Positive Changes for MCCB

By Dave Sedivec
MCCB Director

Every year, MCCB faces the challenge of change. Whether it’s adding more public ground, updating vault toilets at the various parks, or just maintaining the 21 public areas, there is always something new happening. This year is no different. Listed are just two of the changes MCCB has been working on.

First of all, campers at Eveland Access will notice a drastic difference in the tree population at the campgrounds. Due to disease decimating the ash trees, MCCB was forced to cut down over 40 trees for public safety. MCCB has ordered a variety of replacement trees and will be planting these in the spring; however, Eveland Access will definitely have a different look.

Secondly, the construction on the Environmental Learning Center is in full swing. At this point, the walls are up and by the time you receive this newsletter the roof may very well be completed. Feel free to drive by to see the progress. However, we do ask the public to refrain from driving onto the construction site as this is a safety risk. You can also check out the construction progress on the Mahaska County Conservation Facebook page. We try to post pictures of the progress on a regular basis. On another note, MCCB has hired Taylor Studios, Inc. to design and construct the displays for the ELC. We are excited to work with Taylor Studios, Inc. and look forward to starting on this phase of the ELC project. The vision for the new ELC started ten years ago and is now becoming a reality. We would like to sincerely thank everyone that has helped with this project throughout the process.
With the arrival of spring, the loud vocals of the Spring Peeper frog will be heard throughout the night. The male Spring Peepers begin their songs to find a mate around mid-March which is at the end of their hibernation period. Their sound is a shrill “peep, peep, peep”. The louder and faster he peeps, the better his chances are of attracting a receptive female. Each male establishes a small territory and begins calling quite frequently.

Spring Peepers can be found in wooded areas and grassy lowlands near ponds and wetlands in the central and eastern parts of Canada and the United States. These tiny (1.5 inch long), well-camouflaged amphibians are rarely seen. Spring Peepers are small frogs that are tan, brown or olive in color. Their belly is cream or white and is marked with dark lines that form an X on their backs and dark bands on its legs. Perhaps you could find one climbing a tree using its large toe pads. You could also find them within the loose debris of the forest floor.

These frogs are nocturnal creatures, hiding from their many predators during the day and emerging at night to feed on their preferred food such as beetles, ants, flies, and spiders.

Spring Peepers breed and lay their eggs in freshwater ponds or pools and prefer to use ponds where there are no fish. They will spend the rest of the year in the forest. In the winter, these frogs hibernate under logs or behind loose bark on trees, waiting for the spring thaw and their chance to sing.
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!

Robertson Access
By Jason Ryan, Conservation Technician

Robertson Access was named after the original owner of the land. It was purchased by the Mahaska County Conservation Board on May 11, 1977 for $12,180. Robertson Access is approximately 34.8 acres that adjoins the North Skunk River in the northern most part of the county. The river flows northwest to southeast through the park. Highway 146 is the west boundary with the Poweshiek County line being the north boundary. The park is approximately two miles north of New Sharon. The original intent for the acquisition of the area was to provide wildlife habitat, camping, picnicking, a roadside rest area and a public access to the North Skunk River. Some of the work done to the area was a cooperative project between Poweshiek and Mahaska County Conservation Boards. Poweshiek County has an eight acre wildlife area adjacent to the Mahaska County Land on the north boundary.

The Robertson Access has a dense stand of timber growing on it except for the southwest corner of the property. The majority of this land is low floodplain but approximately five acres is high ground and is not susceptible to river flooding. In the northeast corner of the park, a small marsh exists. This area is ideal for conservation practices which are related to waterfowl and other wildlife.

Small game is abundant at Robertson Access with squirrels, rabbits, land dwelling fur bearing animals, plus game and non-game bird populations. The North Skunk River offers good fishing and provides desirable habitat for waterfowl and water dwelling fur bearing animals. Also, deer trails are predominate throughout the park. Trees found in the area are white oak, pin, oak, burr oak, elm, ash, hickory, silver maple, sycamore, wild cherry, willow and cottonwood. When the property was obtained, all marketable walnut trees were removed from the area. Most walnuts left were ten foot or less in height. Today, the area is one of MCCB’s four primitive camping areas costing only $10 dollars per night to camp. The park currently has an updated latrine, informational kiosk, picnic tables, fire rings and a trash receptacle.
Volunteer Appreciation Dinner
Monday, February 26
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. The meal theme this year will be “Campfire Cookout”. There is no cost for the meal, but reservations are needed. To make your reservations, please call MCCB at (641)673-9327 or email decook@mahaskacounty.org.

Maple Syrup Festival
Saturday, March 17
9:00 – Noon
Eveland Access

Throughout the morning, MCCB staff and volunteers will demonstrate how to tap trees and boil it to make maple syrup. You can also explore the black maple sugarbush, the old barn, a Native American sugaring camp and enjoy some old-fashioned games. Bring your appetites for fresh maple syrup on ice cream! This event is for all ages. Come on out for the fun – no reservations are needed. If the weather is poor for an outdoor event, it will be held indoors at the Russell Wildlife Area. Watch Mahaska County Conservation on Facebook for updates.

Mahaska Mammoth: Woolly Dreams Story Reading, Meet the Authors & Environmental Learning Center Update
Thursday, March 29
6:00 – 7:00 p.m.
Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area

Mahaska Mammoth: Woolly Dreams was written after the bones of three woolly mammoths were discovered in Mahaska County. It is a fictional story enhanced with facts that will inspire readers of all ages to learn more about the woolly mammoth and the Ice Age. Come out to hear a reading of the story and visit with the authors. This will also be an opportunity to learn more about Mahaska County’s Environmental Learning Center that is being built at Caldwell Park!

Hunter Education Class
Wednesday, April 11 (5:30 - 9:30 pm) & Thursday, April 12 (5:30 – 9:30 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.

Basket Class
Saturday, April 14
9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Russell Wildlife Area

Naturalist Laura DeCook will teach participants the skills to create a basket with a wooden base and mold. The class size is limited to 10 people. Pre-registration is required and the cost is $20.00 per person. This class is for ages 10 and older. A minimum of 3 people will need to attend in order to hold the class. Call MCCB by April 6th at (641)673-9327 to sign up.
Friends of Mahaska County Conservation Annual Meeting

Monday, April 23
6:30 pm
ISU Extension Office, Oskaloosa

Are you interested in conservation in Mahaska County? The public and members of the Friends of Mahaska County Conservation are invited to attend the 2018 annual meeting. The meal will be provided by the Friends, with catering by the East Market Grocery of New Sharon. Please RSVP by April 15th by emailing friendsmahaskacc@gmail.com or call (641)673-5912.

3rd Annual Night Crawler Hunt

Friday, May 4
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. Let us know you are coming by calling MCCB at (641)673-9327.

2nd Annual Eveland Access Dutch Oven Gathering

Saturday, May 19
3:00 Dutch Oven 101 (this is a 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 Dutch Oven Gathering (D.O.G) down by the river at the Eveland Access Campgrounds. 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 food will be welcomed. There will be plenty of fun, food and fellowship.

If you want to learn the basics about Dutch Oven cooking, join us at the main shelter house at 3:00 pm 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. If you plan on eating at 5:00, please bring our own drink and table settings.

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

“In the spring I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours.”

Mark Twain
Moonlight Movie Night at Eveland Access Campgrounds

Saturday, May 26
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! Watch the Eveland Access Campgrounds Facebook page to find out which movie will be shown. 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 2
12:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Russell Wildlife Area

**Campfire Picnic**
- Bring a drink & side dish
- Hot dogs and table service provided
**Kids’ Fishing Derby & Family Fishing**
- MCCB will provide fishing poles and bait, but feel free to bring your own

It’s an event of **FREE FUN** for the whole family! The event will kick off with a picnic lunch. 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. MCCB will provide the table service and hot dogs.

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 length of fish caught during this event. **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 (night crawlers) will be provided. Please register at the conservation center when you arrive.**

**June 5-6** Challenge Camp
Ages 10 & older
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
$20.00 per camper

Campers will experience many outdoor activities on a more in-depth level than Jr. Naturalist Camp. We will go fishing, hiking, archery, campfire cooking and lots of exploring! Campers will be asked to bring a white t-shirt to tie-dye and decorate for camp. A water bottle will be needed each day.

**June 19-20** Discovery Day Camp I
**June 21-22** Discovery Day Camp II
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 and “Amazing Insects”. We will go hiking, scoop up insects in the pond and more! Campers will be asked to bring a solid-colored t-shirt to decorate for camp. A water bottle will be needed each day.

**June 26-27** Jr. Naturalist Day Camp I
**June 28-29** Jr. Naturalist Day Camp II
Ages 6-12
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
$20.00 per camper

This year’s camp theme will be “Where the Wild Things Are”. Campers will learn about wildlife and the nature around us through exploring and fun group activities. We will go hiking, fishing, fossil digging and more! Campers will be asked to bring a solid-colored t-shirt to decorate for camp and also a water bottle each day.

**July 10** Fishing Camp I
All Ages (kids ages 6 and younger need to come with an adult)
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
$5.00 per person

Have you ever wanted to make your own fishing jigs? Then come to this camp. You will learn step by step how to make jigs and paint them to attract fish. Note: We will work with hot lead and air dryers.

**July 11** Fishing Camp II
All Ages (kids ages 6 and younger need to come with an adult)
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
$5.00 per person

If you love to go fishing, then this camp is for you! We will trek out to the ponds at the Russell Wildlife Area to go fishing. You will also learn how to tie a hook on your line, casting techniques and how to choose the appropriate rod and reel. Fishing poles and bait will be provided, but you can bring your own.
A Big Thank You!
The Mahaska County Conservation Board wishes to extend our appreciation 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 Giveaway
Russ Van Renterghem – Bird Food Giveaway
Mahaska Masters 4H Club – Mitten donations
Mary Jane Sullivan – Winter Day Camp, Halloween Bash
Kim Dixon – Halloween Bash
Kathy Fitzpatrick – Halloween Bash
Barb Vanderwilt – Halloween Bash

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:

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| April 5| Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
         | 6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| April 16| Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
           | 6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| May 3  | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
         | 7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| May 21 | Friends of Mahaska County Conservation
         | 6:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| June 6 | Mahaska County Conservation Board Meeting
         | 7:30 p.m. @ Conservation Center, Russell Wildlife Area |
| June 18| 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. 20240.