

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Winter 2012-13



Nishnabotna Water Trail Stakeholders Meeting:

Everyone is welcome to come learn about the proposed water trail in Mills County to expand canoeing and kayaking recreation opportunities.

December 11th @ 6:00 pm at the Engineers Building in Glenwood (403 Railroad Ave).

Making History

Mills County has been honored with the dedication of a National Historic Landmark. Davis Oriole Earthlodge site located at Pony Creek Park outstandingly illustrates the physical features of lodge inhabitations that commonly occurred across the Plains and is exceptionally valuable to the study of its predominant Plains village pattern habitation type. So, what does all of this mean? Nationwide there are 2,527 national historic landmarks, each with their own unique significance. They possess exceptional value and quality in illustration or interpreting the heritage of the United States. This designation is Iowa's 25th National Landmark.

The Davis Oriole Earthlodge is estimated to be nearly a thousand years old. Earthlodges were built by early Native Americans that existed in thriving communities around this area. Unfortunately, the site is located several feet under Iowa soil and is unrecognizable to the general public. The site is not marked to prevent people from digging into this piece of national history. If you would like to see a replica of an earth lodge, one has been constructed in Glenwood across from the Glenwood Lake Park.

Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

Leaping lizards, is that a six lined racerunner? If you are hiking in the Loess Hills the answer might just be yes. Six-lined racerunners are a little lizard that belongs to the family called whiptails, because of their long, slender tail. Racerunners prefer sandy or dry loess soils so are not found in most parts of Iowa. A special subspecies known as the Prairie Racerunner

occurs in our area along the Missouri River and Loess Hills. Racerunners grow to a length of 9 inches and have 6 lines running down their backs. Males have beautiful blue and green colors which help them attract females. Female racerunners are typically brown. They are capable of dropping their tails and regenerating a new one to escape predators.

Racerunners are extremely fast and can reach speeds of 18 mph. They are diurnal which helps fuel their speed with the heat of the day. A typical day is spent foraging for soft bodied insects, basking in the sunlight, and borrowing under rocks to escape the intense heat of mid day. Because these lizards need such warm temperatures to be successful they are only out and about for a short time during the year. They become active in May and are often back into hibernation by late August.

West Oak Forest (located on L31 north of Pacific Junction) is a good place to look for these fast little reptiles. You will have to wait until next spring



and summer but it is worth the time to get out for a hike along the top bluffs and see a new animal. If you can't wait until the spring to see one of these little critters come out to our office sometime and meet the one that serves as an Education Animal for programs.

Prescribed Fire

Prescribed fire is a common tool used by land managers for many different reasons. It consists of conducting a controlled burn on a specific area when conditions are right. Today, we see the devastating effects wildfires have on communities and most people have formed a negative opinion of fire. Prescribed burns actually have great value to ecosystems and have management results that are one of a kind. Some very important benefits of fire include: Reduces the fuel load, prepares land for new growth, creates diversity for wildlife, and controls invasive plant species.

Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board
Winter 2012-13



The use of fire is not a new idea, people have actually been using it for hundreds of years. Native Americans used fires for hunting, land management (attracting wildlife to a burned area) and insect control near their villages. Bison herds were well know to congregate in recently burned areas attracted by the tender new green grass that sprouts.

Southwest Iowa is part of the Great Plains region of the United States. This region of once vast prairies was maintained by climate, FIRE, and grazing animals. Today the landscape has changed dramatically with the cultivation of crops over much of our area. The small areas of prairie that do exist still rely on fire.

Classroom Connection

Environmental education is an important part of the MCCB's service to the citizens of Mills County. Some exciting things have been happening at several schools in our area. We have worked with the administration at East Mills over the past year to plan a prairie restoration on a portion of the East Mills Middle School/ Nishna Valley Elementary campus that will serve as an outdoor classroom area. The area was prepared by killing the existing vegetation, lightly disking the area, and then in early November we planted a variety of native prairie seeds. Prairie plantings are not for the impatient. It takes many years for the prairie to become established and you will see different plants growing throughout the stages. We were extremely fortunate at this campus because the prairie will be over an acre in size. East Mills is not the only school in our area that will have prairie. Glenwood High school paved the way with a small planting several years ago and we planted a bed of prairie in front of the Glenwood Middle school in the spring. We can all look forward to seeing how these prairie plantings will evolve over the years.

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 15th @ 10:00 am- "Breakfast with the Birds" Join us at Pony Creek Park to watch the birds, have coffee and cinnamon rolls, and a bird feeding craft will be available for all ages of children. Pre-registration is **REQUIRED**, please call 712-527-9685.

January 26th @ 11:00 am- "Ice Fishing and Snow Shoe Hiking" Join us at Mile Hill Lake to learn the basics of ice fishing and/or go for a hike with a pair of the MCCB's snowshoes. Weather permitting. Pre-registration is **REQUIRED**.

February 2nd @ 5:30pm - "Owl Prowl" Join us at Foothills Park, south of Glenwood, as we hike along the trails listening and looking for owls.

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

GO GREEN! If you would like to receive your Conservation Matter's newsletter straight to your email inbox please send your request to millsccbia@hotmail.com

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

This will also put you on the email list to receive event reminders.



LITTLE CRITTERS FUN PAGE

Beavers are the largest rodent found in North America and are considered ecological engineers. They build habitats that benefit many other species of wildlife.

