



Volume 34, Issue 1

Winter 2016-17

Construction for Environmental Learning Center is Around the Corner

By Dave Sedivec
MCCB Director

This last month has been bittersweet for the Mahaska County Conservation Board. On November 8th voters in the unincorporated areas of Mahaska County approved Ballot Measure M, which continues the local option sales tax for twenty years. The vote needed a simple majority and easily passed with a seventy percent yes vote. Eighty percent of the funds will go towards repairing and maintaining county roads. The other twenty percent will go:

For construction of a County Conservation Center that provides learning opportunities for all county residents and that houses and displays the recently discovered mammoth bones in Mahaska County. Any surplus funds shall be used for maintenance, reconstruction or construction of County roads and Bridges.

- Ballot Measure M (Nov. 8, 2016)



This means that Mahaska County is ever closer to our goal of constructing the Environmental Learning Center at Caldwell Park. The Mahaska County Conservation Board began working on this project in 2008. There have been many people working on this project over the years. The MCCB Board Members, both past and current, along with the staff and many volunteers have put in countless hours towards the ELC. There have been focus groups, and of course, the Friends of Mahaska County Conservation working towards this goal. There has also been a great deal of cooperation with the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors, who have set aside funds for this project

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for years. There are so many people to thank. So if I forgot you at this time, I am truly sorry. This project couldn't keep moving forward without the assistance from all of you.

The bittersweet part of this month has been the death of Charles Stream, former Mahaska County Attorney. Many people don't realize that Charles was instrumental in helping the county acquire the mammoth bones. Charles worked with me on a grant to purchase the bones and his wordsmithing on the application was incredible. Charles was great to work with, and I wish that he were still around to see the mammoth display in the ELC for which he worked so diligently.



Youth Outdoor Field Day September - 2016



Halloween Bash at Eveland Access October - 2016



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!

Maskunky Marsh

By Tommy VanRenterghem, Conservation Technician

Maskunky Marsh is located five miles east of Oskaloosa on Highway 92 at the intersection of Highway 92 and Snyder Avenue. The property is approximately 94 acres and was purchased from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation on December 15, 1988. Habitat on the property consists of CRP grass and a small woodlot; with most of the property consisting of marshy wetlands. A control structure was put into place to help raise, maintain or lower the water level based on the level of the South Skunk River. The property holds a vast amount of wildlife including, but not limited to; fish, ducks, geese, beavers, muskrats, raccoons and pheasants.

The marsh is a great place to "waterfowl watch" in the spring and the fall when the migration is occurring. During the migration, the marsh may hold hundreds to thousands of migrating birds that choose the marsh for a resting area. A bird viewing blind was constructed near the south parking lot overlooking the marsh for bird viewing. The main marsh, which sits on the west side of Snyder Avenue, has been used for goose hunting, but only when duck season was closed. This past year, MCCB has changed their regulations and the property sitting west of Snyder can no longer be hunted for any species. However, hunting is still permitted during any season on the 19 acres that lies on the east side of Snyder Avenue.

Along with birdwatching and hunting, another common activity at Maskunky Marsh is fishing or bow fishing. Bow fishing is considered fishing, so that activity may still be performed on the east and west side of the road. In the past few months, MCCB has also purchased a small piece of property sitting south of the south parking at the intersection of 248th Street and Snyder Avenue. Plans have been made to clean up the buildings and sheds that currently sit on the property and develop it as an extension of Maskunky Marsh.





Winter Programs



The Mitten Tree

Friday, December 9
6:30 – 7:30 p.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 your refreshment. Yum! *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327.*

Winter Day Camp



Friday, 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 exploring the outdoors. Indoor activities will include watching the movie "Flipper" (1996) and eating a popcorn snack. *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327 because we have limited space.*

Looking for a healthy outdoor activity?



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

Owl Prowl



Friday, January 6
6:30 – 7:30 p.m.
Russell Wildlife Area



Come out to the conservation center to earn about owls and their special characteristics as birds of prey. Afterwards, we will go on a night hike to call for owls in the woods. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring a flashlight. *This event is for all ages. Please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to pre-register.*

Nature Crafts & Cocoa

Friday, January 20
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 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.*

Environmental Education



- 10 Plastic pencil boxes
- Storage totes with lids of all sizes
- Night crawlers for feeding aquarium fish
- Volunteers for public programs and events
- 3-D archery targets
- Bow rack for archery programs



Winter Programs



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 17
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 for hiking. Pre-register by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327.*

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Monday, February 27
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 decook@mahaskacounty.org to make your reservations.*

Weather Science!

Friday, March 10
6:30 – 7:30 pm
Russell Wildlife Area



What makes the wind blow? How are storms formed? Basic weather information provided at this program will help you make sense of upcoming spring storms. Participants will enjoy interactive science experiments about wind, tornados and air pressure. *This event is for all ages. Please pre-register by calling (641)673-9327.*

Maple Syrup Festival



Saturday, March 18
9:00 – Noon
Eveland Access



Throughout the morning, 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. Bring your appetites for fresh maple syrup on ice cream! *This event is for all ages.*

Lessons we can learn from a snowman:



- It's fun to just hang out in your front yard.
- Accessories don't have to be expensive.
- Getting outside in the winter is good for you.
- Don't get too much sun!
- Wearing white is always in style – even after Labor Day.

Nature Notes

White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist



White-breasted Nuthatches are commonly found around bird feeders in the winter. They are agile birds that creep along tree trunks and large branches, probing into bark with their straight, pointed bills. Nuthatches often turn sideways and upside down on vertical surfaces as they eat. They don't lean against their tails the way woodpeckers do.

White-breasted Nuthatches are gray-blue on the back, with a frosty white face and underparts. The black or gray cap and neck frame the face and make it look like this bird is wearing a hood. The lower belly and the area under the tail are often chestnut-colored. White-breasted Nuthatches get their name from their habit of jamming large nuts and acorns into tree bark, then whacking them with their sharp bill to "hatch" out the seed from the inside.

To create the best opportunity to find White-breasted Nuthatches in the woods, search areas of mature woods and woodland edges. They're particularly associated with deciduous stands, including maple, hickory, basswood, and oak, though they can be found in some coniferous forests. In the winter you can find them in small flocks of chickadees and titmice.

Would you like to attract White-breasted Nuthatches to your yard feeders? Offer them large nuts such as sunflower and peanuts, and by putting out suet. Nuthatches eat mostly insects, also seeds. Insects (and spiders) are their primary diet during the summer and supplement themselves with seeds in winter. The proportion of seeds in their diet may vary from zero in summer to more than 60% in winter. White-breasted Nuthatches will also feed on suet and peanut-butter mixtures at feeders. Their young are fed entirely on insects and spiders.



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.



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.

Mary Jane Sullivan
Linda & Steve Fox
Alice Nace
Bob & Marlys DeBoef
Eddyville 8th grade
Steve Heaton
Peggy Wright
Morgan Wright
Hy-Vee, Oskaloosa
True Value, Oskaloosa
Walmart, Oskaloosa
McDonalds, Oskaloosa

Mahaska Co. Pheasants Forever
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Iowa "Prairie Rose" Dutch Oven Society
Mahaska County Master Gardeners
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Skunk River Retriever Club

Iowa Bowhunters Association
John Steinbach, Iowa DNR
Allen Chilcote
Cindi Bossard
Clow Valve
Striegel Communications
Caseys General Store
Glenn & Susan Knox
Pella Rolscreen Foundation
Roger Beane
Ean Beeken
Bob Lynn

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

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:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| December 8 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| December 19 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| January 5 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| January 16 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| February 2 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| February 20 | 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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Winter 2016-17



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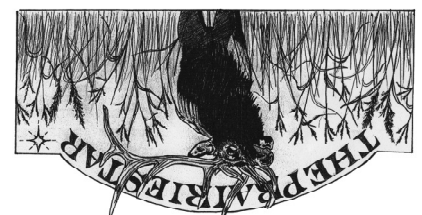
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