

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Spring 2014



Mills County websites have a new look. Check out the MCCB's page at www.millscoia.us

Park Highlight

Mills County Conservation manages over 1,700 acres of land that is open for public use. To familiarize our readers with the opportunities available at the various parks there will be two or three parks "highlighted" in each newsletter during 2014.

West Oak Forest is located on the western edge of the county in the beautiful Loess Hills. It is 308 acres consisting of forest and hilltop prairie remnants along with 7 acres of restored prairie. This park is basically a rectangle that is 1 mile by ½ mile. The area is very steep with rough hills and great scenery. On the highest bluff the elevation reaches 1,100 feet above sea level. The bluffs provide a great view of the Missouri River floodplain. Within the park there are over three miles of hiking trails. If you walk down the lower south trail, you will find an interpretive panel with information about Iowa's Loess Hills and native prairie. West Oak is inhabited by some threatened and endangered species of plants and animals. The area is also rich in cultural history, it was once occupied by the Glenwood Culture. These pre-historic people built earth lodge sites and burial mounds within the park boundaries. You will find great opportunities for hiking, photography, bird watching, nature viewing and mushroom hunting. Prairie enthusiasts will enjoy the lovely hilltop remnants. Skeleton weed, prairie blazing star, and yuccas are just a few of the beautiful prairie plants found here. West Oak is open to non-consumptive recreational use. It is illegal to remove, injure, destroy or deface any natural or man-made structures or materials, including trees, flowers or wildlife. Mushrooms, fruits and nuts can be harvested for personal use. This park is located at 55877 195th St, Pacific Junction, IA. From Highway 34 travel two miles north on L31.

Lake George is the second park that will be highlighted in this issue of *Conservation Matters*. Lake George is a small 9 acre park located on the east side of Mills County at 59490 380th St. This park offers a 2-acre lake with two picnic shelters that can

be used on a first come first serve basis, or shelter reservations can be made at least one week in advance of the desired date, for a non-refundable fee of \$25.00 per day. There are gravel parking lots near each shelter area, allowing for easy public access.

Lake George is a good birding area due to the close proximity to Indian Creek and the access to both live and dead trees for bird use. The lake is a great place to view frogs and turtles. Tree frogs, chorus frogs, cricket frogs, leopard frogs and bull frogs are all found at this location. Painted turtles and common snapping turtles are also regularly spotted.

Visit the new Mills County Conservation website and click Explore Mills County Parks on the right side. This will lead you to an interactive map for park information, directions, and some pictures.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

Soon Mills County will be treated to the spring time music from a variety of frog species. There are six different species of frogs that are found in our area; Northern Leopard frog, Plains Leopard frog, Gray tree frog, Western chorus frog, Cricket frog, and the Bull frog.

Leopard frogs begin calling in April and sound very similar to a long snore. These frogs spend a good portion of their time in grassy areas feeding on nearly any living organism they can fit in their mouth. Sometimes they are found a considerable distance from water while they are hunting. Their tadpoles develop quickly and are able to live on land by the end of June or beginning of July. Check out the Herp Net, www.herpnet.net, for great information on distinguishing the Northern Leopard frog from the Plains Leopard Frog.

Gray tree frogs are commonly found in wooded areas and also closely associated with houses and urban areas. They are attracted to lights in the spring and summer months where they can easily hunt for insects. Gray tree frogs have suction cups on their toes that enable them to climb vertical structures. You will commonly find them on the sides of houses, windows and doors. The name Gray tree frog can be a little misleading since these animals can be gray, blackish, brown, or many shades of green. In June, the tadpoles morph into miniature replicas of the

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adults, however they are bright green.

Our two smallest frogs in Southwest Iowa are the chorus frog and cricket frog. Both of these tiny frogs are often confused as being juveniles of a larger species. As adults they only grown to be about 1 ¼ inch. Chorus frogs are the first frogs to begin calling in the spring and it closely resembles the sound made when dragging a fingernail down the teeth of a comb. They prefer shallow water with good vegetation for camouflage. The cricket frog is often found on the mud or sandy area of banks. Their skin has a texture similar to a toads and they camouflage perfectly into the shore line. A cricket frog call sounds like someone is rolling around a handful of marbles.

From the smallest to the biggest, the final frog that is found in our area is the famous Bull frog. This large frog can grow up to a pound and will eat nearly anything they can fit in their mouth. Mice, baby birds, hatchling turtles, the list is amazing. The extremely adaptable bull frog will out compete most frogs for food resources and given the chance will even eat the other frogs. Areas that have a large bullfrog population will typically not have many other frogs. They are popular in the culinary world as the source of frog legs. Bullfrog tadpoles are unique because they often take two full years to morph in our cold climate. These frogs are fun to catch for all ages, they will grab a lure or can provide a good chase if found on land. A fishing license is required to collect frogs in Iowa, check the current 2014 Fishing Regulations for more information on harvesting bull frogs.

As with all of our Mills County Neighbors remember to show respect to these awesome amphibians and their habitats.

Classroom Connection

A new program, Reading with Nature, was introduced to the teachers. The MCCB Naturalist reads a book and takes a live animal or a nature related item into the classroom for students to learn about. This program stresses the importance of becoming good readers to learn about the natural world. The Glenwood first graders had a great time looking at spiders and spider eggs using microscopes.

Some other fun programs included, recycling, winter wildlife and nocturnal animals. The nocturnal animals program allowed the students to look through a night vision scope which they really enjoyed.

Finally, the Glenwood Envirothon team continues to work hard preparing for the upcoming Regional competition. Eighteen of the team members attended a training day at Pony Creek Park that included presentations from the NRCS, Iowa DNR, and USDA professionals over environmental topics. They also had a visit from Nancy Crews the ISU Horticulturist at the school. Envirothon is a wonderful competition that helps educate the students on a variety of concepts that will be useful for a life time.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Home Sweet Home - March 24th @ 6:00-7:00pm

Join us at Pony Creek Park to learn some great ways to provide habitat in your yard or acreage.

Easter Egg GPS Hunt - April 12th @ 1:00 pm

This Easter Egg hunt is designed for children 5th grade and above or for younger children who have an adult that is willing to help with the GPS. GPS's will be provided to find Easter eggs that are hidden around the park. Pre-registration is required, space will be limited. Call 712-527-9685

Beginner Bird Watching - April 29th @ 4:00-5:00 pm

We will meet at Foothills Park for anyone interested in learning the basics of bird watching. Following the discussion we will spend about 30 minutes looking at birds. All ages welcomed.

Gifford Farms Family Day - May 10th

Come out to Gifford Farms to get a plaster animal track to take home with you and see some of our live animals. Contact Gifford Farms, located in Bellevue, for more information regarding this event (402)597-4920.

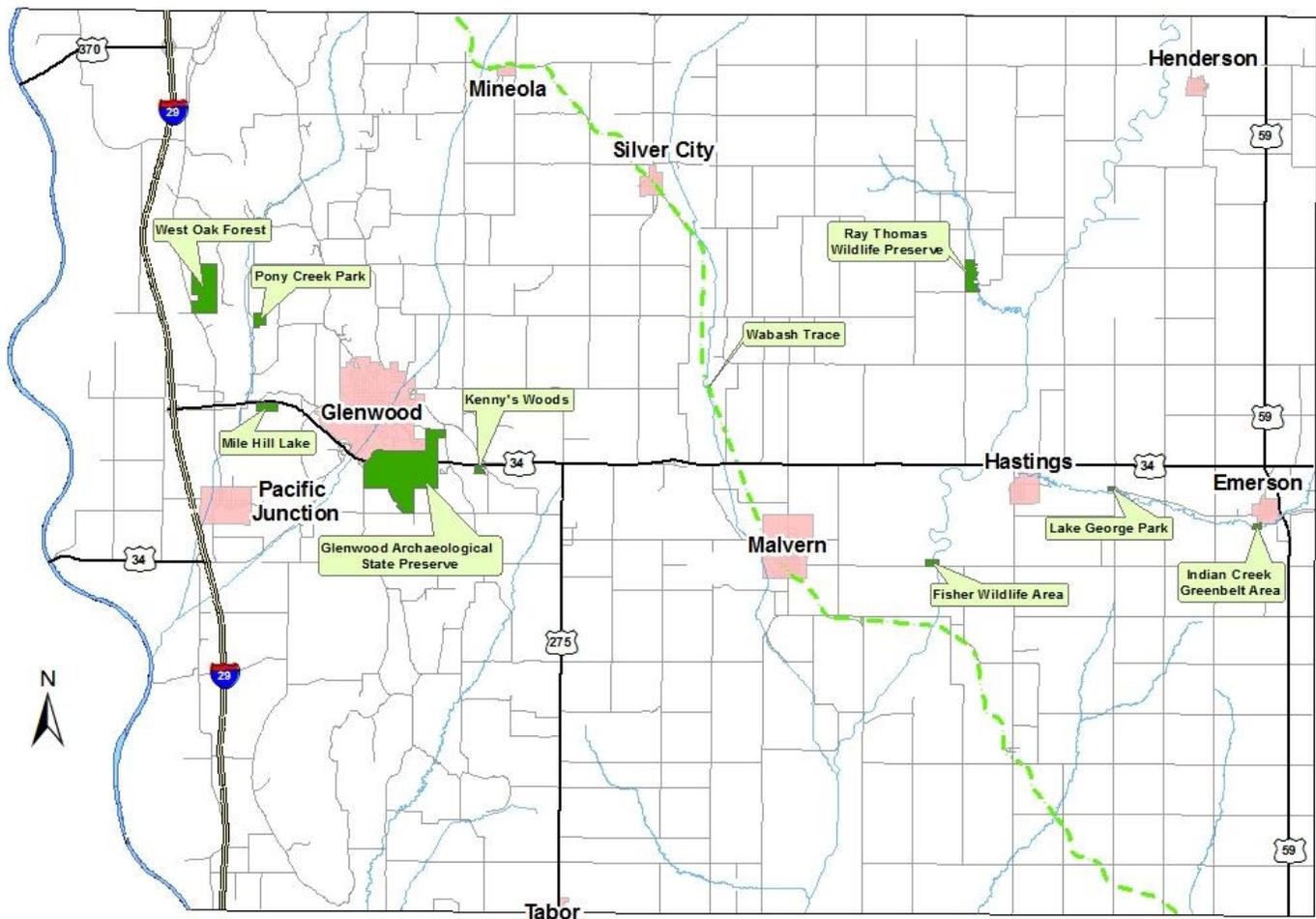
Sunset Hike in the Loess Hills - May 17th @ 7:30 pm

Hike to the top ridges of West Oak Forest and watch the sunset. The MCCB Naturalist will share some information about the Loess Hills during the hike. Call for more information.

To pre-register for these events or for more information, please call Dessa at (712) 527-9685 or send us an email at millsccbia@hotmail.com.

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West Oak Forest (55877 195th St)

308 acres in the Loess Hills consisting of woodlands and prairie. Open for hiking and nature viewing

Pony Creek Park (56235 Deacon Rd)

53 acres of woodland and small prairie remnants in the Loess Hills. This park provides two open shelters, 3 pit latrines, 6 electrical camping sites, primitive camping sites, playground, hiking trails, and a scenic overlook. The MCCB office is also located here.

Mile Hill Lake (21193 US HWY 34)

39 acres of woodlands with a 10 acre fishing lake. Provides a boat ramp, hiking trails, scenic overlook and is open to public hunting.

Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve/ Foothills Park (59069 Levi Road) 906 acres of hay field/ag land, restored prairie, and woodlands. Rich archaeological significance, paved trails, fruit trees, great birding location

Kenny's Woods (255th St and Jagger Rd)

20 acres of woodland, open for nature viewing

Wabash Trace Nature Trail

25 miles of biking/hiking trail. Former railroad corridor with limestone surface. Access points in Malvern, Silver City, Mineola

Fisher Wildlife Area (2.5 miles east of Malvern on Lambert Ave) Nishnabotna river access, open to public hunting

Ray Thomas Wildlife Preserve (35040 Fry Ave)

90 acres open for passive use ONLY, restored prairie, cropland, woodland, creek

Lake George Park (59490 380th St)

11 acres, picnic shelter, grill, 2 acre pond

Indian Creek Greenbelt Area (60163 410th St)

17 acres restored prairie, creek access, fruit trees

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

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Recycling Opportunity

Spiral Communications, Glenwood Chamber of Commerce, Glenwood Community School District and NebWorks, Inc. will host an electronic recycling event designed to allow people to easily dispose of their unwanted electronic devices in an environmentally-friendly manner.

The event will take place Saturday, March 22nd at the Glenwood Community High School parking lot, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m.

During the event, residents and businesses will be able to drop off a variety of items, including: old personal computers, monitors, LCD screen/flat screen monitors, VCR's, radios, stereos, DVD players, microwaves, rechargeable batteries, banking equipment, telephones, networking equipment, laptops, keyboards, mice, power cables, medical equipment (non-hazardous), printers, copy machines, fax machines, cell phones, scanners, portable electronic devices, servers, networking hubs, ink cartridges, toner cartridges, remotes, modems, projectors, cameras, televisions and other electronic items.

Items not accepted include: fluorescent bulbs or light bulbs, washers and dryers, dishwashers, humidifiers/de-humidifiers, refrigerators, car batteries, gas-powered tools, freezers, and ovens (items that do not run on batteries or do not plug in will not be accepted).

Items will be accepted free of charge with the exception of computer monitors and TVs. Computer monitors will be accepted for \$10 and all size televisions will be \$15.

For more information, call Mike at NebWorks, Inc. at 402-873-5151.



Emerald Ash Borer

As you have probably heard already, the State of Iowa has been officially quarantined because of this pesky little bug. A quarantine by state and U.S. agriculture departments means that hardwood, firewood, ash logs, and wood chips cannot be moved out of the area without a permit. Homeowners must not remove their ash tree or firewood from their tree to an area outside the quarantine. Tree removal companies must not haul logs or firewood outside the quarantine area unless inspected and treated as required by the regulations. Emerald Ash Borers have been found in six counties in Iowa, including, Allamakee, Black Hawk, Cedar, Des Moines, Jefferson, and Union counties.

If you are a local landowner please consider attending this free meeting hosted by the Iowa DNR:

March 19, 2014

6:00-7:30 p.m.

Wilbholm Hall

200 S. 6th St. Clarinda, Iowa

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Meeting is offered at no cost. If you want educational materials, call Page County Extension by March 17 at 712-542-5171.

The Emerald Ash Borer is a small, green, invasive, wood boring beetle that attacks and kills ash trees. Master Gardeners will receive 1.5 hours of continuing instruction.

You will learn:

- ☑ How to identify an ash tree
- ☑ Symptoms and signs of EAB
- ☑ Treatment options
- ☑ Replant decisions
- ☑ Resources available to private landowners

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Little Critters FUN Page

1. What is the Largest Song bird in North America?

- a. BLUE jay
- b. COMMON RAVEN
- c. Cedar Waxwing
- d. AMERICAN ROBIN

2. What is the most popular State bird?

- a. Northern Cardinal
- b. Northern Mockingbird
- c. Meadowlark
- d. Gold Finch

3. What bird makes a meow sound?

- a. BROWN headed cowbird
- b. BLACK capped chickadee
- c. Gray catbird
- d. BLUE grosbeak

4. What provides up to 90% of a Hummingbird's diet?

- a. INSECTS
- b. Nectar
- c. Seeds
- d. FISH

5. What bird depends almost entirely on manmade nesting boxes in the Eastern United States?

- a. Eastern Screech Owl
- b. Purple Martin
- c. Tree Swallow
- d. House Wren

6. Which group of birds is called a "murder"?

- a. Belted Kingfishers
- b. Canada geese
- c. Turkey vultures
- d. American crows

7. What is the major food source for American Goldfinches?

- a. INSECTS
- b. SUNFLOWER SEEDS
- c. THISTLE SEEDS
- d. CORN

8. Which bird lays its eggs in another bird's nest for them to raise the young?

- a. BROWN headed cowbird
- b. BROWN thrasher
- c. Hairy Woodpecker
- d. Wood duck



Answers:

1.b, 2.a, 3.c, 4.b, 5.b, 6.d, 7.c, 8.a,