

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Winter 2013-14



## Nature Center

The Mills County Conservation board has been in the planning stages of building a Nature center for the past two years. We are excited to have finally reached the fund raising part of the process. The proposed Nature Center will be constructed near the entrance of Pony Creek Park and will provide lots of new opportunities to the citizens of Mills County. The new building will have an overall foot print of 50' x 85'. The upper level will be 4,075 square feet. This space will include three offices for staff, a large environmental education area, a public lobby space as well as storage and restrooms. There will also be a basement area with 2,050 square feet.

The new building will provide a variety of new possibilities. It will be in a great location with visibility from Deacon Road, which is a part of the Loess Hills Scenic Byway. The lobby space will allow us to display information about the natural resources of the surrounding area and help educate the public about recreation opportunities in the area. The environmental education space will allow local school groups to make field trips to the park and eliminate the need for registration limits on public programs. It will also open the doors for a greater variety of public programs and guest speakers.

The MCCB currently has half of the nearly \$800,000 needed to make this building project happen. We are working diligently writing grants to help reach our goal. If you are interested in making a donation on behalf of the building fund please contact us. All donations are tax deductible and will contribute to the quest of environmental education and outdoor recreation in Mills County.

## Meet Your *WILD* Mills County Neighbors!



The symbol of American freedom and one of our most majestic neighbors is the Bald Eagle. It was chosen in 1782 as our country's emblem because of its long life, great strength and majestic

looks. It is also the only eagle unique to North America. Bald eagles have had a long history of struggles surviving the effects humans have had on the environment. They are at the top of the food chain so chemicals in the environment have a significant effect on them. DDT and human conflict landed them on the National Endangered Species list in 1976. With hard work and new regulations they have rebounded and were removed from the list in 2007. They are still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In Iowa there is a hefty fine of up to \$20,000 for harassing or killing an eagle.

During the winter these beautiful birds show up in Iowa in fairly large numbers to escape the food shortages and harsh conditions of Canada. There are some eagles present in Iowa year round and numerous active nesting sites. Eagles typically return to the same nest every year. Repairing the nest and adding new nesting materials annually adds up and the nests can get quite extensive. They can grow to be 7 feet wide, 10 feet deep, and weigh 2 tons! With the large size of nests, large trees are vital and nests are pretty easy to find. It is important to never disturb a nest and try to stay at least a quarter a mile away when viewing. If you find an active nest in Mills County, the Iowa DNR would like to know, please call (515) 432-2823 with a detailed location.

Bald eagles are large birds weighing between 10-14 pounds with a wingspan of 72-85 inches. They are powerful predators with eye sight four times sharper than a humans. The characteristic white head and tail of the eagle are only found on adult birds. It takes nearly five years to reach adulthood. Juveniles are brown with some white mottling that can be found on their back, under wings, belly, and tail. Juveniles and adults are significantly larger than any hawk, so they are easy to identify. Don't miss the chance of sighting an eagle by only looking for the prominent white head and tail. Eagles are not picky eaters and actually consume a lot of carrion. Fish, rabbits, waterfowl, and nearly anything small enough for an eagle to snatch is also fair game.

Bald eagles can live to be 30 years old but the average life span is 15-20 years. Watching these magnificent birds soar is one of the most impressive sights in nature. They utilize thermal air currents that

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Winter 2013-14



lift them effortlessly up into the sky. Once they reach the highest point they glide down to the next thermal, which can be several miles away, and again are lifted back high into the sky with no effort. Eagles can soar up to an altitude of 10,000 feet. During migration eagles can spend nearly the entire day soaring and gliding from thermal to thermal and only using powered flight in the beginning to reach the first thermal and at the end to find a roosting tree.

Thermals are essential for large birds to conserve energy. Several eagles soaring in the same thermal is called, "a kettle of eagles". During powered flight they can reach speeds of 30-35 mph.

It is easy to understand the significance of this species. I encourage everyone to slow down and take the time to watch an eagle next time you spot one. Look near rivers and large bodies of water during this time of the year and you should easily spot one.

## Classroom Connection

The school year started and we were off to the races. From August to November we have already done 53 programs for the schools in Mills County, reaching a total of 1290 students. Fall is the time of year that the annual 5th Grade Science Camp is held. The students participate in a variety of outdoor, science related activities. Fishing, hiking, canoeing, and astronomy, along with education on trees, prairies, wildlife, team work and recycling are some of the things the kids got to experience.

Other grade levels throughout the counties have had our live education animals visit their classrooms as well as many fun programs about everything from seeds, trees, habitats, seasons, and wildlife. This school year seems promising in our goals to provide Environmental Education to the students in Mills County.

The Glenwood Envirothon team spent a day harvesting prairie seeds from prairie on the bluffs of West Oak Forest and from the reconstructed prairie at Ray Thomas Wildlife Preserve. The seed will be used on the existing prairie plot located at the high school.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Winter WILDland-** December 14th @ 11:00 am  
Join us at Pony Creek Park for some outdoor WILD time! We will be building forts, playing in the leaves, climbing on logs, rolling down hills..... you get the picture. Bring your imagination and warm clothes. Pre-registration is greatly appreciated.

**Snow Day-** January 18th @ 1:00 pm  
Join us at Foothills Park at the Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve for some sledding and snow shoeing fun. We will have a fire to warm up with. Please bring a sled if you have one, if you do not have one we will have several extras on hand. Dress warm and lets enjoy the winter outdoors. Pre-registration is required! Please call 712-527-9685 or email [millsccbia@hotmail.com](mailto:millsccbia@hotmail.com) to let us know if you plan to attend.

**Ice Fishing -** February 8th @ 10:00 am  
Join us at Mile Hill Lake to learn the basics of ice fishing along with some ice safety. We will have some ice fishing equipment available, dress warmly and let's see what we can catch.

**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](mailto:millsccbia@hotmail.com). If you are trying to pre-register for an event after 4:00 on the Friday before that event please email, there is nobody available to receive calls.**

**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](mailto: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

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board  
Winter 2013-14



## **CHILDREN'S NATURE BILL OF RIGHTS**

- Touch a frog
- Hold a snake
- Wade in a creek
- Watch eagles soar
- Climb a tree
- Build a fort
- Lay under the stars
- Ride in a canoe
- Listen to the wind blow
- Dig in the dirt
- Plant a seed
- Smell a flower
- Taste a wild edible plant
- Swim in a lake
- Skip a stone
- See a wild animal
- Identify a bird by song
- Plant a tree
- Look inside a bird nest
- See a rainbow
- Play in the rain
- Call an owl
- Examine an owl pellet
- Catch a fish
- Follow an animal's tracks
- Find a shed snake skin
- Crack a nut with a rock
- Explore a prairie
- Watch a spider spin a web
- Make a mud pie
- Build a snowman
- Go sledding
- Hunt morel mushrooms
- Look under a dead log
- Roll down a hill
- Hold a worm
- Catch lightning bugs
- Go camping
- Warm up by a fire
- Roast a marshmallow
- Collect prairie seeds
- Identify poison ivy
- Pull apart a cattail
- Look at cloud shapes
- Feel animal furs
- Balance on a log
- Watch a sunset
- Watch a sunrise
- Watch geese fly over
- Clean a fish
- Spot a shooting star
- Watch a storm roll in
- Pick edible berries
- Walk barefoot in the grass
- Squish mud between toes
- Play hide and seek in a prairie
- Find a fossil
- Watch a predator
- Hike in the Loess Hills
- Spend an entire day unplugged

I challenge everyone to check off everything on this list before 2015. Making your own list is fun also. Get outside and enjoy Nature!!

# *Conservation Matters*

*Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board*  
*Winter 2013-14*

---



---

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