

Blue Water Nature Notes

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

www.dickinsoncountyconservationboard.com
(712) 336-6352

Project Updates

by Lee Sorenson
Executive Director

Well, spring is here, and we have a busy year ahead of us for the Dickinson County Conservation Board and staff, which we are excited to share with you. The most significant project is the continuation of the Sherwood Forest Park on Lake Shore Drive. The contractors have been working on the project for a little over eight months, including the pause that happened over the winter months. But as the warmer weather gradually moves in, you will start seeing more and more action in the area. One of the first things you will see is the restroom pavilion just north of the scheduled parking lot. This restroom pavilion area will be the main hub for families to sit and enjoy watching their children in the playground area or observe the different bike experiences such as the pump track, street course, and skills course that will be adjacent to the restroom pavilion. Or, instead, visitors may decide to take a ride along the outside edge of the property on the dirt path for more of a mountain bike experience. For those individuals who just want to walk and wander through the scenic beauty, there will also be walking trails that travel through garden promenades and prairie meadows, as well as stopping viewpoints overlooking wetlands along the way to enhance the ability to watch some wildlife. Construction will continue all summer long, and we ask for people to remember it is a construction zone and for safety reasons stay off the property until the project is completed in the Fall of 2024.



Example of bike pump track

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NATURE CENTER HOURS

Tuesdays -Saturdays
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Closed Sunday,
Monday & Holidays

DCCB STAFF

Executive Director
Lee Sorenson

**Community Relations
Coordinator**
Amy Heibult

**Environmental
Education Coordinator**
Danika Cox

Naturalist
Britney Snell

**Regional Collection
Manager**
Charles Vigdal

**Natural Resources
Manager**
Brian Cuperus

**Natural Resources
Technician**
Clay Pavelko

Roadside Manager
Tanner Bouchard

Roadside Technician
Tim Frostestad

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A second project that is in progress is the restoration of the Westport Park located at 1175 230th St, Everly, which is a 10-acre county gravel pit that has been converted into a fishing pond with a dock and picnic area. Last fall, the County Roads Department excavated over 100,000 tons of gravel out of the location, so it was perfect timing to do some renovation on the park. Since the water levels had to be lowered to excavate dry gravel, we were able to take advantage of multiple improvements. First, the pond used to have a levee that separated 2 bodies of water, the contractor was able to remove a portion of that levee and allow both water bodies to be connected. This improvement now allows for boat access to the entire lake, which helps with fish population monitoring and habitat placement along with public fishing availability. Second, was to improve the fish quality in the pond, the County Conservation Board or the IDNR had never stocked the pond in the past although the lake did have multiple species of fish placed by the public including common carp.



Aerial view of Westport Pond

Late in fall, we had to begin a new fishery by starting over. The IDNR stocked 5" largemouth bass and 2" bluegill with catfish being stocked in the spring. The fishery is now under a fish management plan, so do not place other species of fish into the lake. I know that people feel like they are helping but certain fish species will destroy a good fishery. In the next few months, a contractor will be placing shoreline protection (rip rap) along the east shoreline of the pond to help with soil erosion and to increase fish habitat; this is being paid for by a fish habitat cost share grant. Then, in the summer there will be fish habitat structures placed in the lake for improving fish habitat under the water. Although camping is not allowed in this area, it will be a wonderful location for a daily family outing to catch fish, picnic, birdwatch and just enjoy nature at its best.

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For many years, this last project has been on our to-do list; although it might not be as spectacular as the other projects, many of you who visit the nature center in the spring or fall understand the need. We have contracted to pave the nature center parking lot this year, which is scheduled to be completed sometime before October. When this project gets started, we will be posting on our social media channels for parking instructions while construction is underway. A new paved parking lot will stop all the gravel or wet sand from being tracked into the nature center floors or back to your car mats. It is also easier to maintain through the winter months and prevents the staff from raking rock back onto the parking area in the spring. We are so thankful for the support of the Dickinson County Board of Supervisors to help fund a portion of this project along with the Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County.

Trail Trimming Update

by Brian Cuperus

Natural Resource Manager

We are thrilled to share the latest developments in our ongoing efforts to improve the experience and safety along our beloved bike trail. Over the past month, our dedicated team has been hard at work trimming the trees lining the trail, and we're excited to highlight the numerous benefits this initiative brings to our community.

First and foremost, trimming the trees along the bike trail significantly enhances safety for cyclists and pedestrians alike. By removing low-hanging branches and overgrown foliage, we've created a clear pathway that reduces the risk of accidents and improves visibility, especially during early mornings and late evenings. Moreover, maintaining trimmed trees not only enhances safety but also contributes to the aesthetic appeal of our trail. With a well-groomed landscape, visitors can now enjoy the natural beauty of our surroundings without obstruction, fostering a sense of tranquility and appreciation for nature.

Additionally, this initiative aligns with our commitment to environmental sustainability. By carefully pruning trees instead of removing them entirely, we promote healthy tree growth while preserving essential habitats for local wildlife. We invite you to explore the enhanced beauty and safety of our bike trail and experience firsthand the benefits of keeping trees trimmed. Together, let's continue cultivating a vibrant and inviting community space for all to enjoy.

17.4 miles of trail trimmed this winter/spring season!



Wood chipper to chip up tree trimmings and logs



Finished result of cutting back along Gull Point Trail

Benefits of Compost

by Charles Vigdal
*Regional Collection
Manager*

Spring has sprung! Temperatures are rising, and it's the perfect time to start thinking about your garden or what flowers to put in your planters. The best way to get those big tomatoes and peppers, help that dry tree, and get flowers all your neighbors will envy is to improve your soil with compost!

Plants need healthy soil, just like humans need healthy food. After a while, soil can become overused, depleted of nutrients, and compacted. This can lead to unhappy, sickly, slow-growing plants that need to be constantly watered. The best way to make any plant happy in your yard would be to add a bit of compost every year.

Adding compost to your garden, plants, or lawn can help in several ways. Here are a few ways:

- Compost can help with soil density. It increases space in the soil to allow air and water through, allowing healthy roots to grow. It can even help loosen soil clumps, reducing the loss of soil.
- It adds nutrients to the soil and improves the soil's ability to hold on to those nutrients and slowly release them over time; this means less fertilizer is needed.
- Compost is like a sponge for water that aids in water retention and keeps your plants from drying out as quickly.
- It can help balance your soil's pH, helping struggling plants.
- Aids in suppressing plant diseases and pests and keeps the soil's biome healthy.

Compost can be used anywhere plants are grown: around trees, tilled into your garden, in potted plants, and even on your grass lawn. The Dickinson County Regional Collection Center in Milford turns last year's green waste into valuable compost. If you are interested in compost for your plants and garden, stop down and pick up some this spring! Information about getting this amazing compost is below. Finished compost is available at the Dickinson County Regional Collection Center in Milford. It is free of charge if you are filling up your own containers. 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 loading availability at 712-338-2549 or email RCC@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov.



Compost sifter next to sifted pile of compost



Sifted compost

Basal Bark Herbicide Treatment in County Right of Ways

by Tanner Bouchard
Roadside Manager

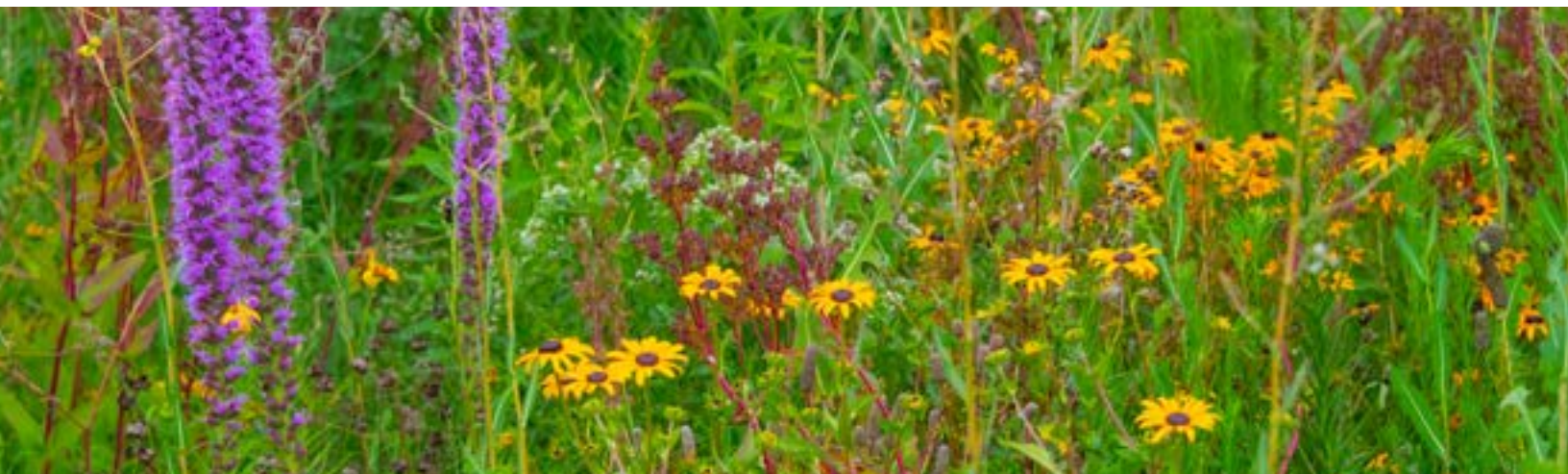
In the world of arboriculture and land management, a groundbreaking method is revolutionizing tree care – basal bark herbicide treatment. Unlike traditional foliar application, this innovative technique directly targets invasive species and unwanted growth, ensuring healthier and more vibrant ecosystems.

Why the buzz around basal bark treatment? Firstly, it's highly efficient. By applying herbicide directly to the lower 12-18 inches of stem of small trees, it penetrates the bark and effectively kills off invasive plants while minimizing harm to surrounding vegetation. This targeted approach not only saves time and resources but also reduces the risk of herbicide drift and environmental contamination. So, there is no need to stress about the possibility of drifting off target.

Moreover, basal bark treatment offers long-lasting results. Eliminating invasive species at their source prevents regrowth and minimizes the need for repeated applications. Ultimately this saves both time and money for county roadside departments, natural resource managers, and environmental enthusiasts alike.

The benefits of basal bark herbicide treatment on small trees are undeniable. Its precision, efficiency, and long-lasting effects make it a game-changer for those in tree management and environmental conservation. Embrace the future of woody brush management with basal bark treatment.

Roadside Technician, Tim Frostestad applying basal bark herbicide to small trees in county right-of-way



The W.I.N.D.'s of Change

by Danika Cox
*Environmental
Education Coordinator*

With our ever-growing and changing world, folks are looking to reconnect with nature and simply slow down and unplug from the hustle and bustle. Our environmental education team partnered with Clay County Conservation Department, Iowa Lakeside Lab, and both Clay and Dickinson County ISU Extension and Outreach's to bring the women in our communities a fun and stress-free way to do just that - Women in Nature Day or W.I.N.D. On February 10th, we held our second W.I.N.D event at Oneota Park in Spencer, where women from a variety of backgrounds came together for fellowship, fun, and the great outdoors. While the original plan included winter recreational activities such as snowshoeing, ice fishing, and cross-country skiing, the weather just wasn't in our favor. There was no snow to be found and the ice was quickly melting off the pond. As always, Mother Nature got the last laugh!

The lack of snow and ice may have impaired our ability to hold these sessions, but it didn't dampen our spirits. Instead, 22 women had the opportunity to learn about winter birding, go on a GPS scavenger hunt, create spa kits with natural materials, gain knowledge in gun safety, practice fire building, master fishing techniques, decorate hiking sticks, and test their skills with primitive weapons such as atlatls, bow and arrows, and axes.



*EE Coordinator Danika Cox
instructing primitive weapons -
featuring the atlatl*

Our goal was to create an environment for women to come together with other like-minded nature lovers to safely try and share outdoor recreational experiences. However, after speaking with those in attendance, we soon learned that there was a secondary objective. W.I.N.D. was also a way to offer people a chance to get away from the stresses of their fast-paced, overwhelming, and constantly shifting realities. It became an avenue for individuals to recharge and restore a love for nature. As our participants departed (laughing and smiling), those leading this event couldn't help but feel that we had accomplished these goals.



*Participants making a DIY walking
stick to take home*

Hoppy Leap Day!

by Britney Snell
Naturalist

Hoppy Leap Day! This year in February, we all experienced an extra 24 hours due to leap year! How did you spend the extra time?

Several families spent the evening at the Maser Monarch Lodge celebrating frogs and fours - since this special day comes around only once every four years. Naturalist Britney and EE Coordinator Danika created frog diet-themed snacks for kids to enjoy while making a frog visor craft! Several kids commented they enjoyed the strawberry "lady bugs" best! Next, the participants explored the lifecycle of a frog through a story time. From egg to tadpole to frog, we discovered that these amphibians go through great changes and rely on both aquatic and terrestrial habitats!

Hopping back to their tables, it was time to create a chorus of frog sounds! What sound does a frog make? I bet most of you just let out a nice big RIBBIT; however, our native Iowa frogs sound much different. Using common household objects, the participants mimicked a variety of native frog sounds. For example, a spring peeper is one of Iowa's smaller species of frogs and makes quite a pleasant call. We shook jingles bells to recreate the call of the peeper. This spring, head over to a local wetland and tune your ears to a choir of native frog sounds- you may just be surprised at the variety of calls that you hear.

The fun continued with a live meet and greet with Wally - an animal ambassador for the Dickinson County Nature Center. The Great Plains Toads live along the Western border of Iowa. The kids were able to see the adaptations on the toad such as bumps along the back for defense and big powerful back legs for leaping around. Additionally, the families could enjoy games such as connect four and frog theme bean bag toss to end the evening. Our special leap day event provided an opportunity for families to create new memories, share laughs, and explore the interesting lives of Iowa frogs. Many kids left the event wearing both a smile and their new frog visors.



Attendees of Leap Day Adventure trying the grape caterpillars, representing frog diets

Be sure to check out upcoming events on our Facebook page or website. As the weather continues to warm up, we encourage everyone to be curious explorers of the great outdoors!



Naturalist Britney Snell reading a story about frog life cycles

"Lady bug" snack was a fan-favorite



Be the Good

by Amy Heibult

Community Relations Coordinator

We each possess gifts and talents that we do not usually notice about ourselves, but those gifts impact others in a way that we could never imagine. It might be taking the time to explain a difficult concept to a child or having a positive attitude to brighten someone's day. Every person has something positive that they bring into this world.

Since starting as the Community Relations Coordinator at the nature center this past year, I have been amazed by every volunteer I spend time with. Each person has such a positive outlook on life and a wealth of knowledge that they bring to the nature center. I know who to refer to when I have a question about birds or a reference to local history. I have grown very fond of these generous people who give their time and energy at this beautiful place. It seems cliché to say, but it rings true that we could not do what we do without our volunteers! I thank each and every person who chooses to give their time at the nature center!

If you are interested in volunteering in a positive, smile-filled environment, consider spending some time behind the front desk of the nature center, warmly greeting guests as they enter. You may be a history enthusiast who wants to educate visitors while in our one-room Westport Schoolhouse just down the road from the nature center. Volunteers can also assist with some of our youth programs, educational projects, and even our Dee's Bee and Butterfly Festival - Dickinson County Conservation Board's largest event of the year! Whether in everyday life or here at the nature center, go and have a positive impact on someone else's life today! Thank you to all of our generous volunteers who give their time and efforts!

Interested in Volunteering?

Stop in and visit the nature center to speak with Amy, call (712) 336-6352, or email aheibult@dickinsoncountyiowa.gov.

*Leah Streeter and
Rise Tracy helping
with crafts at
Dee's Bee &
Butterfly Festival*



*Joanne Gano -
docent at Westport
Schoolhouse*

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 a.m. 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 a.m. 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 a.m., 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 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.



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 a.m. 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 p.m. 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!





Conservation Board Members

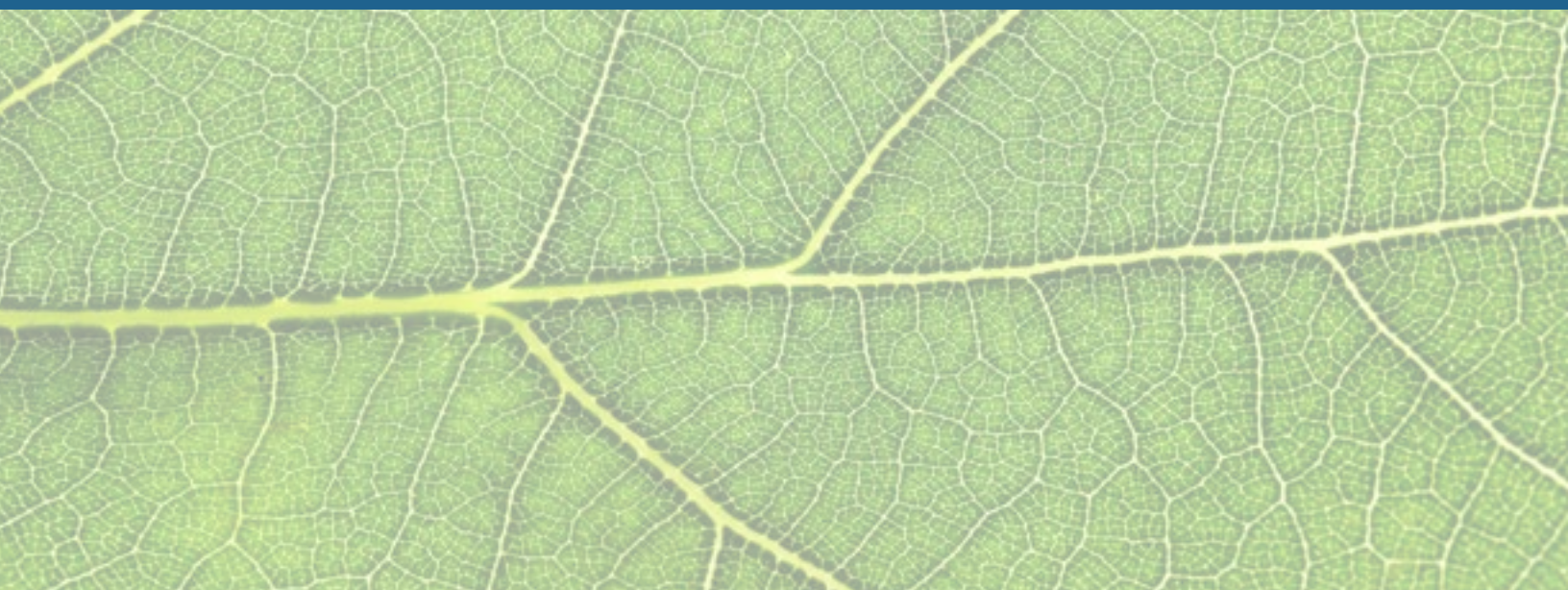
Chair: Steve Anderson

Vice Chair: Eric Stoll

Members: Joan Gronstal, Douglas Nielsen, Robert Waters



After almost 30 years of serving on the Dickinson County Conservation Board, member Kathy Kleen stepped down in December 2023. We would like to thank her for her many years of service and wish her the best moving forward!



Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County

The Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County (CFDC) 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+

Projects aided by CFDC funding:

- **Sherwood Forest Park**
- **Augmented Sand Topography Exhibit**
- **Pollinator Paradise**
- **Snowshoes for Winter Programs**
- **Nature Center Parking Lot**
- **and SO MUCH MORE!**

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.

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."

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

