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Spring 2017

Prescribed Fires

By Dorothy Wedgewood

MCCB Administrative Assistant

It's that time of year when it seems that all around us people are burning ditches, pastures, prairies and even wooded areas. Have you ever wondered why?

Aldo Leopold, born in 1887 in Burlington, Iowa is considered the "father" of wildlife management and is often recognized for introducing prescribed burning for land management strategies. Leopold, who served as a forester and firefighter in Arizona, found that forests with severe fire controls in place lead to brush choked forests and actually increased the probability of extreme wildfires.

According to the *Environmental Encyclopedia*, deliberate burning is an age-old method of maintaining



Prescribed burning by the Mahaska CCB and Mahaska County Pheasants Forever during a night burn. (Photo courtesy of Laura DeCook).

grazing lands. In North America, Indians used fire to maintain open forests and prairies that provided grazing for game animals such as deer and bison". However, these burns are not considered prescribed burns because the fires were not carefully controlled and there were not any specific burn plans.

The definition of prescribed burning is the intentional burning of a predetermined area within a prescribed set of conditions, dates and with appropriate safety precautions to achieve an established purpose. Prescribed burns are controlled, follow a specific burn plan and are coordinated by a burn boss. The predetermined area could be a forest land, grassland, pasture land, wildlife or prairie area, hay land or other area.

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Nature Notes

American Woodcock

Scolopax minor

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist



With the arrival of the first day of spring, many birds and animals are beginning their spring ceremonies to find a mate. The American Woodcock is one of these animals. Woodcocks are perhaps the least-known "game bird" in Iowa. The woodcock is a member of the wading bird family, which includes common snipe, plovers and killdeer. During the evening, go outside and listen for a "peent" sound, which is the sound of an American woodcock. The woodcock is also known by other names such as a Timberdoodle, Bog Snipe, Brush Snipe, or maybe Labrador Twister. The woodcock is a rather odd-looking bird with its brown, black and buff-mottled plumage. Their large eyes are set far back on their head and they have a long bill. The male and female are similar in appearance, with females being a little larger and having a slightly longer bill.

Woodcocks are migratory game birds. In Iowa, we generally do not see a large concentration over vast areas, but they are not as uncommon as you might think. Most birds we encounter here in Iowa are during the spring and fall. They are either passing through to more southern wintering grounds in the fall or making their way back to more northerly nesting grounds in the spring. However, some nesting does occur in Iowa.

Woodcocks are often solitary, not forming into flocks or coveys like quail. They are active during the daylight and, periodically, nighttime hours. During the daytime, they are usually found in moist, young forests with thick understory. They use their long, flexible-tipped bill to probe for the earthworms which make up the bulk of their diet. They also consume various insect larvae, ants, crickets, and beetles. During the night, they use nearby fields and openings to roost, feed and mate.

During this time of year, around dawn and dusk, and sometimes throughout the night, males will frequent the fields and openings near moist woodland habitat to perform courtship displays. During the display, the male begins making a "peent" sound on the ground for about a minute. This is followed by him spiraling 80 to several hundred feet above ground while creating a twittering sound with his wings. He then descends, making a chirping sound, and lands at the point of takeoff. The sequence is then repeated, and the entire display may last up to 45 minutes.

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!

Peggy's Landing

By Dorothy Wedgewood, Administrative Assistant

In June of 1991, Mahaska County Conservation Board Member Peggy Wright purchased this piece of land at a property tax auction. Wright then sold the property to Mahaska County for \$210.00; the property to be managed by the Mahaska County Conservation Board. This area lies adjacent to the Des Moines River and is located just west of the intersection of River Road and Carbon Trail and consists largely of floodplain timber. It is managed by the Mahaska County Conservation Board solely as a wildlife preserve. Hunting is not permitted however, fishing is allowed.



Floodplain forests are unique because of their periodic flooding.

- Floodplain forests provide many free ecological services to our society: they help filter pollutants to prevent them from entering streams, improve water quality, are critical in controlling erosion, and help buffer rivers against catastrophic flooding.
- Floodplains are home to a diversity of wildlife. The damp soils create rich insect and amphibian breeding habitats, and these species in turn become prey for birds such as woodcock and barred owl, for mammals such as mink and raccoon, and for reptiles such as speckled kingsnakes and wood turtles.
- Floodplains provide corridors that allow wildlife to move from one habitat to another.





Spring Programs



Looking for a healthy outdoor activity?
Look for this symbol throughout the list
of upcoming public programs.

STEAMfest Youth & Families Event

Saturday, April 8

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Musco Technology Center, William Penn
University



Youth and their families are invited to spend this day at the Musco Technology Center on William Penn's campus in Oskaloosa for **STEAMfest**. This event is FREE and open to the public. The Mahaska County ISU Extension office has organized hands-on interactive booths, fun entertainment, and activity rooms at this event, which will focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, & Math. **Come and watch MCCB's naturalist present about the weather on the stage at 10:00 am. Volunteers will be needed for the weather experiments!**

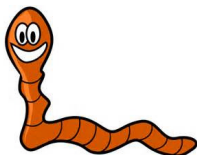
Night Crawler Hunting



Friday, April 21

8:00 pm

Russell Wildlife Area



This was so much fun last spring so we have to do it again! Come out to the conservation center and hunt for night crawlers on the ground. What will we do with them? You can take them home to use as fishing bait or donate them to the worm-eating critters in the conservation center. It will be fun! Wear shoes that can get wet/dirty and bring a flashlight. *This is a great activity for all ages. Call MCCB to sign up at (641)673-9327.*



Eveland Access Campgrounds

Will open for the season at noon on
Friday, April 21, 2017.

Fishing Lure Workshop



Saturday, April 29

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Russell Wildlife Area

Cost is \$5.00 per person



Have you ever wanted to learn how to make your own fishing lures and jigs? On this day, you will learn how to make jigs and lures and have an opportunity to make your own. The best part of the workshop will be having the opportunity to use your newly made lures while fishing at the Russell Wildlife ponds! So bring your fishing poles and join us for some fishing fun (optional). *Pre-registration is required and can be done by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327. Fishing licenses will be needed for anyone age 16 and older that plans to fish. Fishing poles can be provided – let us know at registration.*

Hunter Education Class

Friday, May 5 (6:00-9:00 pm) and
Saturday, May 6 (9:00 am – 4:00 pm)
Russell Wildlife Area



This course is free of charge, but space is limited and **pre-registration is required at www.iowadnr.gov**. Anyone born after January 1st, 1972 must attend a Hunter Education course before they are allowed to purchase an Iowa hunting license. Any person who is 11 years old or older is eligible to attend the class. **Participants must attend both days.**



Spring Programs

1st Annual Eveland Access Dutch Oven Gathering



Saturday, May 13

3:00 Dutch Oven 101 (*free public class*)

5:00 Pots on the table – taste testing!

Eveland Access Campground Shelter Houses

The public and Dutch oven chefs are invited to MCCB's first ever Dutch Oven Gathering (D.O.G.) down by the river at Eveland Access Campground. Either come and watch the chefs create masterpieces or bring along your Dutch oven, ingredients, recipe and charcoal and whip up your own! Pre-made recipes will be welcomed. There will be plenty of fun, food and fellowship. If you want to learn the basics about cooking like this, join us at the main shelter house for a *free* Dutch Oven 101 class. Dutch oven chefs will be cooking on the shelterhouse lawn and preparing a taste testing opportunity for everyone! Pots will be on the table at 5:00 pm. *Please bring your own lawn chair and table settings.*

*** If you plan on cooking at this D.O.G., please contact MCCB to sign up and receive more detailed information at decook@mahaskacounty.org or (641)673-9327.

Fishing 101



Saturday, May 20

10:00 am – Noon

Russell Wildlife Area



Sometimes we have parents and grandparents ask us for tips on fishing with kids. *How do you tie on a hook? How do you take the fish off the hook? How do you fix the fishing reel?* The answers to all your fishing questions can be answered here! Come alone or bring the kids for this hands-on class. Do you have a tackle box? Bring it along too. *To sign up for this event or for more information, call MCCB at (641)673-9327.*

Moonlight Movie Night at Eveland Access Campgrounds



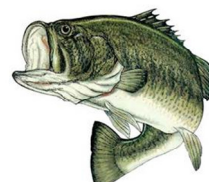
Saturday, May 27

8:30 p.m. (at dark)

Eveland Access Campground

Want to do something fun with the whole family on Memorial Day weekend? Campers, campground visitors and the public are welcome to come out and watch a *FREE* movie at the Eveland Access Campground. A family-oriented movie will begin at dark. Bring your family, a lawn chair or blanket to sit on and enjoy the show. *FREE* popcorn will be available! Eveland Access is located at 2890 Galeston Ave. which is 4 miles south of Beacon, IA on Highway T39.

Family Fishing Day & Kids' Fishing Derby



Saturday, June 3

11:00 am - 2:30 pm

Russell Wildlife Area

11:00 am

Casting Contest & T-shirt Printing

(bring your own light colored t-shirt)

Noon

Campfire Picnic (Bring a drink & side dish.

Hot dogs and table service provided).

1:00-2:30 pm

Kids' Fishing Derby & Family Fishing

It's an event of FREE FUN for the whole family! The event will kick off with a casting contest and t-shirt printing. Bring a plain, light-colored t-shirt if you would like to have it silkscreened with this year's logo and a fish print. Then at noon, we will cook hotdogs over a campfire (while supplies last). If you come for the picnic, please bring your own drink and a side dish to share. At 1:00, we will hike to a pond and go fishing. For kids ages 18 and younger, trophies will be given to the largest and smallest fish caught during this event. Also, Iowa resident fishing licenses will NOT be needed for this event or throughout this weekend. Bring your own pole or borrow one from MCCB. Bait will be provided. Please register at the conservation center when you arrive.



Summer Day Camp information
is listed on page 6!



Pre-register by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327.
After registering, more camp information will be sent to you!

June 6-7 Discovery Day Camp 1
June 8-9 Discovery Day Camp 2

Ages 5 and younger

10:00 a.m. – Noon

\$10.00 per camper

Parents are encouraged to attend.

Kids will participate in indoor and outdoor activities to explore nature. This year's camp theme will be "Pond Detectives". Campers will be asked to bring a t-shirt to decorate for camp. Choose only one of these camps to attend. They will have the same activities.



June 14-16 Jr. Naturalist Day Camp 1
June 21-23 Jr. Naturalist Day Camp 2

Ages 6-12

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

\$20.00 per camper

The theme this year will be "Exploring the Prairie". Campers will learn about what a prairie is, how they benefit the land and how pioneers once lived in the prairie. We will go hiking, fishing and more! Campers will be asked to bring a t-shirt to decorate for camp, and a water bottle and lunch each day. Choose only one of these camps to attend. They will have the same activities.



June 28-30 Challenge Camp

Ages 10 & older

10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

\$20.00 per camper

Campers will experience many outdoor activities on a more in-depth level than Jr. Naturalist Camp. This year's theme will be "Famous American Explorers". We will go fishing, hiking, archery, campfire cooking and lots of exploring! Campers will be asked to bring a t-shirt to decorate for camp and a water bottle and lunch each day.



Sign Up TODAY!
Call MCCB at (641)673-9327

"Naturally Speaking"

Saturdays at 7:20 am

740 AM - KMZN



Due to KBOE's new programming, "Naturally Speaking" has been moved to 740 AM KMZN. The segment will air every Saturday morning at approximately 7:20 am right after local news and sports and right before "In Memoriam".

I hope all of the listeners can follow us there! You will be able to listen to a short segment about anything going on in nature.

Prescribed Burns (continued)



*A prescribed burn by the Mahaska County Conservation Board.
(Photo courtesy of Dorothy Wedgewood).*

Prescribed burns serve many purposes. Some of those purposes include: controlling undesirable vegetation; preparing sites for harvesting, planting or seeding; controlling plant disease; reducing wildfire hazards; improving wildlife habitat; improving plant production quantity and/or quality; removing debris; enhancing seed production; facilitating the distribution of grazing and browsing animals; restoring and maintaining ecological sites and managing native plant diversity/composition. With so many benefits, it is no wonder people burn. Just remember burns are unpredictable so they should follow specific guidelines with the appropriate safety precautions.

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.

**SPRING
BREATHES
NEW LIFE
INTO THE
WORLD
AROUNDUS**

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.

Are you interested in volunteering? Contact MCCB at (641)673-9327.

Cargill – cracked corn for bird food

Susan Repinski-Hill – sugar maple tree donation

Mark & Mary Jane Sullivan – Maple Syrup Festival volunteer

Emma Adams - Maple Syrup Festival volunteer

Addison Beane - Maple Syrup Festival volunteer

Rob Campbell - Maple Syrup Festival volunteer

Evan Zimmerman - Maple Syrup Festival volunteer

Eveland Access Cabins



The Apple and Birch Cabins at the Eveland Access are available for rent year-round. To view pictures of the cabins and to find more information on renting:

www.mahaskaconservation.com.

Cabin Rental Prices:

Sunday-Thursday \$60/night

Friday-Saturday \$75/night

Week stay \$420

For reservations call MCCB at (641)673-9327.

MCCB CALENDAR NOTES:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| April 6 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| April 17 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| April 25 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation – Annual Dinner Meeting
6:30 p.m. @ ISU Extension Center – Email friendsofmahaskacc@gmail.com to sign up. |
| May 4 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| May 15 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| June 1 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| June 19 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
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.

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Peggy Wright, New Sharon
Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa
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Linda Fox, Rose Hill

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Vice Chairperson
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Member
Member

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Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Conservation Technician
Jason Ryan	Conservation Technician
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant

Spring 2017



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Website: www.mahaskacaconservation.com

Email: mcdb@mahaskacounty.org

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Mahaska County Conservation Board



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