

Nature News

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION • 2020 NATURE PROGRAMS AND NEWS

September - December 2020




POLK
COUNTY
CONSERVATION

www.LeadingYouOutdoors.org

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The rejuvenating nature of Nature is constant and predictable. As we find our way through this most distressing time, get outside, hike a trail, paddle a river, and let the sound of wind and the birds uplift. Read more from Polk County Conservation Director, Richard Leopold.

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Virtual Fall Makers Market

Since we are not able to hold an in-person Fall Makers Market at the Jester Park Nature Center as planned in November, we wanted to give our community and local small businesses something to look forward to by taking it online!



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New to Our Parks & Trails

Polk County Conservation staff has been busy in our parks and trails this past summer! New additions, improvements, and recreational opportunities continue year-round so that we can give you and your family a unique experience, bringing you closer than ever to conservation and the natural world.



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Public Programs & Events

The programming outlined in this edition of Nature News runs from September -December of 2020. Due to the continually evolving COVID-19 situation, we decided not to fully include all of our planned programming. Please check our website frequently for programming offerings and to make sure that the program you are interested in is still being offered at:

www.leadingyououtdoors.org/calendar.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

An Ecologist View of Nature

From an ecological viewpoint, although it doesn't always appear to be, the natural order of things is constant and predictable.

Nature is constant. This doesn't mean things don't change, they do. Twelve thousand years ago we had mastodons in Iowa. These animals are gone, but their category, large herbivore, remains in our white-tailed deer. A particular species of tree may not survive in our changing climate, but "a tree" will likely replace the same niche, although this change may also affect birds, insects, soil biota, etc. that depend on the native tree.

Nature is predictable. This doesn't mean we humans can predict these changes very well. Ecological science is filled with miscalculations and revisions. What this means is that in retrospect, all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. Our inability to accurately predict is because of our limited understandings, nature always has specific cause-and-effect.

The rejuvenating nature of Nature is also constant and predictable. As we find our way through this most distressing time, get outside, hike a trail, paddle a river, and let the sound of wind and the birds uplift.

See you on the trail!



Richard Leopold,
Polk County Conservation Director





Jester Park Nature Center [TEMPORARILY CLOSED]

*Fall & Winter Hours
(September 8, 2020 - May 30, 2021)*

**Jester Park Outdoor
Recreation & Wellness Center [OPEN]**

*Fall & Winter Hours
(September 8, 2020 - May 30, 2021)*

Saturday | 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Sunday & Open Holidays | Noon - 4 p.m.

Holidays Closed

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



Board Members

Lance Northway, *Board Chair*
Jill Altringer, *Vice-Chair*
Jim Cataldo, *Secretary*
Ryan Crane
Pamela J. Mollenhauer

Executive Director

Richard Leopold

Deputy Director

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Nature News

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Administration Hours

M-F, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Follow Us on Social Media



Bond Updates



September - December 2020

PARKS

Fourmile Creek Greenway

Design work on a stormwater wetland along Fourmile Creek at E 35th Street and Hull is currently underway with construction anticipated to begin late fall. This will create a buffer for flooding and improve water quality, as well as beautifying and adding wildlife habitat to the area.

Jester Park

Construction plans are currently underway for a new RV dump station located near Shelter #2. The project is anticipated to be bid in fall 2020.

Renovations to Skull Pond, located across from Shelter #2, are anticipated to take place throughout the upcoming winter months. Work includes reworking the golf cart bridges and shoreline work with a new outlet structure.

Yellow Banks Park

The cabins set to be built in Yellow Banks Park are currently on hold due to financial constraints at this time. Staff will revisit this project in the future when more funding becomes available.

ABOUT

On Tuesday, November 6, 2012, voters supported the Polk County Water and Land Legacy Bond (PCWLL) in historic fashion passing the measure by 72%. This large margin of victory clearly shows that there is bipartisan support for critical water quality, wildlife, trails, and recreation projects.

Much appreciation goes out to the citizens of Polk County and the many people that supported this bond referendum with volunteer efforts or financial assistance towards education efforts. Polk County's government leaders, community organizations, corporate friends, and individual supporters have shown tremendous local leadership. Special recognition must go to the Polk County Board of Supervisors, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Great Outdoors Foundation.

We encourage the public to stay involved and updated on PCWLL projects in future years. Visit our website regularly for project updates and public input opportunities.



Photo by Brett Stewart



Locally Grown • Raised • Created



FALL MAKERS MARKET VIRTUAL

WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT OUR FALL VIRTUAL MAKERS MARKET WILL BE USING AN ONLINE PLATFORM SO WE CAN CONTINUE BRINGING OUR COMMUNITY TOGETHER DURING THIS DIFFICULT TIME ON NOVEMBER 12 - DECEMBER 12!

Since we are not able to hold an in-person Fall Makers Market at the Jester Park Nature Center as planned in November, we wanted to give our community and local small businesses something to look forward to by taking it online!

The 2020 Virtual Makers Market will take place from November 12 - December 12. We will be hosting links and information on each local vendor that is involved on our website, where you will be able to shop from the comfort of your home or while you're outside in your favorite spot! We will also be spotlighting each local vendor on our social media pages and encourage you to check them all out.

So grab a mug of hot chocolate or coffee, your favorite blanket, computer, and get ready to shop for gifts or goods just in time for the holiday season!

We can't wait for the day that the world is free from this pandemic and community gatherings are safe again! In the meantime, our team is hard at work behind the scenes to create opportunities for our community to come together in the name of conservation.

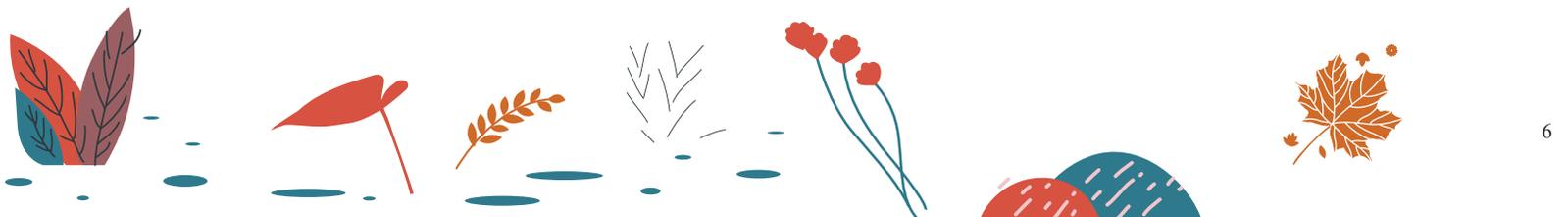
HOW TO SHOP

The virtual market will be available for you to shop online from November 12 - December 12 at: www.jesterparknaturecenter.com/fall-makers-market.

Vendors will be announced closer to the event and will also be listed online.

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A VENDOR?

Visit the website to download and fill out an application at: www.jesterparknaturecenter.com/fall-makers-market.



NEW

to our parks & trails

Polk County Conservation staff has been busy in our parks and trails this past summer! New additions, improvements, and recreational opportunities continue year-round so that we can give you and your family a unique experience, bringing you closer than ever to conservation and the natural world.



Pictures [Above]: New creek access at Mally's Park. [Left]: New accessible fishing dock located near Shelter #4 at Easter Lake Park. [Below]: Youth Conservation Corps July crew member assisting in planting 21,000 pollinator plants that were installed in the Jester Park bioswales near the nature center and Easter Lake Park pollinator gardens.

Picture [Right]: New boat ramp and parking lot at Easter Lake Park.





Pictures [Left]: Newly painted Easter Lake Park Beach concession stand. [Below]: New boat docks and rentable pontoons at Easter Lake Park, located at the beach.



Pictures [Far Left]: New limestone steps located near the Jester Park lodge.

[Left]: New bridal cottage and landscaping in front of the Jester Park Lodge.



Pictures [Above]: New Mindful Contemplative Area located behind the Jester Park Nature Center. [Right]: Polk County Conservation employee and "Ant Hill" sculpture artist Brent Hansen and his family enjoying the new attraction west of the Jester Park Nature Center.



September - December 2020

PUBLIC PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Visit our website for programming at: www.leadingyououtdoors.org/calendar.

Our top priority has been and will continue to be the health and well-being of our visitors, program attendees, volunteers, and staff. In response to the ongoing development of COVID-19, the Jester Park Nature Center will remain closed until the Polk County Health Department recommends otherwise.

While our doors remain closed, many outdoor programs are being offered in a safe, modified manner. Polk County Conservation programs will adhere to social distancing, smaller group size, increased sanitation, and face masks are mandatory while indoors.

Please check our website frequently for programming updates at www.leadingyououtdoors.org/calendar.

VOLUNTEERcalendar

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2020

HAPPY HOUR HARVEST

Join us one evening per month in August and September on the Chichaqua prairie as we collect seed from plants ready to harvest. Volunteers are welcome to cool down and relax with drink and dinner specials at Founders Irish Pub in Bondurant.

Pre-Registration Required.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
August 25	6-8pm	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
September 15	6-8pm	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

VOLUNTEER TIME OFF (VTO) - SEED HARVEST

Does your company offer Volunteer Paid Time Off (VTO)? Join us as we collect seed from plants ready to harvest from one of your county parks. Come and go between per your allotted hours.

Pre-Registration Required.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
September 4, 9, 18, & 23	9am-3pm	TBD
October 2, 7, 21, & 30	9am-3pm	TBD
November 4 & 13	10am-3pm	TBD

FALL SEED HARVEST

We spread the seed that is harvested in the fall on new land acquisitions. We are always restoring land back into the prairie that it once was, and we need your help! Kids and adults are welcome - No experience needed. Polk County Conservation will provide supplies needed. Come and go as needed. **Pre-Registration Required. To RSVP and for more information, Contact Michael French at Michael.French@polkcountyiowa.gov.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
Sept - Nov	Volunteer's Choice	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

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Detailed meeting locations, workday information, and equipment will be provided to those registered closer to the date of the event.

What to Wear | Wear long pants, sturdy closed-toe shoes, gloves (supplied if you do not have a pair), and bring a refillable water bottle.

Volunteer Registration | Visit apps.polkcountyiowa.gov/community_services to create your Conservation profile and begin signing up for events today!

****If you are registering a group, or have any questions or concerns for a volunteer day, please send an e-mail to pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov.****

NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY

National Public Lands Day Polk County is hosted by Polk County Conservation and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation. Join us on Saturday, September 26 as we collect prairie seed at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt and Snyder Farm to celebrate National Public Lands Day. Two different sites have been chosen to allow for social distancing. The event will conclude with food, drinks and singer/musician Jake Schrodt at the Longhouse.

***Pre-Registration Required. Deadline: September 18.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Times</u>	<u>Location</u>
September 26	10am-12pm	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

**Register online at www.leadingyououtdoors.org*

**All activities, food, and drinks are free for registered volunteers.*

MOONLIGHT SEED HARVEST

Join us and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation for a moonlit evening as we hand harvest native prairie seed under the sunset at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. Afterwards, we'll gather around the campfire at the Youth Camp Area to enjoy s'mores and celebrate autumn with new friends. Bring a head lamp or flashlight for this event. **Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
October 3	5:30-7:30pm	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

WOODLAND RESTORATION

Invasive species removal is at the forefront of restoration efforts in our Iowa woodlands. Spend your time on the frontline of this continuous battle as we remove honeysuckle, buckthorn, and oriental bittersweet from one of your county parks.

Pre-Registration Required.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
November 14	10am-12pm	Brown's Woods

CEDARS FOR CELEBRATION

Grab the kids, your spouse or significant other, as PCC and Trees Forever partner together for this eco-friendly event. Come on out and find that special tree for your Holiday Season, and help restore native habitat in one of your county parks!

For more information, contact: pat.spain@polkcountyiowa.gov.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
December 5	10am-1pm	South of Jester Park

SUMMER 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Assisted in planting 7,081 native prairie seedlings in front of the Jester Park Nature Center and on the north shore of Easter Lake.
- Harvested 695 lbs of spiderwort for prairie restoration projects.
- Removed 930 lbs of invasive garlic mustard.
- Picked up 200+ lbs of trash.
- Dug up 1200 lbs of curly dock.
- Cleared several acres of woodland invasive species such as honeysuckle, autumn olive, and oriental bittersweet.
- Learned about topics such as land stewardship, leadership, finances, conservation careers, and Leave No Trace environmental ethics.
- Enjoyed Friday recreation days, kayaking, canoeing, archery, fire building, geocaching, hiking, and water quality monitoring.
- Camped for two nights under the stars and giant oak trees in Polk County.



MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE GREW AS INDIVIDUALS...



“I really could consider this as a future. I didn’t realize how much a part of me it was and how fulfilling it would be to work outdoors.”
- Abbie

“This has made me appreciate how much work has gone into all of the parks. Before, I would just pass by it and not care. I am now starting to realize there is a lot of effort that goes into making the parks nice.” - Emma

“I feel that I definitely have grown and I have come to like the environment more. I’m now more aware of our global impact and now I know how my career can relate to the environment.” - Aime

“I learned that I’m physically capable of a lot more than I thought I was. I enjoyed coming in every day, meeting people, and talking with people. I made some good friends and got to talk to people about their jobs.” - Ivy



“I think I’ve grown a lot, especially when working with other people. I like the work. I think it’s really gratifying. I’m considering a career in natural resources and this helped me explore that path.”
- Adam

Polk County Conservation Youth Corps aims to engage and inspire diverse youth through hands-on environmental stewardship projects, outdoor recreation, and conservation education. Youth Corps offers paid work-learning opportunities for ages 15+ in Polk County, Iowa.



Explore paid Spring, Summer, and Fall opportunities for ages 15-18 by visiting: www.LeadingYouOutdoors.org/Youth

EQUESTRIANcalendar

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2020

GUIDED TRAIL RIDES | \$45

Come out to our wonderful location right off of Saylorville Lake and enjoy a horseback ride through the timber! Each outing lasts 60-90 minutes, including a safety briefing, riding instruction, and up to an hour out on our beautiful trails. **Ages: 8+.**

Pre-Registration Required.

Date	Days	Times
June 5 - October 4	Friday	9:30am 11am 2pm 3:30pm
	Saturday	9:30am 11am 2pm 3:30pm
	Sunday	Reserved for overflow booking

HOLIDAY SLEIGH RIDES | \$150

Bring your loved ones out for some cookies, hot cocoa, horses, and fun! On November 2nd, Holiday Ride registration will open online. These will run through the holidays starting in November and ending in January. **Pre-Registration Required.**

PONY EXPRESS TO SANTA

Come visit Santa at the Jester Park Equestrian Center for a magical holiday tradition! Children, ages 3 - 12, will ride their pony through a winter wonderland before meeting Santa Claus in his sleigh. Make holiday crafts, sing carols on a sleigh ride, and more! Pony ride tickets include all additional activities.

Tickets must be purchased in advance, online at:

www.JesterParkEC.com

Date	Times	FEE
December 11	2 & 3pm	\$50/Ticket
December 12	10am, 11am, 1pm, & 2pm	\$50/Ticket
December 13	10am, 11am, 1pm, & 2pm	\$50/Ticket

VOLUNTEER WITH US

We need volunteers of all types to help out with a wide variety of jobs and programs. Volunteers must be 18+ to help with the horses. Some basic barn chores and special events can be assisted by minors over 12 years of age with parental consent. No prior horse experience required. **Find volunteer opportunities online:**

www.jesterparkec.com

HORSEMANSHIP BASICS - GROUP LESSONS | \$500

This horsemanship class is for those who have little or no experience with horses. Students will spend two hours a week, for six weeks, learning the basics of horsemanship. Lessons will teach safety, grooming, tacking, leading, basic horse anatomy, essential nutrition and care, and riding! **Six spots available per session.**

Ages: 8+. Pre-Registration Required.

Session	Days	Time
Session 1 -Tuesdays	Sept. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, & Oct. 6	4:30-6:30pm
Session 2- Thursdays	Sept. 3, 10, 17, 24, Oct. 1 & 8	4:30-6:30pm
Session 3- Tuesdays	Oct. 13, 20, 27, Nov. 3, 10, & 17	4:30-6:30pm
Session 4- Thursdays	Oct. 15, 22, 29, Nov. 5, 12, & 19	4:30-6:30pm

RETREAT WITH HORSES - FREE DEMONSTRATION FOR FIRST RESPONDERS & HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Discover how horses help humans heal mentally and emotionally through a demonstration of Equine Assisted Learning activities with EAGALA certified professional Sierra Carmichael. This introduction and demonstration is open to First Responders and Health Care Workers along with a spouse or loved one. Learn about how horses help us to communicate effectively, manage challenges, create lasting relationships, and recognize peace while enjoying the natural setting of our equestrian center near Saylorville Lake.

We will be serving a refreshing snack and non-alcoholic beverages. Get an inside peek at what veterans experience in our Horses Helping Heroes wellness program and what you could experience soon in our new First Responders Wellness Program. This event is free, but donations will be accepted. Space is limited, so reserve early **Pre-Registration Required.**

Date	Times	FEE
September 16	6-7pm	FREE
September 25	5:30-6:30pm	FREE
October 10	10-11am	FREE
October 19	6-7pm	FREE

To register for an activity or event, visit:

www.jesterparkec.com



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



Meet Polk County Conservation's Newest Board Members



Ryan Crane



Ryan Crane serves as Director of Charitable Giving at the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines, where he advises and engages with nonprofits to pursue noncash gifts and planned gifts. He earned his Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP®) designation in 2016 and has served in fundraising and advocacy roles in the nonprofit sector for 11 years.

Ryan was a member of the 2017 class of Forty Under 40, and a member of the 2014 class of the Greater Des Moines Leadership Institute. He is also a 2011 Fellow of the New Leaders Council program. He completed his undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Northern Iowa and serves as a volunteer and board member for several area organizations, including serving as Chair of the West Des Moines Public Art Advisory Commission.

In his spare time, he hits the trails of Greater Des Moines as a cyclist and a runner.

Pamela J. Mollenhauer

Pam Mollenhauer has worked in the field of Public and Environmental Health for many years. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration/Marketing from Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa in 2006.

Pam is a governor-appointed commissioner on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC). Pam currently serves on the Pleasant Hill Planning and Zoning Commission, is a board member of the Polk County Conservation Board and a board member to the Iowa Public Health Association. She previously worked at the State Hygienic Laboratory as an environmental analyst (18 yrs.), HR + Education & Outreach (6 yrs.) and Director of Public Policy (6 yrs.).



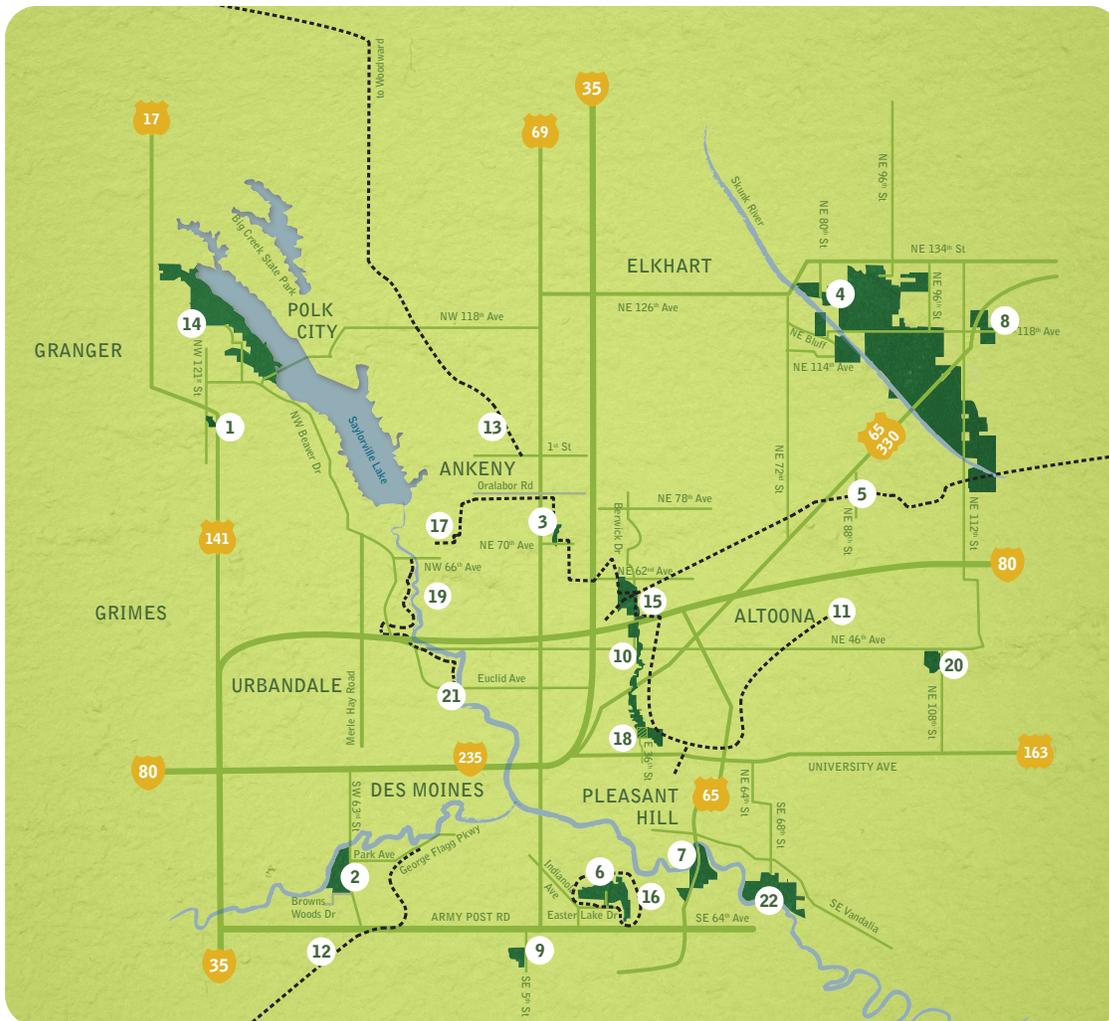
Pam's interest in environmental health includes supporting the Iowa Environmental Council and being an active member of the Iowa Environmental Health Association (IEHA), where she served as president from 2008-2009. She plays a key role on the Iowa Public Health Association (IPHA) as a past president and as an active member of the IPHA Advocacy and Membership Committees.



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

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AREAmap



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. Mally's Park
16. Mark C. Ackelson Trail
17. Oralabor Gateway Trail
18. Strasser Woods State Preserve
19. Sycamore Trails
20. Thomas Mitchell Park
21. Trestle to Trestle Trail
22. Yellow Banks Park