

nature news

MAY - AUGUST 2024

Polk County Conservation | PROGRAMS & NEWS



Barred owl fledgling photo by: Eric Williamson



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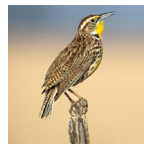
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OUTSide



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Horses Helping
Heroes



I3
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Through
the Lens



I3
Native Plant
Sale



I4
Summer
Skills



HOURS OF OPERATION:

Mon - Fri | 9 am - 4 pm
Saturday | 10 am - 4 pm
Sunday & Open Holidays | Noon - 4 pm
Closed Sunday | DEC - FEB

**JESTER PARK
OUTDOOR RECREATION &
WELLNESS CENTER**

SUMMER HOURS: *(Memorial Day - Labor Day)*

Thurs - Sat | 10 am - 4 pm
Sunday, Memorial Day,
& Labor Day | Noon - 4 pm

FALL & WINTER HOURS: *(until May 28, 2024)*

Saturday | 10 am - 4 pm
Sunday & Open Holidays | Noon - 4 pm
Closed Sunday | DEC - FEB

*Open extended hours when 6" of snow on ground
for skiing and snowshoeing.*

HOLIDAYS CLOSED:

Presidents' Day
Easter Day
Veterans Day
Thanksgiving Day
Christmas Eve & Christmas Day
New Year's Day

*Polk County Conservation strives to host inclusive,
accessible events and meetings that enable all
individuals to participate. If you anticipate needing
a modification due to a disability or have questions
about accessibility, please contact us at 515-323-5300
or pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov.*

IT'S FINALLY HERE!

This is the summer you've been waiting for. This is the summer Polk County Conservation has been working toward for not just months, but years. In May, two new parks will open offering novel and inspiringly accessible recreation for all.



First, we'll welcome the wildly curious and quietly cautious to **Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake Park**. There is no other place in the country like it. From the website to the parking lot to the beachfront, every space Athene North Shore occupies is designed to be universally accessible. You can learn all about its amazing past and inspiring future here in these pages.

Then a few short weeks later, **Sleepy Hollow** will reopen with a newly constructed all-weather turf surface tubing hill. I invite you to drop in. Relive memories of past visits and take up the challenge of creating new ones. Sleepy Hollow is a recreation destination built for everyday adventure.

But wait. There's more! Construction will begin this summer on the long-planned, long-anticipated **Fourmile Mountain Bike Park**. If all goes as planned, you should be able to peddle trails and terrain rarely found in this part of the Iowa by the time the next Nature News hits your mailbox. Doesn't a cool fall ride under a lush tree canopy sound great?

Grab your friends or family and embrace this summer's new recreation destinations.

See you on the trails!

Richard Leopold
Director
Polk County Conservation





SUSTAINABLE SWITCHES: Saving Water

Running the water while brushing your teeth wastes about 4 gallons of water.

Shutting the water off reduces that amount to less than a quarter gallon. This also goes for shaving, flossing, and any other activities you do at the sink.

THINK next time
you run your **SINK!**

PLOTTING A COMEBACK

GROWING, HARVESTING RARE NATIVE PLANTS



Prairies are considered Iowa's most complex and diverse habitats, offering food, shelter, water, and space for innumerable wildlife. Today, however, this wide-open landscape makes up less than one percent of Iowa's landscape.

It's this uniqueness and rarity that compels Polk County Conservation to actively protect and restore prairies. One of the ways conservation staff does this is through encouraging the growth of hardy plants and flowers that are known to grow locally. But getting access to such rare local seeds can be an expensive endeavor.

Harvesting seed has been identified as one creative solution to the challenge of procuring costly native prairie seed from existing prairies. And in recent years Polk County Conservation has actively planted native prairie plants in production plots for the express

purpose of harvesting even more desirable seed. In 2023 alone, the prairie production plots produced nearly 37 pounds of seed, valued at \$13,398. In addition to the cost savings, the effort gives staff more control over what types of seed they grow and subsequently harvest to fill out its needed inventory.

The prairie seed production plots are located at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt and are jointly managed with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, with the help of many volunteers. The success of the effort is spurring the two organizations to double the capacity of the plots in 2024 and grow up to six additional species of prairie plants.



Scan to Donate

Your investment makes an **impact.**

Support Polk County Conservation's mission to provide quality outdoor recreation, conservation education, and long-term protection of natural heritage.

**Opening Day
 Celebration**

- May 5, 10 am – 4 pm
- Free rentals
- Nature programs
- Recreation demonstrations
- Pontoon boat rides

Location

2816 Shoreline Road
 Des Moines, IA 50320

Website

NorthShoreRecArea.org

Hours of Operation

Park hours:
 Sunrise to Sunset

**Operating hours for Rentals,
 Concessions & Restrooms:**

- Memorial Day-Labor Day
- Mon-Fri: Noon-8 pm
- Sat-Sun: 10 am-8 pm

Rentals

- Single kayaks – \$25
(standard, adaptive)
- Tandem kayaks – \$40
(standard, adaptive)
- Pedal-powered kayaks – \$35
- Trolling motor-powered kayaks – \$45
- Stand-Up Paddleboards – \$30
- Canoes – \$35
- Bikes/trikes – \$20
(standard bikes available via B-Cycle station)
- Pontoon boat – \$350
(driver provided)
- Fishing rods – \$10
- Beach/water wheelchairs – free



All-Natural Fun for One and All

Athene North Shore Recreation Area Opens for Summer

Joy. Confidence. Wonder. Connection. This is what the Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake Park is built to inspire in all who visit the new waterfront park this summer. Opening in May 2024, Athene North Shore is a place where you can achieve something monumental or simply make a special memory. It's a place the entire community can connect with one another and the natural world.



When the park officially opens, you'll see a space perfectly designed to draw people together. All children will mingle together for imaginative play in the natural playscape and spray ground. Paddlers of all skill level and ability will paddle the lake together in adaptive or standard kayaks. Whether on two-wheels or two feet, anglers of all stipes — or should we say scales? — will fish side-by-side on the accessible docks or pontoon boat. Even the list of summer programs will feature topics and teachers that bridge the gaps in both interest and ability.

“There are a few things that the staff at Athene North Shore are very focused on. The first is creating the most welcoming, usable space for all people,” said Devon Boes, Community Outreach and Program

Coordinator. “The other, equally important, is safety – both physical and emotional. And I see these two elements going hand-in-hand. When we create a safe space for everyone, then park users immediately feel it, and know they are surrounded with the support they need to try something new, recreate in a way they never thought possible.”

In addition to the critical built environment and equipment that create safe spaces at Athene North Shore, the staff are all trained to facilitate safe recreation and education opportunities. In addition to first aid and CPR, staff on-site are also trained to assist with safe transfers in and out of recreation equipment, as well as adapt programs to serve a wide range of people for maximum inclusion.

This commitment by staff to build such a safe space is underpinned by



the dedication of community leaders. Athene North Shore is the achieved vision of a group of change-makers who wanted to create a natural space where everyone could enjoy carefree outdoor recreation together. The collective effort by community leaders, designers, accessibility specialists and staff have created a recreation destination that is built upon an all-encompassing welcome, as much as it is dirt and concrete footings.

Athene North Shore is truly a park for all people. IT'S A PARK FOR YOU.



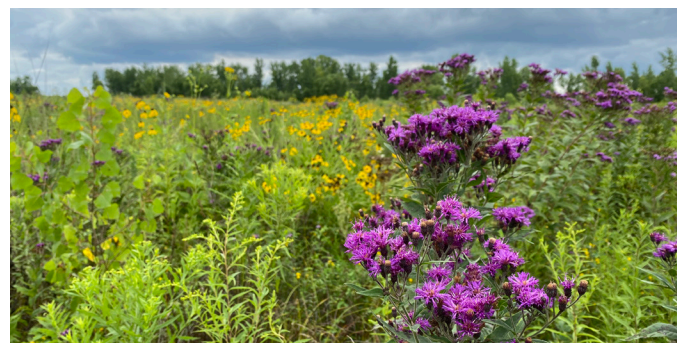
GOOD stewards

As part of Conservation's promise of transparency to the voters, this space in Nature News is dedicated to providing updates on projects — large and small — that are funded with Polk County Water and Land Legacy bond dollars.



ICON Water Trail Site

Conservation invested \$1.5 million toward the design of its future ICON water trails site in downtown Des Moines. Initial plans include fish habitat and ripple features for kayaking. The water trail park will sit along the Raccoon River just to the east of the Fleur Drive.



Trails End Wildlife Seeding

Construction is nearly complete on the wetlands within this expansive wildlife area. Next up, staff have planted more than \$80 thousand in native prairie plants. This flora will play a vital role in creating wildlife habitat and support natural filtration of the wetland water.



New Playgrounds

Colorful and full of nature themes, there are two new playgrounds at Easter Lake Park and one new playground at Thomas Mitchell Park. These are exciting attractions for kids with slides, climbing gyms, and merry-go-rounds ready for play in summer 2024.



Alleman Park

Conservation purchased more than 40 acres in the community of Alleman. The land is situated along Fourmile Creek, which will allow staff to continue its restoration work along this flood-prone waterway, as well as promote recreation as the town's first and only public park.

Septic Tank Updates

Conservation's construction team recently learned that some of the underground septic tanks in the parks were reaching their expiration dates. Dollars are now committed to replacing the tanks and creating a long-term maintenance and replacement schedule.

SPRING/SUMMER
PROGRAMS & EVENTS
Refer to the QR Code OR visit LeadingYouOutdoors.org
to get detailed descriptions and to register.

For any questions, call 515-323-5300 or
email us at pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov.

LEARN ENGAGE PLAY

02
MAY

Toddler Tales - Wiggly Worms

10-10:30 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 2-5 | FREE | No registration required

15
MAY

Wildlife Monitoring for Snakes

6-7:30 pm
Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Sandhill Unit
All ages | FREE | No registration required

VOLUNTEER

04
MAY

Brandon Lay Challenge Trail Volunteer Work Day

9 am-3 pm | Jester Park Equestrian Center
Ages: 18+ | FREE | Registration required

17
MAY

Catch-n-Croakers

8:30-10 pm
Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, Longhouse
All ages | FREE | No registration required

11
MAY

Shinrin Yoku

1-3 pm
Jester Park, Shelter #5
Ages: 12+ | \$20/person | Register by May 9

20
MAY

Hike for Health

9:30-10:30 am
Thomas Mitchell Park, Pond Parking Lot
Ages: 10+ | FREE | Register by May 19

21
MAY

Women in the Woods with Wine - Pollination Celebration

7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 21+ | \$15/person | Register by May 19

22
MAY

Story Tellabration - Born to be Wild

10-10:30 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 2+ | FREE | No registration

25
MAY

Nature Art

1-2:30 pm | All ages
Jester Park Nature Center
FREE | No registration required

**Horse whispers
in the woods**

A women's circle
of self-discovery
through the intuitive
and healing power
of horses.
Ages 21+ | Women Only

Registration Required
6-8 pm | \$40/person
May 30, June 13 & 27, Aug 8

JESTER PARK
EQUESTRIAN
CENTER

ALL PROGRAM DETAILS
SCAN HERE





sunset yoga

Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 12+ | \$15/person

MAY 20 & JULY 23: 7:30–9 pm
JUNE 24: 8–9:30 pm
AUG 19: 7–8:30 pm

Registration required

30 MAY

Kayak Basics
6–8 pm
Outdoor Rec and Wellness Center
Ages 16+ | \$20/person | Register by May 29

06 JUN

Toddler Tales - Pond Life
10–10:30 am & 11–11:30 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 2–5 | FREE | No registration required

07 JUN

Senior Fishing Day
9 am–Noon | Ages 60+
Easter Lake Event Center
FREE | Register for lunch only by May 24

07 JUN

Family Fishing Basics
1–4 pm
Easter Lake Event Center
Ages: 5+ | FREE | No registration required

08 JUN

Adult Summer Camp Retreat
9 am–3:30 pm
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 18+ | \$50/person | Register by June 6

08 JUN

Shinrin Yoku
9–11 am
Brown's Woods
Ages: 12+ | \$20/person | Register by June 6

13 JUN

**Eco-Bus Trip:
Barns, Bees, Moos, and Kangaroos**
7 am–6:30 pm | Cedar Falls, IA
Ages 18+ | \$120/person | Register by May 30

15 JUN

Canoeing Basics
10:30 am–Noon | Jester Park
Ages: 12+ (under 18 required w/ adult)
\$5/person | Register by June 13

17 JUN

Hike for Health
9:30–10:30 am
Easter Lake Park, Shelter #4
Ages: 10+ | FREE | Register by June 16

18 JUN

Princess Adventures - All About Birds
10–11 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 4–6 | \$5/person | Register by June 14

18 JUN

Women in the Woods with Wine - Fabulous Fishing
7–9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 21+ | \$15/person | Register by June 16

20 JUN

Pony Tales
11 am
Jester Park Equestrian Center
All ages | FREE | No registration required



LGBTQ+ OUTside

ADULT MEETUP
5:30–7 pm | Ages: 18+ | Registration required

JUNE 11: Intro to Disc Golf
\$5/person | Southwoods Park, WDM

JULY 9: Kayak & Paddleboarding
\$15/person | Raccoon River Park, WDM

AUG 13: Bouldering & Axe Throwing
\$5/person | Outdoor Rec & Wellness Center

JUNIOR HORSE ADVENTURES SUMMER CAMP



Jester Park Equestrian Center
Sessions: June: 3–6, 17, 18
July: 8–11
Ages: 8–12 | 9 am–Noon
\$500/child/session | Pre-Registration required

PRAIRIE STOMP SUMMER MUSIC SERIES

JUNE 20 | 6–8 pm
BRIAN HERRIN DUO
Jester Park Nature Center
All ages | FREE
Vendor: Thelma's Ice Cream Sandwiches

21 JUN

Pints in the Park
7:30–9 pm
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 21+ | \$15/person | Register by June 19

21 JUN

Full Moon Hike
8–9 pm
Thomas Mitchell Park, Pond Parking Lot
All ages | FREE | No registration required

22 JUN

Pond Study
10–11 am | Ages: 3+
Yellow Banks Park
FREE | No registration required

23 JUN

The Epic Adventure of Recycle Rabbit Puppet Show
1–2 pm | Jester Park Nature Center
All ages | FREE | No registration

DROP IN
when you want to go all out.



SleepHollowEvents.com

PROGRAM DETAILS
SCAN HERE







Horses Helping Heroes

A program specifically designed to help our Veterans.

SUMMER SESSIONS Jester Park Equestrian Center
Registration Required | All Ages

HEROES: CO-ED
Wednesdays @ 6 pm
May 1 – June 6 | June 26 – July 31 | Aug 14 – Sept 18
FREE for Veterans & Service Members

26 JUN **Story Tellabration - Down at the Pond**
10-10:30 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 2+ | FREE | No registration required

28 JUN **Animal Guided Meditation**
6:30-8 pm
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 12+ | \$15/person | Register by June 26

03 JUL **Toddler Tales - Ladybugs**
10-10:30 am & 11-11:30 am
Jester Park Nature Center
Ages: 2-5 | FREE | No registration required

09 JUL **Princess Adventures - Butterflies**
10-11 am
Easter Lake Event Center
Ages 4-6 | \$5/person | Register by July 5

10 JUL **Toddler Tales - Ladybugs**
10-10:30 am
Easter Lake Event Center
Ages: 2-5 | FREE | No registration required

11 JUL **Eco-Bus trip: Music on the Mississippi**
7 am-6 pm
Moline, IL
Ages 18+ | \$140/person | Register by June 28

12 JUL **Pony Tales**
11 am
Jester Park Equestrian Center
All ages | FREE | No registration required

12 JUL **Shinrin Yoku & Kayaking Combo**
1-4 pm
Jester Park, Shelter #5
Ages: 12+ | \$35/person | Register by July 10

13 JUL **Pond Exploration**
11 am-Noon
Thomas Mitchell Park, Pond Parking Lot
All ages | FREE | No registration required

13 JUL **Kayak Basics**
10 am-Noon
Outdoor Rec and Wellness Center
Ages 16+ | \$20/person | Register by July 12

16 JUL **Women in the Woods with Wine - I am Not Lost, I am Geocaching**
7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center
Ages 21+ | \$15/person | Register by July 14



JULY 18 | 6-8 pm
FLYING SILOS
Jester Park Nature Center
All ages | FREE
Vendor: Thelma's Ice Cream Sandwiches

19 JUL **Family Fun Night**
6-8 pm | Outdoor Rec and Wellness Center
All ages | \$5/person (FREE under 4 yrs)
No registration required

20 JUL **Creek Walk**
10-11 am
Thomas Mitchell Park, Shelter #1
Ages 6+ | FREE | No registration required



NATIVE PLANT SALE

MAY 18 & JUNE 15 | 11 am-2 pm
Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center

Polk County Conservation and Prairie Landscapes of Iowa are teaming up to offer two native plant sales this spring. All species for sale are native to Iowa, and once established, require minimal care while providing numerous benefits to our wildlife and landscapes.



JESTER PARK NATURE CENTER

THROUGH THE LENS:
DSM Camera Club
Exhibition | **MAY 6 - AUGUST 25**



Waiting for Love
by Deb Shoning



Thistles
by Larry Mendenhall

21 JUL **Moonlight Paddle**
7:30-9 pm
Jester Park, Shelter #5
Ages: 18+ | \$5/person | Register by July 18

22 JUL **Hike for Health**
9:30-10:30 am
Fort Des Moines Park, Shelter #3
Ages: 10+ | FREE | Register by June 21

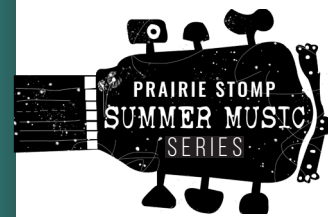
24 JUL **Story Tellabration - Color, Color Everywhere**
10-10:30 am | Jester Park Nature Center
All ages | FREE | No registration required

01 AUG **Toddler Tales - Snakes**
10-10:30 am & 11-11:30 am | Ages: 2-5
Jester Park Nature Center
FREE | No registration required

03 AUG **Insect Hunt**
10-11 am | All ages
Fort Des Moines Park
FREE | No registration required

FOR PROGRAM DETAILS
SCAN HERE





AUGUST 8 | 6-8 pm
JAKE SCHRODT
 Jester Park Nature Center
 All ages | FREE
 Vendor: *Thelma's Ice Cream Sandwiches*



GUIDED TRAIL RIDES

STARTING JUNE 14

Jester Park Equestrian Center
 Fri & Sat | 9:30 am, 11 am, 2 pm
 Ages: 8+ | \$80/rider
Registration required

**09
AUG**

The Magic of Nature
 10-11 am
 Easter Lake Event Center
 Ages: 3-6 | FREE | *Register by Aug 5*

**09
AUG**

Pints in the Park
 7:30-9 pm
 Easter Lake Event Center
 Ages: 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by Aug 5*

**10
AUG**

Adult Summer Camp Retreat
 9 am-3:30 pm
 Easter Lake Event Center
 Ages: 18+ | \$50/person | *Register by Aug 8*

**10
AUG**

Creek Walk
 11 am-Noon
 Jester Park, *Shelter #5*
 All ages | FREE | *No registration required*

**11
AUG**

Meteor Shower Watch
 8:30-10 pm
 Yellow Banks Park, *Prairieview Shelter*
 All ages | FREE | *No registration required*

**11
AUG**

Geology Rocks
 1-2 pm
 Easter Lake Event Center
 All ages | FREE | *No registration required*

**12
AUG**

Dog Days of Summer
 6-7:30 pm
 Jester Park Nature Center
 All ages | FREE | *Register by Aug 10*

**15
AUG**

Pony Tales
 11 am
 Jester Park Equestrian Center
 All ages | FREE | *No registration required*

**16
AUG**

Wild Night Life & Hike
 8-9:30 pm
 Jester Park Nature Center
 Ages: 5+ | \$5/person | *Register by Aug 15*

**19
AUG**

Hike for Health
 9:30-10:30 am
 Brown's Woods
 Ages: 10+ | FREE | *Register by Aug 18*

**20
AUG**

**Women in the Woods with Wine -
Prairie Ponderings**
 7-9 pm | Jester Park Nature Center
 Ages 21+ | \$15/person | *Register by Aug 18*

**22
AUG**

**Eco Bus Trip: Pearl Buttons &
Historic Pine Grist Mill**
 7 am-7:30 pm | Muscatine, IA
 Ages 18+ | \$115/person | *Register by Aug 8*

**24
AUG**

Shinrin Yoku
 9-11 am
 Fort Des Moines Park, *Shelter #3*
 Ages: 12+ | \$20/person | *Register by Aug 22*

**28
AUG**

Story Tellabration - I Love Bugs!
 10-10:30 am
 Jester Park Nature Center
 Ages 2+ | FREE | *No registration required*



JESTER PARK EQUESTRIAN CENTER
*Sessions: June: 10-13, 24-27
 July: 8-11, 15-18, 22-25, July 29-Aug 1
 Aug: 5-8*
 Ages: 9-12 | 9 am-Noon
 \$500/child/session | *Pre-Registration required*



VOLUNTEER JOIN OUR PROGRAM!

Make a positive impact protecting wildlife and preserving the natural world. Scan the QR code or visit us: bit.ly/PCCVolunteerE-News





SUMMER SKILLS

10 am - Noon
 Outdoor Rec & Wellness Center
 Ages: 10-16 | \$10/person/session
Register 2 days prior to session

<p>JUNE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11: Archery 13: Geocaching 18: Air Rifle 21: Kayaking 25: Survival Hike 	<p>JULY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9: Archery 11: Kayaking 16: Air Rifle 18: Survival Hike 23: Geocaching
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OWLS
 OLDER, WISER, LIVELIER SENIORS

11 am - Noon | Jester Park Nature Center
 Ages: 12+ | FREE | *No registration required*

MAY 7: Osprey Recovery

**JUNE 4: Cartoons & Conservation:
A Visit with Ding Darling**

JULY 2: The National Parks Bucks List

**JULY 17: Owls of Iowa
(Easter Lake Events Center, 1-2 pm)**

**AUG 6: Adventures in Peru
w/ an Iowa Naturalist**

ALL PROGRAM DETAILS
SCAN HERE

14

15



Polk County Conservation
 12130 NW 128th Street
 Granger, IA 50109

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1. Beaver Creek Greenbelt
2. Brown's Woods
3. Carney Marsh
4. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
5. Chichaqua Valley Trail
6. Easter Lake Park
7. Eagle Roost Wildlife Area
8. Engeldinger Marsh
9. Fort Des Moines Park
10. Fourmile Creek Greenway
11. Gay Lea Wilson Trail
12. Great Western Trail
13. High Trestle Trail
14. Jester Park
15. Lauridsen Skatepark
16. Mally's Park
17. Mark C. Ackelson Trail
18. Oralabor Gateway Trail
19. Strasser Woods State Preserve
20. Sycamore Trails
21. Thomas Mitchell Park
22. Trestle to Trestle Trail
23. Yellow Banks Park