



# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Winter 2011-2012



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## Grant Award

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The Mills County Community Foundation awarded \$24,500 in grants to Mills County nonprofit agencies. This foundation works with individuals, families, businesses and organizations to create permanent funds that address the changing, vital community needs and interests. MCCB was fortunate to receive a \$600 grant from this Foundation. This money has been used to purchase snow shoes for the public to use. If you are interested in using the snow shoes please call the office 527-9685, Monday thru Friday 8-4. We have 2 sets of men's, 2 sets of women's, and 2 sets of children's.

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## Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

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*How much wood would a wood chuck chuck if a wood chuck could chuck wood? As much wood as a wood chuck would if a wood chuck could chuck wood.* We

have all heard this tongue twister, but how much do you know about wood chucks? The wood chuck is a large rodent also known as a ground hog or whistle pig. They weigh 5-10 pounds and are part of the squirrel family. Wood chucks are found throughout the eastern United States. Don't bother going out to find on right now though, they are snuggled deep in a den. Wood chuck are one of the few animals in Iowa that are true hibernators. They enter their dens in late October and hibernate until March. During hibernation their heart rate slows to 4 beats a minute and only 1 breath per minute. A wood chuck burrow is usually five feet deep and up to 30 feet long with multiple entrances. They are strict herbivores and can be found most often in open, grassy areas. Breeding season for this species is from March-April and after a 32 day gestation period a litter of 2-6 young are born. A woodchuck can live to be 6 years old, however, they have numerous predators such as hawks, fox, coyotes, bobcats, dogs, and people. Some consider them a pest because they damage crops, burrow under buildings, and gnaw

underground wires.

Ground Hog Day is February 2, 2012. This popular holiday is based on the folklore that if a ground hog, aka, woodchuck, sees its shadow when it emerges from its den that the winter will last 6 more weeks. The ground hog prediction is reported to only be accurate 39% of the time.

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## Letter from James Gates

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*To my Mills County Friends,*

*As many know, I left my position with Mills County Conservation on August 19 of this year, earlier than I originally anticipated.*

*Not long after the move I received a thank you letter from Kadyann Hatfield. The Hatfields had brought a birdhouse to Pony Creek Park to present to me, but I had already moved to Northeastern Iowa. They donated the birdhouse to the Conservation Board in my name, and I want to thank them for the donation.*

*Much like Lewis & Clark, I learned a lot from my time in the Loess Hills of southwest Iowa. That knowledge and the fond memories will always be with me. I greatly enjoyed my nearly 5 years with Mills County Conservation.*

*To avoid this being too drawn out and taking too much room, I wish to thank everyone for everything...and then some.*

*Thank you for the opportunity to serve Mills County and its public. I look forward to visiting in the future.*

*Sincerely,*

*James W. Gates*

*PS: Remember to visit YOUR Mills County Parks!*



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## ANIMAL TRACKS

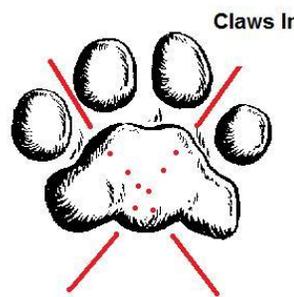
Winter is a wonderful time to get out and investigate what kind of critters have been moving about in the snow. Iowa has a diverse group of wildlife, but many species are very hard to find and view. Identifying animal tracks is often the only way of knowing that a species is in the area. After a fresh snow is ideal animal tracking conditions when the landscape has essentially been wiped clean. This fresh canvas shows every move an animal makes. The drama of predator-prey interactions can unfold right in front of your eyes. Bobcat tracks following those of a cottontail rabbit could result in a small tussle in the snow. Sometimes you can tell if the predator caught its prey and other times you can cheer for your favorite prey species as you realize they escaped being a meal.

Some of the most common tracks that you will find are raccoon, squirrel, deer, dogs, and cats. Small bird tracks are very common everywhere you look, but they typically cannot be identified to the exact species that left them. See if you can determine if the animal went to its home (burrow, nest, tree) or if it was foraging for something to eat. Squirrel tracks are common through residential areas and almost always begin and end at a tree. Looking at and following animal tracks is fun and educational for adults and children of all ages, so get outside and do some detective work. Use the pictures of tracks to help with your search.

Recent sightings of cougars in Iowa have many people second guessing whether they have found a large dog/coyote track, or if by chance it belongs to a cougar. The picture on the right shows the X Factor which is a pretty dependable way of telling a cat and dog tracks apart. It works for bobcats, foxes, and domestic cats and dogs as well.



### The X Factor



**Cougar Track**  
No X - Touches pad



**Coyote Track**  
X does not touch pad



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **January 28th @ 1:00 pm- ICE FISHING**

We will meet at **Mile Hill Lake** to learn ice safety, equipment needs, fishing techniques and fish identification. We have a limited number of ice fishing poles and a manual ice auger. Please dress appropriately and bring something to sit on (a bucket works fine). Also, you must purchase your 2012 Iowa Fishing licenses before this event. Pre-registration is **REQUIRED!**

### **February 18th @ 6:00 pm- OWL PROWL I**

Learn some of the common owls of Iowa and their calls. After a short presentation we will go for a walk and call some owls. This program is at **Pony Creek Park**. Please bring a flash light and dress accordingly. Pre-registration is **REQUIRED!**

### **March 3rd @ 10:00 am- HABITAT CONSTRUCTION**

Come assist with nest box building. Type of boxes will be determined at a later date. Feel free to call for more information. We will meet at **Pony Creek Park** and pre-registration is **REQUIRED!**

To pre-register for these events or to ask questions, please call (712) 527-9685.

If you have suggestions for articles or programs we would love to hear them!



If you are interested in receiving the Conservation Matters newsletter straight to your email inbox

please send your request to  
[millscbia@hotmail.com](mailto:millscbia@hotmail.com).

It is also available on the MCCB website:  
<http://mccb.millscoia.us>

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*Mills County Conservation Board*



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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**Animal Tracks**

Match the Carnivore to its Track Pattern.

Red Fox      Otter      Bobcat      Coyote      Weasel

www.exploringnature.org      ©Sheri Amsel

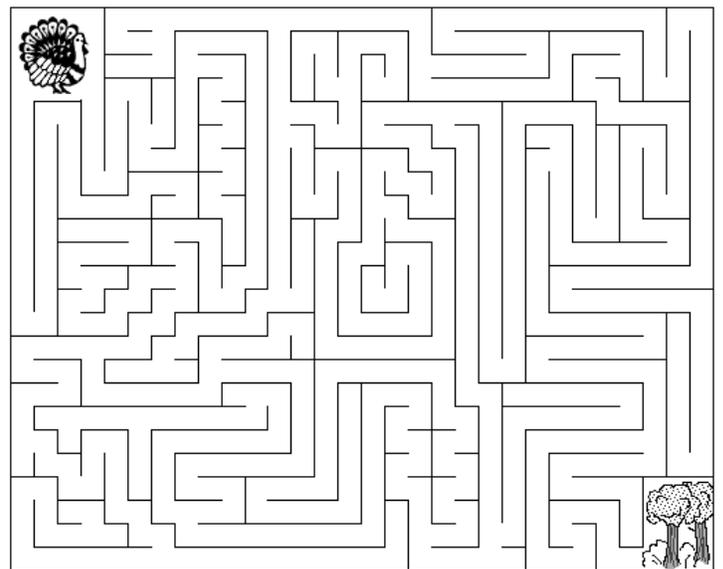
*An important part of being a Scientist is having the ability to find answers to questions that you may not know. I challenge you to find the answers to the following questions. **READY, SET, RESEARCH!!!!***

What is the state bird of Iowa?

What is the state tree of Iowa?

This animal is the only Marsupial found in Iowa and has an opposable thumb?

What do skunks eat?



Help the turkey escape into the woods

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