

Leading you Outdoors

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2013 - JUNE 2014



YEAR AT A GLANCE



Father and son enjoying an afternoon fishing on the restored pond at Thomas Mitchell Park.

Polk County Conservation has undergone significant revitalization since the passage of the Polk County Water and Land Legacy (PCWLL) bond referendum in November of 2012. Projects that were only a dream on paper prior to PCWLL began to take shape in 2013 and 2014.

In concert with planning for and executing many "shovel ready" projects and initiatives, a comprehensive Strategic Plan was set in motion in January of 2014 that was designed to meet the needs of Polk County, its citizens, and our parks, trails, and natural areas for generations to come. The seven initiatives identified within the plan were environmental education, water quality, public awareness, natural areas, outdoor recreation, watershed management, and trails. These focus areas will be a high priority for Polk County Conservation throughout the duration of this plan.

Growth of quality environmental education and public awareness to effectively expand the outreach of conservation goals lies at the forefront of these initiatives. Community involvement and education is a key element in successfully providing sufficient natural spaces for a healthy environment and for the individuals within.

Water quality and local watershed health also became a top priority throughout the planning process specifically at Easter Lake, Fort Des Moines, Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, and in the Fourmile Creek Watershed. Areas of concern have been identified and priority is given accordingly in an effort to improve upstream behaviors as well as assisting adjacent communities, private entities, and the public in watershed awareness through consistent inventory and monitoring of these areas.

Placing high importance on preservation, restoration, and maintenance of county lands has led to numerous key property acquisitions which are consistent with several conservation goals. In addition to improved water quality through watershed management and expanded wildlife habitat, promotion of a diversity of trails and unique access features throughout county lands has granted park users with a variety of recreation immersion and engagement opportunities.

Projects and initiatives will continue to evolve in accordance with priorities of Polk County Conservation and the public we serve. The Polk County Water and Land Legacy bond referendum, guided by solid planning and community input, has provided the means by which these goals are met along with the support of local citizens and partners in the community.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Polk County Conservation welcomed several new faces to its ranks this year. Richard Leopold accepted his role as the Deputy Director in July of 2013. Gary Halbersma signed on as Construction Maintenance Supervisor in July of 2013. Nick Gordon filled a Natural Resources Technician position in June of 2014. Also, the Jester Park Equestrian Center brought aboard Lela Mullen in August of 2013 as the Equestrian Center Manager, and Shellie Carmony in June of 2014 as the Equestrian Program Specialist.
- In January of 2014, a new 5-year strategic plan was rolled out by the Polk County Conservation Board. The initiatives within this 5-year strategic plan include focus on environmental education, water quality, public awareness, protection and preservation of natural areas, outdoor recreation, watershed management, and promotion of a diversity of trails within the county.



Jester Park cabins offer guests a place to relax in a beautiful woodland setting with close proximity to recreational opportunities.

RECREATION ENHANCEMENT

- Construction on a new 2.5 mile connection of the Gay Lea Wilson Trail from Ankeny to Altoona reached completion. This trail is part of a 110 mile loop through central Iowa that connects existing parks, trails, and businesses in five counties. In addition to this trail connection, sections of the creek in the Fourmile Greenbelt have been stabilized.
- Thomas Mitchell Park underwent significant enhancements. A half-mile natural surface trail was constructed around the pond as well as shade structures and accessible fishing piers. Limestone steps were installed at various points throughout camp creek to improve recreational access to the water.
- Phase I of the Mark C. Ackelson Trail at Easter Lake reached completion in the fall of 2013. Summer 2014 saw the beginning of Phase II. This enhancement will provide park users and local residents with enhanced recreational opportunities and lake access. This trail will eventually be a part of the larger connected trail network between Ewing Park and Easter Lake, and the larger regional trail between downtown Des Moines and Carlisle.
- Jester Park hosted a Summer Kick-Off Celebration in June 2014. This event marked the grand opening of the Jester Park rental cabins. Park guests participated in canoeing and fishing on the newly renovated Discovery Pond, strolled along the new accessible trail and toured the cabins now open for reservation.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

RECREATION ENHANCEMENT (CONT'D)

- Contracts were secured to begin construction on the Chichaqua Valley Trail Connection. Upon completion, this extension will connect trail users from Baxter to Des Moines.
- Available for the 2014 camping season, Campground #2 at Jester Park upgraded its 28 sites to full electric amenities in order to accommodate a higher demand for electric sites.
- Planning and design of a new outdoor classroom began on the south end of Fort Des Moines park adjacent to Studebaker Elementary. This feature will provide a setting for environmental education and programming.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH

- The 2014 Master Conservationist program wrapped up their 7th session held within Polk County in May. This course covered a variety of topics relating to Iowa's natural resources and environmental health. The program offered certification through Iowa State University and encouraged participants to partake in volunteerism related to local conservation efforts.



Master Conservationists studying a unique Iowa landscape



The Chichaqua Valley Trail Connection will extend trail accessibility throughout Polk and Jasper County.

- Polk County Conservation entered into a television and online partnership with Mills Fleet Farm. This example of public and private organizations coming together under similar interests demonstrates a shared effort to extend our outreach to a wider audience to provide access to outdoor recreation and appreciation of Polk County's natural resources.
- The Environmental Education Department was awarded a REAP/CEP grant for \$20,170. "Discover Your Watershed" ranked first out of eleven other grants. It was praised by the review board for great partnerships, working with high school students, and for the place-based education.
- PCC launched accounts with Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and has created a monthly blog to help stay connected with the public. These social media outlets are in addition to the Facebook account the Conservation team already manages.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

LAND PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

Several properties were acquired by Polk County Conservation for the purpose of improved water quality, wildlife habitat protection, environmental education and outdoor recreation. These acquisitions include 8 acres at Thomas Mitchell Park, 22 acres at Yellow Banks Park, three locations adjacent to Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt totaling 180 acres, and 24 acres along the High Trestle Trail from Ankeny to Des Moines.

Polk County Conservation has become an active player in the Fourmile Creek Watershed Management Authority. Enhancements both up and downstream to the Fourmile Creek Watershed have been on-going in an effort to improve water quality and flood control.

Stabilization of the streambed and the inclusion of erosion control along Camp Creek at Thomas Mitchell Park were done in conjunction with recreation and access enhancements. This project has fulfilled several goals in the areas of water quality, protection of aquatic habitat, and reinforcement of park infrastructure.



Ongoing restoration efforts have provided excellent habitat for wildlife resulting in successful fledging of Sandhill Cranes at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt.

Restoration at Fort Des Moines Park's 14-acre pond began in an effort to improve recreational opportunities and quality of habitat. This popular urban fishing spot had experienced diminished performance due to siltation. Pond dredging, shoreline stabilization, and the construction of silt basins, rock checks and sills, and wetlands were a variety of methods used during this restoration process.



Fort Des Moines Park underwent pond restoration to improve water quality, fisheries health, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ongoing enhancements continued at the Yellow Banks Park dam and pond area to improve access and recreational opportunities to the pond. The outlet and overflow structures will be replaced, and the top of the dam will be lowered eight feet to improve accessibility to the water.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

INFRASTRUCTURE (CONT'D)

- A new Jester Park entrance road was constructed on the west end of the park off NW 128th Ave. Once open to the public in the future, this new entry will provide park users with improved access to the park and the Jester Park Conservation Center.
- A new trailhead parking lot was constructed at Brown's Woods. Work also began to expand the nature trails in the park. Future amenities will include a restroom, drinking fountain, and kiosk station for park information and environmental education.
- A vehicular access bridge across Camp Creek at Thomas Mitchell Park was installed to separate shared foot and vehicular crossing. The former crossing will continue to be utilized for pedestrian crossing, while the new bridge will serve as a safe means for traffic to travel between the east and west sides of the park.

RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT

- Polk County Conservation entered into a contract with Shive-Hattery that provided essential program management services related to Polk County Water and Land Legacy planning and project development.
- In a joint contract with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and as part of the Easter Lake Watershed Management Plan, property was acquired near Easter Lake to facilitate upcoming lake and watershed restoration strategies. This area will serve as valuable public land and wildlife habitat within the Des Moines River Greenbelt in future years.
- Planning and design for the Jester Park Conservation Center continued and preliminary site preparation took place. Fundraising to supplement bond contributions will continue in an effort to make this project a success.



Funds dedicated to enhancements at Thomas Mitchell Park have provided visitors with improved recreational opportunities.



The future Conservation Center at Jester Park will serve as a gateway for outdoor recreation and education in Polk County.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

REVENUE

REVENUES:	General Basic	General Supp.	Insurance	Reserve	REAP	Bond	Golf Course	TOTALS
Property Taxes	\$2,981,087	\$926,771	\$116,120	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$4,023,978
Recreational Fees	613,841	0	0	0	0	0	0	613,841
Concessions	62,692	0	0	0	0	0	0	62,692
Environmental Protection Agency Grants	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous Federal Grants	14,282	0	0	90,302	0	379,187	0	483,770
Miscellaneous State Grants & Reimbursements	11,971	0	0	25,963	0	1,644,387	0	1,682,320
Land Rent	103,902	0	0	0	0	0	0	103,902
Building & Shelter Rentals	161,163	0	0	0	0	0	8,400	169,563
Equipment & Machinery Rentals	1,540	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,540
Firewood Sales	17,361	0	0	0	0	0	0	17,361
Miscellaneous Sale of Commodities	2,092	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,092
FEMA	259,006	0	0	0	0	0	0	259,006
Service Fees	210	0	0	0	0	0	0	210
Miscellaneous Contributions & Reimb. Other Govts	3,630	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,630
General Administration Fees	12,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	12,000
Fee Based Program Revenues	55,129	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,129
Commissions	2,376	0	0	0	0	0	200,194	202,570
Easements	80,296	0	0	0	0	0	0	80,296
Motor Vehicle Fuel Refunds	4,182	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,182
Miscellaneous Contributions & Donations	0	0	0	0	5,272	139,073	0	144,345
Miscellaneous Reciepts	2,302	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,302
Fixed Assets Sold	7,697	0	0	0	0	0	0	7,697
Recoveries on Losses	0	0	0	0	156,461	0	0	156,461
REAP Annual Per Capita Payment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
REAP DNR Fishing & Hunting Grant	0	0	0	0	0	8,749,918	0	8,749,918
Bond Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	188,319
Transfers in from Golf Course	129,425	32,040	0	26,854	0	0	0	1,875
Fund Interest	0	0	0	0	140	0	1,735	1,875
TOTAL REVENUES	\$4,526,182	\$958,811	\$116,120	\$143,119	\$161,873	\$10,912,565	\$210,329	\$17,028,998

GRANTS

The following are grants and reimbursements awarded during FY 13-14. The annual amounts listed are the award totals. Depending upon the grant specifics, the award may be received in one year or over a multi-year period.

MPO TAP-Ackelson Trail Phase III (Easter Lake)	\$135,000
MPO TAP-Ackelson Trail Phase II (Easter Lake)	\$560,000
MPO-Ackelson Trail Phase III (Easter Lake)	\$338,000
LAWCON-Fort Des Moines Classroom	\$103,437
REAP-CEP Discover Your Watershed	\$20,170
State Rec Trail-Ankeny/HTT Connector	\$782,500
Iowa Ornithologist Union-Barn Owl Nest Boxes at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt	\$200
State Rec Trail-Ankeny/HTT Connector	\$100,000
Greater Des Moines Community Foundation for Jester Park Conservation Center	\$100,000

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

EXPENDITURES

EXPENDITURES:	General Basic	General Supp.	Insurance	Reserve	REAP	Bond	Golf Course	TOTALS
Conservation Infrastructure/Equipment	\$162,200	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$-	\$162,200
Environmental Education	384,140	107,294	0	0	0	0	0	491,434
Natural Resources	708,342	210,435	0	0	0	0	0	918,777
Administration	970,774	137,373	0	0	0	0	0	1,108,147
Community Outreach	216,991	50,044	0	0	0	0	0	267,035
Conservation Grants	9,036	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,036
Parks Advocacy	470,452	143,665	0	0	0	0	0	614,117
Construction, Maintenance, Operations	1,116,349	239,758	0	0	0	0	0	1,356,107
Equestrian Center	487,899	70,242	0	0	0	0	0	558,140
Insurance, Unemployment, & Workers Comp. Medical	0	0	116,120	0	0	0	0	116,120
Conservation Land Acquisition & Development	0	0	0	25,951	0	0	0	25,951
Resource Enhancement & Protection	0	0	0	0	147,469	0	0	147,469
PCWLL Bond	0	0	0	0	0	10,912,565	0	10,912,565
Golf Course Transfer to Operations & Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	0	188,319	188,319
Golf Course Minor Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,638	6,638
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$4,526,182	\$958,811	\$116,120	\$25,951	\$147,469	\$10,912,565	\$194,957	\$16,882,055

BUDGET SUMMARY

The General Basic funds expended for the various departments covered salaries, supplies, and services. The General Supplemental funds covered employee benefits. The Insurance expenditures were for Unemployment Insurance, Workers' Comp Disability, Workers' Comp Medical Expense, and Liability Insurance premiums.

Projects completed or continued with the Reserve funds were radio upgrades for all vehicles and a tank-less water heater for the Jester Park Lodge. Polk County Conservation Board continues construction and repairs of trails throughout Polk County.

Projects completed or continued with REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) funds were way finding signs throughout all our parks, equipment purchases, new fencing and barn upgrades at the Jester Park Equestrian Center, support of a naturalist's salary for wildlife research, plus various smaller projects throughout all areas. We also received a REAP CEP Grant, Discover Your Watershed, for the education of high school students on watershed knowledge and management. We also supported various 28E agreements including the Easter Lake-Yeader Creek Watershed and the High Trestle Trail Legacy Fund.

Projects completed or continued with the Polk County Water and Land Legacy (PCWLL) dollars have been highlighted throughout the annual report by the blue water drop designation.

Polk County Conservation continually monitors revenues and expenses to assure budget compliance. In addition, a user fee committee annually reviews the various direct user charges for camping, shelter rentals, educational programs, special events, and other fee based activities to assure that a fair mix of user fee charges and general Polk County taxpayer support is maintained in the annual budget.

FACTS AND FIGURES

PARK VISITATION (WHERE RECORDED)

Brown's Woods	70,112
Carney Marsh	17,657
Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt	51,041
Chichaqua Valley Trail	10,530
Easter Lake Park	481,181
Fort Des Moines Park	177,716
Four Mile Creek Greenbelt	1,170
Gay Lea Wilson Trail	37,396
Great Western Trail	32,858
High Trestle Trail <i>near PCC gazebo area</i>	41,047
Jester Park	460,518
<i>includes Mile Long Boat Ramp, Golf Course, Equestrian Center and Lodge</i>	
Mally's Park	16,646
Thomas Mitchell Park	127,656
Trestle to Trestle Trail	23,711
Yellow Banks Park	251,501

TOTAL PARK VISITATION* **1,800,740+**

*PCC is unable to accurately calculate total park visitation from traffic counters. The estimated visitation total of 1,800,740 people reflects only those parks equipped with counters or alternative ways for tracking visitation.

RENTAL FACILITY RESERVATIONS

Chichaqua Longhouse	96
Easter Lake Park (Shelters #1-#5)	290
Fort Des Moines Park (Shelters #1-#2)	111
Jester Park (Shelters #2-#6)	249
Jester Park Lodge	114
Mally's Park	5
Thomas Mitchell Park (Shelters #1-#2)	110
Yellow Banks Park (Shelters #1-#4)	88

TOTAL FACILITY RESERVATIONS **1063**

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

- 1,172 school programs involving 23,139 students
- 197 youth programs involving 4,019 youth
- 5 public camp programs involving 69 youth
- 66 adult programs involving 2,407 adults
- 81 family programs involving 3,391 participants
- 6 bus trips involving 294 participants

The Environmental Education staff connected with various audiences for a total of 43,145 hours.

VOLUNTEER HOURS CONTRIBUTED

14,000 hours in total
Estimated value: \$245,000



Wells Fargo employees lending a hand at the 2014 River Run Garbage Grab volunteer event.

UNIT DIRECTORY

Polk County Conservation Administration Office

11407 NW Jester Park Drive
Granger, IA 50109
tel: (515) 323-5300
fax: (515) 323-5354
pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov
www.leadingyououtdoors.org

Administration

Richard Leopold, Interim Director
Loren Lown, Parks & Natural Areas Planning Adminr.
Carol Ann Carlson, Accountant
Cindy Lentz, Administrative Supervisor
Melissa Ritter, Accounting Clerk
Ginny Malcomson, Accounting Clerk

Community Outreach

Kami Rankin, Community Outreach Supervisor
Pat Spain, Planning and Outreach Coordinator

Environmental Education

Patrice Petersen-Keys, Environmental Ed. Coordinator
Heidi Anderson, Naturalist
Lewis Major, Naturalist
Joe Boyles, Naturalist
Lori Foresman-Kirpes, Naturalist

Natural Resources

Mark Dungan, Natural Resources Manager
Doug Sheeley, Natural Resources Supervisor
Ron Ugolini, Natural Resources Technician
Chris Lunan, Natural Resources Technician
Al Pasker, Natural Resources Technician
Dan Hrubes Natural Resources Technician
Nick Gordon, Natural Resources Technician
Lael Neal, Natural Resources Worker

Board Members

Sara Kurovski
Tom Levis
Connie Johnson
Mike Smith
Jim Cataldo

Parks Advocacy

Dean Bruscher, Ranger
Brian Herrstrom, Ranger
Charlie Finch, Ranger
Chris Clingan, Assistant Ranger
James Dotzler, Assistant Ranger

Construction, Maintenance, and Operations

Wayne Johnson, Construction & Maintenance Manager
Gary Halbersma, Construction & Maintenance Supr.
Stan Manning, Special Services Technician
George Lentz, Equipment Maintenance Superintendent
Ken Young, Mechanic
Luke Harshbarger, Mechanic
Steve Haefner, Construction Technician
Barney Feezell, Construction Technician
Tim Wears, Maintenance Technician
Tyler Naeve, Maintenance Technician
Chance Patrick, Maintenance Technician

Leisure Services

Lela Mullen, Equestrian Center Manager
Shellie Carmoney, Program Specialist