

The Prairie Star

Newsletter

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Winter 2023

2023: A New Year For MCCB

By Laura DeCook
MCCB Naturalist

The Mahaska County Conservation Board and staff will be going through some new changes during 2023. Change can be a good thing; a time of growth and learning, and time to try new things. To help keep the public up to date, this newsletter will provide information about some of the upcoming changes: conservation board member updates, changes with the director, and new exhibits.

As always, the conservation board and staff appreciate the opportunities to provide you and your family ways to connect with the outdoors. With our new leadership, we will continue our commitment in caring for our county areas and pursuing environmental educational opportunities for everyone. This new year will be a brand-new chapter for each of us at MCCB, and we look forward to your support and participation!



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SPECIAL THANK YOU'S

From MCCB



Dave Sedivec, MCCB Director for 12 years.

Sedivec Retires as MCCB Director

The Mahaska County Conservation Board and staff wish Dave Sedivec the best with his future as he retires as Director for Mahaska County Conservation. Dave began working with MCCB in April 2010 and will retire on January 20, 2023. As director for the last 12 years, Dave has been involved in many changes and areas of growth with Mahaska County Conservation. We are sure he will enjoy the memories of land acquisitions that provided more natural areas for the public, expansion of Eveland Access Campground, the construction of the Environmental Learning Center, and teaching hunter education to future hunters; just to name a few. However, we are sure he will enjoy each day of hunting, fishing and camping whenever he wants! Congratulations Dave on a well-earned retirement.

Peggy Wright, 35 Years as MCCB Board Member

We want to say a BIG thank you to Peggy Wright for serving on the Mahaska County Conservation Board for the last 35 years. Peggy has been an integral part of the board and leaves us as a well-respected friend of conservation. Over the years, Peggy has been involved in many MCCB land acquisitions, hiring of full-time staff, worked on committees, and shared her positive wisdom. She even served on the Board of Directors for the Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards (now the Iowa County Conservation System) for three five-year terms. Her dedication to conservation is immeasurable!

Peggy has shared some of her best memories of her 35 years on the Mahaska County Conservation Board. Her favorite county area is Cedar Bluffs because of its beauty and location which places you directly into nature. Peggy was also involved in the acquisition of Cedar Bluffs and the process to have it dedicated as a state preserve in 1997 by the Iowa State Preserves Board. Nature speaks loudly to her, however, her fondest memory in her own words were about the “good friends and people that I have worked with and the contacts I have made over the years who are now my friends”. Thank YOU, Peggy for all you have done in the last 35 years for Mahaksa County Conservation!



Peggy Wright



WELCOME TO MCCB

Meet the New MCCB Director, Chris Clingan

First, I would like to thank the Mahaska County Conservation Board for selecting me to be the new Director of the Conservation Board! I am looking forward to all the challenges ahead in this new chapter in my career. Growing up in rural What Cheer, my Grandfather Wilmer Clingan had a ranch where he raised Whitetail Deer and Bison. It was unique and interesting to me as well as many others. He truly had a love for all things that were wild, and he loved to share his passion with others. Needless to say, a lot of that passion stuck with me.

Since Graduating from Tri-County High School I have dedicated most of my career working to protect Iowa's natural resources and the people that enjoy them. Mahaska County has so much to offer for people to get outside and get connected to the world we live in. So of course, when the opportunity became available to work for the conservation board, I couldn't let it pass by. Providing quality outdoor opportunities for people to get connected with nature is what the conservation board is all about and I am honored to be a part of their team.

I am truly looking forward to serving the Mahaska County community the best I can! I want everybody to know that I have an open-door policy, so feel free to stop by the Environmental Learning Center to introduce yourselves. Additionally, if you or anyone you know would be interested in getting involved by volunteering with the conservation board, please contact us!



Chris Clingan, new MCCB Director

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 to 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
- Frozen mice for feeding educational snakes
- Glue sticks
- Colored pencils
- Playdough
- Quart and pint-sized mason jars with lids
- Butterfly nets for programs
- Collapsible awnings for outdoor programs
- Feed birds at the ELC bird feeders



NATURE NOTES

Searching For Northern Saw Whet Owls

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

Northern Saw-whet owls (*Aegolius acadicus*) are one of the smallest raptors found in Iowa and across the United States. They are small, only 8 inches tall and weigh about 3 ounces. During the cold winter months in Iowa, they can be found in a wooded area with thick cover, mostly conifers or within a thick tangle of shrubs. With a little searching in the right places, you can find saw-whets during the daytime. Amazingly, they can be found in parks and on trails with frequent human activity!



Finding a Saw-whet owl is a fun wintertime experience! It is worth bundling up on a cold day to look for them. To help you successfully locate Saw-whets, here are a few tips:

1. Look for them sitting on branch in conifers, especially cedar trees. They are rarely found higher than 10 feet up in a tree. The ones I have found were perched on a branch at eye level! They will also hide out in groves of pine and spruce trees.
2. It is also important for these owls to have a source of water nearby. Their roost is almost always near a creek, lake, pond or river because hunting near the edge of the water next to trees provides a good diversity of prey for hunting. They will hunt for small mammals, birds, bats, and occasionally insects. Since Saw-whets are so small, they must watch out for predators such as larger raptors, including owls and hawks.
3. Look for owl poop! This is a good indicator of a tree housing an owl. Saw-whet owl poop appears thick and chalky and leaves white splashes on tree branches and on the ground below. Since owls often sit in the same tree all day, they often leave quite a few droppings.
4. Another sign of owls in the area are pellets on the ground. These are non-digestible fur and bones from prey that are coughed up by the owl. The pellets for Saw-whets will be smaller compared to larger owls such as the Great Horned or Barred owls. For Saw-whets, one mouse would last for two meals.
5. Look in small tree cavities. If the sun is shining directly on the tree cavity on a cold day, there could be an owl basking in the sunshine. The best practice for searching in tree cavities is to use binoculars, scopes, or a camera lens to look for activity. Northern Saw-whets sit very still, so wait patiently for any movement.
6. Use other birds to let you know where they are. All birds of prey are subject to mobbing (harassment from other birds). A Saw-whet's diet is mostly small mammals, but songbirds are subject to be meals, too. When flocks of chickadees and nuthatches sound alarmed with long, agitated calls, there is a possibility of an owl nearby.



Northern Saw-whet owls may freeze their food to eat at a later time. When they want to eat it, they will take it back to the roost and lay on it so it will thaw for eating!



A Woolly Mammoth Is Coming To The ELC!

by Laura DeCook, MCCB Naturalist

In 2010, a femur bone from a Woolly mammoth that once roamed the land in Mahaska County during the last ice age was discovered by a landowner in rural Mahaska County. Afterwards, the Mahaska County Conservation Board had the privilege to help dig up the bones. Today, these bones are on display inside the Environmental Learning Center. They are fascinating to see and have been a great asset in teaching the public about our ice age history.



A Woolly mammoth tooth discovered in rural Mahaska County. It is now on display at the Environmental Learning Center.

When the Environmental Learning Center was designed and built, MCCB wanted to have a life-sized Woolly mammoth skeleton on exhibit. We are excited to announce that a replica skeleton will be arriving at the Environmental Learning Center soon! The replica skeleton was paid for by the MidwestOne Bank in Oskaloosa and is being built by Elemoose in Springfield, Missouri. MCCB is planning an open house for the public to come and see this mammoth inside the Environmental Learning Center once it has been installed. Be sure to check back with us to learn more about this open house event! Until then, here are a few sneak peek photos of the skeleton being made. An updated video of these photos is also on display inside the ELC.





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 that bring the children to the program 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

February 7 The Mitten

Explore Jan Brett's story "The Mitten" and find out how animals survive the winter.

March 7 Fun With Weather

Come and help with fun weather experiments!

April 11 Animal Party

Bring a stuffed animal and join in on some fun games such as BINGO, Cake Walk and Pin the Feather on the Turkey.



*Day Camps will be held in June!
Watch for information and sign ups.*

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.

February 10 "Snakes!"

10:00–11:00 am or 1:00–2:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center

March 10 "Bison"

10:00–11:00 am or 1:00–2:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center

April 14 "Woolly Mammoths"

10:00–11:00 am or 1:00–2:00 pm
Environmental Learning Center

"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn".

~ Benjamin Franklin ~



EXPERIENCE

Programs for Adults



Coffee Club at the ELC

9:00-10:00 am

Friday, February 3rd

Friday, March 3rd

Friday, April 7th

Anyone is welcome to come out and enjoy the coffee, home-baked snacks and company. 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.



O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

LUNCH & LEARN DAYS **Bring a lunch and a friend!**

*Pre-registrations are appreciated for
supplies and seating.*

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

Making Bird Treats

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, February 17, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Come and learn how to make simple and easy suet bird cakes to feed the birds. You will be able to take home what you make! We will eat lunch first and then make the bird treats.

Maskunky Marsh

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, March 24, 2023

Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Located east of Oskaloosa on Hwy. 92 is Mahaska County's Maskunky Marsh. Come and learn about the benefits of wetland and about the Maskunky Marsh.

Gardening – How To Grow Your Wallet

11:30 am – 12:30 pm

Friday, April 21, 2023


Environmental Learning Center, Caldwell Park

Cathy Drost from Mahaska County ISU Extension will come and share information about a creative way to garden.



DISCOVER

Programs for All Ages




OWL PROWL

A FUN FAMILY EVENT!

Friday, January 27th
7:00 - 8:00 pm

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

- Learn about owls in Iowa.
- Go on a hike to find owls.
- Dress for the weather!



Registrations are appreciated.
Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 to let us know
you are coming.

TO ALL THE DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

THANK YOU!

Youth Outdoor Field Day

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Oskaloosa Fire Department
Mahaska County Sheriff Department
Mahaska County Izaak Walton League
Spring Creek Arms
Scanlon Bait & Tackle
Oskaloosa Disc Golf
Nelson Pioneer Farm & Museum
Mahaska County Master Gardeners
Oskaloosa Trees Forever
Oskaloosa Central United Methodist Church
Swim's Sports Awards & Screen-Printing
Justin Shipman

Linda Fox
Mary Jane Sullivan
Carol Peterson
Susan Knox
Lona Brager
Shirley Kelderman
Deb Osborn
Pat Kitzman
Katie Woosley
Suzette Striegel
Verna Conry
Roger Beane
Nick Shipman

Clint O'Day
Jeff Patterson
Guy Almon
Norma Drummond
Doug Drummond
TJ Brom
Tyler Vermeer
Margaret Spiegel
Ryan Smithart
Glenn Knox
Chad Malone
John Steinbach
Heather Little



Halloween Bash

Mahaska Drug
Legacy Real Estate
Eddyville Volunteer Fire Department
Orscheln Farm and Home
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation

Oskaloosa Hy-Vee
Wymore Automotive
Mary Jane Sullivan
Ila Ruby
Carol Peterson

TJ Brom
Susan Anderson
Rodney Anderson
Doug Drummond
Norma Drummond





VOLUNTEER

Information & News

Mahaska County Conservation Board

JOIN OUR VOLUNTEER TEAM





NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING DAY

MCCB has many ways YOU can help as a volunteer. If you have never volunteered for us before, come check out opportunities during one of our fun and easy one-hour training sessions!



JANUARY 30, 2023
1:00-2:00 pm or
6:00-7:00 pm

Sign up for a session by calling
(641)673-9327 or email
decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.

Volunteer Training Update (for current volunteers)

As of January 2023, the Mahaska County Conservation Board requires all volunteers to attend a volunteer training program once every three years instead of annually. To maintain your volunteer status your next training will now be three years after your last training date. *Volunteers will still need to annually submit information for a background check.* Reminders will be sent to volunteers when it is time to renew training and/or submit background check information.

We want to make volunteering as simple as possible because we appreciate your help! Thank you for volunteering!

Volunteers are needed!

Call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or email
decook@mahaskacountyia.gov to learn more.

- Greet guests visiting the Environmental Learning Center
- Assist with public events, camps and field trips
- Photograph/video event activities
- Light housekeeping at the ELC
- Feeding educational animals
- Replace fishing line on program fishing poles
- Feeding birds at ELC bird feeders

You Are Invited!

The Mahaska County Conservation Board staff greatly appreciates everyone's generous gift of time and service as a volunteer. Whether you are wanting to start volunteering or have already shared your talents on a board, a committee or volunteered at MCCB's programs and events, you are truly valued and we would LOVE to honor your service!



Volunteer Appreciation Dinner

February 13, 2023
6:30-8:00 pm
at the Mahaska County
Environmental Learning Center
(lower level)

SCHEDULE:
6:30 pm Doors Open
7:00-7:30 Dinner
7:30-8:00 Presentation



Contact MCCB to confirm your attendance by February 8th. Call (641)673-9327 / decook@mahaskacountyia.gov.



MAHASKA COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER

Open hours are 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday or by appointment.

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.

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, although contributions to help defray costs are greatly appreciated. Please help us by keeping us informed of any change of email address or if you no longer wish to receive our newsletter.

Mahaska County Conservation Board MEETING DATES

MCCB's monthly board meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. Public is welcome to attend.

February 2, 2023

March 2, 2023

April 6, 2023

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

Willie Van Weelden, Oskaloosa,	Chairperson
Steve Dixon, Oskaloosa	Vice-Chairperson
Curt Jager, Eddyville	Secretary
Linda Fox, Rose Hill	Member
Vacancy	Member

STAFF

Chris Clingan	Director
Laura DeCook	Naturalist
Tommy VanRenterghem	Park Ranger
Jason Ryan	Park Ranger
Dorothy Wedgewood	Administrative Assistant

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.