

Nature News

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION • 2021 NATURE PROGRAMS & NEWS

January - April 2021



Photo by Eric Williamson



www.LeadingYouOutdoors.org

CONTENTS

January - April



pg 3

A Message from the Director

The year 2020 has been tough, for the many reasons we all know. Now, 2021 is upon us, and it is time for a new start. Read more from Polk County Conservation Director, Richard Leopold.

pg 6

Public Programs
& Events

The programming outlined in this edition of Nature News runs from January - April 2021. 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.



pg 7 - 8

Special Winter Cabin Rental Offer

Book a winter cabin getaway for the holidays, a special weekend, or a week-long stay to reconnect with your family away from the hustle and bustle of life. When you book from December 1, 2020 through March 1, 2021, automatically get 20% off your reservation at the Jester Park or Thomas Mitchell Park Cabins for stays January 3 to March 11, 2021.



pg 9

Shamrock Shenanigans

Sneaky little leprechauns have hidden 10 special shamrocks on the trails around the Jester Park Nature Center.

See how many you can spot, snap a picture, and share your photos with us on Facebook or Instagram!

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----|---|
| 4 | Jester Park Nature Center | 12 | 2021 Polk County Conservation Youth Corps |
| 5 | Bond Updates | 13 | Jester Park Equestrian Center Calendar |
| 10 | Volunteer Calendar & Spotlight | 14 | Horsemanship Basics Series to Continue |
| 11 | Cross-Country Ski & Snowshoe Rentals | 15 | Polk County Conservation Area Map |

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

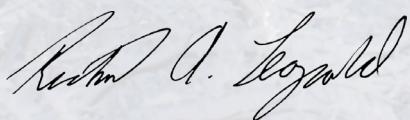
"Let there be respect for the earth, peace for its people, love in our lives, delight in the good, forgiveness of past wrongs, and from now on a *new start*."
- Reverend Peter Trow

In 1999, as we entered the new millennium, the above quote was offered as a world resolution. No offense to "1999", but I think we need this sentiment now more than they needed it then! The year 2020 has been tough, for the many reasons we all know. Now, 2021 is upon us, and it is time for a *new start*.

Because of the stress and tragedy, we have had more people in our parks and on our trails than we have ever experienced! Those of us already close to the earth have continued to reaffirm our ties with the natural world. Those new to the out of doors (or those who were once close and had drifted away) are hiking, fishing, wildlife watching, hunting, peddling, paddling, or just sitting outside with the wind and sun on their faces in record numbers.

Those of us at Polk County Conservation are humbled, grateful, and more than a little excited about the growing public support for the natural world. Nature is constantly available, accessible, and welcoming. Let the outdoors strengthen your body, calm your emotions, and refresh your spirit.

See you on the trail,



Richard Leopold,
Polk County Conservation Director





Jester Park Nature Center
[TEMPORARILY CLOSED]

Jester Park Outdoor
Recreation & Wellness Center
[OPEN FOR EQUIPMENT RENTALS]

(Open 7 days a week, when there is at least 6 inches
of snow on the ground.)

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
Douglas Romig

Nature News
Volume 21, Issue 1

Designer & Editor
Shae Rossetti,
Community Outreach Coordinator

Administration Office
12130 NW 128th St
Granger, Iowa 50109
515-323-5300

pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov
www.leadingyououtdoors.org

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

Follow Us on Social Media



Bond Updates



January - April 2021

PARKS

Fourmile Creek Greenway

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

Jester Park

Renovations to Skull Pond, located across from Shelter #2, are currently underway and will continue throughout the upcoming winter months. The golf cart bridges will be reworked, along with shoreline improvements and a new outlet structure. A new RV dump station will be located near Skull Pond and is expected to be open in 2021.

Yellow Banks Park

A survey is currently underway on a ravine located below Oakview Pond at Yellow Banks Park. This ravine will be restored to improve bank stability and reduce sediment entering into Yellow Banks Pond.

Additional RV camping sites, as well as the addition of a new natural playscape, are currently in the design phase with construction anticipated to begin in late spring 2021.

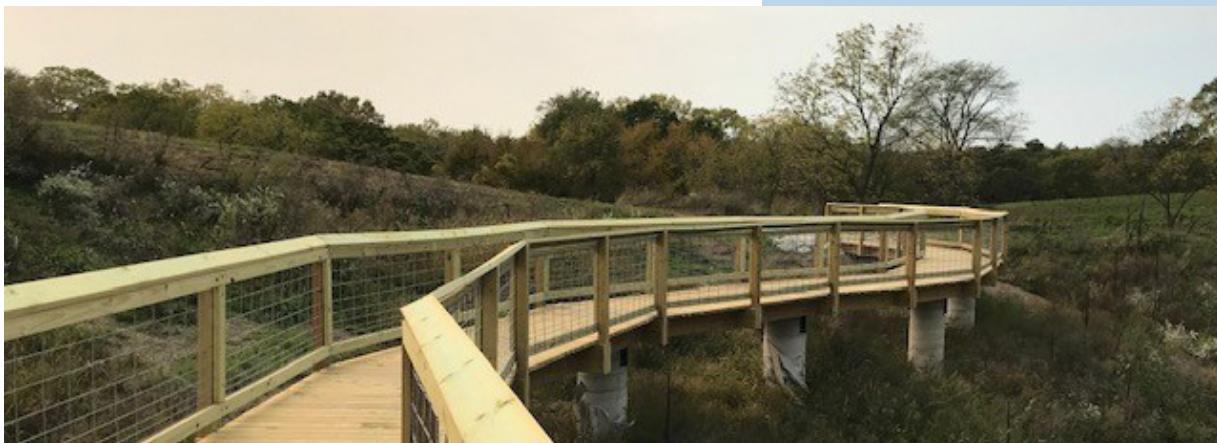
ABOUT

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.

www.leadingyououtdoors.org



New Walking Deck Near Oakview Pond at Yellow Banks Park



January - April 2021

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, 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 required by for participants and staff.

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

20% OFF WINTER CABIN RENTALS



Book a winter cabin getaway for the holidays, a special weekend, or a week-long stay to reconnect with your family away from the hustle and bustle of life. When you book from December 1, 2020 through March 1, 2021, automatically get 20% off your reservation at the Jester Park or Thomas Mitchell Park Cabins for stays January 3 to March 11, 2021. Book early as cabin availability goes quickly.

ABOUT THE CABINS

Bundle up and gather with your family or loved ones around the fire pit, go snowshoeing or cross-country skiing or hike nearby woods while you stay in a cabin. Begin and end the day gazing over the nearby pond or bird watch from the large deck. When the weather outside is frightful, gather inside to enjoy games, puzzles, or read by the gas fireplace.

Additional amenities include a full modern kitchen with dishes provided, comfortable beds, bathroom with accessible shower, modern household furnishings, and outside BBQ grill and fire ring.

Take a break from technology, as the cabins do not have Wi-Fi or TVs to distract you from nature, allowing you to hike, fish, bird watch, hunt, or just sit and enjoy the scenery.

BOOK YOUR CABIN ONLINE

This offer is valid 7-days of the week, online at: www.MyCountyParks.com. Questions? Contact us at pccb_info@polkcountyiowa.gov or call 515-323-5300.

Covid-19 Safety Procedures

⁷ In addition to standard cleaning protocols, cabins are cleaned between rentals with additional disinfecting of areas such as door, faucet, and toilet handles, handrails, etc. Gloves and face shields are required for all staff cleaning our cabins.



Polk County Conservation has created an online family challenge that will take you from your home and into our county parks. Even though it's cold, we want to encourage you to get outside and have fun doing it! The game will be played using the *GooseChase* app - simply download the free app to your phone, create your team name, search for *Polk County Chill Out Challenge*, and start earning points by completing missions.

New missions will be posted each Monday, starting **December 28, 2020**. Your team will have until **January 31, 2021** to complete as many missions as you can. If you have questions, please email heidi.anderson@polkcountyiowa.gov.

The team earning the most points will win a two night cabin stay at Jester Park.

Other prizes awarded include:

- \$50 towards any Polk County Conservation shelter reservation
- \$50 towards any Polk County Conservation camping reservation
- \$50 towards use at the Jester Park Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center
 - Guided trail ride for two at Jester Park Equestrian Center
 - Family Pass to Glow Wild 2021
- Family 4 pack mini golf package at the Jester Park Golf Course

Download the App

goosechase





SHAMROCK SHENANIGANS

DATES: MARCH 11 - 21

Sneaky little leprechauns have hidden 10 special shamrocks on the trails around the Jester Park Nature Center.

See how many you can spot, snap a picture, & share your photos with us on Facebook or Instagram!



Share your adventure on Instagram with us (@PolkCountyConservation) by hashtagging #JPShamrocks or post your photos on our Facebook wall!

VOLUNTEER calendar

JANUARY - APRIL 2021

VOLUNTEER TIME OFF (VTO) - WOODLANDS

Does your company offer Volunteer Paid Time Off (VTO)? Join us as we remove invasive species such as honeysuckle, buckthorn, and oriental bittersweet from one of your county parks. Come and go between your allotted hours. **Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
January 6, 29	1pm-3pm	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
February 10, 26	1pm-3pm	TBD
April 7, 16, 23, 28	10am-3pm	Jester Park/Brown's Woods

TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT WORKSHOP & WOODLAND IMPROVEMENT WORK DAYS

Calling all park stewards, trail ambassadors, and general conservation enthusiasts! Strengthen your impact in our parks and along our trails with this workshop devoted to cultivating healthy woodlands throughout Polk County. The goal of timber stand improvement is to improve the structure, condition, health, and growth of tree stands in our parks. Join us to boost your volunteer resume and abilities by learning all about managing desirable trees. **Pre-Registration Required.**

**Classroom session for interested volunteers from 10 am until 12 noon on January 16. Lunch is provided, followed by a hands-on demonstration outdoors from 1 - 2pm at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. \$5 for lunch or participants can bring their own lunch.*
Pre-Registration Required.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
*January 16	10am-Noon	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
February 20	10am-Noon	Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

EARTH DAY WORK DAY

Come and celebrate the 51st Earth Day weekend with us, as we remove garlic mustard from some of our county parks. Be sure to wear long pants, sturdy shoes. Bring gloves and a refillable water bottle. **Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Times</u>	<u>Location</u>
April 24	10am-12pm	*Locations Vary

For more information, contact:
ConservationVolunteers@polkcountyiowa.gov.

The programming outlined in this edition of Nature News runs from January - April 2021. Due to the continually evolving COVID-19 situation, we aren't able 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.

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.****

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Victor Young has volunteered with Polk County Conservation since 2019. Victor is a former high school drumline captain who now does finish carpentry and identifies purple coneflower as his favorite plant species. As Polk County Conservation adapted to COVID and encouraged individual volunteer seed harvesting, Victor became a regular. Starting in August he spent an average of 2-3 hours most weeks at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt harvesting a variety of seeds throughout the season. His dedication to seed collection made him the first volunteer issued a 2020 volunteer seed harvest permit. Victor learned that his favored way to harvest involved bringing two buckets with him into the prairie, using one of the buckets as a seat harvesting seeds into the other. Victor also took part in seed harvest events such as our Happy Hour Harvests and the Moonlight Seed Harvest.

We are thankful for all of our volunteers, especially during times like these!



Victor Young with his seed harvesting buckets.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI SNOWSHOE RENTALS



RENTAL EQUIPMENT PRICES

Cross-Country Skis | \$15/half day (10 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. or 1 - 3:30 p.m.)

Snowshoes | \$10/day

Cross-country ski and snowshoe rentals are available at the Jester Park Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center, adjacent from the nature center. Rentals include snowshoes, cross-country skis, boots, and poles. Equipment may be reserved in advance. For more information, call: (515)-323-5330.

SIZING

Cross-country skis are sized mainly for adults. Height, weight, and European shoe size required for each reservation. Snowshoes are sized for kids and adults, with a weight range of 40-250 pounds.

**SKIS & SNOWSHOES WILL ONLY BE RENTED IF THERE IS
AT LEAST 6 INCHES OF SNOW ON THE GROUND.**

SAFE. SOCIAL. SERVICE LEARNING.

2021

Polk County Conservation Youth Corps provides opportunities to work outside while learning valuable professional and personal skills. Crews work together to complete conservation service projects like trail maintenance and invasive species removal, learn about environmental science, and explore through outdoor recreation.

To learn more and to apply online, visit:
www.LeadingYouOutdoors.org/youth.



POLK COUNTY
CONSERVATION
YOUTH CORPS
Inspire - Connect - Serve



AGES 15 - 18

• Spring Crew | Apply by February 21

March 30– May 2 on Tuesday/Wednesday evenings & every other Saturday. Earn a paid stipend and weekend camping trip to end your session.

• Summer Crew | Apply by March 31

Sessions run four weeks (6/7 – 7/2 or 7/12 – 8/6), Monday through Friday. Earn a paid stipend, camping trip, and weekly recreation experiences.

AGES 19+

• Summer Crew Leader (12 weeks, summer) | Apply by February 15 | Gain hands-on experience leading projects and teaching outdoor skills.

• Senior Crew Leader (6 months, May - November) | Apply by January

QUESTIONS?

Contact Youth Corps Coordinator, Janna Coulter, at:
janna.coulter@polkcountyiowa.gov

EQUESTRIAN calendar

JANUARY - APRIL 2021

WINTER SLEIGH RIDES | \$150

We have extended our sleigh rides this year! Bring your family or friends out for a sleigh (or wagon) ride through the woods of Jester Park. **Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Times</u>
Jan 9 – Feb 7	Saturday & Sunday	10am 11am 1pm 2pm

SWEETHEART RIDES | \$75

Come out on Valentine's Day weekend to spend time with your loved ones! Go on a half-hour sleigh (or wagon) ride through the timber trails of Jester Park Equestrian Center. **Rides depart every half hour. Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Times</u>
February 13 & 14	Saturday & Sunday	10am - 3pm

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! **Ages: 8+. Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Session</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Times</u>
Session 1	Jan 19, 26, Feb 2, 9, 16, & 23	4:30-6:30pm
Session 2	April 1, 8, 15, 29, May 6 & 13	4:30-6:30pm
Session 3	April 6, 13, 20, 27, May 4 & 11	4:30-6:30pm

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.

HORSE ADVENTURES SPRING BREAK DAY CAMPS | \$100

Can't wait until summer to go to camp? Come join us for a day! Activities will include riding time, horse care lessons, games, and crafts. **Pre-Registration Required.**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Times</u>	<u>Ages</u>
March 15	9am-12pm	8-10
March 16	9am-12pm	5-7
March 17	9am-12pm	14-18
March 18	9am-12pm	5-7
March 19	9am-12pm	11-13

HORSE ADVENTURES SUMMER CAMPS | \$385

Join us for a fun-filled week of summer camp at Jester Park Equestrian Center! Enjoy learning all about horses and riding, along with participating in other fun camp activities like games and crafts. Summer camps will run from June-August, and will open for registration in February. **Ages 5-18. Pre-Registration Required. Sign up for our camp contact list, online at: www.jesterparkec.com.**

The programming outlined in this edition of Nature News runs from January - April 2021. Due to the continually evolving COVID-19 situation, we aren't able 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.

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





Horsemanship Basics Series to Continue

"We are thrilled to have a professional equine instructor with Kelly's depth of horse knowledge and successful riding, training, and coaching experience on our team. Kelly's passion is helping others learn about the amazing world of horses!" - Claudia Starr, Jester Park Equestrian Center Manager



KELLY BLAIR

Jester Park Equestrian Center,
Riding Instructor

The Equestrian Center's Horsemanship Basics series will continue in 2021 with popular instructor, Kelly Blair leading the way. Horsemanship Basics is a six-week series that meets one day per week for a two-hour class covering horse safety, horse care, grooming, groundwork, proper equipment, horse behavior, mounting, riding technique, and communication with horses.

An Iowa native, Kelly owned and operated her own horse training business and lesson program for over 20 years, focusing on youth and amateur riders. Her experience includes a broad range of different breeds of horses and disciplines of riding. She has taught a wide range of students, from those with no horse experience to riders capable of competing for national titles. Her holistic teaching philosophy provides positive guidance to students of all abilities.

Join our Horsemanship Basics class and discover the many ways horses can enrich the lives of people of all ages!



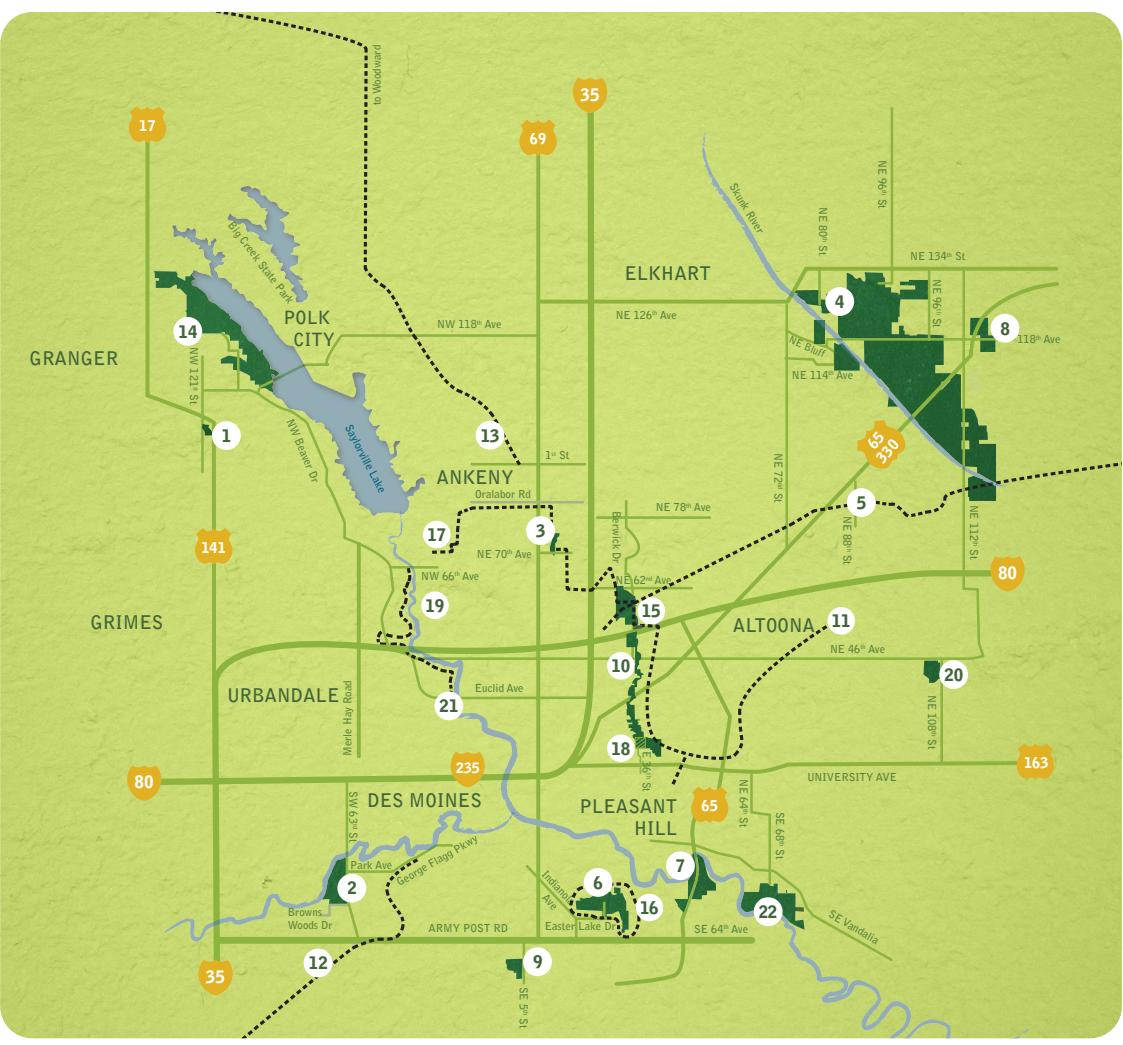
Jester Park
Equestrian Center
11171 NW 103 Court
Granger, IA 50109
(515) 999-2818
www.jesterparkec.com



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

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
AMES, IA
PERMIT NO. 14

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