

Conservation Matters

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring of 2007*

Spring has Sprung!

It's official! Spring is HERE! For a couple of days there, I was a little worried. Winter decided to give us one last blast with that late storm. Some of the birds (starlings and robins around here) had already returned just a few days before it hit, but it looks like most of them survived.

Well, I know many people out there have found that when the snow melted, it left behind a mess under their birdfeeders. You're not alone. We have seed shells littering the ground here, too. Fortunately, it shows us just how much use the bird feeders receive. Unfortunately, we have to clean it up; otherwise it could create a fungus growth, which would not be good for the birds or your lawn. For those of you who used pre-shelled seeds, I imagine you have far less mess, and even less of a chance for the fungus. Although, I must admit – in some cases, the fact that there is a shell on the seed seems to keep the birds there longer, as they have to open the shells. But again, this is from personal observation. Out of all the birds that come to the feeders, the Nuthatch seems to be the most serene because they have flown to the feeders while I have been filling them up with seed. No other bird sticks around or comes near the feeders while I am out putting seed in the feeders.

Actually, that bird topic reminds me of something that I've been doing as a little side project here at Pony Creek Park. I've recently borrowed my brother's video camera so that I can video some of the birds as they come to the feeders, and the park. So far I have documented the Rufous-sided Towhee, American Goldfinch, Tufted Titmouse, Black Capped Chickadee, White Breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Red Bellied Woodpecker, Northern Yellow Shafted Flicker, Hairy Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, Blue Jay, several Sparrow species, and the Dark Eyed Junco seems to be hanging around as well. We also have some Crows, several hawks, Green Winged Teal, and Wood Ducks, too. It is great to see such a variety of birds, and there is always a new one showing up to the park, and they are very welcome – just as you are welcome to come and visit us – even if it is just the birds you want to see!

Another sign of spring is the emergence of the earlier wildflowers (violets & Dutchmen's Breeches), some of which are blooming out here at Pony Creek Park. On April 29th we will perform the "Mushrooms & Blooms" program! You can find more upcoming events on our website:

www.millscoia.us/consboard/consmap.html

All of our public programs are now on the website!

Mills County Conservation Board Parks

With the arrival of spring, and the receding of the snow, many things begin to appear. I will lump the things we've been finding in the county parks into one general category: Trash. Pop & beer cans and bottles (some of which are worth 5 cents) and their boxes, diapers, old clothes, tires, fast food bags, boxes and cups, fishing line, bait containers, magazines, and various other items that will not be mentioned, have all been found in our parks.

Now I know many people don't think that some of the items they're throwing out will affect nature in any way, because "they're biodegradable". Yes, it may be biodegradable, but it is still the act of littering, and it will also make even the prettiest landscape look filthy. It also takes time for those "biodegradable" items to break down. On a visit to Mile Hill Lake recently, I happened to notice a person cleaning the trash out of their car. Instead of placing the trash in a bag to take home and dispose of it, they were just pulling it out of their car and putting it on the ground behind them. In a matter of 10 minutes, they were gone, and I was left to pick up the trash.

I am aware that many people feel we should make trashcans available in the parks, but from past experience, we disagree. If we were to put trashcans in, they become vandalized. They become used for fires. They are ripped off of their chain and thrown into nearby bodies of water, or dragged into the trees. In other instances, people bring their trash from home, and fill up the trashcans, or pile their trash around the trashcan if someone else has already filled it.

By not having trashcans, we are trying to make people aware that they are responsible for the

Conservation Matters

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring of 2007*

amount of trash that can be found in a park (or other areas). I have a habit of taking a grocery bag with me when I go fishing. Initially, it was for picking up fishing lures, but inevitably it always ends up being used for trash.

We all must remember that it is often our most nonchalant actions, which have enormous repercussions. Whether people learn this through a citation and a fine, or a day volunteering to pick up trash at one of the parks, either way it will open people's eyes to how much impact they have on a place meant for serenity.

Fishing at Mile Hill Lake!

I have been seeing more and more people sitting at Mile Hill Lake lately, with a line in the water, attempting to catch some fish. Maybe they'll take them home and cook them up and feed them to their family, or release the fish to grow bigger, or maybe they'll get skunked and have to come back again some other day to catch some fish.

For a lot of people the outcome of a fishing trip is not the important thing. The important thing is that you had the chance to spend a day out in your boat, or on shore, with a line in the water, and you took it.

If you really want to make your fishing trip memorable, take a youngster fishing. If it's their first time fishing, watch their face when you bring a fish in. It won't matter how big it is to you, because to them, it "was this big!" There's never a dull moment, although sometimes it's a little difficult to get them to stay still. You can buy them their first fishing rod, reel and tackle combo, and teach them to use it with enthusiasm. The good thing about taking them when they are young is that the adult is the only one who needs a fishing license. When the child reaches 16 yrs old, they will need their own, but not a moment sooner.

During the first 3 days of June, Iowa residents can fish without a license. We wish to invite the adults to bring their children out to Mile Hill Lake on Saturday the 2nd of June to take advantage of this opportunity to help the children

learn the joys and responsibilities that exist in fishing. This event will take place on June 2, 2007 and last from 9am to noon, although you may stay and fish as long as you like. We will have some poles and tackle available for use, but please feel free to bring your own.

Also note that this event requires any and all non-resident fishermen to have proper licenses because the free fishing days are for Iowa residents only. Also please be aware that if you bring a boat, be courteous to the people on shore, and all boaters must abide by state laws.

Thank You

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our Conservation Technicians, Terry Maguire and Gary Johnson, for one year's service with the Mills County Conservation Board. We appreciate your dedication and service. Thank you guys!

We would also like to thank Denise Lewis with Raptor Recovery, and Jan Faraci for the donations of bird specimens. We are working to have these birds mounted and on display at the Pony Creek Park office. Thank you!

Also – thank you to those who requested to receive the newsletter online. It is very much appreciated!

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 22, 2007 – EARTH DAY!

April 29, 2007 – 2 pm – Mushrooms and Blooms at Pony Creek Park.

May 5, 2007 – 7:30am to 10am – Breakfast with the Birds! at Mile Hill Lake

June 2, 2007 – 9am to Noon – Fishing at Mile Hill Lake

June 12, 2007 – 6pm – Evening Hike at West Oak Forest

June 23, 2007 – 10 am - Archeological Foray at West Oak Forest