

# Nature News

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION • 2012 NATURE PROGRAMS AND NEWS

## CONTENTS

PCC News  
pg 2-4

Public Programs  
pg 5-8

Trips  
pg 9

Summer Camps  
pg 10

Volunteer  
Opportunities  
pg 11

Map  
pg 12

Yearly Calendar  
pg 14

Equestrian Center  
Calendar  
pg 15

OWLS  
Older, Wiser,  
Livelier Seniors  
pg 16

## Blanding's Turtle Sightings

When staff spotted a turtle with a sunny yellow throat, they knew it was something special—a Blanding's turtle, one of Iowa's threatened species. "I almost drove right past it, but something about its color, shell shape and movement struck me as being different from the myriad of painted turtles we typically see out here," said Doug Sheeley, Polk County Natural Resources Supervisor. Sheeley and Lael Neal, Natural Resource Worker, encountered the turtle at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt in September. A few weeks later, another Blanding's turtle was found about three miles from the first one. The last report of a Blanding's turtle at Chichaqua was in 2007 when researchers from Drake University found a single individual during a box turtle study.




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"I almost drove right past it, but something about its color, shell shape and movement struck me as being different..."

-Doug Sheeley, PCC Natural  
Resource Supervisor

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Blanding's turtles need diverse, connected wetlands like those at Chichaqua to survive. They live in shallow marshes and, like other turtles, surface to bask on logs. Lucky wildlife watchers might glimpse their bright yellow neck and chin through binoculars, but Blanding's turtles, shyer and rarer than painted turtles, quickly plop into the water. Up close, tiny flakes of yellow speckle the turtle's dark shell and legs. Males wear a black "mustache." Adult turtles are typically eight to ten inches long and may weigh three pounds.

Blanding's turtles spend more time on land than many other turtles. Both

males and females journey from wetland to wetland, chomping crayfish, frogs, and snails. Unlike most Iowa turtles, Blanding's turtles can swallow food out of water and eat earthworms, slugs, grass, and berries.

In June, females search on land for sandy nesting areas. They may travel more than half a mile to bury their eggs. The eggs and hatchlings encounter many obstacles before reaching adulthood. Raccoons, foxes, and skunks snack on the eggs, and fish, snakes, and birds eat young turtles.

Adults face few natural predators and can live more than 70 years. They defend themselves by shutting out danger. The turtles can pull in their heads and close the front of their shells with their hinged plastrons (A box turtle can close its shell completely.)

Blanding's turtles are found in west-central Nebraska, across the Great Lakes Region, and into western Pennsylvania and New York. Most states in the turtles' range list them as threatened or endangered.

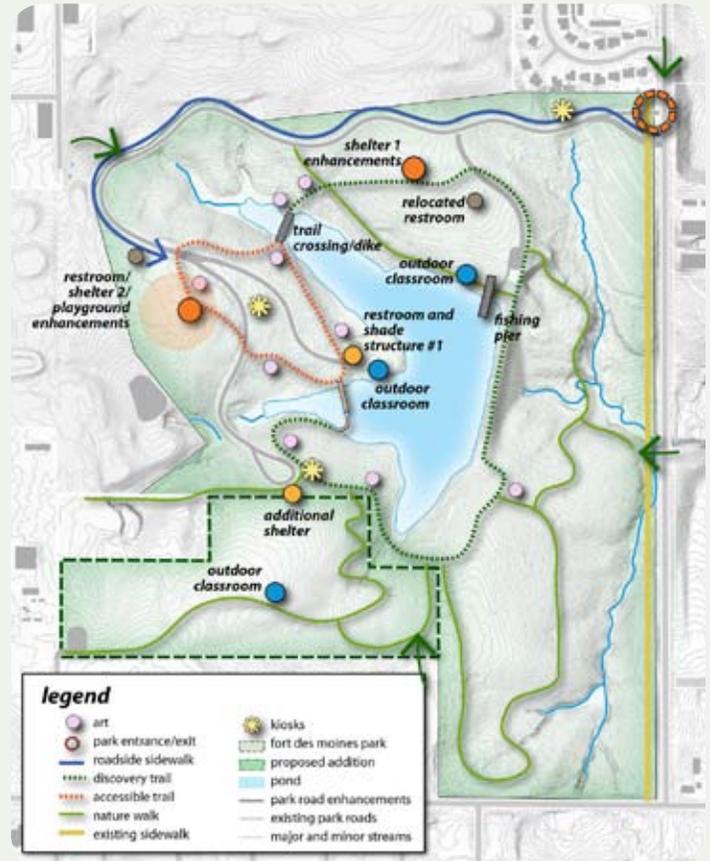
## Fort Des Moines Park Master Plan Near Completion

In January 2012, another master plan will be completed for the Polk County Conservation park system. Fort Des Moines park is the fifth area that has gone through the master plan process. This 117-acre park, located at 7200 SE 5th St. in Des Moines, features a 14-acre lake, two picnic shelters, a playground, nature trails, and an arboretum.

Public input was an integral part of the plan. PCC hosted two public meetings, created an online feedback survey, installed Guide by Cell signage with informational messages, and relied on input from our Advisory Committee. Staff and consultants from RDG Planning and Design compiled, reviewed, and analyzed this feedback and incorporated it into the plan when possible and feasible.

Key recommendations within the plan include:

- improved pedestrian connectivity to the park and adjacent partners
- improved exterior and interior park views; removal of perimeter fence
- development of a drive and parking lot at the north end of the pond
- expanded nature trails and connections with adjacent partners
- development of a pond boardwalk, trail crossing/dike, and fishing pier
- enhanced play area and include a wet play feature
- enhanced boat ramp area with a shade structure, restroom, and improved parking
- enhanced interpretive signage and kiosks
- development of outdoor classrooms for environmental education
- enhanced partnerships with neighbors, schools, museum, zoo, golf course, and others



Fort Des Moines Master Plan Map



### Guide by Cell....Hear what you have been missing!

The Polk County Conservation cell phone audio tour has expanded to 13 PCC parks, trails and natural areas in 2011. Guide by Cell was implemented in 2010 and since that time more than 5,900 callers have listened to 7,000 audio messages on natural history and unique park features. Hundreds of callers have taken time to leave feedback and share their thoughts. Callers representing 42 states have heard over 175 hours of messages ranging from frog and bird calls, to invasive species education, to messages highlighting the arrival of the baby bison this summer.

Next time you visit a PCC park bring your cell phone and dial 515-418-9207 followed by the number and the # key and hear what you have been missing!

### Ginny Malcomson Accepts Accounting Clerk Position

This summer Polk County Conservation Board hired Ginny Malcomson as an Accounting Clerk with the Administration Unit. Ginny began working for Polk County Conservation in 1996 in the Administration Unit and later on in the Environmental Education Unit as a naturalist. During her many years as a naturalist, she gave numerous programs, taught summer camp activities and coordinated the Nature Friends program.

When not giving programs, Ginny continued working with the Administration Unit implementing a file management system of over 50 years of files. In her spare time, Ginny loves to travel, hike, and bike with her family. We're glad to have Ginny on board!



## 2011 Great Outdoors Fund Friends Celebration

The Great Outdoors Fund hosted their annual Friends Celebration on Friday, September 16th, at the Jester Park Lodge. Corporate, family, and individual friends mixed and mingled while enjoying appetizers, games, and beverages on the Lodge deck overlooking Saylorville Lake. Delicious food, a silent auction and a live auction energized by Jerry Kluger were just a few of the evening activities that guests enjoyed. Everyone also appreciated receiving an autographed copy of Ty Smedes' photographic book on Iowa eagles.

Contributions to the Fund are invaluable! Annual Friend memberships allow the Fund to support numerous local conservation and recreation projects. They will continue to thoughtfully support quality projects and serve as a catalyst to leverage more funding for local outdoor organizations.

### Thank you to our Friends...

#### Corporate Friends:

Brick Gentry Law Firm  
Bridgestone  
Casey's General Stores, Inc.  
Des Moines Orthopaedic Surgeons  
Growing Green Communities  
Holmes Murphy  
Hubbell Realty Company  
Hy-Vee, Inc.  
Iowa Health Systems-Des Moines  
Jester Insurance Services  
Knapp Properties  
MidAmerican Energy  
Pioneer Hi-Bred  
Prairie Meadows Racetrack and Casino  
Quik Trip Corporation  
RDG Planning & Design  
Scheels  
Shive Hattery  
Snyder & Associates  
The Graham Group, Inc.  
The Iowa Clinic, P.C.

#### Individual, Family & Company Friends:

Jeff Aden  
Kip Albertson  
Amy Andres  
Dr. Susan D Andrews  
Susan Attari  
Daniel P Bartlett  
Doris Beckett

Susan & Greg Bridge  
Capital City Equipment  
Carol Ann Carlson/Mark Lowman  
Mary Cooper  
Joe & Sheryl Corfits  
Pat Boddy & Rob Davis  
Rusty & Shannon Doner  
Jo Duke  
Kate Garst  
Carl & Marcene Grant  
Linda Halbrook  
Sue Haskell  
Fred & Charlotte Hubbell  
Jim & Ellen Hubbell  
David Hurd  
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation  
Deanna Jackson  
Barbara John  
James Johnson  
Jeff & Joy Johnson  
John & Mary Keck  
Keri Kinnaird  
Kenton Klein Sr.  
Mark Kubik  
Ronald Kuntz  
Mike & Jane LaMair  
Tom Levis  
Ian & Danielle Lin  
Steve & Deb Lindner  
Chris & Gail McCarthy  
James & Deborah Miller

Carylann Mucha  
Mike Myszewski/Martha James  
Erin Netteland  
Robert Nicholson  
Dawn & Dean O'Connor  
Tony Padden  
Dennis & Becky Parker  
Loran Parker, M.D.  
Jeff & Louisa Perry  
Ed & Camille Power  
Ray D. Putz  
Michael & Ann Richards  
Steven Rottler  
Steve Sanders  
Dick & Nelda Sampel  
Barbara J Schmidt  
Judy Sheets  
David & Kim Shelquist  
Terry F Simpson  
Karen Sol  
James Sommers  
Marilyn Staples  
Sherrilyn Stewart  
Mike & Roni Sweeney  
Arlene Sweet  
Mike & Jan Tebo  
Rick & Nan Tollakson  
Jay Vonderhaar  
Jerry & Margaret Weiner  
Trelen Wilson  
James Youngblood



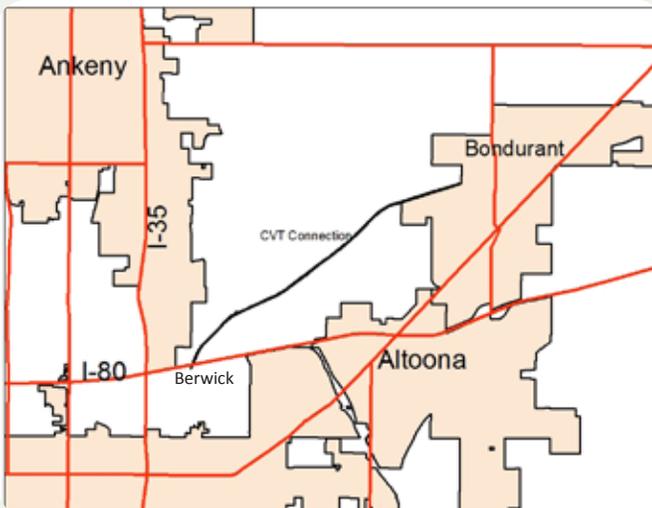
## Chichaqua Valley Trail Extension Receives State Recreation Trails Funding

Polk County Conservation Board was recently awarded \$753,750 through the State Recreational Trails Program for the Chichaqua Valley Trail Connector project. This 5.5 mile trail connection follows an abandoned Union Pacific railroad that spans between Bondurant and Berwick. Grant dollars will be used to acquire the former rail line corridor. Additional funding for construction on this 10' paved multi-use trail will be sought after in the coming years.

The west end of the new extension will intersect with the Gay Lea Wilson Trail in the town of Berwick at Mally's Park. The east end of the trail will connect with the town of Bondurant and tie-in to the existing Chichaqua Valley Trail which ends at Baxter in Jasper County.

The trail will effectively serve the needs of recreation enthusiasts who enjoy non-motorized activities such as bicycling, rollerblading, walking, jogging, and nature viewing. This trail will link other existing and planned regional trails, such as Des Moines' and Ankeny's Gay Lea Wilson Trails, the Neal Smith Trail, and the High Trestle Trail. All of these projects have either been completed or are in progress.

If you are interested in lending volunteer and/or financial support towards this project, please contact Kami Rankin at [kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov) or (515) 323-5363.



*The new trail extension will connect the Gay Lea Wilson Trail in Berwick with the town of Bondurant and tie-in to the existing Chichaqua Valley Trail*

## PCC Advisory Committee Member Applications Now Being Accepted

The Polk County Conservation Advisory Committee was established in 2007. Approximately 25 members serve on the committee for two year terms with a goal of providing professional feedback to Polk County Conservation staff and board members on various planning and programming issues.

The Committee meets four times per year. Members are asked to offer their ideas and professional expertise on discussion items, gather public perception on various topics, and conduct external research in order to accomplish committee goals.

Polk County Conservation is now accepting membership applications to be a part of this advisory committee. New members will begin their term in January of 2012. We enjoy working with committee members for the benefit of Polk County's outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental education initiatives, and natural resource protection.

If you are interested in serving on the Advisory Committee, please contact Kami Rankin at (515) 323-5363 or [kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:kami.rankin@polkcountyiowa.gov).

## The Tomorrow Plan

The Greater Des Moines area is in the process of shaping a sustainable development plan called The Tomorrow Plan. This 20-month effort (launched in September) involves all 17 communities, 4 counties and a whole host of businesses, non-profits, and other institutions in Central Iowa. This plan will propose ideas for a vibrant and enduring future, considering social, economic, and environmental factors.

Applied Ecological Services (AES), an international firm based in the Upper Midwest, is responsible for many of the environmental aspects of the plan, including addressing water quality, natural resources, wildlife/habitat and overall environmentally sensitive areas. AES has convened a conservation advisory panel to assist with this work, including review of basic sustainability principles and identifying the Greater Metro area's most critical areas to preserve, protect, and/or restore. This process will update and enhance the "Save the Pieces" project that Polk County Conservation began many years ago.

You can help with this task. You may know of particularly high quality "hidden gems" of the Metro area's landscape and waterways—that have not yet been discovered and catalogued. Or maybe you have a strong opinion about where the big REAP investment should be in 2012 in the Metro area. If you know of such a place, please do your best to describe it and locate it on a map and send the information to Dennis Parker at 11407 NW Jester Park Drive, Granger, IA 50109 or email [dennis.parker@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:dennis.parker@polkcountyiowa.gov) so we can do our best to make sure these sites are recorded for future generations and conservation.

Each year Polk County naturalists select a variety of programs we feel the public will enjoy. Our programs have been designed with you in mind, so they are both educational and fun.

- Program and event information is available by visiting: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org) or by calling our administrative office at: (515) 323-5300, Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
- Fees and registration are not required unless otherwise noted.
- Many programs are family-oriented and are designed so all ages can participate.
- Outdoor programs will be canceled if there is lightning or other extreme weather conditions such as wind, cold, or rain.
- Programs are developed for beginners. No prior experience is required unless noted.
- Youth and adult groups such as church, scouts, and 4-H are always welcome.
- No refunds will be given after the registration deadline.

## Owl Prowl

**January 20 @ 5:30-6:30 p.m.**

**Yellow Banks Park, tent camping area**

Bundle up and join a naturalist for a campfire program to learn about owls. After a brief discussion about these flying predators of the night, we will go for a hike and learn how to call three different species of owls. All ages welcome.

## Cross-Country Ski Basics

**January 21 @ 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.**

**Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge, WDM**

Learn the basics of cross-country skiing and practice your skills on beautiful woodland trails. Proper clothing, equipment, and skiing techniques will be discussed before we practice our new skills on the trails. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required; deadline is January 19. Minimum age 12. Fee: \$10 (includes skis, boots, and poles).

## Ice Fishing Clinic

**January 21 @ 12:00-3:00 p.m.**

**Fort Des Moines Park, boat ramp**

Come and learn the basics of ice fishing and get some hands-on experience. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license. Bait and poles will be provided. Bring something to sit on and dress warmly. All ages welcome.

## Cross-Country Ski Basics

**January 28 @ 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 12:30-2:30 p.m.**

**Chichaqua Longhouse**

See description for January 21st Cross-Country Ski program. Pre-registration required, sign up for the 10:00 or 12:30 class; deadline is January 26. Minimum age 12. Fee: \$10 (includes skis, boots, and poles).

## Snowshoe Hike

**January 28 @ 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.**

**Thomas Mitchell Park, meet at pond parking lot &**

**2:00-3:30 p.m.**

**Jester Park, Shelter #5**

Learn how easy and fun snowshoeing can be while experiencing the great outdoors. Wear warm waterproof boots. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required, sign up for the 10:00 or 2:00 class; deadline is January 26. Minimum age 8. Fee: \$5 (includes snowshoes).

## Do More Outdoors

**January 29 @ 1:00-4:00 p.m.**

**Chichaqua Longhouse**

Come enjoy the great outdoors this winter and have fun playing in the snow. Ongoing activities include snowshoeing, cross country skiing (for teens and older), and winter hikes. There will be plenty of snowy fun like snow painting and sculpturing too. Indoor programming will include topics like keeping safe and warm in the winter and how to make a winter survival kit. Co-sponsored by Iowa Health Des Moines.

## Hog Wild

**February 2 @ 6:30-7:30 p.m.**

**Urbandale Public Library**

Iowa is known for its hogs, but there is more than one kind of “hog” in Iowa. Come get “hog wild” with a Polk County Conservation naturalist as we discuss the ground hog. All ages welcome.

## Ice Fishing Clinic

**February 4 @ 12:00-3:00 p.m.**

**Jester Park, Shelter #5**

See description for January 21st Ice Fishing program. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license.

## Indoor Kayaking Basics

February 4 @ 6:00-8:00 p.m.

Urbandale Public Pool, 7201 Aurora Ave., Urbandale

Got a case of cabin fever? Let's go kayaking on a cold winter day! Learn the basics of recreational kayaking from a PCC naturalist in the comfort of an indoor pool. Participants will learn about types of kayaks, equipment, techniques, self rescues, and have a chance to practice skills on the water. Dress to get wet and bring a towel and a dry change of clothes. All equipment is provided. Pre-registration is required; deadline is January 20. Minimum age 18. Fee: \$15.



## The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles

February 7 @ 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Jester Park Lodge

Join local author/photographer Ty Smedes for a slide presentation which will reveal many incredibly interesting discoveries about the bald eagle and how they go about their every-day lives here in Iowa! See eagles eating fish while on the wing, photos which illustrate the age of younger eagles, an eagle nest diary, eagles flying with icicles on their toes, eagles diving, catching fish, and much more. Learn how researchers track bald eagle movements, where eagles come from that winter in Iowa. Listen to stories of confrontations between bald eagles and other species. This presentation will reveal many highlights of Ty's new book "The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles", which he will be signing and offering for sale.

## Cross-Country Ski Basics

February 12 @ 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Chichaqua Longhouse

See description for January 21st class. Class will be canceled without snow. Pre-registration required; deadline is February 9. Minimum age 12. Fee: \$10 (includes skis, boots, and poles).

## Ice Fishing Clinic

February 12 @ 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Easter Lake Park, Shelter #2

See description for January 21st Ice Fishing program. Anyone over the age of 16 will need a valid fishing license.

## Tricky Tracks

February 18 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Jester Park Lodge

Have you seen all of the animals that live in the woods or in your neighborhood? Come to this program and you'll learn how to find the signs that tell you without having to see them. All ages welcome.

## Birds Adaptations

February 18 @ 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Jester Park Lodge

Birds of a feather flock together...but different beaks, feet and other adaptations help birds catch insects, prey or gather seeds. Utilizing various bird taxidermy mounts you will help identify how each bird survives in their habitat. A free fun family outing!

## Winter Hike

February 25 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Brown's Woods, meet in parking lot

All the leaves are gone and the sky is gray, so join us for a walk on a winter day. Search for mammal tracks and learn how animals survive the winter. All ages welcome.

## Bald Eagle Watch

February 26 @ 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Saylorville Lake and Jester Park Lodge

Stop by the Saylorville Visitors Center to learn about our national symbol, the bald eagle. Then venture out to different areas around the lake to observe them in their natural setting. The Jester Park Lodge will be hosting "Spirit", a live eagle used for education. Hourly programs starting at 1:00 p.m. will give you a close look at this amazing species. All ages welcome.

## Indoor Kayaking Basics

March 3 @ 6:00-8:00 p.m.

Urbandale Public Pool, 7201 Aurora Ave., Urbandale

See description for February 4th Indoor Kayaking Basics. Pre-registration is required; deadline is February 17. Minimum age 18. Fee: \$15.

Program Registration: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)

## Unhuggables

March 6 @ 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Jester Park Lodge

Explore the truth about snakes, spiders, and other animals we find difficult to love. All ages welcome.

## Wild Night Life & Hike

March 20 @ 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Jester Park, Camp Area 5

Join PCC naturalists for a campfire program about the wild night life in Jester Park. A short hike will follow as we search for some of these nocturnal animals. Afterward enjoy eating s'mores around the campfire. Pre-registration is required; deadline is March 16. Fee: \$5.

## Spring Fling

March 21

Jester Park Lodge

Reptiles from 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Mammal Mania from 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Come for one, or stay for both. Bring a sack lunch and enjoy a spring picnic or eat inside the Lodge. Wear your hiking shoes to explore the great park trails before or after the programs. All ages welcome.

## Mud Hike

March 22 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Brown's Woods, meet in parking lot

&

1:00-2:00 p.m.

Thomas Mitchell Park, meet in pond parking lot

Join a PCC naturalist to discover what's happening in the woods on the first day of spring! The trails could be muddy, snowy, or dry as a bone in March. Wear boots or shoes that can get dirty. All ages welcome.

## Rain Barrel Workshop

March 24 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. and 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Jester Park Shop

Did you know 50% of the pollution in our lakes and rivers is washed in by storm water? One way to slow down storm water runoff is to install a rain barrel. A short discussion about ways to collect and use runoff water will be held before participants construct their own rain barrel. All materials and tools will be provided. Make sure you are able to transport your 55-gallon barrel back to your home after the workshop. Pre-registration required; deadline is March 16. Sign up for the 9:00 or 10:30 class. Fee: \$50.

## Ticks and Lyme Disease in Iowa

April 3 @ 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Jester Park Lodge

Come find out the real story about ticks and get the facts about Lyme disease in Iowa, one of the most controversial illnesses of our time. We'll discuss where ticks live, how ticks find a host, how to remove a tick, and what the symptoms of Lyme disease are. This program is geared for adults.

## Rain Barrel Workshop

April 14, 9:00-10:00 a.m. and 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Jester Park Shop

See March 24 Rain Barrel Workshop description. Pre-registration required; deadline is April 6. Sign up for the 9:00 or 10:30 class. Fee: \$50.

## Geocaching 101

April 21 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Chichaqua Longhouse

Never heard of geocaching or always wanted to give it a try? Geocaching is a high-tech scavenger hunt using GPS. Come learn the basics and try finding several geocaches hidden just for you at Chichaqua. Pre-registration required; deadline is April 13. Minimum age 8. Fee: \$5.

## Earth Day Tree Planting

April 22 @ 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Location TBD

Join Polk County Conservation staff to celebrate Earth Day with a tree planting project in one of our local parks. Check our website at [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org) for the location when details become available. All ages welcome.

## Spring Wildflower Hike

April 28 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Brown's Woods, meet in parking lot

Enjoy a beautiful spring day as we hike through the woods to view and identify the dazzling display of spring wildflowers. All ages welcome.



## Nature Friends Preschoolers Exploring Nature

**3-5-year olds with an adult**  
**6:30 - 7:30 p.m.**

Join a naturalist in a nature adventure! We will explore a different nature topic each evening through stories, sharing time, guided exploration, and art activities. Snacks will be provided.

**Fee:** \$7 per program

Participate in a Park Passport Program. Attend five different programs, each located at a different park and receive a Nature Friend Explorer Pack. Participants must record program name, location and date with the speaker's initials on their passport. Turn the passport in at the Conservation Office at Jester Park or Raccoon River Nature Lodge to receive your Nature Friend Explorer Pack. One pack per child please.

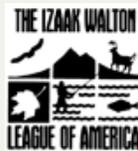
**April 9** – Planting a Rainbow  
*at Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge*

**April 24**– Wiggly Worms  
*at Jester Park, Shelter #5*

**May 7** – It's Windy  
*at Peony Park, 1100 63rd St., West Des Moines*

**May 22** – Silly Salamander  
*at Fort Des Moines Park, Shelter #2*

To register for Nature Friends programs, call the West Des Moines Parks and Recreation Office at (515) 222-3444 or visit [www.wdm-ia.com](http://www.wdm-ia.com). These programs are co-sponsored by the Des Moines Chapter of the Izaak Walton League and West Des Moines Parks and Recreation.



## Park Packs

**Nature-Themed Backpacks**  
**Free two-week checkout**

These backpacks come with a field guide and a variety of activities and fun facts to assist in the discovery of a specific nature topic. Themes include: Birds, Trees, Insects, Animals of Iowa, Geology, Life in a Pond, Wildflowers & Plants, Animals of the Night, and Outdoor Skills.

For more information, contact Lori at: (515) 323-5380 or email: [lori.foresman-kirpes@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:lori.foresman-kirpes@polkcountyiowa.gov)

## Master Conservationist

**April 3 - May 15**

This course will cover a variety of topics related to Iowa's natural resources and environmental health. Participants will acquire tools that will help them lead a life that contributes to sustainability. Those who attend the series are eligible to become certified as Master Conservationists through Iowa State University Extension.

To become a Master Conservationist you need to:

- Have an interest in conservation and environmental issues
- Attend hands-on training sessions
- Provide 32 hours of volunteer efforts
- Have a willingness to learn and share ideas

Course topics will include Iowa's physical environment, ecological principles and techniques, wildlife diversity, woodlands, prairies, wetlands, sustainable agriculture and land use, energy and waste reduction, and water quality.

The course will be held on seven consecutive Tuesday nights, April 3 - May 15 from 6:00 - 9:30 p.m. and May 19 from 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Classes will be held in various locations including the Jester Park Lodge, Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, and Des Moines Water Works.

The Master Conservationist program is limited to 30 participants. The registration fee is \$70. Registration deadline is March 27.

## Rental Skis and Snowshoes Available

Interested in trying cross-country skiing or snowshoeing this winter? If so, consider renting a pair from Polk County Conservation. We have 30 sets of snowshoes and cross-country skis for rental. The equipment is sized mainly for adults. Equipment can be reserved in advance by calling (515) 323-5300. Equipment must be picked up and dropped off at Jester Park during normal office hours, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Cross-country ski rental (includes skis, boots, poles): \$8/day

Snowshoe rental (snowshoes only): \$7/day



## Winter Wildlife Viewing

Winter is one of the best times to view wildlife. There aren't any leaves on the trees to block your view, it's quiet, and animals leave awesome tracks in the snow. Plus you are more likely to see animals during the day because they may become more active as the day grows warmer.

One of the most exciting animals to see in the winter is a bald eagle. During the winter months, bald eagles migrate south as far as they need to find food and shelter. They often cluster around open water waiting for an opportunity to snatch a fish. A great spot to catch a glimpse of an eagle is at Yellow Banks Park in southeastern Polk County. Drive down to the boat ramp to get a good view of the Des Moines River and you might see eagles roosting in the trees or sitting on the ice near open water.

Many songbirds are easier to see through the trees during the winter. Dark-eyed juncos, cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, downy woodpeckers and red-bellied woodpeckers can be seen in wooded areas of all our parks. The Jester Park Bird Blind has several feeders set up for viewing birds, while providing you some protection from the elements. A short walk north from Shelter #5, along the park road, will reward you with lots of close-up viewing opportunities if you can be quiet.



*Black capped-chickadee*

Many other animals are active throughout the winter. Squirrels, raccoons, opossums, deer, and foxes are some of the more common animal tracks you might see in your backyard or a county park.

Take a moment from your busy holiday schedules and escape to a county park this winter. You might be surprised what you see if you take the time to look!

### Polk County Conservation Board Members:

Jim Cataldo, *Des Moines*  
Tom Levis, *West Des Moines*  
Michelle McEnany, *Urbandale*  
Tina Mowry-Hadden, *Altoona*  
Mike Smith, *Des Moines*

**Polk County  
Conservation Director:**  
Dennis Parker

## Cross-Country Ski/Snowshoe Day Trip

**February 11 @ 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.**  
**Lime Creek Conservation Area**

Spend a day cross-country skiing or snowshoeing at the Lime Creek Conservation area north of Mason City. There are more than seven miles of groomed ski trails that wind through the forest, restored prairie, and along the Winnebago River. Trails can accommodate all levels of skiers. Designated snowshoe trails are also available. We'll provide the skis and snowshoes, but you are welcome to bring your own if you have them. A hot lunch will be waiting for us at the Lime Creek Nature Center.

- Fee: \$45; includes transportation, equipment, and lunch
- Departure from Jester Park
- Minimum age 12
- Registration deadline is February 3

## Sandhill Crane Bus Trip

**March 24-25**  
**Kearney, Nebraska**

Join us on a trip to the Platte River near Kearney, Nebraska, to view the migration of nearly 500,000 sandhill cranes. These large birds fill the skies, fields, and river valley as they stop to eat and rest on their long migration northward. We'll get off the bus to view cranes at Fort Kearny State Park and the Rowe Sanctuary. We will also visit the Great Platte River Road Archway Monument while in the Kearney area.

- Fee: \$150; includes motorcoach transportation and lodging (double occupancy), Sunday continental breakfast, and admission fees
- Departure from the Living History Farms parking lot on Saturday at 7:00 a.m. and return on Sunday at 5:00 p.m.
- Minimum age 12
- Registration deadline is March 9



*An exhibit inside the  
Great Platte River Road  
Archway Monument*

**More bus trips to come in May 2012. To view photos of previous bus trips go to Polk County Conservation's Facebook page and look under the bus trip photo folder.**

To register for a trip: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)

## Junior Naturalist Camp

**June 11 - 14**

**9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

**Ages: 10 - 11 years**

Do you know a child who loves the outdoors? Campers will spend the week fishing, canoeing, hiking, geocaching and more while exploring the outdoors. Campers will also learn how to use a compass, build a fire, and cook a snack over a fire. On the last day of camp, campers will become official Iowa Junior Naturalists and receive a badge and certificate. Daily field trips will take us to other Polk County parks.

- Fee: \$100
- Registration deadline is May 29
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge



## Water Wonders Camp

**June 25 - 28**

**9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

**Ages 8 - 9 yrs**

Come and get your feet wet as we discover all we can about water. We'll compare ponds, rivers, lakes, and wetlands plus the animals that live in them. Daily field trips will take us to other Polk County parks.

- Fee: \$100.
- Registration deadline is June 11.
- Limited to 12 campers.
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge

Camp Details: These day camps are designed to encourage hands-on learning through outdoor explorations, activities, games, crafts, and more. Camps will be led by naturalists. These camps fill up fast, so register early!

To register for a camp: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)

## Paddle Camp 1

**June 18 - 21**

**9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

**Ages: 12 years and up**

Campers will learn the necessary skills and techniques to safely canoe and kayak. Students will then get the opportunity to apply their new skills during a daylong river trip led by naturalists trained by the American Canoe Association. This camp will be physically demanding and challenging in a safe and supervised environment.

- Fee: \$100
- Registration deadline is June 4
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge

## Paddle Camp 2

**July 17 - 20**

**9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

**Ages: 12 years and up**

Campers will apply the skills and techniques learned in Paddle Camp 1 to navigate down a variety of rivers. Four unique central Iowa rivers will be explored, each one becoming more technical and challenging. Each trip will be led by experienced American Canoe Association Certified Polk County naturalists. This camp will be physically demanding and challenging in a safe and supervised environment. Participants must complete Paddle Camp 1 to be eligible for this camp!

- Fee: \$100
- Registration deadline is July 3
- Limited to 12 campers
- Meeting location: Jester Park, Shelter by Lodge



2011 Paddle Camp

# A Job Well Done

During the spring of 2011, numerous work days were cancelled due to the rain and it appeared we were in for another wet year. As the summer progressed and everything began to dry out, events such as the River Run Garbage Grab, Amazing Prairie Festival, Do More Outdoors series, and the Four Mile Creek Sweep went off without a glitch. Thank you to everyone who helped with these and many other programs and events!

Eagle Scouts have been working on and completing several great projects including the first three phases of the Jester Park Amphitheater; of which, the first two will soon be completed. Other projects at Jester Park include a new retaining wall and steps at the Hickory Ridge trailhead and an arbor over the trail at the Natural Playscape. Bat houses are proposed at Thomas Mitchell and Easter Lake Parks, and should be ready by spring.

## Jester Park Invasive Species Winter Round-up

**January 14 @ 10:00 a.m.-Noon**

**Meet us at 9:45 a.m. along the road, by Two Dam Pond (near Shelter #5)**

Your assistance is needed to help us restore our woodlands by removing honeysuckle and other invasives. Dress according to weather (in layers), wear sturdy boots and bring gloves. Light refreshments will be served and tools will be supplied.

## Volunteer Appreciation Banquet

**March 4 @ 5:00-7:30 p.m.**

Come join us at the Jester Park Lodge where we will highlight some of our volunteer projects and events from '10. Nature and Wildlife Photographer Ty Smedes will be presenting a program about Bald Eagles. Anyone who has volunteered 10 hours (or more) is invited to attend. Please contact Pat Spain to confirm your hours.

## Brown's Woods Clean-up

**April 14 @ 9:00-11:00 a.m.**

Families, youth groups and scouting organizations welcome! Lunch will be provided by The Huntmaster's Club and the Des Moines Izaak Walton League following the event. Meet at the parking lot off Brown's Woods Dr. Please contact Pat Spain to confirm your attendance ensuring adequate lunch counts.



*Eagle Scout Brandon Theisen, improved the Hickory Ridge Trailhead at Jester Park by installing a new retaining wall and steps.*



*Eagle Scout Ian Dungee, constructed a willow arbor at the end of the Hickory Ridge Trail near the Jester Park playscape.*

### VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED FOR:

- Therapeutic riding program
- Helping with pony rides
- Cleaning stalls
- Trail clearing and maintenance
- Conducting park and shoreline clean-ups
- Harvesting prairie seed
- Invasive species removal
- Planting trees
- Cleaning out fire rings
- Mulching trees
- Stream clean-ups
- Helping with programs & events

To volunteer, please contact: Pat Spain at (515) 323-5280 or [pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov](mailto:pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov)



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Beaver Creek Greenbelt</li> <li>2. Brown's Woods</li> <li>3. Carney Marsh</li> <li>4. Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt</li> <li>5. Chichaqua Valley Trail</li> <li>6. Easter Lake Park</li> <li>7. Engeldinger Marsh</li> <li>8. Fort Des Moines Park</li> <li>9. Four Mile Creek Greenbelt</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Gay Lea Wilson Trail</li> <li>11. Great Western Trail</li> <li>12. High Trestle Trail</li> <li>13. Jester Park</li> <li>14. Mally's Weh Weh Neh Kee Park</li> <li>15. Sycamore Trail</li> <li>16. Thomas Mitchell Park</li> <li>17. Trestle to Trestle Trail</li> <li>18. Yellow Banks Park</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

THE GREAT OUTDOORS FUND  
WWW.GREATOUTDOORSFUND.ORG

# Be a Friend of the Great Outdoors

Pledge your support today for high quality, healthy living for Greater Polk County through expanded open space, restored landscapes, and greater recreation and outdoor education opportunities.

By becoming a friend, you will...

- ◆ Have your name published in The Great Outdoors Fund Annual Report and Polk County Conservation Nature News Newsletter
- ◆ Be put on the mailing list to receive current GOF and PCC news and information
- ◆ Participate in special programs, tours & events designed exclusively for our Friends
  - ◆ Be invited to the annual 'Friend of the Great Outdoors' banquet
  - ◆ Support conservation and recreation projects in your own backyard

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual (annual): \_\_\_\_\_ \$50      Family (annual): \_\_\_\_\_ \$100      Corporate: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE	TIME	ACTIVITY (*pre-registration required)	LOCATION
January 3	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Peace Through Corn	Jester Park Lodge
January 14	10:00 a.m.	Invasive Species Work Day	Jester Park
January 20	5:30 p.m.	Owl Prowl	Yellow Banks Park
January 21	10:00 a.m.	Cross-Country Ski Basics*	Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge
January 21	12:00 p.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Fort Des Moines Park
January 28	10:00 a.m.	Cross-Country Ski Basics*	Chichaqua Longhouse
January 28	12:30 p.m.	Cross-Country Ski Basics*	Chichaqua Longhouse
January 28	10:00 a.m.	Snowshoe Hike*	Thomas Mitchell Park
January 28	2:00 p.m.	Snowshoe Hike*	Jester Park
January 29	1:00 p.m.	Do More Outdoors	Chichaqua Longhouse
February 2	6:30 p.m.	Hog Wild	Urbandale Public Library
February 4	12:00 p.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Jester Park
February 4	6:00 p.m.	Indoor Kayaking Basics*	Urbandale Public Pool
February 7	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles	Jester Park Lodge
February 7	6:30 p.m.	Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles	Jester Park Lodge
February 10-19		Sweetheart Sleigh Rides	Jester Park Equestrian Center
February 11	8:00 a.m.	Cross-Country Ski/Snowshoe Trip*	Lime Creek Conservation Area
February 12	1:00 p.m.	Cross-Country Ski Basics *	Chichaqua Longhouse
February 12	1:00 p.m.	Ice Fishing Clinic	Easter Lake Park
February 18	10:30 a.m.	Tricky Tracks	Jester Park Lodge
February 18	12:30 p.m.	Bird Adaptations	Jester Park Lodge
February 25	1:00 p.m.	Winter Hike	Brown's Woods
February 26	12:00 p.m.	Bald Eagle Watch	Saylorville Lake & Jester Park Lodge
March 3	6:00 p.m.	Indoor Kayaking Basics*	Urbandale Public Pool
March 4	5:00 p.m.	Volunteer Appreciation Banquet	Jester Park Lodge
March 6	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Photographs & Poems of Iowa	Jester Park Lodge
March 6	6:30 p.m.	Unhuggables	Jester Park Lodge
March 20	TBD	Spring Break Equestrian Day Camp*	Jester Park Equestrian Center
March 20	7:30 p.m.	Wild Life & Night Hike	Jester Park
March 21	10:30 a.m.	Amazing Reptiles	Jester Park Lodge
March 21	1:00 p.m.	Mammal Mania	Jester Park Lodge
March 22	10:30 a.m.	Mud Hike	Brown's Woods
March 22	1:00 p.m.	Mud Hike	Thomas Mitchell Park
March 24	9:00 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Jester Park
March 24	10:30 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Jester Park
March 24-25		Sandhill Crane Bus Trip*	Kearney, Nebraska
April 3	11:00 a.m.	OWLS - Iowa Public Television	Jester Park Lodge
April 3	6:00 p.m.	Master Conservationist	Jester Park Lodge
April 3	6:30 p.m.	Ticks and Lyme Disease in Iowa	Jester Park Lodge
April 9	6:30 p.m.	Nature Friends*	Raccoon River Park Nature Lodge
April 14	9:00 a.m.	Brown's Woods Clean-up	Brown's Woods
April 14	9:00 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Jester Park
April 14	10:30 a.m.	Rain Barrel Workshop*	Jester Park
April 21	10:00 a.m.	Geocaching 101*	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
April 22	1:00 p.m.	Tree Planting	Location TBA
April 24	6:30 p.m.	Nature Friends*	Jester Park
April 28	10:00 a.m.	Spring Wildflower Hike	Brown's Woods

## Construction Has Begun

Renovations to the Jester Park Elk/Bison Exhibit at Jester Park are under way. The exhibit is anticipated to be opened to the public sometime in 2012. Improvements to the exhibit include an accessible pathway, observation deck, spotting scopes, educational displays and high quality art pieces. Funding for this project has been made possible through the generosity of, The Land and Water Conservation Fund, Great Outdoors Fund, Polk County Board of Supervisors, Wal-Mart, and the Paula Timmerman family endowment.



*Close-up of one of the interpretive pods*

*Viewing plaza (shade structures will be placed on the posts)  
A life size elk sculpture will be the centerpiece*

### JESTER PARK EQUESTRIAN CENTER CALENDAR:

#### Sweetheart Sleigh Rides

**February 10 - 19**

You and your sweetheart can book a 45-minute private ride which includes hot chocolate and a flower. You may also share your ride with another couple if you'd like. Rides will be in the daylight and run on wheels if there is not enough snow. Reservations can be made by calling the Equestrian Center. Fee: \$60.

#### Sleigh Rides

Come enjoy the winter snow by taking a horse drawn sleigh ride. A 45-minute sleigh ride costs \$50 for 5 people, and \$10 for each additional person on top of that. One sleigh holds 6 and one holds 8 (3 and younger are free). If you have a larger group we can run two sleighs at once.

We also offer an open fire pit outside free to use or an indoor conference room that may be rented to warm up after your ride.

#### Spring Break Day Camp

**March 20**

This camp will be for children ages 8 and older. Call or check our website for more details.

#### Indoor Riding Lessons

We also offer indoor riding lessons year round for beginner to advanced riders. Private lessons are \$35 per hour and \$30 if you ride with a group of 2 or more. Buy five lessons and get the sixth one free. Lessons are scheduled by calling the Equestrian Center.

#### FREE Compost

We have a large quantity of horse manure if you need some good compost for your garden. It is free for the hauling and we can help with loading. A voluntary donation for programming at the Equestrian Center will be accepted for loading.



Jester Park  
Equestrian Center  
11171 NW 103 Court  
Granger, IA 50109  
(515) 999-2818  
[www.jesterparkec.com](http://www.jesterparkec.com)



Polk County Conservation  
11407 NW Jester Park Dr.  
Granger, IA 50109

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## OWLS

(Older, Wiser, Livelier, Seniors)

Looking for an excuse to get out of the house, make some new friends, enjoy a good meal and learn about the exciting world of nature? Then join us! These programs are held the first Tuesday of each month. The nature program will start at 11:00 a.m. at the Jester Park Lodge. An optional luncheon follows the program at noon in which pre-registration is required. The cost of the catered lunch is \$8.00. Lunch registration is due the Friday before the program.

### Peace Through Corn

**January 3**

The Garst Family has deep roots in the history of Iowa. Using her family experience in Coon Rapids, Liz Garst recounts the history of agricultural development in Iowa, from early settlement through the fabulous mid-century explosion of farm productivity, based on the hybrid seeds, machinery, fertilizers and livestock technologies promoted by her grandfather. Liz tells how it came to pass that Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and his family visited the Garst family in 1959. This program has been funded by Humanities of Iowa.

### The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles

**February 7**

Join local author/photographer Ty Smedes for a slide presentation which will reveal many incredibly interesting discoveries about the Bald Eagle and how they go about their every-day lives here in Iowa. Learn how researchers track bald eagle movements, where eagles come from that winter in Iowa. And listen to stories of confrontations between bald eagles and other species. This presentation will reveal many highlights of Ty's new Book "The Return of Iowa's Bald Eagles", which he will be signing and offering for sale.

### Light and Matter: Photographs and Poems of Iowa

**March 6**

Author and photographer Paul Brooke will present an interactive slideshow featuring photos from Iowa and the Amazon. He will read from Light and Matter: Photographs and Poems of Iowa and his newest work Sirens and Seriemas: Photographs and Poems of the Amazon and Pantanal. Brooke is a professor of English at Grand View University and spent part of the spring 2011 semester traveling in Brazil.

### Why Iowa Public Television Matters Today

**April 3**

Iowa Public Television (IPTV) is one of the state's last locally owned, locally controlled media services. Statewide IPTV provides television, educational and online services to all Iowans, regardless of where they live and what they can afford to pay. Join Mary Bracken who explains why IPTV is more important today than ever before.

To register for lunch: [www.leadingyououtdoors.org](http://www.leadingyououtdoors.org)