



Volume 34, Issue 4

Fall/Winter 2017-18

## Progress for Mahaska County's ELC and Local Habitat

**By Dave Sedivec**  
MCCB Director

This is an exciting time for the Mahaska County Conservation Board and staff. The Environmental Learning Center construction is progressing on schedule. I am amazed at the amount of cooperation and coordination that is involved in a project of this scale by the county, the architects, the construction manager, engineers, utility companies and other government agencies. Make sure that you occasionally drive past the site on Highway 92 east of Oskaloosa to keep track of the progress.

On another note, every year the Izaak Walton League of Iowa presents Wildlife Habitat Improvement Awards to county conservation boards. The awards are divided into two categories based on county population, counties with a population of 20,000 or below and counties with a population of above 20,000. We fall into the latter category. I am proud to announce that the MCCB

received the second place award in the large county category. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that we have earned this. Achievements like this would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the Board, the staff and the many volunteers and conservation organizations, especially the Mahaska County Pheasants Forever Chapter and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

As described above, we are accomplishing some very good things around here. When I get to sneak away for a while, and stand in a marsh at daybreak to watch the world wake up, or sit in a tree stand and watch nature go about its day, I will remain thankful, because we could not achieve what we have alone. **Thank you to all of you that have helped to make this a great year for the Mahaska County Conservation Board!**



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# EXPLORE MAHASKA COUNTY



Mahaska County has over 1,500 acres of forests, wetlands, prairies and parks to explore. The Mahaska County Conservation Board manages 21 separate parks, river accesses and wildlife areas with over six miles of maintained trails.

Check out this issue's featured area!

## Is Maskunky Marsh All Dried Up?

By Dorothy Wedgewood, Administrative Assistant

If you have driven by Maskunky Marsh lately, you may have noticed that it is almost completely dry. Have you ever wondered how a drought, such as we have had this year, can affect an area like Maskunky Marsh? Can a drought damage or replenish this area? Or even the most basic question, what is a wetland?

A wetland is characterized by water that covers the soil. The water that covers the soil can either be deep with inches rising above the surface of the soil or just to the surface of the soil. The water coverage can occur either short term or long term and may vary throughout the year.

Wetlands have several benefits. They can reduce erosion and flooding. Wetlands can store flood water. Just one acre of wetland can store more than 360,000 gallons of water if flooded at a depth of one foot. That is enough water to fill over 12,000 bath tubs according to wetlands-initiative.org. Wetlands can also filter off polluted runoff such as toxic pesticides; purifying the water. Some of the economic benefits wetlands provide come from hunting the migratory birds and trapping animals like beaver and muskrat. Wetlands also offer recreational benefits such as hunting, canoeing, bird watching and hiking.



Seasons of drought for a wetland are actually very valuable to its productivity. Plants are key features of a wetland and annuals that produce a food source and cover for species such as duck and geese are vital. As these plants grow and die they deposit leaves and stems in the basin of the wetland. Overtime the productivity of the wetland decreases and the plant community switches from annuals producing food and cover to perennials; reducing the quality of the habitat.

A drought can rejuvenate a wetland. As a drought progresses, the wetland dries out and the bottom sediments are exposed to air. Oxygen speeds decomposition of organic matter and this in turn "fertilizes" the basin. Plant seeds that have lain at the bottom basically inactive now spring to life germinate and grow. Once again the wetland becomes a productive habitat. This time also allows for maintenance; upkeep and repair of any nesting boxes and cleanup of any islands to promote a more habitat friendly environment. When the water returns and once again covers the wetland the inhabitants of the area are provided with an abundantly rich habitat. This cycle is necessary to the health of the wetland.

Maskunky Marsh is a wetland distinguished by deep water covering inches above the soil; usually lasting long term. It is a wonderful environment providing shelter, food, spawning, vegetation and nesting sites for a variety of species of birds, fish, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates (snails, frogs, and crayfish).

*(Continued on page 3)*



# Nature Notes



## Oak Tree Acorns

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

Oak trees such as white oaks, bur oaks, swamp white oaks, red oaks, black oaks, pin oaks and shingle oaks drop their acorns in late August and early September. But even before the seeds are ripe enough to fall, wild animals are gathering them. Flocks of blue jays, grackles and blackbirds pluck the green acorns from the branches and consume them on the spot or store them for later meals. Squirrels and chipmunks scramble up into the oak's canopy and chew off the branch tips. The leafy stems, with new acorns attached, then fall to the ground and form a feast with the chipmunks getting a large share of the harvest. One chipmunk can haul away four or five acorns at a time!

White and bur oak acorns sprout right after hitting the ground. The nutrients are rapidly transferred from the nuts into the new seedlings. However, gray squirrels bite off the pointed acorn tips, which prevents sprouting and loss of food value. The acorn is then stored as a future food source.

Other wildlife species in Iowa that relish acorns include raccoons, wild turkeys, grouse, pheasants, white-footed mice, deer and ducks. White and bur oak acorns are sweet tasting and are usually consumed first. These acorns consist of about six percent protein and sixty-five percent carbohydrates for the animals. Red oak acorns contain a higher fat and tannin content. Tannins are bitter tasting chemicals that can interfere with digestion. Since all oaks contain tannins in their leaves and acorns, those with higher amounts of tannin are less attractive to herbivores. Squirrels bury the red oak acorns in the forest floor where rain and snow gradually lessen the tannin content over winter. By late winter, when other food items are scarce, the red oak acorns are a welcomed meal. By spring, the red oak acorns that do not get eaten begin to sprout into new trees.

*(Maskunky Marsh continued)*



Maskunky Marsh, September 2017

However, over the last several years the islands have become populated with trees and shrubs reducing nesting efficiency by shading out desirable plants. The annuals that provide food and cover have dwindled. Maskunky Marsh was ready for rejuvenation.

This drought has provided the perfect opportunity for MCCB to cut out the trees and shrubs on the islands. This will create a predator resistant nesting area. Also, if you have noticed, plants such as smart weed have been growing plentifully. When the water returns this will provide an abundant food source for waterfowl. Remember, droughts are temporary and a necessary part of the lifecycle of a wetland. The water will come back and when it does Maskunky Marsh will be full of life again.



# Fall & Winter Programs



## Halloween Bash at Eveland Access

Saturday, October 21  
2:00 – 8:00 pm  
Eveland Access Campground



Bring your family and the little ghouls and goblins to spend the afternoon and evening at Eveland Access to participate in fun Halloween activities! There is no cost for this event. If you are interested in camping at Eveland on this weekend, each site is \$15.00 per night on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Campers are asked to decorate their campsite with a Halloween theme and provide treats to hand out to trick-or-treaters. The campsite with the best decorations will be awarded a free camping coupon book (11 free nights = \$150.00 value) and more great prizes! Camping sites are \$15.00 per night on a first-come, first-served basis.**

### SHELTERHOUSE ACTIVITIES:

2:00 pm **Decorated Pumpkin Contest** (bring your own decorated pumpkin – prizes for kids & adults)

### Ghoulish Games

 (games to play all afternoon)

- Pumpkin Croquet
- Worm Pie Eating Contest
- Mystery Touch Boxes
- Halloween Bingo .... and more!!!

3:00 pm **Creepy Contests** (for children & adults)

- Coloring Contest
- Best Witch Cackle Contest
- Best Owl Call Contest
- Best Coyote Call Contest
- Costume Contests (Most Creative, Most Frightening, Best Hand-Made & Most Humorous Costumes)

4:30 pm **Storytelling by Mrs. Fox** (in shelter house)

5:00-6:30 pm **Trick or Treating** (campsite to campsite)

5:00-6:30 pm **Camp Site Decoration Judging**

7:00 pm **Award Presentations for All Contests**  
(at campground movie location)

7:00 pm **Campground Movie**  
**"The Haunted Mansion"**  
(east side of campgrounds - bring your own lawn chair/blanket) There will be free popcorn!

## Night Hike & S'More!

Friday, October 27  
6:30 – 8:00 pm  
Russell Wildlife Area



Bring your family and friends out to the conservation center to take an evening hike around the Russell Wildlife Area. We will begin with a campfire and s'mores to fuel us up for the hike on the trails. While hiking, we will explore the sights, sounds and smells of the fall season. Bring a flashlight, wear comfortable hiking shoes and bring a friend! *This event is for all ages. Registration deadline is Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>. Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to sign up.*

## Animal Tracks & Scat

Saturday, November 18  
10:00 am – Noon  
Russell Wildlife Area



What track and scat is that? Come out to the Conservation Center on this day to learn about the tracks and scat (droppings) of Iowa's wild animals. Participants will be able to make a plaster cast of a track to take home. *This event is for all ages. Registration deadline is Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>. Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to sign up.*

## The Mitten Tree

Saturday, December 9  
10:00 – 11:00 a.m.  
Russell Wildlife Area



Come and listen to Jan Brett's story, *The Mitten*, and decorate a very special pair of mittens. One mitten will be placed on the tree in the conservation center and the other mitten can go home with you. **Donate a pair of warm mittens and bring them to this event!** All donated mittens will be given to a local charity to help keep people warm this winter. Mitten-shaped cookies will be available to decorate for a yummy treat! *This event is for all ages. Registration deadline is Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>. Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to sign up.*



# Fall & Winter Programs



## Winter Day Camp

Friday, December 29  
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.  
Russell Wildlife Area



Kids, get out of the house during your winter break and come out to the conservation center to have fun and learn about nature on a winter day! Dress for the weather because having fun in winter is spending some time outdoors. Indoor activities (including a movie and popcorn) will also be held so we can warm up our fingers and toes. *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327 because we have limited space. Registration deadline is Dec. 28<sup>th</sup>.*

## Nature Crafts & Cocoa

Friday, January 12  
6:30 – 8:00 pm  
Russell Wildlife Area



This program is sure to bring out the crafty and creative side of you! You will be shown how to create some very simple crafts using things found at home and right outside in nature. So bring your family and friends out to the conservation center for some fun and fellowship. Whatever you make, you will take home! Refreshments will be served. *This activity is for all ages. Please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to reserve a spot and craft supplies. Registration deadline is Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>.*

## Bird Food Giveaway

Early February (TBA)  
9:00 am – Noon  
Russell Wildlife Area



Bring your buckets out to the conservation center to get free cracked corn for bird feeding. Each family will be limited to 10 gallons of cracked corn. Information about bird feeding will be available. *For more information, call MCCB at (641)673-9327.*

## Tapping Trees for Syrup

Friday, February 16  
9:00 – 11:00 am  
Russell Wildlife Area



If you would like to help MCCB collect tree sap that will be made into maple syrup sampled at the Maple Syrup Festival, then come out to the conservation center on this morning. After collecting sap from maple trees in the park, you can watch the next steps first-hand. *Dress for the weather and for hiking. Pre-register by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327.*

## Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Monday, February 26  
6:00 pm  
Russell Wildlife Area



We appreciate our volunteers! If you have volunteered with the Mahaska County Conservation Board this last year, we want to thank you for taking time to help us and for sharing your talents. We want to treat you to a very special program and dinner. There is no cost for the meal, but reservations are needed. *Please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or email [decocook@mahaskacounty.org](mailto:decocook@mahaskacounty.org) to make your reservations.*



facebook

Mahaska County Conservation

winter snow  
Hot Chocolate sit by the fire  
frost chilly  
snowman  
sledding  
snowball fight  
wonderland  
icicle  
white



# Youth Outdoor Field Day 2017



## Eveland Access Cabins



The Apple and Birch Cabins at Eveland Access are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find more information on renting, visit [www.mahaskaconservation.com](http://www.mahaskaconservation.com).

**Cabin Rental Prices**  
Sunday – Thursday \$60/night  
Friday-Saturday \$75/night  
7 nights \$420



## Statement

The primary mission of this organization shall be to create an awareness of our natural environment, encourage a state of harmony between people and their natural communities, develop and implement public conservation policy, maintain the public's investment in our natural resources, and strive diligently within the budget restraints to provide adequate services for the environmental education and enjoyment of the citizens of Mahaska County.

## The Prairie Star

The Prairie Star is the quarterly newsletter of the Mahaska County Conservation Board and is mailed to those persons on our mailing list. There is no charge for the newsletter, although contributions to help defray printing and mailing costs are greatly appreciated. Please help us keep our costs down by keeping us informed of any change of address or if you wish to receive the newsletter by email.

**AUTUMN**  
crunching in the leaves  
**CIDER AND DONUTS**  
**APPLE PICKING**  
HOT CHOCOLATE  
listening to the wind blow  
**FOOTBALL**  
wood smoke & leaf mold  
**BRILLIANT COLORS**



# A Big Thank You!

The Mahaska County Conservation Board wishes to extend our deepest thanks to the following people and businesses for their donations and volunteer time.

## Youth Outdoor Field Day

### Sponsors:

Mahaska County Pheasants Forever  
Mahaska County Izaak Walton League  
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation  
Mahaska County Master Gardeners  
Mahaska Health Partnership  
Bowfishing Association of Iowa  
Gateway Church of the Nazarene  
Grace Fellowship Outdoor Adventure Club  
Oskaloosa High School Pioneering Ringnecks  
Oskaloosa Fire Department  
Skunk River Retriever Club  
Spring Creek Arms  
Tackle Boxx Bait & Archery  
Oskaloosa Hy-Vee  
Mahaska Bottling  
BLUSH Boutique & Customized Printing  
Pella Rolscreen Foundation  
Clow Valve  
Striegel Communications  
Glenn & Susan Knox

### Volunteers:

Susan Knox  
Mary Jane Sullivan  
Mark Sullivan  
Linda Fox  
Cindi Bossard  
Josh DeCook  
Gary Carter  
Griffen Molenburg  
Linda Goode  
Suzette Striegel  
Verna Conry  
Roger Beane  
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Brooks VanDerBeek  
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Hunter Hines  
Andy Watts  
Pete Eyheralde  
Sheryl Hefner  
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Marion Striegel  
Jerry Blanchard  
Ethan Vos  
Megan Vos  
Aaron Vos  
Brandon Salevsky  
Zack Salevsky  
Leah Wilcox

## MCCB CALENDAR NOTES:

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| November 2  | <b>Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting</b><br>7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| November 20 | <b>Friends of Mahaska County Conservation</b><br>6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area    |
| December 7  | <b>Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting</b><br>7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| December 18 | <b>Friends of Mahaska County Conservation</b><br>6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area    |
| January 4   | <b>Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting</b><br>7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| January 15  | <b>Friends of Mahaska County Conservation</b><br>6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area    |
| February 1  | <b>Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting</b><br>7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| February 19 | <b>Friends of Mahaska County Conservation</b><br>6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area    |



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



## COUNTY CONSERVATION CENTER HOURS

12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Monday through Friday or by appointment.

The Mahaska County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public. Visitors are always welcome and encouraged to attend. The board meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at the Conservation Center. Please note: these dates are subject to change.

**A large-type version of this newsletter is available on request.**

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.

## Mahaska County Conservation Board



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**Steve Dixon**, Oskaloosa  
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**Linda Fox**, Rose Hill

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Dorothy Wedgewood  
Mike Ryan

Director  
Naturalist  
Conservation Technician  
Conservation Technician  
Administrative Assistant  
Part-Time Technician



Fall/Winter 2017-18



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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Mahaska County Conservation Board



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