

Winter 2018

Conservation Matters

Mills County Conservation Board

Timber Stand Improvements

Winter is a good season for Conservation Specialist, Zach Kolhoff and Conservation Technician, Jesse Ayers, to work on Timber Stand Improvements in your Mills County Parks. The thick undergrowth of the timber is dormant, and that makes an already strenuous job a bit easier. Let's take a closer look into what Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) is and the benefits to the natural ecosystem. There are circumstances when woodland areas can be improved by doing more than just letting the trees grow. TSI involves actively managing a stand of trees to improve its species composition, structure, health and growth.

In many cases TSI consists of cutting down or deadening trees that are considered a "less than desirable species" to improve growing conditions for the more valuable trees. This can be beneficial for timber production and improving habitat for wildlife and insects. Trees growing in a dense stand tend to put most of their energy into vertical growth to obtain sunlight. Thinning trees out around them can allow the tree to put their energy into crown growth, which increases the production of nuts and fruits. Oak trees really benefit from reducing the competition around them which is important for the woodland community as acorn production increases. Acorns are eaten by dozens of different wildlife species, ranging from white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, eastern cottontail rabbits, squirrels, mice, blue jays and bobwhite quail. A second TSI practice is girdling a tree. This kills the tree, but it is left standing. Dead trees, known as snags, are very important for insects, woodpeckers and a variety of animals that rely on tree cavities to nest. Making a 1 inch deep cut all the way around the tree will stop the passage of necessary nutrients and it will eventually die.

Mills County has two invasive shrubs, bush honeysuckle and autumn olive that are taking over the understories of our woodlands. TSI is extremely important in those areas to remove these obnoxious plants. Their dense foliage and growth pattern prohibits the woodland floor to get sunlight and reduces the chance for woodland flowers, native shrubs and trees to grow and flourish.

If you are at one of the Mills County parks and notice TSI happening, now you will have a small glimpse into one of the many management practices that are happening year-round to make healthy, habitats for all to enjoy!

If you are a landowner and would like to improve your woodlands and need some advice to get started our Iowa DNR District Forester, Lindsey Barney, is a wonderful resource! You can reach her at 712-482-6245 or email

Lindsey.Barney@dnr.iowa.gov.

*Upcoming Event
Highlights*

*Nature Painting –
January 12th*

*Bee House
Building-
February 10th*

*Connecting with
Nature-
March 3rd*

*Tiny Nature
Adventures-
January 2nd
February 6th
March 6th*

Mills County Neighbor



Carpenter Bee hole



Leaf Cutter Bee



Miner Bee



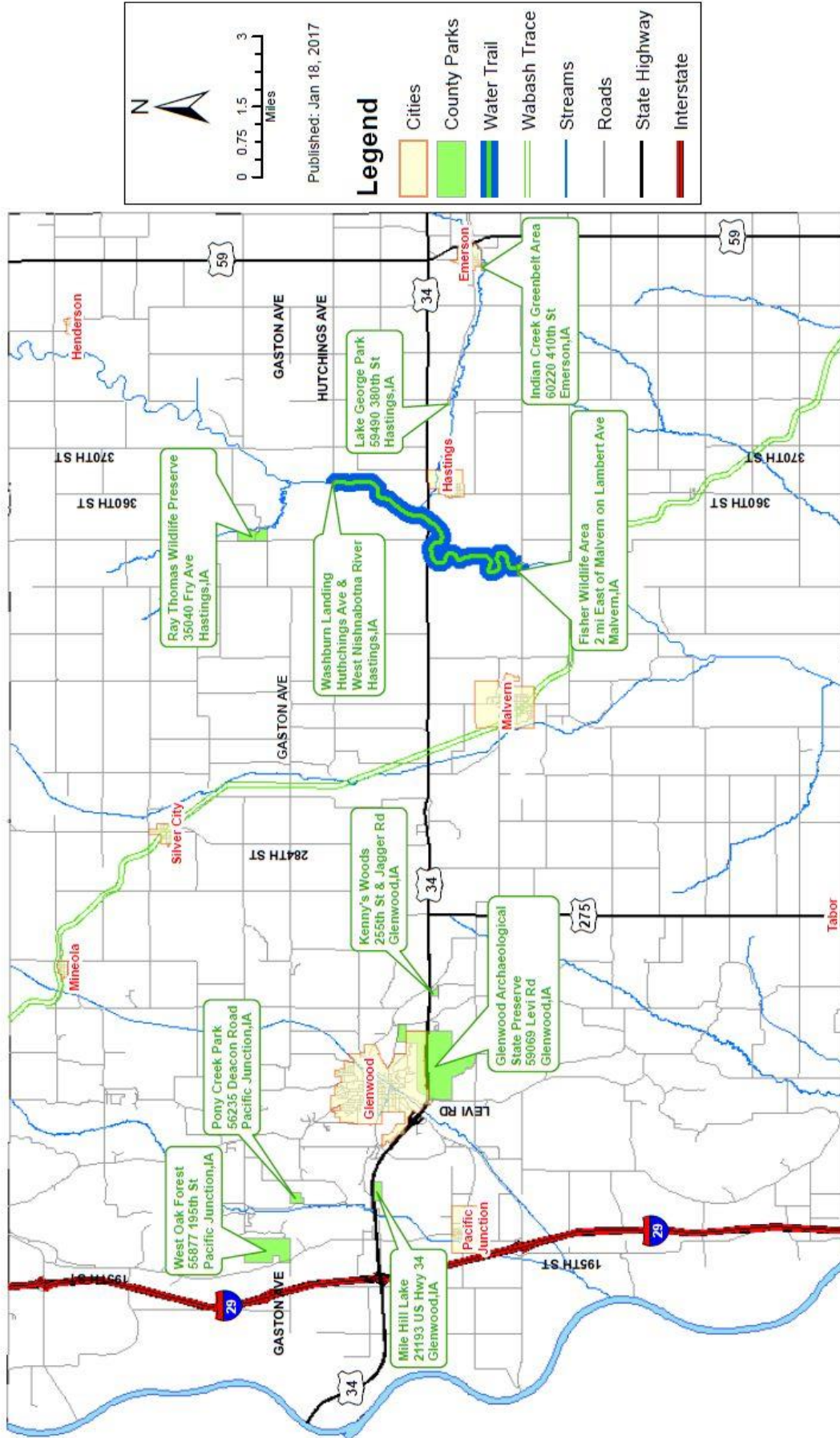
Bee House Examples

Solitary bees are a wonderful group of pollinators that many people know little about. This group of bees makes up 90% of bee populations but are often overshadowed by the colony nesting bees. Over 4,000 species of bees exist in North America and ~200 occur in Iowa. Let's get to know more about the unsung heroes of pollination.

As their name suggests, Solitary bees are lone bees, which means they do not belong to a colony. Since they live alone and do not swarm they are the perfect bee to have around children and pets. Only females are capable of stinging and do only if they are handled roughly. Female solitary bees create their nests without the help of a male and depending on species they can be found in hollow reeds, twigs, holes in wood, or tunnels in the ground. Eggs are laid within the tunnels in small cells constructed out of various materials according to the species; mud, leaves, and wax are some examples. One fascinating part of the nest building is that eggs with females inside are laid in the back and males in the front. This ensures that if a predator accesses the hole that females have a better chance of survival. Pollen and nectar are collected from numerous flowering plant species and packed in the cells for the larva to feed on once they hatch the following Spring. After the cell is packed with the food and an egg, it is sealed, and the female does not return to care for the young.

Solitary bees can be attracted to your yard/garden by providing them with good nesting sites. Miner bees require bare ground that is not too sandy or dry to dig their nest holes. A hand full of other species look for holes in dead trees. It is not common today for people to leave dead trees standing in their landscape so providing other resources for these little pollinators is important. Bee houses are easy and fun to make or can be purchased commercially from several vendors. If you are interested in making one, here are some tips to follow or you are welcome to attend the Bee House making program at Pony Creek Nature Center.

- With drill bits of various sizes (5/16th of an inch works best for Mason bees) simply take some scrap lumber and drill holes 3 to 5 inches deep but not all the way through the wood block. For example, get a 4 inch by 4 inch piece of wood and drill holes that are 3 and 1/2 inches deep.
- Securely place the bee house on the south side of buildings, fence posts, or trees. Ideal location would be at least 3 feet off the ground
- DO NOT move bee houses after they are in place until at least November.
- DO NOT spray insecticides on or around bee houses.
- If you choose to build your own bee houses, DO NOT use treated wood.



Don't let the cold weather keep you from getting outdoors and enjoying YOUR Mills County parks.

Upcoming Public Programs

Nature Painting- January 12th @ 2:00-4:00 pm

Join Hannah Rief, owner of the Creative Canvas, for a fun painting class at Pony Creek Nature Center. Pre-registration is required, so call 712-314-1968 and save your spot today! Cost is \$30 per person and pre-payment is appreciated through the Creative Canvas website, <https://www.getcreativewithhannah.com>

You are welcome to bring your own beverages!



Changing Seasons

Bee House Building- February 10th @ 1:00 pm

Supplies to build a variety of different bee houses will be provided at Pony Creek Nature Center. Easy project that will help you add nesting sites for solitary bees in your garden or yard. Pre-registration is required.



Connecting with Nature- March 3rd @ 1:00 pm

Nature Journaling is a great way to connect with nature. It helps you look closely at things while you describe what you hear, see, smell and feel outdoors. We will meet at Pony Creek Nature Center for some journaling practice indoors and weather permitting there will be a hike to enjoy the beautiful scenery of Pony Creek Park. Supplies to make a small journal will be provided or you are welcome to bring your own. Pre-registration is required.

Pre-registration contact information:

Phone: 712-527-9685

Email: millsccbia@hotmail.com

Pre-registering helps us plan accordingly for programs.

Tiny Nature Adventures-

The first Wednesday of each month, 10:00-11:00 am. Nature themed activities for children 3-5 years old. Adult must stay with child and pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 712-527-9685.

We will be outdoors when weather allows so dress accordingly! Pony Creek Nature Center, 56235 Deacon Road.

January 2nd, February 6th, March 6th

Pony Creek Nature Center

56235 Deacon Road
Pacific Junction, IA

712-527-9685

Hours: Monday thru Friday
9:00am to 3:00 pm



Mills County Conservation Board:

Contact information

Mills County
Conservation
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51561

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MCC Staff:

Jerad Getter, Director
Dessa Montgomery, Naturalist
Zach Kohlhoff, Specialist
Jesse Ayers, Technician

MCC Board Members:

George Marshall, Malvern
Lana White, Hastings
Kreg Kinzle, Glenwood
Ted Golka, Glenwood
Debra Swirmiky, Glenwood



The Mills County Conservation Board is committed to providing the citizens of Mills County with quality outdoor recreation areas and opportunities for environmental education experiences. Please take advantage of these services and visit the nearly 1,800 acres of public land available!

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MILLS COUNTY CONSERVATION
56235 DEACON RD
PACIFIC JUNCTION, IA 51561



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