

Fall 2023

# Blue Water Nature Notes

Newsletter for the Dickinson County Conservation Board &  
Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County

[www.dickinsoncountyconservationboard.com](http://www.dickinsoncountyconservationboard.com)  
(712) 336-6352

## GREETINGS

The Dickinson County Conservation Board (DCCB) and Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County (CFDC) would like to thank all who have supported the Nature Center and DCCB conservation efforts.

In this issue of Blue Water Nature Notes you will find articles describing projects and programs that have taken place in the 2023 year. We hope you enjoy this issue!



## CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS

**Chair:** Joan Gronstal

**Vice Chair:** Steve Anderson

**Members:** Kathy Kleen, Eric Stoll, Douglas Nielsen

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## NATURE CENTER HOURS

Tuesdays -Saturdays  
10 am to 4 pm  
Closed Sunday,  
Monday & Holidays

### DCCB STAFF

**Executive Director**  
Lee Sorenson

**Environmental  
Education Coordinator**  
Danika Cox

**Naturalist**  
Britney Snell

**Community Relations  
Coordinator**  
Amy Heibult

**Regional Collection  
Manager**  
Charles Vigdal

**Natural Resources  
Manager**  
Brian Cuperus

**Natural Resources  
Technician**  
Clay Pavelko

**Roadside Manager**  
Tanner Bouchard

**Roadside Technician**  
Tim Frostestad

**Roadside Technician  
p.t.**  
Cassie Severson

## I WANT TO COMPOST!

by Charles Vigdal  
*Regional Collection  
Manager*

### **What is compost?**

Not many people know what compost is or how it is made. I have people calling it all sorts of names: mulch, soil and even dirt. Whatever you call it (just don't call it dirt!), compost can be a great resource for homeowners and a great way to recycle your waste. Compost is a very nutrient packed, loamy, porous, broken-down organic matter that is used to improve soil's physical, chemical, and biological properties. The way we produce it at the Regional Collection Center is by mixing green waste that comes in, like lawn grass, leaves, and wood chips together and letting it naturally decompose. We then sift it, removing garbage and rocks, and have it available for the public to use. This keeps green waste out of the landfill and provides a valuable product, so it's a win/win for the community.



*Compost sifter next to  
sifted pile of compost*



*Sifted compost*

### **What are its uses and benefits?**

Compost has a variety of uses around your home. It is great for anything that grows. You can add it to your gardens and flower beds annually to improve nutrients and organic material naturally, eliminating the need for store-bought synthetic fertilizers. It's a great addition around trees because compost's porous nature helps retain moisture and reduce watering wherever it is added to existing soil. Mixing it in your flowerpots will help improve soil structure, helping to stabilize pH levels and reduce plant diseases. It also increases the aeration of the soil, allowing more room for microbes and worms which will further improve the nutrients in the soil. Want a greener, more drought tolerant lawn? Throw it over your existing grass. Don't want to spend money on expensive potting soil, use compost! With the production of compost and with the use it can be a natural carbon sequestration process, capturing carbon that would otherwise be released in the air. If you are growing plants, compost is what you want.

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*Vegetable and natural waste can be composted for home use*

### **Composting at home**

Anybody can compost! It can be a great way to divert your household waste, like leaves, grass, and certain waste foods, into a money-saving resource. There are many types of household composting, indoor worm vermicomposting, outdoor rotating bins, stationary piles, and many other new technologies. The easiest to get going would be an area of your yard that can be used to pile material or buy or create a breathable bin to collect the organic material. Once you have a receptacle or area, simply start putting organic material in your pile. Waste you can add can be grass clippings, leaves, coffee grounds, eggshells, food, and vegetable scraps. There are certain wastes that you want to avoid putting in your bin like meats, dairy products, oils, and pet wastes. It is easy to maintain your pile or bin. Turn the material periodically and add water when the decomposing process looks like it has stopped or slowed down. After 8 to 12 months, you will have finished compost that is ready for the garden.

If you want any finished compost for your projects, you can always contact the Dickinson County Regional Collection Center. There is no charge if you are filling up your own containers but if you are looking for a trailer loaded, there is a \$10 a bucket (3 to 3.5 cu yards) loading fee. There are woodchips available also. Call for availability at 712-338-2549 or email [RCC@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:RCC@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov)

## **OAK SAVANNA RESTORATION**

by Brian Cuperus  
*Natural Resource Manager*

Oak savannas used to be common in Iowa but have become less abundant throughout the years. There are many reasons as to why these ecosystems have been eliminated or degraded. Once these ecosystems have been altered, it takes multiple management practices to bring them back to what they once were. These oak savannas have an incredible amount of diversity and are a very important habitat to many wildlife species, and we feel there is a need to restore what is left.



*Overgrown oak savanna*

Horseshoe bend's oak savannas have been neglected and overtaken by invasive and non-native species throughout the years. In order to bring this unique ecosystem back to life, we selected a ten-acre oak savanna to restore and have completed approximately 75% of the project. We broke this area into three sections; the first step in the process was cutting the understory out and spraying the rest of the vegetation because there was little to no wildlife value left in the overgrown, non-native vegetation.

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We then re-planted native vegetation, which has been very successful. The next phase was to clear cut due to the lack of oak regeneration and over-population of unwanted woody plants. Once the unwanted woody vegetation was removed, we did the same process of planting native plant species, including new oak trees to fill in the gaps. The native vegetation on this section is in its second growing season and is establishing well. There is anticipation of decent working conditions this fall and winter to finish the final section.



*Oak savanna restoration in progress*



*Horseshoe Bend - restored oak savanna*

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## **HOW, WHEN, AND WHERE HYDROMULCH IS USED IN THE RIGHT OF WAY**

by Tanner Bouchard  
*Roadside Manager*

Hydromulch is a blend of material that comes in a square or rectangular bale, usually it is made up of organic materials mixed with a tackifier; these materials absorb water easily. When mixed into the hydroseeder machine with water, the seed and mulch becomes a very fluid blend that is easy to shoot out of the pump located on top of the machine. The mixture is then applied to cover the exposed soil of the roadside.

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*Hydroseed mixture (blue-ish green material pictured) sprayed into bare roadside*



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We will use our hydroseeder from the beginning of spring to the end of fall for native seed planting and bank stabilization. The mix of hydromulch we use is dependent on how steep the slope is, how exposed it is to rain events, and other events that can cause erosion to the planting site. Usually, we hydroseed areas with bare dirt, whether it is a resloping area, ditch cleanout, or just general dirt work in the roadside. The mulch, mixed with cover crops and native seeds, will prevent erosion and weed germination from occurring in these areas.

The reason hydroseeding is more effective in certain areas than drilling and broadcasting is that the mulch provides a protective layer over the bare soil. That protective layer prevents erosion and helps contain moisture with the seeds that are mixed; this results in better germination. The hydroseeder also allows us to plant native seed in areas that most of our other equipment cannot get to or cannot be used safely.



*Mowing a hydroseeded planting to suppress weeds and promote native plant growth*

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## GIRLS IN STEM CAMP

by Britney Snell

*Naturalist*

Science careers captivate the hearts of many young women who aspire to be the next generation of doctors, conservationists, business owners, and more. This summer, Dickinson County Conservation Board (DCCB) and several local organizations offered a 24-hour Girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) camp to 7th-9th grade girls.

The ten attendees heard from local women who are serving the community through a STEM-based career. Each presenter provided a hands-on look at a typical day in the field. We listened to a chiropractor, organic farmer, and counselor just to name a few.



*Krissy Thiessen, local organic farmer presenting at Girls in STEM*

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Additionally, the attendees participated in many outdoor recreational activities. They enjoyed Pilates on the dock, paddling kayaks, navigating with GPS, and hiking in the night.

One highlight of the day for DCCB staff was leading the Flame Chemistry program. The girls learned how different metals interact with fire to produce various colored flames. They explored four different known chemicals in order to identify their unknown chemical.

This year, our efforts to provide this STEM-based opportunity also earned the Governor's STEM Advisory Council Seal of Approval. Overall, we enjoy this annual collaborative camp and hope to see your 7th-9th grade girl attend next year!



*Flame chemistry program led by DCCB Naturalist Britney Snell and Intern Sara Hoerichs*

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: FAMILY NATURE NIGHT

by Britney Snell  
*Naturalist*

Friday evenings are prime time for family fun, and Dickinson County Nature Center offers the perfect opportunity the 4th Friday of EVERY month! To end the year, the DCCB staff invites your family to join us at the following Family Nature Nights.

- October 27th: Howlin' Halloween
- November 17th: Animal Open House
- December 15th: Tea Party in Pajamas

Family Nature Nights are designed with families in mind. Each theme will include interactive activities for all ages. DCCB staff loves to see grandparents with grandkids, aunts with nephews, best buddy meet ups, and all the varieties of beautiful families out there. Plan to join us with your family and friends at the next Family Nature Night! The program starts at 5:00pm and typically runs about an hour long. Register for the free fun by visiting our website. Space is limited, so be sure to sign up today!



*Family Nature Night: participant with a nice bluegill*



## MEET A VOLUNTEER

by Amy Heibult and Jan Purdy  
*Community Relations Coordinator & Volunteer*

Meet Jan Purdy! Jan says she's a "hometown girl that has found the perfect place to land." In 1964 she graduated college and began her career in teaching elementary school. In the meantime, Jan met her husband, Ed, and the adventures continued.

As lovers of the outdoors they have been on many trips together like canoeing, white water rafting, even exploring caves, rain forests, and jungles! One major adventure was having their daughter, Marcy, who followed their footsteps of loving the outdoors and all of its critters. She had salamanders, turtles, and butterflies that were occasional accessories to the living room by crawling on the drapes. Jan and Ed always encouraged her to explore; she definitely did then and still does today! She now teaches in Spirit Lake - 'like mother, like daughter.'



Jan had a 33-year teaching career and later chose to volunteer for story time at the library. This allowed her to continue spending time with kids, which she enjoyed. Jan volunteered for 12 years until she asked herself what her next step should be. She was presented with the opportunity to volunteer at the Nature Center and took it. Jan reminisced about the time when the Nature Center was just the Back Porch restaurant that was relocated to its present site. She expressed, "Thanks to generous donors, the process began in creating a delightful nature center."

Jan understands that adult and child education are crucial to conserving our ecosystems, especially in the Iowa Great Lakes region. She went on to say, "It's such a joy to still be involved with education."

"It made my heart sing, hearing how much fun kids have in nature!", as she described a day when one of the naturalists came back from a field trip telling about how much fun they had as a group.

"When you enjoy what you love, who keeps count?" is what you will hear when asking how long she has been volunteering at the Nature Center.

## VOLUNTEERING

Do you have a love for the outdoors, nature, or education? We are always looking for volunteers to help greet visitors, assist with environmental education projects, or help with events like Dee's Bee and Butterfly festival! Volunteers assist with answering phone calls, informing visitors about the exhibits and features of the Nature Center, and educating about wildlife conservation.

Are you passionate about history? From April to September we have a docent in the Westport schoolhouse to give short informative tours to visitors. If you are interested in volunteering, contact Amy Heibult, Community Relations Coordinator, at (712) 336-6352, email [ahuibult@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:ahuibult@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov), or just stop in at the Nature Center.



*Willia Mueske and Lisa Leopold volunteering at Dee's Bee & Butterfly Festival*

## A SPECIAL THANK YOU

We would not be here without the generous help of our volunteers.

Artie Nash  
Barbara Falk  
Becky Peters  
Carol Gronstal  
Cathy Abbott  
Deb Minnich  
Deb Yellick Manly  
Debbie Schomburg  
Diane Frank  
Duane Schimmer  
Erika Leupold  
Gloria & Chuck Ditsworth  
Gretchen Graff  
Harlan Christenson  
Helen Bauman  
Jack & Sherryl Jones  
Jacque Banks  
Jan Purdy  
Jim Tuel  
Joan Gronstal  
JoAnn Gano  
John Ralph  
Jonathan Ballew  
Julie Peterson  
Karen Baker  
Karen Dokken  
Kate Ebinger  
Kate Shaw  
Kathy Krueger  
Leah Streeter  
Lesa Manning

Linda Dusold  
Linnea Johnson-Scott  
Lisa Duffy  
Lisa Leopold  
Mallory Clark  
Marcia Hill  
Margaret (Rise) Tracy  
Marsha Carlson  
Mary Ann & Jack Montgomery  
Mary Lou Foster  
Mary Lou Korwes  
Mirabai Moseley  
Nancy Galloway  
Noel Peterson  
Pam Denherder  
Pat Burke  
Penny Nordstrom  
Penny Wilson  
Robert Baird  
Ron & Ellen Williams  
Ruby O'Hagan  
Ruth Nolting  
Ruth Ann VanDonslear  
Sandra Sykes  
Susie Brantly  
Troy Peterson  
Wendall Hansen  
Wendi Rex  
Willia Mueske



## BECOME A MEMBER

The Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County (CDFC) is an independent, non-profit organization that supports the projects, education, and conservation efforts of Dickinson County. By becoming a member you can personally be involved with improving your local county parks, assist with land acquisition, improve and support the Dickinson County Nature Center, and help conserve native wildlife and habitats.



### Membership Levels:

**Robin** - Student \$15

**Goldfinch** - Individual \$30

**Cardinal** - Family \$50

**Bluebird** - Contributor \$75

**Oriole** - Sustaining member \$125

**Wood Duck** - Patron \$250

**Great Blue Heron** - \$500

**Osprey** - \$1000+

### Benefits of being a member:

- 10% discount at the Nature Store
- \$10 discount on youth summer camps
- \$3 discount on T-shirts
- Periodic updates about CDFC and Dickinson County Conservation Board

Become a member by visiting the Dickinson County Nature Center, 22785 Nature Center Road, Okoboji, IA 51355. You can also go to [www.dickinsoncountyconservationboard.com/foundation](http://www.dickinsoncountyconservationboard.com/foundation).

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## FOUNDATION BOARD

**President:** Tom Maser

**Vice president:** Rebecca Peters

**Secretary:** Erika Leupold

**Treasurer:** Mike McFarlin

**Board members:** Leah Streeter, Jim Tuel, Ron Williams, Penny Wilson, Mary Kay Donovan, Lisa Leopold, Wade Brantley, Linnea Johnson-Scott

## MISSION STATEMENT

*"to encourage environmental awareness among visitors and residents while fostering appreciation, preservation and conservation of the Iowa Great Lakes region's unique cultural history, glacial geological formations, native species and natural habitats through education and action."*

## FEATURED PROGRAMS AT THE NATURE CENTER

### Kenue Coffee Hour

This is a free adult program held on the first Thursday of every month at 10:30 am in the Maser Monarch Lodge. We host a diversity of speakers that incorporate nature-based topics. Enjoy a cup of coffee or tea and learn something new!



### Birding on the Green

Amateurs to well-seasoned birders are sure to enjoy a leisurely ride through Brooks Golf course to gain field identification skills or photography opportunities. The group meets in the parking lot of Brooks Golf at 7:00 am on the first Monday of the month from May to September. You may just spot your next “lifer” species.



### Nature Explorers

Throughout June to August on the 2nd and 3rd Wednesdays at 10:30 am, our environmental education team promotes learning development for 5-12 year olds while school is out of session. The goal of Nature Explorers is to keep minds sharp and to help children to engage in learning while spending time with friends during the summer.

### Nature Tots

Nature Tots is an age-appropriate program for 2-5 year olds to begin learning the foundational knowledge about our environment and local wildlife. We host Nature Tots on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 10:30 and 1:30.



### Homeschool Ed-Ventures

Each month of the school year, homeschool families join our environmental education team for a program designed to grow an interest in science for 5-12 year olds. We aim to provide academic support in nature and natural history. Through Homeschool Ed-Ventures, participants will connect to the outdoors, develop life skills, and create positive memories with new and life-long friends. Join us at 10:30 on the 3rd Thursday of the month during the school year.

### Family Nature Night

What better way to spend time together than learning a new skill or experiencing something new together as a family? This monthly program takes place on the 4th Friday of the month at 5:00 pm. The Environmental Education team exposes families to a variety of themes and skills from Dutch oven cooking to star gazing! We hope your family can join us!

