

The Prairie Star

Newsletter

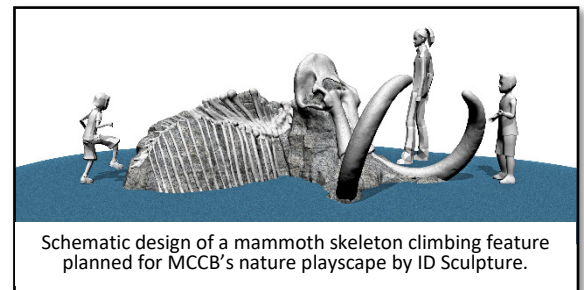
Volume 41, Issue 1

Winter 2023-24

Nature Playscape is Becoming a Reality in Mahaska County

By Laura DeCook
MCCB Naturalist

Mahaska County Conservation has made great strides with the planning and fundraising for an outdoor nature playscape and amphitheater. These features will be located on the west side of the Environmental Learning Center and will be very accessible from the recreational bike trail and the ELC parking lot. The playscape will consist of climbing structures, tunnels, and other unique outdoor themed play opportunities for kids of all abilities. It will not only be designed as a play area for children, but also a relaxing area for anyone who wants to enjoy nature.



Schematic design of a mammoth skeleton climbing feature planned for MCCB's nature playscape by ID Sculpture.

To make this plan a reality, Mahaska County Conservation has been steadily working on fundraising efforts to raise the \$500,000 needed for the project. The efforts are paying off because we have been

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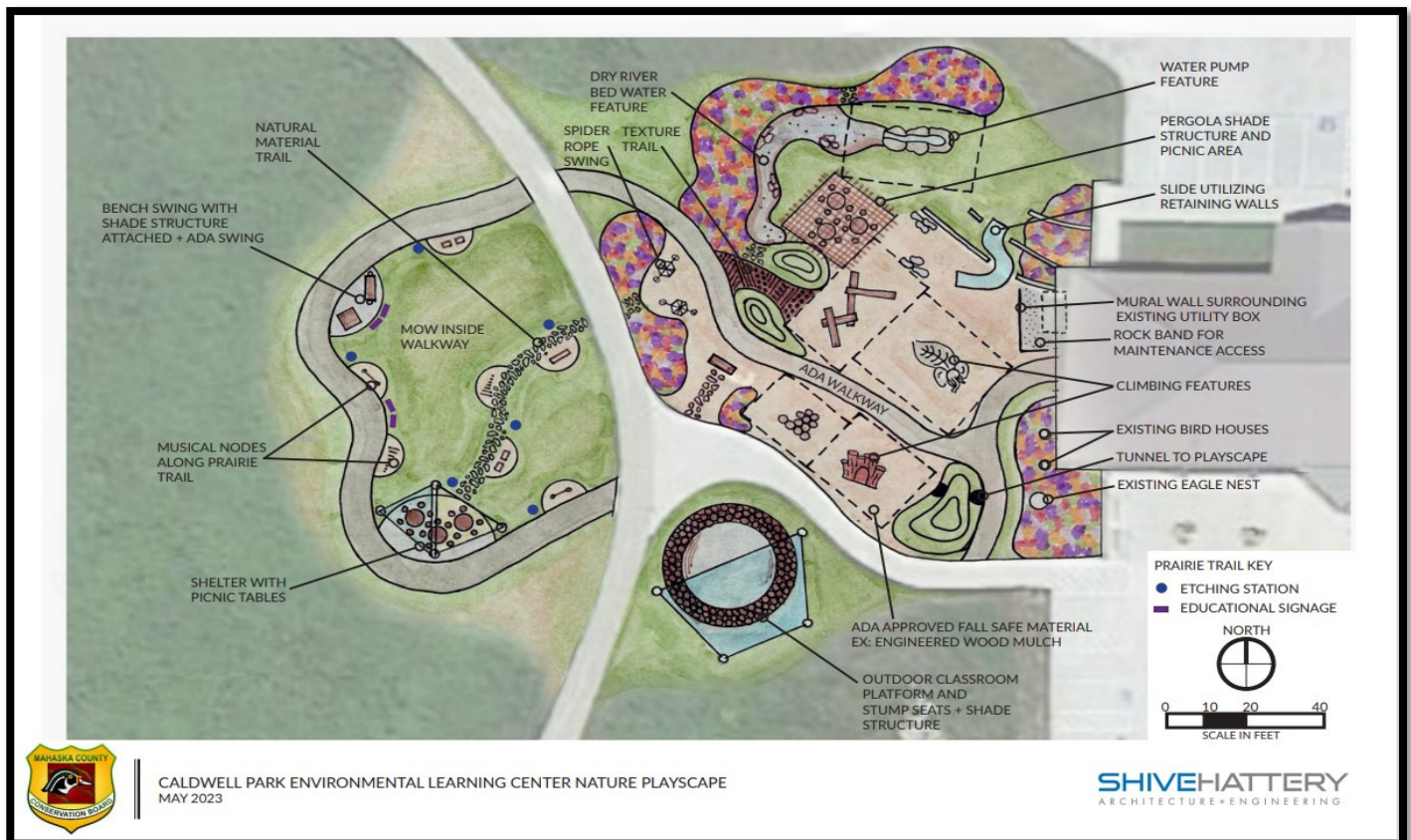
awarded grants and have received some donations. This is a list of grants and donations that have been acquired so far to reach the goal for the nature playscape and amphitheater:

Walter L. McQuiston Community Trust	\$27,700.00
Rural Enrichment Grant	\$20,000.00
Donations through Friends of Mahaska County Conservation	<u>\$9,200.00</u>
Total	\$56,900.00

We have applied for and are waiting to learn about receiving a couple more grants that will greatly help.

Iowa Arts Council Strengthening Communities Grant	\$100,000.00
George Daily Family Trust Grant	\$250,000.00

Again, your support is important to us. If you wish to donate to the playscape and amphitheater project, your tax-deductible donation would be greatly appreciated! Another way you can help is to fill out a survey which will become available after the first of the new year.



UPCOMING PUBLIC MEETING: COMPREHENSIVE PARK PLANNING

In January 2024 a public meeting will be held at the Environmental Learning Center about a comprehensive park planning in Mahaska County. We invite everyone to come and learn about our plans and offer ideas. The community is encouraged to attend this meeting and get involved with shaping the future of our county parks. Please share your thoughts and opinions on how we can make Mahaska County a better place to live and grow.



SPECIAL THANK YOUS

To all the donors and volunteers THANK YOU!

Youth Outdoor Field Day

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Oskaloosa Fire Department
Mahaska County Sheriff's Office
Muddy River Bowfishing
Spring Creek Arms
Scanlon Bait & Tackle
Oskaloosa Disc Golf
Green Iowa AmeriCorps
Mahaska County Master Gardeners
Oskaloosa Trees Forever
Swim's Sports Awards & Screen-Printing

Linda Fox
Mary Jane Sullivan
Lona Brager
Susan Knox
Josh DeCook
Ray Becze
Pat Kitzman
Joyce Moses
Lois Harris
Suzette Striegel
Verna Conry

Gary Engel
Pam White
John Langstraat
Aubrey Brown
Kristine Jaenette
Cheyenne Reak
TJ Brom
Cole Scanlon
Paul Scanlon
Norma Drummond
Doug Drummond

Ron Van Heuvelen
Justin Shipman
Alexis Shipman
Deputy Wilke & Rocco
Roger Beane
John Steinbach

Halloween Bash

Mahaska Drug
Legacy Real Estate
Eddyville Volunteer Fire Department
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
True Value

Oskaloosa Hy-Vee
Fareway
Mary Jane Sullivan
Mark Sullivan
Val Terpstra

Randie Gist
Susan Anderson
Rodney Anderson
Doug Drummond
Norma Drummond

Steve Dixon
Kim Dixon
Marlis DeBoef
Trish Clingan

Eveland Access Cabins

1681 – 290th St., Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577



**Apple and Birch Cabins
are available for rent year-round.**

To view pictures of the cabins and find rental information, visit
the MCCB website: www.mahaskaconservation.com
or call MCCB at (641)673-9327.

Environmental Education DONATION WISH LIST

- Night crawlers for feeding educational animals
- Glue sticks for crafts
- Colored paper for printing
- Construction paper for crafts
- White cardstock paper for crafts
- Quart and pint-sized mason jars with lids for maple syruping this spring
- Bird bath for bird feeding area
- Sponsors for Eveland Access Summerfest
- Patio furniture for deck viewing area at ELC

If you have questions, contact Laura at (641)673-9327.



NATURE NOTES

Squirrels in Iowa

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

Iowa has four species of tree squirrels, but it's the fox squirrels (*Sciurus niger*) and eastern gray squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) that are seen most often in Mahaska County. The nocturnal southern flying squirrels (*Glaucomys volans*) are rarely seen, and red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) live in the mixed pine forests of northern Iowa. Both fox and gray squirrels can be found in heavily forested areas. You can tell the difference between the two species by their size and color. Fox squirrels are bigger (averaging one to three pounds) and have grizzled gray fur on the back with rusty orange bellies. The smaller gray squirrel (3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds) has lighter gray fur dorsally and white belly fur.



As temperatures begin to drop in the fall, squirrels can be seen carrying mouthfuls of dry leaves from the forest floor to their nests high in the tree branches. A squirrel's nest is called a drey. The leaf nest or drey is built by squirrels by making a framework of twigs and then piles of leaves are added layer upon layer. The squirrel hollows out a nest cavity in the center of the leaves.

If a squirrel can find an older tree with hollow cavities in the limbs, it will use that for shelter. Using a hole in a tree is a lot less work and makes a sturdy shelter. In some parts of Iowa, it can be challenging to find big old trees full of holes and rotten limbs. What looks like a five-star hotel to a squirrel are the trees that people sometimes cut down for lumber or firewood. Sometimes old trees get cut down just because they appear unsightly.



On winter days with heavy snowfall or freezing rain, oak hickory forests are very quiet. Squirrels are not out scurrying around, cutting nuts, rustling leaves, or scolding people – all which would betray their presence. If they do venture out for food in the winter, foraging for buried nuts can be risky for squirrels. If squirrels' food does not produce enough energy, then their vital layer of insulated fat will be steadily lost, and they may not survive the winter.

Somewhere, in a tree near you, a squirrel is getting ready to survive an Iowa winter. Take some time this season for a closer look at these amazing little critters!



Squirrels are quick and nimble, but they could get stuck if they run into tight places too fast! To check out the size of a hide hole, squirrels use whiskers not only on their faces, but on their legs. These highly sensitive hairs allow the animal to feel how close the sides are of a hideaway.



INVESTIGATE

Programs for Kids



Knee-High Naturalist programs are free activities for kids ages 5 and younger. The program activities are designed to help foster learning about nature and exploring the outdoors. Adults who bring children to programs need to remain with them during the program.

Pre-registration is required to participate.

*Call (641)673-9327 or
email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.*

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Environmental Learning Center

December 12 Owls

Come and make an owl craft and listen to a story about calling for owls.

January 16

The Mitten

Explore Jan Brett's story "The Mitten" and find out how animals survive the winter. Meet an animal that used the mitten!

February 6

Pajama Party!

Wear your pajamas, bring a stuffed animal and come and play fun games.

March 5

Fishy Fun

We will take a close look at fish, listen to a story, and make a fish craft.

Homeschool Science Labs



Free monthly programs for your children that will provide hands-on learning experiences and excite them about science and nature.

Registrations are needed!

*Call (641)673-9327 or email
decook@mahaskacountyia.gov to sign up.*

1:00-2:00 pm

Environmental Learning Center

December 1 "Wolves in Iowa"

Learn about the time when wolves lived in Iowa and tour the Wolves in Wildlands exhibit.

January 5 "Paper Airplanes"

Find out what makes planes fly and test your skills at folding a paper airplanes. We will fly our planes to see how far they will fly!

February 2 "Groundhog Day Party"

We will celebrate the early arrival of spring or more winter – depending on what the groundhog decides. Get ready for some fun games!

March 1 "Greed VS Need"

We will explore how understanding the difference between greed and need helps our natural resources.



EXPERIENCE

Programs for Adults



Coffee Club at the ELC

9:00-10:00 am

Friday, December 1st

Friday, January 5th

Friday, February 2nd

Friday, March 1st

Everyone is welcome to come out and enjoy the coffee, home-baked snacks, and socializing. We have a great time visiting and learning about fascinating things in nature and with MCCB. Bring a cup and a friend! *Donations are appreciated to help purchase supplies for future Coffee Clubs.*

We meet in the Environmental Learning Center's Discovery Lab (upper level). Feel free to tour the exhibits after having coffee. There are many great displays to see in the ELC! Reservations are not needed to participate.

JOIN US ON DECEMBER 13TH

WOLF DOCUMENTARY

1:00-2:00 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

CALL (641)673-9327
FOR RESERVATIONS



American Bison Documentary

FEBRUARY 28, 2024

1:00-2:00 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING CENTER

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED

CALL (641)673-9327
FOR RESERVATIONS



**Are you looking for a fun way
to volunteer?**

**Become an
ELC Host!**

See page 10 to learn more.





EXPERIENCE

Programs for Adults



O.W.L.S.
Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls



LUNCH & LEARN DAYS
Bring your lunch and a friend!
Pre-registrations are appreciated for supplies and seating.

“Wolves and Wild Lands” Guided Tour

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, December 15, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and get a guided tour through the “Wolves and Wild Lands” travelling exhibit while it is in Mahaska County. Lunch will be held first; the tour will be immediately afterwards.



Osky High School Storybook Players

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, January 19, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

They are back again! Come and watch the talented Oskaloosa High School students perform a storybook play. It was a full house last year, so let us know you are coming! Feel free to eat your lunch during the performance.

“Sandhill Cranes and Their Midwest Region” with Diane Crookham-Johnson

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, February 23, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Diane will share fascinating photos and information about sandhill cranes and their role in Iowa’s ecosystems. Don’t forget to bring your lunch and a friend!



“Owls of Iowa”

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, March 22, 2024

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and learn about the owls that live in Iowa. We will take a close look at the uniqueness of each owl species and learn the sounds they make in nature.



DISCOVER

Programs for All Ages

Holiday Fun at the ELC

December 26th

- 1:00 pm **Storytime**
1:30 pm **Fish Feeding**
12:30--4:30 pm
- Cookies & Cocoa
 - Indoor scavenger hunt
 - Wolf exhibit
 - Discovery Lab activities
 - Live animals

December 27th

- 1:00 pm **Storytime**
1:30 pm **Snake Feeding**
12:30-8:00 pm
- Indoor scavenger hunt
 - Wolf exhibit
 - Discovery Lab activities
 - Live animals

December 28th

- 1:00 pm **Storytime**
1:30 pm **Family Movie in
Discovery Lab**
12:30-4:00 pm
- Indoor scavenger hunt
 - Wolf exhibit
 - Discovery Lab activities
 - Live animals



Wolves in the Wildlands Exhibit

Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center
2342 Hwy. 92
Oskaloosa, IA 52577

COME SEE IT DECEMBER 1-29, 2023!



DISCOVER

Programs for All Ages

Beginning Beekeeper Class

January 12—February 23, 2024

every Friday, 6-8 pm

at the Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center
(basement, enter South side)
2342 Hwy 92, Oskaloosa



Cost: \$45

Price includes book, hand-outs,
class instruction with power point,
1-year membership to IHPA, and
plenty of Q&A time.

- Class topics include: equipment needs, colony management, honey bee health, & first year expectations.
- Beekeeping is a family affair. We encourage you to bring your spouse and children. (Cost covers your immediate family.)
 - Many find the class helpful both before and/or after their first year of beekeeping.
 - This class sponsored by: Iowa Honey Producers Association (IHPA) & Mahaska County Conservation.

Early **REGISTRATION** preferred

Contact Jim & Tina Marshall
marshalltmf@gmail.com
641-660-0983



Park Stewards

ARE NEEDED!

Volunteer with us and help
keep our county parks clean.
Contact us today to get started!



Call Mahaska County Conservation
at (641)673-9327 or email
decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.



- To make one pound of honey, honeybees must gather nectar from nearly 2 million flowers.
- A queen bee can produce up to 2,000 eggs per day.
- Bees communicate with each other by dancing.
- A single bee would need to fly nearly 90,000 miles, or three times around the earth, to make one pound of honey.
- The average speed of a worker honeybee is about 15-20 mph when flying to a food source.
- The only insect that produces food that humans eat is the honeybee.
- A colony of bees consists of 20,000-60,000 bees and one queen.





VOLUNTEER

Information & News

Volunteer Training

JANUARY 22, 2024

6:00-7:00 PM

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO
VOLUNTEER!

- Environmental Learning Center Host
- Event & educational program volunteer
- County park stewards
- ELC live animal care
- Flower bed maintenance
- Bird feeding

ARE YOU WANTING TO
VOLUNTEER WITH US?
SIGN UP TO ATTEND!

(641)673-9327
DECOOK@MAHASKACOUNTYIA.GOV

VOLUNTEER TRAINING IS ONCE EVERY THREE YEARS.

Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

Mahaska County
Conservation
Volunteer

February 5, 2024

6:00-8:00 pm

at the Mahaska County
Environmental Learning Center
(lower level)

SCHEDULE:

6:00 pm Doors Open

6:30 pm Potluck Dinner

Meat, drinks & table service provided.

Please bring side dish or dessert.

7:15 pm Presentations



Please RSVP by Feb. 1, 2024 by calling (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.



Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center

2342 HWY. 92, OSKALOOSA, IA 52577
641.673.9327



Mondays	12:30-4:30 pm
Tuesdays	12:30-4:30 pm
Wednesdays	12:30-8:00 pm
Thursdays	12:30-8:00 pm
Fridays	12:30-8:00 pm
Saturdays	10:00 am - 6:00 pm

Come and see Woolly mammoth bones found in Mahaska County, the 1,000 gallon fish aquarium, live animals, and so much more!

The Prairie Star

The Prairie Star is the quarterly 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. You can contact us by calling (641)673-9327 or by emailing decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

Mahaska County Conservation

Mahaska County Conservation'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 MEETING DATES

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. The public is welcome to attend.

December 18, 2023

January 15, 2024

February 19, 2024

March 18, 2024

Lower level of the Mahaska County Environmental Learning Center
2342 Hwy. 92, Oskaloosa, IA 52577

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

Mahaska County Conservation Board

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

STAFF

Chris Clingan	Director
Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Park Ranger
Jason Ryan	Park Ranger
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant
Rosemary Miller	ELC Attendant
Ryan Swarts	ELC Attendant

Mission 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.