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Winter 2015/2016

Looking Back on MCCB's 40th Year

By Dave Sedivec
MCCB Director

I sit here trying to decide what to write for this article while reflecting on the events of this last year, our fortieth year as the Mahaska County Conservation Board. The county has acquired a 93 acre public hunting area, the North Skunk River Wildlife Area, north of New Sharon and is working on a 200 acre acquisition next to Russell Wildlife Area. These areas become open to the public upon completion of their purchase. Iowa ranks 49th in the U.S. for percentage of ground open to

the public for outdoor recreation purposes, so these purchases are a step in the right direction.

The new restroom/shower facility at Eveland Access has been a huge success. It is closed for the winter, but I encourage everyone to check them out next season, if they haven't already. The restrooms have been the most requested improvement talked about since I have been here, and now that they are here, I have to ask myself, why didn't we do this sooner?

The Mahaska County Freedom Rock was completed at Caldwell Park this November, years ahead of schedule, and is a great addition to the area and the community. Please visit the rock if you haven't yet.

The Youth Outdoor Field Day and the Halloween Bash were both very successful again this year, and work continued at the mammoth dig site.

Everything listed has shown that 2015 was a banner year for the MCCB, but it couldn't have taken place without a lot of help and cooperation. There is the five member Mahaska County Conservation Board, the Friends of Mahaska County Conservation, Mahaska County Pheasants Forever, Oskaloosa Ikes, the American Legion Auxiliary and many individuals that all have donated time and energy to help us succeed. One amazing thing about Mahaska County is that there

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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!

Cedar Bluffs State Preserve

By Dorothy Wedgewood, Administrative Asst.

Cedar Bluffs Natural Area was purchased by the Mahaska County Conservation Board in 1991. This area consists of approximately 223 acres. Of these acres, 54 acres are tillable, 21 acres are reconstructed prairie and food plots, 26 acres are unplowed upland, 13 acres are terraced and 109 acres contains steep to excessively steep side slope.

Cedar Bluffs is bordered by 270th Street to the south, private land on the east and west and Cedar Creek to the north. However, the Des Moines River, not Cedar Creek was once the northern border. Sometime between 1878 and 1884 a flood caused the Des Moines River to take a more direct route; bypassing the bluffs and leaving Cedar Creek to occupy the old riverbed. The Des Moines River, however makes two bends near Cedar Bluffs which has proven to attractive to bald eagles for winter roosting sites and nesting.

On June 10, 1997 Cedar Bluffs Natural Area was adopted as a state preserve and dedicated as such on October 8, 1997. To be considered a state preserve, an area has to pass several criteria/categories. This criterion includes; biological - botanical and zoological, geological, scenic, archaeological and historical. Many state preserves are dedicated for unique features in one, two or maybe three categories, but Cedar Bluffs has qualities in all the above mentioned preserve types.

Cedar Bluffs is unique in that it has significant biodiversity; offering a complex blend of natural and cultural features. It is rich in deciduous woodland. Rare ferns such as Goldie's Wood Fern and Silvery Glade Fern, mosses, lichens and other uncommon herbaceous plants grow amid a geological anomaly in Mahaska County. *(Continued on page 3)*



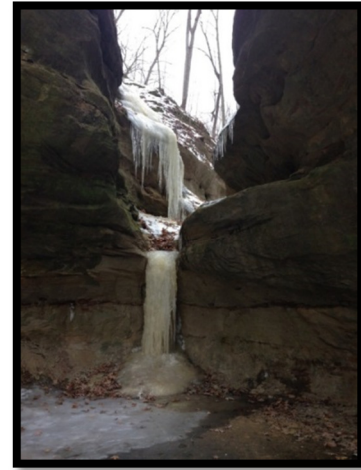
Scenic view of the Des Moines River valley

("Cedar Bluffs" Continued...)

High sandstone bluffs; reddish in color and covered with trees rise up from the broad flood plain. The bluffs are dissected by three large canyons with abrupt box canyons and cascading waterfalls. Several small shelter caves are scattered amongst the bluffs. Creek beds house plant fossils while the bluff-top outlook offers a breathtaking view of the Des Moines River Valley.

Cedar Bluffs is host to different varieties of chert. Chert is a hard rock that was intentionally broken to use for knife blades, arrowheads, scrapers and ax-heads. Native American presence is documented by the presence of stone (chert) tools, artifacts, flint flakes and a mound.

With cool moist sandstone cliffs, scenic canyons, shelter caves, several waterfalls (the most impressive at twelve feet), a wide variety of uncommon plants, prairie and trails; Cedar Bluffs has much to offer. There is no other known area like this in southern Iowa. Come enjoy the bountiful beauty of the Cedar Bluffs Natural Area.



Frozen waterfall at Cedar Bluffs



Cedar Bluffs Prairie



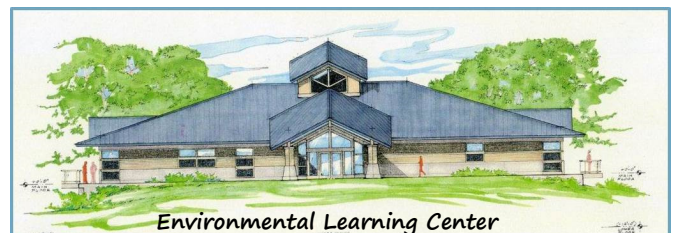
Prescribed Prairie Burn at Cedar Bluffs

("Looking Back" Continued...)

is more inter-departmental cooperation than anywhere else that I have ever worked. The Secondary Roads, the Sanitarian, Roadside Department, Sheriff's Office and all of the departments in the courthouse have had a hand in helping us to provide services to the public. I want to personally thank all of you on behalf of the MCCB, because we couldn't be nearly as successful without you our task would be a lot harder.

Okay, looking to the future, the two main items that I will concentrate on in the upcoming year are to work on finalizing the 200 acre land acquisition and getting it open to the public as soon as possible, and working on a dedicated funding source for the Environmental Learning Center to be located at Caldwell Park. We have been getting very good support for this needed project from the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors, and will continue to work closely with them to make this public building a reality.

If anyone has questions about the ELC project or would like an informational presentation about it, please contact our office. I hope that everyone has a good winter and an even better 2016.



Environmental Learning Center



Winter Programs



Winter Day Camp



Wednesday, December 30
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 we will be spending some time outdoors searching for animal tracks. Indoor activities will include watching the movie "The Great Bear" and eating a popcorn snack. *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327 because we have limited space.*

Nature Crafts & Cocoa

Friday, January 15
6:30-7:30 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 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.*

Wolf Moon Walk



Friday, January 22
6:30 p.m.
Russell Wildlife Area



Come out to the Russell Wildlife Area and walk along the trails under the light of the "Wolf Moon". Before we venture outdoors, you will learn about the moon phases and why the January full moon is called the Wolf Moon. *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327.*

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Monday, February 1
6:30 pm
Russell Wildlife Area



We sure 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 share your talents by providing you a special dinner and program. There is no cost for the meal, but reservations are needed. *Please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacounty.org to make your reservations.*

Bird Food Giveaway

Saturday, February 6
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.*



Look for this symbol throughout the list of upcoming public programs.



Winter Programs



Hide Tanning Workshop

Saturday, February 6 (1:00-5:00 pm)
Monday, February 8 (6:30-7:30 pm)
Tuesday, February 9 (6:30-7:30 pm)
Thursday, February 11 (6:30-7:30 pm)
Russell Wildlife Area



Note: Registration deadline is January 29th

During this workshop, participants will take time over four different days learning how to flesh and tan an animal hide. This will be a hands-on workshop and participants will be able to take home the hide they worked on. Hides will be provided for you, but you may bring your own. If you would like to donate an animal hide for this workshop, it would be appreciated. You must pre-register by Jan. 29th by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327.

Sugarmakers in the Sugarbush



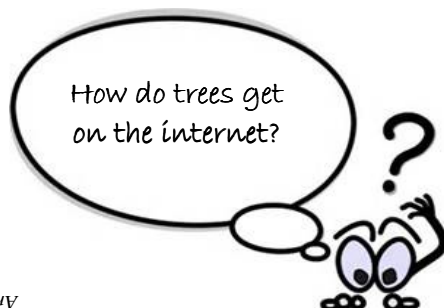
Friday, February 19
8:30 – 10:00 am
Russell Wildlife Area



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 expect some hiking. Pre-registration is appreciated. Call (641)673-9327 to sign up.

Tree Riddle

Answer: They log in!



Homemade Cleaning Supplies Workshop

Thursday, March 10
6:00 - 7:00 pm
Russell Wildlife Area



Are you looking for less expensive and easily made cleaning ingredients to use in your home? Then come to this workshop to learn about some of the easy recipes and make a sample to take home and see how it works. Please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to sign up.

Maple Syrup Festival



Saturday, March 19
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Eveland Access



Throughout the afternoon, MCCB staff will demonstrate how to tap trees and boil it to make maple syrup. You can explore the black maple sugarbush, the old barn and a Native American sugaring camp. Park at the Eveland Access Campground and catch a hayrack ride up the hill to the sugar shack. The hayrack ride leaves every half hour. Bring your appetites for fresh maple syrup on ice cream! This event is for all ages.



Our meetings are held on the third Monday of every month at 6:30 pm in the conservation center at the Russell Wildlife Area.
Public is welcome!

Nature Notes

Eastern Fox Squirrel

Sciurus niger

By Laura DeCook, Naturalist



Iowa has four species of tree squirrels, but it's the fox squirrel that is seen most often in this area. Other common squirrels found in Iowa include the gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), the red squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) that lives in the mixed pine forests of northern Iowa and the nocturnal flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*) which is rarely seen. The fox and gray squirrels can both be found in heavily forested areas, but if you observe hedgerows or timbered draws surrounded by fields, you're likely to see only fox squirrels. You can easily tell the difference between the fox and gray squirrels by their size, color and number of teeth. Fox squirrels are bigger (averaging 1 to 3 pounds) and have grizzled gray fur on the back with rusty colored orange bellies. The smaller gray squirrel (3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds) has lighter gray fur on the back and white belly fur. Fox squirrels have 20 teeth in their mouths and the gray squirrels have 22 teeth.

The eastern fox squirrel eats acorns, hickory, walnut, beech, mulberry and hawthorne seeds. It also eats green shoots and buds, fruits, berries, corn, insects, moths and beetles. Fox squirrels gather and store nuts for use in the winter by burying them safely in the ground. They locate nuts stashes by using their keen sense of smell. If the squirrels do not find all of their hidden nuts, they become a terrific source of "reforestation". The nuts that remain in the ground lead to the growth of new nut trees.

The eastern fox squirrel is a solitary animal, although it will share a feeding area with other squirrels. It spends most of the day eating, gathering and storing food. It usually nests in a tree hollow. If it can't find one, it will build a nest made of leaves in the crotch in a tree.



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.



"The color of springtime is in the flower; the color of winter is in the imagination."

~ Ward Elliot Hour

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.

Halloween Bash

Oskaloosa Hy-Vee
Oskaloosa Walmart
Linda Fox
Peggy Wright
Morgan Wright
Amanda VanderVeer

Eddyville Fire Department

Mahaska Drug
Oskaloosa Fareway
MaryJane Sullivan
Doug McMillan
Lisa Holmes

Gary Daniels, the "Twigologist"

Eveland Access campers that handed out candy and decorated their camp sites

Prairie Seed Donation

Iowa Prairie Network

Warm up this winter in the 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.

Beginning January 1, 2015 the cabin rental prices will be:

Sunday-Thursday \$60/night

Friday-Saturday \$75/night

Week stay \$420

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

MCCB CALENDAR NOTES:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| January 7 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| January 18 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| February 4 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| February 15 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| March 3 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| March 21 | 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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Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa

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Naturalist

Conservation Technician

Conservation Technician

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Winter 2015-16



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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