Enjoy an afternoon at the campground filled with carnival games, BINGO, contests, and not-so-spooky stories by Mrs. Fox. Don't miss the dog costume parade and campground-wide trick-or-treating! Don't forget to bring a decorated pumpkin for the pumpkin contest. This contest is for all ages. Campers are encouraged to decorate their sites for both trick-or-treaters and the Halloween Lights & Sights auto tour. Prizes will be awarded for the best-decorated campsites on both the east and west sides. Campsites fill up fast, so be sure to plan ahead! There will be plenty of parking for all visitors. **The event schedule and detailed information are found on page 7.**

November

12 Wildlife Game Night

6:00-7:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Bring the whole family for an evening of wildlife-themed fun! Test your knowledge and skills with Animal Sound Challenge, Animal Track Match-Up, Food Web Challenge, Who Am I?, and other hands-on games. Participants of **all ages** can play, learn, and discover fascinating facts about Iowa's wildlife. No wildlife expertise is needed—just bring your sense of adventure! **Pre-registration is needed. Sign up with the QR code at the top of this page.**

PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES



December

10 Sustainable Gift Wrapping & Decorating Workshop

6:00-7:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Discover fun and simple ways to wrap and decorate your holiday presents while reducing waste. Learn how everyday materials—such as newspaper, reusable ribbon, pinecones, and other items from nature—can turn a gift into a charming creation. Come ready to be inspired and enjoy a festive evening of creativity, hot cocoa, and holiday treats! **Please sign up by scanning the QR code at the top of the page.**



4-31 Travelling Exhibit: “Your Friendly Neighborhood: Explore Your Local Wildlife Wherever You May Be!” View during regular building hours

Environmental Learning Center, Lower Level

You don't have to travel far to discover wildlife—it's all around you! This colorful, family-friendly exhibit introduces some of the animals that share our cities, farms, neighborhoods, and parks. Stop by, learn something new, and get inspired to head outside and explore nature in your own friendly neighborhood!

19 Birding With Ella “Mahaska Christmas Bird Count”

6:00 am - 12:00 pm

Locations Vary - Directions in Registration Link!

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC), run by Audubon, is the nation's longest-running community science project. People around the country organize local counts between December 14-January 5 each year.

This year will be a trial run for the Mahaska County CBC. Participants will be assigned a sector of the anticipated 15 square mile circle to cover. The time is a guideline; participants are welcome to conduct their count at any time throughout the day. This program is open for all ages and skill levels; we will pair beginner birders with those who are more experienced. Since this is a trial run year, we will not be submitting the data collected to Audubon. We will still compile results to send to participants and post on social media.



We will meet at the Environmental Learning Center at noon to go over the morning's findings and to gather feedback for making this an official count in the future. Hot drinks and treats will be provided! For more information on the Christmas Bird Count, visit the Audubon CBC page.

Please sign up by scanning the QR code at the top of the page. If you have questions, contact Ella at (641)673-9327 or by emailing paulson@mahakacountyia.gov.

It's time to sign up FOR IOWA HUNTER SAFETY CLASSES



SCAN FOR A
QUICK LINK TO
IOWA DNR!

YOUTH OUTDOOR FIELD DAY



WHAT TO BRING TO YOUTH OUTDOOR FIELD DAY

Here are a few suggested items to help you feel prepared for the event:

	Dress comfortably and wear sturdy shoes.		Bring a reusable water bottle. A refill station will be available!
	Bring bug spray.		Wear a backpack or bring a bag to carry your belongings.

YOUTH OUTDOOR FIELD DAY

EXPLORE * LEARN * DISCOVER * HAVE FUN!

at Russell Wildlife Area



Sign up with this QR Code or at the event.



SEPTEMBER 12, 2026

8:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Russell Wildlife Area 2254 - 200th St, New Sharon, IA 50209

ATTEND TO
ACTIVITIES AND
WIN A WATER
BOTTLE!

Event Registration: \$5 per child

Sign up early for easy registration with the QR code or
sign up the day of the event!

AND MORE
ACTIVITIES!

FISHING

HONEYBEES

.22 SHOOTING

**FOSSIL
DIGGING**

**STORYBOOK
WALK**

BOWFISHING

KITE BUILDING

**FLY
FISHING**

For more information: 641-673-9327 | decook@mahaskacountyia.gov

HALLOWEEN BASH

HALLOWEEN BASH at Eveland Access

- 1-3 pm Carnival Games (tickets on sale at event)
- 1-2 pm B.A.R.K Ranger Fun: (meet at shelter house)
Dog Costume Parade around east side campground
Bobbing for Hotdogs
- 2:00 pm Decorated Pumpkin Contest
For kids & adults - bring your already decorated pumpkins to the shelter house
- 2:30 pm Halloween BINGO in shelter house
- 3:30 pm Spooky Stories with Mrs. Fox
- 4-5:30 pm Trick-or-Treating around campground - there will be a countdown sendoff at the shelter house.
- 7-9 pm Halloween Lights & Sights Auto Tour
(\$5 suggested/free-will donation per vehicle at entrance)
Each person in vehicle gets to vote for their favorite campsite!
- 9:15 pm Decorated Campsite Awards in Shelter House

Saturday, Oct. 24 / 1:00-9:00 pm

CAMPGROUND CAMPERS: Get into the spirit by decorating your campsite for a chance to win fun prizes!
*Campsites will be judged individually, not as a group of sites. The more sites decorated, the better! We ask that campers provide candy for trick-or-treaters. If you're camping on the east side, consider bringing dog treats too—our dog costume parade will pass through that area!
Campsites are first-come, first-served at \$20 per night. Planning a longer stay?
Grab a coupon book—11 nights for \$200 (that's one night free!). SPOTS FILL UP FAST, SO PLAN AHEAD!



Eveland Access Campground

2890 Galeston Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
For information call 641-673-9327



PROGRAMS FOR KIDS



September

2 Knee-High Naturalists “Nature Show & Tell”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

This free program is designed for children ages 5 and younger. Bring a special item from nature to share with the group, such as a rock, pinecone, leaf, or seedpod. If you find something that cannot or should not be collected, take a photo and bring it instead. Each child will have an opportunity to show their item and share what makes it interesting. *Please do not bring songbird feathers, bird nests, or eggs. Pre-registrations are needed. Sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.*

12 Youth Outdoor Field Day

8:00 am - 12:00 pm

Russell Wildlife Area

This annual event is a family favorite, offering a wide range of outdoor activities for kids to enjoy. This year, a big lineup of fun activities is planned for the kids!

Honeybees	Kite Building	Fishing	Fly Fishing
Bowfishing	Fossil Digging	Tree Identification	Wildlife Identification
.22 Shooting	Leave No Trace	Storybook Walk	Sheriff & Police K-9s
Children's Museum Activity			

Families can explore the trails while taking part in these hands-on activities. Registration is available in advance or on the day of the event. The cost is \$5.00 per child - adults are free.

More information and a registration link is found on page 6.



16 Homeschool Science Lab “Nature Photography”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Homeschool students are invited to explore nature through the lens of a cell phone camera! We'll learn simple photography tips, including how to use light and center an image. Then we'll head outside to practice taking creative photographs of fall colors, textures, reflections, and wildlife. Please bring a cell phone that your child has permission to use. *Pre-registrations are needed. Sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.*

October

7 Knee-High Naturalists “Spider Web Building”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Get ready for some web-slinging fun! Children ages 5 and younger will discover different kinds of spider webs and learn how webs help spiders catch food, stay safe, and protect their eggs. Then each child can become a web slinger and build a spider web of their own!

Pre-registrations are needed. Sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.



PROGRAMS FOR KIDS



October cont.

21 Homeschool Science Lab “Bat Science”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Homeschool students are invited to discover the fascinating science of bats! Come learn about some of the bat species found in Iowa, how bats benefit people and the environment, and explore how they use echolocation to find food in the dark. Students will also investigate the special adaptations that make bats the only mammals capable of true flight. **Pre-registration is needed, and you can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.**

24 Halloween Bash

1:00-9:00 pm

Eveland Access Campground

Join us for a favorite fall tradition! Enjoy an afternoon at the campground filled with carnival games, BINGO, contests, and not-so-spooky stories by Mrs. Fox. Don't miss the dog costume parade and campground-wide trick-or-treating! Don't forget to bring a decorated pumpkin for the pumpkin contest. This contest is for all ages. Campers are encouraged to decorate their sites for both trick-or-treaters and the Halloween Lights & Sights auto tour. Prizes will be awarded for the best-decorated campsites on both the east and west sides. Campsites fill up fast, so be sure to plan ahead! There will be plenty of parking for all visitors. **The event schedule and detailed information are found on page 7.**



30 Trick or Treating at the Environmental Learning Center

5:00-8:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Keep the Halloween fun going and swing by the Environmental Learning Center for more treats and spooky surprises! Show off your costumes, collect candy, and check out the cool exhibits and live animals while you're here. Don't forget to snap a photo at our selfie station next to the life-sized Woolly Mammoth skeleton—it's the perfect spot for costume pics! Trick-or-treating will be available while supplies last.

November

4 Knee-High Naturalists “Feathered Friends”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Children ages 5 and younger are invited to have some fun with our feathered friends! We'll learn about birds, what they eat, and how bird feeders help them find food. Each child will make a bird treat to take home and place in their yard. We'll also venture outdoors to help feed the birds at the Environmental Learning Center! **Pre-registrations are needed, and you can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.**



18 Homeschool Science Lab “Wild About Turkeys”

10:00-11:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Get ready to gobble up some fun facts about wild turkeys! Kids will explore the turkey life cycle, discover what turkeys eat, and learn about the different sounds they make. We'll also uncover fascinating adaptations and surprising behaviors that help wild turkeys survive. Everyone will leave with plenty of interesting turkey facts to share! **Pre-registration is needed. You can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.**

PROGRAMS FOR KIDS



December

- 4-31 Travelling Exhibit: “Your Friendly Neighborhood: Explore Your Local Wildlife Wherever You May Be!”**
View during regular building hours
Environmental Learning Center, Lower Level
You don’t have to travel far to discover wildlife—it’s all around you! This colorful, family-friendly exhibit introduces some of the animals that share our cities, farms, neighborhoods, and parks. Stop by, learn something new, and get inspired to head outside and explore nature in your own friendly neighborhood!
- 9 Knee-High Naturalists “Nature’s Mitten”**
10:00-11:00 am
Environmental Learning Center
This free program is designed for children ages 5 and younger. This month, children are invited to enjoy *The Mitten* by Jan Brett and discover how animals use shelters to stay safe and warm during winter. After the story, we’ll have fun with a mitten-themed activity, and each child will create a special craft to take home! *Pre-registration is needed. You can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.*
- 16 Homeschool Science Lab “Make a T-shirt Tote Bag”**
10:00-11:00 am
Russell Wildlife Area
Turn an old t-shirt into something useful! Kids will cut and design a T-shirt to create a reusable no-sew tote bag for carrying books, toys, or anything else they choose. Please bring a T-shirt that can be cut and transformed. This is a fun way to give an unused item from home a brand-new purpose! Space is limited, so sign up soon. *Pre-registration is needed, and you can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page. A minimum of 5 kids is needed to hold the program.*



FREE FISHING EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE FOR CHECKOUT!

You can now borrow rods and tackle at:

Environmental Learning Center
2342 Hwy. 92
Oskaloosa, IA 52577

Monday-Wednesday: 12:30-4:30 pm
Thursday-Friday: 12:30-7:00 pm
Saturday: 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

(641) 673-9327

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS



September

4 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a cup or mug with nature on it (plants/animals) to take part in a door prize.** Registration is not needed, and we meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

18 O.W.L.S. “A Monarch’s Incredible Journey”

1:00-2:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are welcome to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program. Each fall, monarch butterflies begin an incredible journey south to their wintering grounds in Mexico. Discover how these delicate butterflies travel thousands of miles, find food along the way, and know when and where to migrate. We’ll also explore the monarch life cycle and learn how milkweed and fall-blooming flowers help monarchs complete their amazing journey. **Pre-registration is appreciated. Please call (641) 673-9327, email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov, or register online using the QR code at the top of this page.**



October

2 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has Halloween or fall decorations on it to take part in a door prize.** Registration is not needed, and we meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.



30 O.W.L.S. “Behind the Badge: Meet the Park Rangers”

12:00-1:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are invited to join O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) for an informative program about park rangers. What does it take to care for our county parks? Join Mahaska County Conservation’s park rangers for an inside look at their work. They will discuss their many responsibilities, share memorable experiences, and explain how their skills and roles have grown over the years. Come meet the people working behind the scenes to maintain, improve, and protect our parks—and bring your questions! **Pre-registration is appreciated. You can sign up using the QR code at the top of this page, by calling (641)673-9327, or emailing decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.**

PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS



November

6 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug and a thankful comment to share to take part in a door prize.** Registration is not needed, and we meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

20 O.W.L.S. "Beyond the Gobble"

1:00-2:00 pm

Nature Playscape Pergola, Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are welcome to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program. Discover the fascinating life of Iowa's wild turkeys! We'll explore their life cycle, diet, seasonal behaviors, communication, and impressive adaptations. Learn what different turkey calls mean, how these large birds survive throughout the year, and why they are an important part of Iowa's woodlands. You may be surprised by how much there is to learn beyond the gobble! **Pre-registration is appreciated. Please call (641) 673-9327, email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov, or register online using the QR code at the top of this page.**



December

4 Coffee Club

9:00-10:00 am

Environmental Learning Center

Drop in and join us for fresh coffee and tasty treats on a Coffee Club day. We talk about upcoming programs, volunteer opportunities with Mahaska County Conservation, and about everything in nature. **This month, bring a coffee cup or mug that has Christmas decorations on it to take part in a door prize.** Registration is not needed, and we meet upstairs in the Discovery Lab.

18 O.W.L.S. "Christmas Cookie Decorating"

11:00 am-12:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

Adults of all ages are welcome to join the O.W.L.S. (Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls) program for a festive afternoon of holiday cookie decorating. We had so much fun doing this last year, we are doing it again! Bring a friend and enjoy a cozy, creative time decorating homemade sugar cookies. We'll have coffee, hot chocolate, plenty of cookies to sample, and lots of holiday cheer! **Pre-registration is needed to reserve a seat. Please call (641) 673-9327, email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov, or register online using the QR code at the top of this page.**



B.A.R.K. RANGERS

How Does My Dog Become a B.A.R.K. Ranger?

Select a Mahaska County park and complete a fun and easy activity checklist to earn your FREE B.A.R.K. Ranger certificate!



-  **FIND THE CHECKLIST:**
Visit www.mahaskaconservation.com and click the "Links" tab.
-  **GET YOUR CERTIFICATE STAMPED:**
After your visit, stop by the ELC during open hours to receive your certificate stamped with your dog's paw print!
-  **BUY A B.A.R.K. RANGER DOG TAG:**
\$10.00 each • Cash or check to FMCC

 **EARN YOUR FREE B.A.R.K. RANGER CERTIFICATE TODAY!**

We can't wait to see you and your pup out on the trails!

Scan for Your Digital B.A.R.K. Ranger Badges!



Paws-itively Fun Selfie Scavenger Hunt participants in July.



A Halloween Bash costume parade puppy in 2025.

BARK RANGER
Costume Parade
& Bobbing for Hotdogs
AT THE HALLOWEEN BASH

1:00-2:00 PM
OCTOBER 24, 2026
EVELAND ACCESS CAMPGROUND
2890 GALESTON AVE, OSKALOOSA, IA 52577
(MEET AT THE SHELTER HOUSE)

More event info is found here:
https://www.mahaskacountyia.gov/files/conservation/halloween-bash-flyer-2025_66932.pdf



**B.A.R.K. Ranger Costume Parade
at Halloween Bash
October 24, 2026
1:00-2:00 pm
Eveland Access Campground**

This event was so fun last year, we are doing it again! Bring your dog and their costume to show off on a costume parade around the east side of the campground. Some of the campers hand out dog treats as we walk the route! At the shelter house, your dog can have fun bobbing for hotdogs and getting their paws stamped on a special BARK Ranger certificate. BARK Ranger dog tags will be available to purchase \$10 each. **No registration is needed - just show up at the event! All dogs must be on a leash.**

VOLUNTEER NEWS



Join Us for Volunteer Training in September!

If you would like to join our volunteer team or renew your volunteer status, come to our one-hour training on **September 1, 2026** at the Environmental Learning Center. Please sign up for one of two sessions by scanning the QR code below, contacting our office at (641)673-9327, or emailing decook@mahakacountyia.gov. Volunteers are asked to attend a training once every three years.

Afternoon session 1:00-2:00 pm

Evening session 5:00-6:00 pm

Volunteer Opportunities

- Greet visitors and help with light cleaning work as an Environmental Learning Center Host
- Help with environmental education programs
- Pull weeds in native flower beds in the Nature Playscape and Eveland Access Cabins
- Be a Park Steward and work on a project in a county park - opportunities are endless!



CONSERVATION CORNER

Teamwork in Action Across Our County Parks

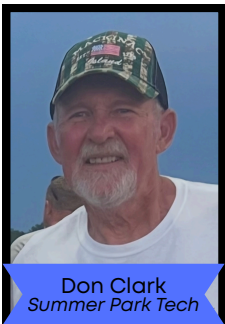
by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator

Mahaska County Conservation's full-time and seasonal employees have accomplished tremendous work in our parks this summer. With help from Green Iowa AmeriCorps members and Iowa STEM Externs, the team made great progress on projects throughout the county.

Their work included mowing, weeding, mulching, planting trees, adding native plants to pollinator gardens and oxbow wetlands, constructing fish habitat structures, installing educational park signs, and much more.

Keeping our parks beautiful and our educational programs running smoothly takes teamwork. We are also grateful for the support of our volunteer Park Stewards and conservation partners at the Mahaska County Soil & Water Conservation District.

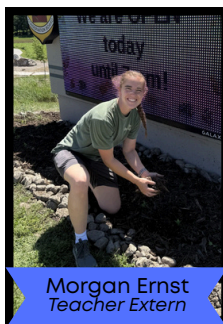
We hope you have enjoyed visiting our county parks and have noticed some of the improvements made this summer. Thank you to everyone whose hard work made these projects possible!



Don Clark
Summer Park Tech



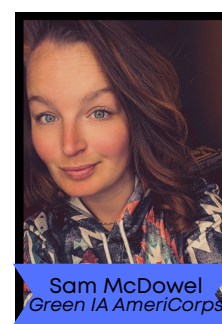
Caden Albright
Summer Park Tech



Morgan Ernst
Teacher Extern



Stephanie Visser
Teacher Extern



Sam McDowel
Green IA AmeriCorps



Jayden Steil
Green IA AmeriCorps

Welcome, Park Ranger Ethan Zieglerowski!

by Laura DeCook, Environmental Ed Coordinator

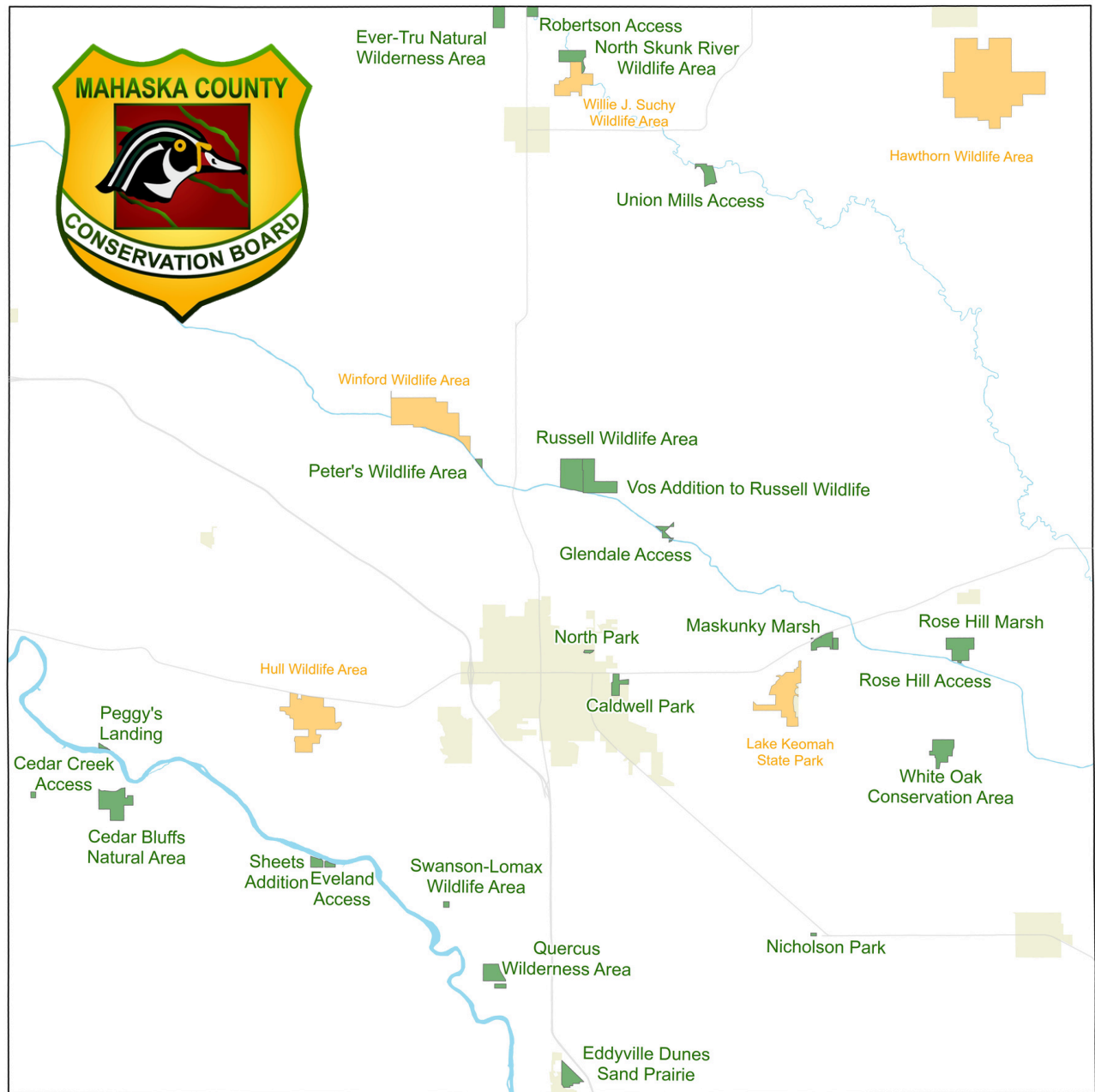


Mahaska County Conservation is pleased to welcome Ethan Zieglerowski as our new Park Ranger. A recent graduate of William Penn University, Ethan is eager to begin serving the residents and visitors of Mahaska County.

In his new role, Ethan will help care for our parks, assist visitors, protect natural resources, and ensure our conservation areas remain safe and enjoyable for everyone. He looks forward to spending time in the parks, meeting community members, and supporting the outdoor recreation opportunities that make Mahaska County a wonderful place to live, work, and visit.

We are excited to have Ethan join the Mahaska County Conservation team and look forward to the positive impact he will make. If you see Ethan in one of our parks, be sure to say hello and welcome him to the Mahaska County Conservation team!

MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION PARKS



MAHASKA COUNTY PARK

ADDRESS

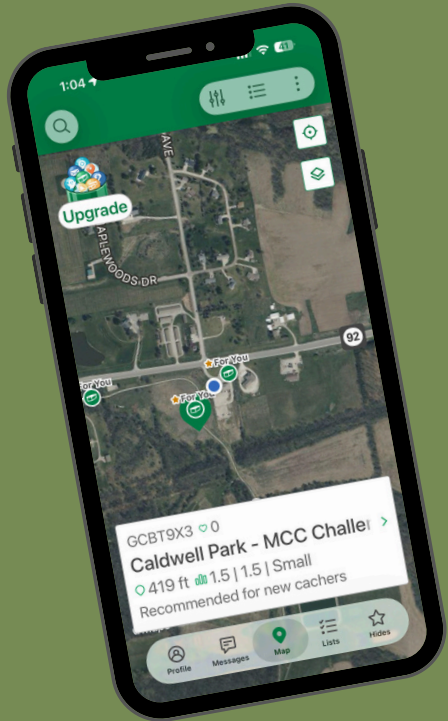
Caldwell Park & Environmental Learning Center	2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Cedar Bluffs State Preserve	1235—280th, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Cedar Creek Access	2748 Ashland Ave., Tracy, IA 50256
Eddyville Dunes Sand Prairie	901 N. Merino Ave., Eddyville, IA 52553
Eveland Access Cabins	1681—290th St., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Ever-Tru Natural Wilderness Area	Lexington Ave., New Sharon, IA 50207
Maintenance Shop	2254—200th St., New Sharon, IA 50207
Maskunkum Marsh	2395 Snyder Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Nicholson Park	2791—305th St., Cedar, IA 52543
North Skunk River Wildlife Area	2236—110th St., New Sharon, IA 50207

MAHASKA COUNTY PARK

ADDRESS

Peggy's Landing	1198 River Road, Leighton, IA 50143
Peter's Wildlife	Hwy. 63, New Sharon, IA 50207
Quercus Wilderness Area	3139 Kent Ave., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Robertson Access	1010 Hwy 146, New Sharon, IA 50207
Rose Hill Marsh & Access	3108 Ventura Ave., Rose Hill, IA 52586
Russell Wildlife Area & Vos Addition	2254—200th St., New Sharon, IA 52577
Swanson-Lomax Wildlife Area	1972—295th St., Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Union Mills Access	1355 Parkin Ave., New Sharon, IA 50207
White Oak Conservation Area	2647 Ventura Ave., Cedar, IA 52543

ACTIVITY PAGE





GEOCACHE CHALLENGE

LOOK FOR CACHES ANYTIME!
WIN PRIZES!

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER
2342 HWY 92, OSKALOOSA, IA 52577

STOP BY FOR YOUR CHALLENGE PUNCH CARD!

PRIZES INCLUDE:

SNOBIZ, KWIK STAR, TACO JOHN'S,
SCOOTERS COFFEE, & MCDONALD'S!

CACHES ARE FOUND AT THESE PARKS:

CALDWELL PARK, RUSSELL WILDLIFE AREA,
CEDAR BLUFFS NATURAL AREA, EVELAND ACCESS &
WHITE OAK CONSERVATION AREA

CHALLENGE PUNCH CARDS ARE LOCATED AT ANY CACHE AND AT THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER.



GEOCACHE CHALLENGE

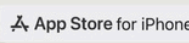


STEP 1: Download the geocaching app on your phone.

STEP 2: Scan the geocache challenge list for your first cache.

STEP 3: Punch your card when you find a cache.

STEP 4: Return your filled card to the Environmental Learning Center to claim your prize!



Geocache Challenge List:



MAHASKA COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

Mahaska County Conservation Board & Meeting Dates

Chairperson	Linda Fox, Rose Hill
Vice-Chairperson	Jennifer Peterson, Oskaloosa
Secretary	Chuck Webb, Oskaloosa
Member	Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa
Member	Curt Jager, Eddyville



MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 6:00 pm on the third Monday of each month. Public is welcome to attend. Meetings are held in the lower level of the Environmental Learning Center, 2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577.

September 21, 2026
October 19, 2026
November 16, 2026
December 21, 2026

Dates and times are subject to change. Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 for more information.

Mahaska County Conservation Staff

Executive Director	Chris Clingan
Environmental Ed Coordinator	Laura DeCook
Park Ranger	Tommy VanRenterghem
Park Ranger	Ethan Zieglowsky
Admin. Assistant/Naturalist	Ella Paulson
ELC Attendants	Dawn Weldon & Cindi Bossard

Discover Nature in Iowa!



**MAHASKA COUNTY
ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER**

2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577
Ph: (641)673-9327

OPEN HOURS

Monday - Wednesday	12:30-4:30 pm
Thursday & Friday	12:30-7:00 pm
Saturday	10 am - 2 pm
Sunday	CLOSED

The Prairie Star is the newsletter of the Mahaska County Conservation Board and is emailed to those persons on our mailing list. There is no charge for the newsletter. Please help us by keeping us informed of any change of email address or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter.

Mahaska County's programs and facilities are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on non-discrimination regarding race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, and handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Mahaska County Conservation Board or the office for Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington D.C. 29240.