

The Nature of Things

THE BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17 WINTER 2018-2019

Well, I Guess It's Your Money.... *By Karen Phelps, Director*

"Hey boss, someone smashed the gate at Minne Estema." How's that for a Monday morning greeting at the office?

The River Parks Ranger, Jon Geiger, was waiting for me when I arrived at work that morning. Thankfully he had started a pot of coffee for us knowing it would help to quell the anger brewing inside me.

It seems someone had decided that the closed entrance gate at one of our parks was not meant to keep them out, so they rammed it until the gate was torn off of its hinges, off the post it was anchored to and then, just to be sure we wouldn't be able to attach the destroyed gate, they stole the chain securing it to the post. Total damages: \$630.00

Entering the park further, Jon discovered that someone (unknown if the same culprit) must have thought the only way to enter our restrooms was to shoot the lock securing the brand new electrical box installed for security lighting on our remodeled bathroom. It doesn't matter that the lock wasn't cut; the impact broke the locking mechanism on the lock and destroyed the electrical box. The bathroom, by the way, wasn't locked. Total damages: \$210.00

Moving on to another set of gates in yet another park, they too were bent beyond repair. Total damages: \$430.00

Even though we post to the website and Facebook page that our parks are closed for the season, walk in use only, there are those that feel these safety standards do not apply to them and so they proceed to destroy public property, which, ironically enough, they pay for through their tax dollars.

I have been asked by people why we can't add playground equipment to certain parks, pave our park roads, upgrade electrical sites...and the list goes on. Perhaps if people realized we are constantly repairing vandalism to our parks, often times on improvements we just completed, they would understand where their dollars go and how frustrated, disappointed and angry it makes our staff.



The lock that was attached to the gate at Minne Estema park.

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Electronic versions are available at our website www.bentoncountyiowa.org
Contact us at:
319-472-4942 or
info@bentoncountyparks.com
to be added
to our mailing list.

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Plans for Hannen Lake Park *By Collin Strickland, Park Ranger*

Throughout my first full year as Park Ranger at Hannen, I have put a lot of thought into planning future projects for the park. Some projects are ones that can get completed sooner than others. I've put together a list of project ideas that I would like to complete.

In the near future, we plan to build a new maintenance facility. This building will house an updated public shower house, an office, and a heated shop that will be used to work and store equipment. This facility has the potential to also be utilized for educational programs and possibly provide shelter during storms.

Another exciting project that we are currently working on is a kayak dock that will make it easier and safer for people getting in and out of their kayaks. This dock would replace the wooden boat dock on the west side of the lake.



This pine grove on the east side of Hannen Lake after most of the understory brush was removed. Additional pine trees have been removed to thin out the stand and improve tree health.

This past fall, we cleaned up the pine stand on the east side of the park between the road and lake. This area was once a thick stand of invasive species, such as honeysuckle, autumn olive, and multiflora rose. Using our skid steer with a forestry head attachment we cleared the area of these invasive plants to prevent them from continuing to spread in the park. We thinned the tree stand of dying or dead trees, and planted about 30 new pine trees.

We are also looking into replacing the playground on the east side of the lake. In 2017/18, the playground on the west side of the park by the shelter was replaced. The funds for that playground came from chili cook off events and Community Foundation grants.

During the 2018 camping season the Cedar Cabin at Hannen Lake is usually occupied. Eventually we would like to build additional cabins. A lot of other county conservation boards are

building cabins that can accommodate 8-12 people. While these cabins are not cheap to build, they are becoming more and more popular with the public. Since our cabin and shelter reservations system is going online soon, we feel these additional cabins would fill up quickly.

Other projects include re-leveling numerous camping pads, continuing to improve roadways, clearing areas where invasive species are present, enclosing the shelter on the east side of the lake, and upgrading more electric sites to 50AMP.

We will continue to work on converting areas back into native habitat. This will help with the water quality issues we are having with the lake. When we have heavy rains, we have a problem with erosion of sand into the lake from the beach. We are working on a plan to redesign the beach and sidewalk leading down to the beach, utilizing native plants to help slow the water down from the hillside.

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Hannen Lake Park *Continued from previous page*

We are currently working with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources Lake Restoration Program to address the issues with the Hannen Lake watershed. Our ultimate goal is to reduce the amount of nutrients flowing into the lake while also enhancing the quality aquatic species in the lake. We are in the very early stages of this project which includes developing a five-year plan for the lake.

These are some of the goals and visions for Hannen Lake Park. We look forward to seeing you at Hannen this upcoming season!

Update on the River Parks *By Jon Geiger, Park Ranger*

We are excited to announce that Hoefle-Dulin County Park has received a new playground. Many years ago this park had a swing set and a slide that had become worn out and no longer met the criteria for a safe playground. These structures were removed and nothing took their place, mostly due to lack of funding. Our staff feels that there is a great need for quality playgrounds in our parks. Playgrounds provide a safe and fun opportunity to experience the outdoors in our county parks. The new swing and slide have been assembled and set into the ground. Due to unseasonable flooding this fall and early frost, the project will be finished in the spring with the addition of playground mulch and final assembly of the swings.

This new amenity has been placed where an old pavilion used to stand. The pavilion was removed in 2016 after a windstorm that left the building unstable and unusable. We decided that this would be a great location for the playground because it is visible from almost all areas of the park. A bench will be added this spring, allowing parents a spot to supervise their children, enjoy a book, or just sit and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature. This area has a great view of the Cedar River so you can sit and watch the boats go by during the summer months. Funding for this project was made possible through the Benton County Community Foundation, Local Option Sales Tax, and various fundraising events. For more information about the Benton County Community Foundation visit their website at www.cfneia.org/affiliates/benton-county.



Thank You!!

Thank you to the LaGrange family in memory of their parents Jane & Bob. Their generous donation will help us to restore over 20 acres to native prairie.

Thank you to Sam Overturf for his generous donation, as well as continued contributions of cans and bottles for our “Nickles for Nature” fund.

Thank you to JoEllen and Jerry Krug for your generous cash donation to the Benton County Community Foundation.

A Special Thanks *By Scott Bahmann, Rodgers Park Ranger*

As a park ranger in a county park, besides law enforcement I am held accountable for many things during the camping season. This includes mowing, weed trimming, cleaning park facilities, and answering questions from park patrons, not to mention registering campers, supervising seasonal employees, working on large projects, and hosting events. At times it is very overwhelming even with help from our staff. So for the last 16 years, I chose to have a campground host to help offset some of the tasks.

A campground host is a volunteer that resides in the park throughout the camping season. They set an example by being a model camper and obeying all park rules. They are also good housekeepers by taking care of the restrooms, picking up garbage, and cleaning shelters. At times they will even help park staff mow and assist with fundraising events.

When I first started in 1998, I was hired on as the River Park ranger and have had the opportunity to meet some nice campers. Some of these campers even camped at Rodgers Park. Two campers that always stood out to me were Daryl and Pauline Stout.

Daryl and Pauline spent their entire summer utilizing our parks and really enjoying them. They were always a friendly face that I could sit down and talk to after a long day. They always seemed to look after things and let me know if there was any trouble. Instead of having them move after the 14 day maximum stay rule, I asked them if they had any interest in being a campground host at Rodgers Park. We briefly talked about it and they asked what the duties would be. I explained to them that their main job was to keep up with the restrooms and answer any questions that park users may have. They thought it sounded like a great idea and took on the role as campground host.

Since 2004, Daryl and Pauline have helped with many things at the park like cleaning restrooms, picking up garbage, and even answering questions from park patrons. They were always willing to get the job done, and showed true ownership in what they did. I was reminded several times to leave the restrooms alone for them to clean. They told me if I was going to be gone they would take care of checking the shelter to make sure it was clean for rentals. They also took it upon themselves to check the fire rings and pull the old registration tags that campers had left behind. Rodgers Park has hosted many fundraisers throughout the years and Daryl and Pauline were always looking for ways to get involved, whether they were just attending the event or lending a helping hand.

After a few years, I added a few new things to their plate like selling ice, firewood, and live bait. All went well until the bait machine stopped working or someone decided they needed firewood or ice at odd hours. Daryl and Pauline were able to overcome these issues by posting their available hours and removing the malfunctioning bait machine.



Pauline and Daryl Stout at their going away celebration!

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A Special Thanks *Continued from previous page*



Showing appreciation for Daryl and Pauline's hard work at their going away party.

As the years went by we changed a few things, but this did not change the quality of the work that they did. Benton County Conservation added two yurts and a new shop with public restrooms. What troopers Daryl and Pauline proved to be by yet again jumping in and cleaning the new restrooms and checking on the yurts often. We also added some fundraisers including a golf tournament and a haunted trail during Halloween. During our golf tournament Pauline would help sell tickets and Daryl would try his hand at golf even though they were not avid golfers. They were truly dedicated to our haunted trail event called "Terror on the Trail." They donated food items for the concession stand and Pauline would help run it. Daryl would help set up, tear down and even get a few scares in on the trail. They truly had their hands full between these events and keeping up with their other tasks.

Throughout the years they were not only considered a campground host, but a part of the family. They attended birthday parties and even went on an occasional fishing outing. Now after 14 years Daryl and Pauline have decided to retire from being a campground host to pursue a life of leisure. They will truly be missed by my family, park patrons, and the Benton County Conservation staff.

Daryl and Pauline, enjoy your retirement and we look forward to seeing you once again as patrons and continued friends in the coming years!

Interested in volunteering or sponsoring?

Volunteer opportunities include gardening, trail work, special events, helping with environmental education programming, staffing the nature center, and assisting with various projects. Feel free to contact us at info@bentoncountyparks.com or 319-472-4942 if you are interested in volunteering!

We are also looking for donors to help sponsor the care of our environmental education animals and to help keep the bird feeders filled. If you are interested, please contact us at the email or phone number listed above. Donors will be recognized in our next newsletter and online (donors can remain anonymous if desired).

Don't Make Them, Take Them *By Zach Parmater, Conservation Tech*

Everyone is always talking about the amount of time kids spend on electronics this day and age. Just take the devices away and shoo your children outside. Tell them to get dirty and to go discover nature. While this is a very viable option to get your children interested in the outdoors, sometimes I feel it can create even more of an issue. You take the one thing away from them they want to be playing with and tell them they have to go outside. This is very easily perceived as a punishment in my eyes. What is one of the first things we take from our children when they misbehave? It's their electronic device, isn't it? Whether it's a cellphone, iPod, iPad, PlayStation, Xbox or simply TV, we take them away to show some sense of control over a bad behavior or lack of motivation to accomplish simple tasks. So, if we confiscate these devices and say go outside and play, our children could subconsciously be perceiving that as a punishment and end up disliking the outdoors even more.

I think it's fair to say that our children don't dislike the outdoors, but don't have an understanding or an appreciation for it. Growing up I had three brothers fairly close in age that I could explore the outdoors with. I grew up in an era where kids felt safe from evil - we ran around until we heard Ma or Pa holler and say it was time to come home. We were fortunate enough to grow up in a part of town that had a few acres of timber and a creek full of all kinds of wild critters in our backyard. I should make it clear that my parents showed my siblings and I a lot of things in nature, always took us fishing and Dad took us hunting. I don't ever remember my parents telling us it was time to go outside, it was always time to come inside.

As I was reaching adulthood, I would hear other parents and teachers saying, "Kids these days, all they want is a computer or a TV, we've got to get them outside more." What's the solution? If I would have known then what I know now, I would have told them, "don't make them, take them." Maybe someone else out there has already laid claim to that saying; if so I'll apologize now and tip my hat to you. Because I believe it is so very true. Show them the outdoors, get out there with them and experience it together. Do something to make them feel a sense of accomplishment in the outdoors.

One of my favorite things to do with my son is picking wild black raspberries and making a batch of home-made pie crust. The satisfaction of creating dessert from wild edibles that my son and I gathered together while enjoying the outdoors makes the pie so much more than just a dessert. It was watching the insects scurry about their busy lives. The beautiful songs from countless species of birds flying from tree to tree sometimes landing just a few feet from you, almost like they're saying, "This is my patch, what are you doing here?" The large snake that startled me and slithered off under an old log never to be seen again. With all the good, there comes some bad; while picking wild berries the mosquitos and gnats come out in droves, sometimes it seems like there are enough to carry you away. Without bug spray on, it almost becomes a test of mental fortitude. However, we always push on to collect enough berries to create our dessert.



Berry-stained hands are evidence of a hearty crop.

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What is Your Favorite Season?

By Aaron Askelson, Naturalist

I certainly have a hard time picking my favorite season. In Iowa there are so many unique things about each season that it is hard to pick just one. The excitement I used to feel from the first snow has kind of worn off a little at my age but to say it is completely gone would be a lie. Having a snowflake catching contest with my son is still a favorite activity. The first flowers that come up in spring time now seem to mean a lot more than they ever did when I was a kid. When the leaves begin to turn in the fall is another one of those signs that brings back vivid memories of long drives along the Mississippi River to absorb all the wonderful hues the leaves were changing to. Summer can be summed up in an old canning jar holding 5 or 6 fireflies in it. Running barefoot through my grandparent's backyard with my sister and cousins catching as many as we could.



Each season brings something new to the senses. In the late fall you have the crunch and crackle of dried leaves being crushed under foot. One of my favorite activities with a group of kids is to challenge them to try and catch a falling leaf out of the air. It seems like a rather simple task until you try it. On a breezy fall day, it can be quite entertaining to watch 25 second graders trying to catch numerous maple leaves as they spiral and swirl in a not so straight way to the ground.

A couple of years ago we had a field trip of second graders out to the Nature Center. One of the kids had recently moved to Iowa from the deep south, so "winter" was very new to him and he had never been on an ice-covered pond. I led this group across the ice to the other side instructing them to take small cautious steps. We all crossed without incident and the group as a whole become much more adventuresome. After investigating some deer and pheasant tracks the kids were drawn back toward the frozen water. I asked the teacher if it would be alright to cut our hike short and enjoy the

frozen pond for a while. She wholeheartedly agreed and stated that this was probably the first time many of them had had the opportunity to do something like this. Of course, with ice there were a few falls but the kids were so excited they bounced back up and began to play again. They were having a great time slipping and sliding across the ice.

Spring time brings new sights, sounds, and smells. My appreciation of the early spring flowers has grown over the years and I have become better at identifying them. My latest favorite is Spring Beauty, which is a super tiny flower that my kid thought was funny because it was so small and delicate. Spring brings the promise of a new year and new growth.

Summer is a time when I try to be out on the water as often as I can. Canoeing and kayaking along the Cedar and exploring new waterways is where I feel at peace. In Iowa it can be hard to find areas of true wilderness but many of Iowa's rivers can provide glimpses of wilderness that can almost transport you back in time. The solitude of being one of the only people on a stretch of river can have a real calming effect on you. Getting to see a fawn and doe come to the water's edge as you float silently by is something that not everybody gets to experience.



Continued on page 11

Winter Wildlife Watch *By Caitlin Savage, Naturalist*

Many animals stay here in Iowa during the winter, but become less active to save energy and keep warm. You can still search for signs that they leave behind.



Tracks/Trails: Snow is one of the best surfaces to find animal tracks in. Look for tracks and see if you can tell where their trail leads. Use clues such as size, shape, and habitat found to figure out what animal they came from. The tracks at left are rabbit tracks. Note the staggered front foot tracks behind the hind foot tracks.



Scat: Scat is the scientific word for animal poop. Finding scat can tell you a lot about an animal and what kind of food it has eaten. For example, deer scat may be in individual pellets (like pictured above) when the deer is eating browse like leaves, twigs, and acorns, or clumped together when the deer is eating grasses and forbs.

Homes: You may be able to find nests or dens of an animal. One home that is easy to spot in winter is a squirrel nest, or drey. These nests are made up of leaves and twigs in a clump, usually in the fork of a tree.



Fur, bones, etc.: Sometimes you may get lucky enough to find a



body part from an animal. Fur and feathers can be shed naturally or when an animal is injured/killed. It is always exciting to find animal bones as well and try and figure out the story of what happened to the animal. Male deer (bucks) shed their antlers each winter, so look for shed antlers in Iowa from mid January through March.

Chew Marks:

Look for places where an animal has been enjoying a meal. Both rabbits and deer browse twigs, but because deer lack upper incisors, they leave the ends of twigs rough



and shredded while rabbits' sharp top and bottom incisors cut the twig at a 45° angle (like twig on right side in picture above). You may also find acorns or walnuts that squirrels and other rodents have been chewing.

What are these animals doing during winter?

Draw a line to match each animal with what they are doing during the winter!
Check your answers on page 11.



Groundhog

A. I stay active in the winter, finding food that I stored in hiding places during the fall so I have plenty of energy for the cold winter days.



Gray Squirrel

B. There's no food for me here in the winter, so I travel to a warm, sunny place in Central America to spend the winter. This is called migrating.



Black-Capped Chickadee

C. I can't find enough food during the winter time - I love insects! - so I hibernate (go into a deep sleep) in a cave, tree cavity, or building.



Big Brown Bat

D. I can adjust to the cold weather by changing my diet (I don't eat as many insects) and finding warm places to roost. At night, my body goes into a regulated hypothermia - my body temperature drops 15° below my daytime temperature, helping me to save energy.



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

E. I am a true hibernator. I spend the winter in my underground burrow, where my heart beat drops from around 80 beats per minute to 5 beats per minute!

Don't Make Them *continued from page 6*

I can't imagine a time before our manmade products for keeping the bugs at bay. It's hard not to think of the Man upstairs and His idea of making us suffer temporarily for something oh so sweet. Life has become so easy, so to speak. Most people don't struggle to survive. Food is just a few blocks away at the store. Anything you could possibly want, all you need is money. We've become disconnected from the most important things in life. Food, water and shelter. Once these things were fought for. People had to spend most of their day and most of their lives fighting for these staples. Now we take them for granted. I challenge you to take a minute, stop and think about how easy the essentials are to come by these days. The meat you eat, somehow easier to eat when you don't think about someone else killing and preparing the animal. Hunt an animal, watch it die, clean it, and I guarantee you will have a new-found appreciation for the meat you prepare to feed your family. Or the plants gathered for sustenance to keep you and yours healthy. Grow it yourself, experience the things that make it frustrating. Animals getting into the garden, insects thinking it's ok to munch on the greens you were planning on eating for dinner yourself. Nature is a wonderful thing at times, at others it seems as though it's completely against you. Finding a balance and understanding the chain of events that must occur to keep us fed and alive is important. Gathering wild edibles or hunting your own meat to feed your family can and will make you and your children appreciate it even more. Hunting isn't for everyone, I understand that, but tending a garden, scavenging for wild edibles, or going for a hike and learning about nature can excite kids and give them a feeling of accomplishment. So, the next time you think about telling your kids to go outside, don't make them, take them.



Wild Game Recipe: Scott's Asian Deer Loins

Ingredients

- 1 whole deer loin (remove tendons)
- Marinade:
 - *3 Tbsp oyster sauce
 - *4 cloves garlic (minced)
 - *1 tsp fresh ginger (minced)
 - *1 tsp kosher salt
 - * 1/2 tsp black pepper
 - *One pinch sugar

Steps

- Cut deer loin in half lengthwise.
- Cut loin into 12 equal parts.
- Use meat tenderizer and pound flat until 1/2" thick.
- Place meat in bowl, cover in marinade for at least 30 min or overnight.
- Grill to medium rare or your liking.

It's Your Money *continued from page 1*

We have an overwhelming sense of pride in what we do. We write grants to secure funding to take the burden off of the tax payers. People continue to give donations to our foundation to help support conservation. We try hard to supplement the budget in every way we can. Still people choose to destroy our hard work.

Over the years in our parks we have picked up air conditioners, microwaves, TV's, TV carts, tires, refrigerators, stoves, washers, dryers, and most likely any other household item you can imagine. The time it takes to pick up after people, the dollars it takes to run these items to the landfill and the frustration involved, makes us wonder why we continue to fight the good fight.

We recently replaced the gates, posts, and lock and chain that were destroyed at the above mentioned park. Within one week, the new lock was destroyed and the gate stood wide open. That's right: ONE WEEK!

We have purchased multiple security cameras for our parks. These are instant download, so when someone tries to steal one of these cameras, they will already be on our phones and most likely will be hearing from the sheriff office in a timely fashion. These cameras and the cost to operate them are rather expensive in and of themselves. Unfortunately a necessary cost from the tax payers to help us keep our parks safe and free of vandalism.

Favorite Season *continued from page 7*

Which season is your favorite? I was pretty sure I had mine figured out (summer) until I started writing about each season, now I am not so sure. So many activities in different seasons - I guess the one thing that ties them all together is almost all of them are done with family and friends. So whatever season it is, get outside and create those memories with your family and friends. The Benton County parks are a great place to make those life long memories.



Did you know? Snowflakes are made up of ice crystals that form around tiny bits of dirt or pollen. They are symmetrical and hexagonal (six-sided). The temperature and humidity conditions the snowflake goes through as it falls to earth are what give it its unique shape.

Answers from page 9, Winter Animals

Groundhog - E

Gray Squirrel - A

Black-Capped Chickadee - D

Big Brown Bat - C

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird - B

Conservation Board Members

Daniel Gibbins: Urbana, Chair
Dan Hill: Vinton, Member
Denni Randall: Belle Plaine, Member
Randy Scheel: Garrison, Member
Becky Van Wey: Vinton, Member

The Benton County Conservation Board meets the second Monday of every month at 5:00 at the Nature Center. Meetings are open to the public.

Conservation Staff

Karen Phelps	Executive Director
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Aaron Askelson	Interpretive Naturalist
Caitlin Savage	Interpretive Naturalist
Jon Geiger	River Parks Ranger
Collin Strickland	Hannen Park Ranger
Zach Parmater	Conservation Tech/Ranger
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