

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring 2009

Economic Woes & Their Effects on Pets

The current economic situation in this country and many others is forcing people to make drastic decisions with their life and lifestyles. Spend or save? Buy now or buy later? In most instances you will hear people say that no matter what happens, "Family comes first", which makes sense.

Many families across the county, state, nation and world, are at a point where they have to decide if they can afford to keep their pets. It is common in times of economic frailty that pets become casualties of financial constraint.

You may be saying "They don't eat THAT much", but considering that many families have more than one pet, it can and will add up. The prices of pet food vary a great amount, from \$0.99 cans of cat food, to \$30 bags of dog food. Monthly costs can be substantial depending on the amount of food given to the pet for one meal, the number of pets to feed and if they have any specific dietary needs.

Expense	Dog	Cat
Food	\$120	\$145
Licensing	\$15	\$0
Annual Vet care	\$235	\$130
Misc.	\$45	\$30
Toys & Treats	\$55	\$25
Avg Yearly Cost	\$470	\$330
Ten-Year Avg Cost	\$4,700	\$3,300

From ASPCA website: <http://www.aspc.org/>

The figures listed above do not take into account the costs of spaying/neutering your pet, costs of adoption or purchasing the pet, litter / feces removal, kitty litter, litter boxes, crates, initial medical exams/shots, grooming, any required insurance, any kennel stays, obedience or other training costs, leashes, tags or many other additional costs. According to the ASPCA, the average first year of owning a dog costs over \$1,000 due to the above listed items including the one time fees of adoption/purchasing, vet exams, spaying/neutering, etc.

Most people do not take the long term cost of owning a pet into account until there is some sort of financial crisis. At which point people may decide the pet must go. If you can no longer afford to care for your pet, or simply no longer want to, there are options for your pet. Humane societies, animal shelters or even a local veterinarian may be able to place the animal in a good home. You could try listing it for sale or as "free to a good home" in a local paper as well.

You should not take the animal out into the country and drop it off. These 'drop offs' might become a nuisance to someone, get hit by a car or get shot at or killed for hurting livestock or a family member.

If you can no longer take care of your pet, please be responsible and kind enough to give them a chance to be someone else's pet.

Time for Spring Maintenance!

We all know warmer weather means yard maintenance: mowing, picking up fallen limbs, etc. We must also remember to prepare as best we can for the warmer weather to arrive.

Some of us know how hard it is to get your mower checked or fixed by a reputable shop in the springtime. There are at least 5 mowers ahead of yours needing to be checked out first. Next year, try to get your mowers into a shop early to get your mower running properly and the blades sharpened for spring.

We should clean bird feeders and around our bird feeders. All of the discarded shells and seed may form a fungus which is harmful to birds. The feed litter may also attract rodents, raccoons and deer. Our fragrant friend, the skunk, may be attracted to the insects which are attracted to the organic litter.

Close the doors to bluebird houses so bluebirds can start building nests. Remember to check them periodically to prevent wrens and other less desirable birds from using the box.

Organize your compost pile, turning it to jump start the aerobic processes.

If you have prairie remnants or tall native grasses on your property and you choose burning as your maintenance tool, remember to burn between April 1 and May 15 to avoid harming ground nesting birds like pheasant and quail. The Mills County Conservation Board has burn equipment available for use from the Loess Hills Alliance fire cache. Please call (712) 527-9685 if you wish to reserve the equipment or if you have any further questions.

Anglers will want to check equipment before they get their lines wet this spring to prevent line (and heart) breakage.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" – or in this case, fish.

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Meet Your **WILD** Mills County Neighbors!

This issue's "neighbor" is one that many of us enjoy catching with a hook and line. Some of us even enjoy cooking them up and putting them on our plates. I am talking about the Bluegill, *Lepomis macrochirus*, a fish that we can all catch in local ponds lakes and rivers during all seasons. For many of us, this was the first species of fish we ever caught on hook and line.



Bluegills are aptly named, as they have an operculum, or gill covering, that is blue or black in color. Bluegills will eat nearly anything they can fit in their mouth. Mealworms, kernels of sweet corn, a piece of night crawler, dough ball, even small spinners & jigs are successfully used as baits for bluegill. They rarely weigh over a pound, but 1/4 or 1/3 pound fish are fairly common. Lengthwise, the bluegill rarely grows to reach 12 inches. The Iowa bluegill record weighed 3 pounds 2 ounces, measured 12 7/8 inches long and was caught in a farm pond. The average life span is 5 years, which makes sense given that they are the primary forage fish for other predatory fish. Some Iowa bluegills have reached 13 years of age.

During the spawn (May – August) male bluegills are building their bowl-like nests in the sand and gravel deposits in the shallow water. When females come around the nesting sites of the males, they choose which nest they want to lay their 4,000+ eggs in based on displays performed by the males. After fertilization the male guards the nest and fry, until the fry develop enough to swim off.

When a pond is built and stocked, bluegills and channel catfish are stocked first, usually in the fall. Bass are not added until the following summer, giving the bluegill and catfish a chance to grow and find hiding places in their new habitat. Bluegill can become stunted (small) when they become too numerous and outgrow their food base. This is why predators like the largemouth bass are necessary in

ponds. This and the fact they mature at 1 yr, is also why we are allowed to harvest so many.

Most of us anglers know to check every year for any possible changes to fishing regulations. As of January 21, 2009 there is now a daily bag limit of 25 on bluegill and crappie in all public waters. There is still no possession limit, however.

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

4/18/09 10am – 1pm

Festival of the Young Child

James will be at Northeast Elementary School in Glenwood with animal furs for children to see and feel.

4/22/09 EARTH DAY!

Idea: Visit some of the county parks and search for morel mushrooms or take pictures of spring flowers!

4/25/09 10am – 3pm

Gifford Farms Nature Day - Bellevue, NE.

James will be at Gifford Farms making plaster animal tracks for children. It's a great chance to get outside!

MAY

5/09/09 10:30am

May Hike @ Pony Creek Park

We will likely see some wildflowers, invasive species, and other things along our hike on the trails. You are welcome to bring cameras. Please bring your own drinking water. This program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

5/15/09 7:00pm – 9pm

Bats of Iowa @ Pony Creek Park

Learn what they eat, their habitat requirements, how they affect you, bat exclusion practices, and how you can help them.

JUNE

6/6/09 9 am - noon

Going Fishing! @ Mile Hill Lake

Iowa's Free Fishing Weekend is June 5, 6 and 7th. Iowa residents may fish public waters for free. We will be taking advantage of this by providing some fishing poles, tackle and bait for youth to learn to fish. We will learn to identify fish and many other aspects of fishing. We will also be able to practice casting with different rods & reels. You may bring your own fishing equipment and bait. This program is dependent upon cooperative weather.

To register for MCCB programs or to ask questions, please call James at (712) 527-9685.

Thank you.

Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!

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The Mills County Conservation Board is able to accept, in the name of Mills County, any gifts, bequests, contributions and appropriations of money or other personal property for conservation purposes. Your tax-deductible donations, and our grant writing, promote the growth and betterment of our facilities for the enjoyment of the citizens of Mills County and its many visitors.

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