

Pathways to Nature

A Newsletter of the Webster County Conservation Board

December 2020



2020 A YEAR IN REVIEW—Parks, People & a Pandemic

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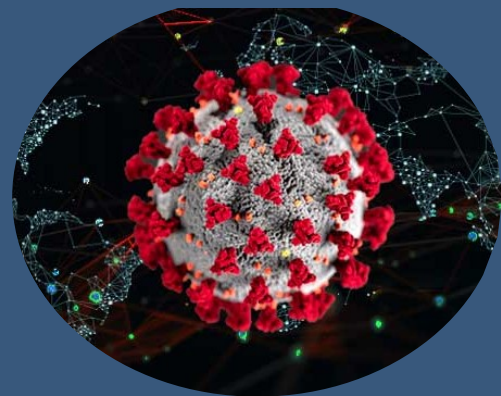
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2020 started as a typical year for the Conservation Department with the usual anticipation of the upcoming recreation season, event and program planning and scheduling a variety of park and habitat improvements.

By mid-March, it was very apparent that we were in for a year that would be like no other in our lifetime. There was no script, no plan and no answers as the world, as we knew it, stopped for COVID-19, a global pandemic like something we have only seen in movies.

As we watched most indoor facilities, restaurants and businesses close in some capacity, people flocked to parks, trails and green spaces in record numbers. The pandemic quickly affirmed that our outdoor spaces and wild places play a key role in our mental and physical wellbeing. To many of us, this confirmed what we already knew, that nature and outdoor activities provide an escape from the hustle and bustle of our busy and programmed lives. In fact, recent Iowa and national surveys indicate a 140 –200% increase in park and trail use during the pandemic.

While it can be difficult to find the “silver-lining” during a global pandemic, the fact that social distancing and shelter-in-place orders have caused American's to seek refuge in their local parks, trails and wild places speaks volumes to the important roles nature and the outdoors play in our lives. Families are exploring new areas close to home, mothers are looking for new playgrounds to visit, clubs and service organizations held their meetings outdoors and bikes, kayaks and other outdoor equipment has been hard to find.



2020 A YEAR IN REVIEW—Parks, People & a Pandemic cont.

According to bicycle manufacturers, bicycle sales have increased by more than 120% in recent months as more people are exercising and exploring alternate forms of travel. The kayak industry is experiencing similar demand, boasting \$405 million in sales and considered to be “the new toilet paper because everybody is going out and buying them” according to Casey Shilling, Owner of Carried Away Outfitters .

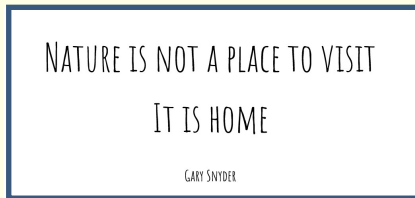
Although a lot of the services provided by Conservation Boards are difficult to measure, camping and trail use were considerably higher than I have ever seen in my twenty-four years working for Webster County. Every weekend our campgrounds resembled a holiday weekend and trailhead parking areas were full on both weekends and weekdays.

Our programs and events saw the largest negative impact due to COVID-19. Forced to cancel in-person programming and events, our staff offered a variety of self-guided and virtual programming. The results were amazing! All of the modified programs were “sold out”, some within an hour of advertising. People discovered and explored areas that they didn’t know existed in their own backyards.

Webster County parks, trails and campgrounds set record visitations during the pandemic. Some of the highlights include:

- The John F. Kennedy Park Campground set a record for revenue in 2020, surpassing the previous record by \$10,000, despite being closed for the first six weeks because of COVID.
- The Gypsum City Campground also set a record for highest income to-date. Camping revenue nearly doubled in 2020!
- On-line camping reservations increased by 100% from 2019 to 2020.
- Firewood sales hit a record high in 2020 with a 35% increase.
- Kayak and canoe rentals doubled from 2019.

At the same time Iowa’s parks and trails are experiencing record visitations, state funding continues to be among the lowest in the nation. Iowa ranks 49th in the nation for public lands and consistently ranks near the bottom for per capita spending on years since Iowa’s approved a Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund through her “Invest in Iowa” Program. However, due to the shortened legislative session the plan was never considered. This lack of legislative leadership and action has already cost Iowans over \$1 billion dollars in lost natural resource investments. Imagine the parks, trails and outdoor opportunities that would have been available to Iowans during the pandemic if the legislature followed the will of the people that approved this funding in 2010.



environmental protection. It has been ten constitutional amendment to create the Recreation Trust Fund and still not one fund that was created by the people to dollars per year for water quality, soil improvements, trails, lake restoration, watershed protection, local conservation partnerships and environmental education and protection.

Just prior to the pandemic, Governor Reynolds introduced a plan to finally fund Iowa’s Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund through her “Invest in Iowa” Program. However, due to the shortened legislative session the plan was never considered. This lack of legislative leadership and action has already cost Iowans over \$1 billion dollars in lost natural resource investments. Imagine the parks, trails and outdoor opportunities that would have been available to Iowans during the pandemic if the legislature followed the will of the people that approved this funding in 2010.

As we emerge from this pandemic in 2021, I’m hopeful that people will remember the important role parks, trails and wild places play in our lives. I’m hopeful that in a generation raised on computer and TV screens, we continue the reintroduction of our youth to the outdoors. I’m grateful for the investments our local leaders have made and continue to make in our “quality of life” amenities. I’m optimistic that this virus has caused us all to slow down and remember the things that are truly important.

Matt Cosgrove, Director

Parks Are Essential, Especially During a Health Crisis

83% of adults find exercising at local parks, trails and open spaces essential to maintaining their mental and physical health during the COVID-19 pandemic.



WALKING



JOGGING



HIKING



BIKING

59% of respondents say it is very or extremely essential to exercise in parks and green spaces to relieve stress and remain healthy during this crisis.

Numerous studies show there are physical and mental health benefits to spending time in green spaces. Local parks, trails and open spaces have recently become even more of a respite from stress. In March 2020, NRPA released a joint statement about using parks and open spaces while maintaining physical distancing. To date, more than 1,000 groups nationwide have signed on to voice support of the safe use of parks during this crisis. Visit www.nrpa.org/Coronavirus for more information.

Each month, through a poll of 1,000 U.S. residents focused on park and recreation issues, NRPA Park Pulse helps tell the park and recreation story. Questions span from the serious to the more lighthearted. The survey was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com).

Visit nrpa.org/ParkPulse for more information.



Camp Wa-No-Ki - A Hiking Destination

By Karen Hansen, Environmental Education Coordinator

For many people, this year — 2020 — has been a year in which finding the positive has been a challenge. Escaping into the outdoors provided a lifeline for sanity and wellness. The outdoors was hopping with activity this year. Trails in nature offer a place to walk or jog to improve emotional and physical health, lower stress, and gain tranquility. Finding the positive....

COVID-19 put a stop to face-to-face programming. The positive in this was TIME

to work on trail development and challenge course elements at Camp Wa-No-Ki. This involved clearing trail, building bridges, repairing trail erosion, installing signs, clearing gathering spots for groups, etc. Besides trail improvements, the badly eroded streambank near the road was greatly improved by Russ' Construction to hopefully save the road and improve water quality. More positives....



A visit to Camp Wa-No-Ki will be worth your time. And hopefully you'll love it enough to return often. The automatic gate opens at 6:00am and closes at

10:30pm. As you drive in, there are several small parking spots designed for day-use hiking, located before the big lodge parking lot.

Hiking amenities:

- ◇ Wayfinding signs to aid in navigating without getting lost.
- ◇ Updated trail map at the entrance and on mycountyparks.com
- ◇ New foot bridges to access difficult areas safely.
- ◇ Challenge course with five elements for individual or small group fun.
- ◇ Trails mowed for hiking, snowshoeing, cross country skiing at your leisure.



Future developments:

- ◇ Access to the river for canoeing and kayaking
- ◇ River bank access for fishing
- ◇ Island development for primitive camping
- ◇ Directional & entrance signage

Watch for:

- ◇ Trail celebration in the spring of 2021
- ◇ Self-guided exploratory activities
- ◇ Family and youth programming

Camp Wa-No-Ki is located 1 mile east of Coalville and 1 mile south, at the end of the road.

2400 WaNoKi Camp Road, Fort Dodge

WCCB Area Spotlight

Henderson Landing - Webster County's newest water trail access

Webster County is excited to introduce the newest water trail access on the Des Moines River near Kalo. The access was identified as a "high priority" in the 2017 Des Moines River & Lizard Creek Water Trails and Corridor Plan. This addition will provide convenient access for paddlers, boaters and emergency response personnel between Fort Dodge and Dolliver State Park.

The access was made possible through a three acre purchase from Dean & Sharon Henderson. The Henderson's have been extremely helpful in this process to provide more public access to the Des Moines River Water Trail. The Henderson's have noticed an increase in paddlers and wanted to provide a safe and legal place for people to utilize the river.

The total project cost was approximately \$100,000 and was funded by Webster County and a grant through the Iowa DNR's Water Trail Program.





Webster County Donates Cabin to Fairgrounds

The White-Oak Camping Cabin from the John F Kennedy Memorial Park Campground found itself a new home on November 3rd. The cabin has been donated from the Webster County Conservation Department to the Webster County Fairgrounds.

Built in 2007 by the Iowa Central Community College Carpentry Program, the cabin found its home at the campground in 2008. The cabin has been rented out for the last 12 years, but was no longer fitting the need of the campground.

“It has done well for us,” said Cody Peterson, Operations Manager at Webster County Conservation. “We just noticed a shift of people wanting their own bathrooms and water – a fancier, glamping type of experience.”

This new partnership gives Webster County Conservation the presence it’s been looking for at the Webster County Fair. During the fair, the cabin will house exhibits, both inside and out. Leading those exhibits will be Conservation Department’s Naturalists, Erin Ford and Karen Hansen. With the fair growing every year, Webster

County Conservation is excited to be there and help educate. Education will focus on everything from natural resources to outdoor recreational activities that Webster County has to offer.



At left - McGough Construction sets the cabin into it's new location at the Webster County Fairgrounds

“UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot...

Nothing is going to get better. It's not.”

In 2021 you will see some new additions to the Children's Forest. With the Emerald Ash Borer now present in Webster County, the Conservation Department Staff has been working on removing ash trees throughout the parks. Once killed by the borer, these trees become brittle and dangerous. We will be removing them from areas where they would become a hazard to park visitors. Instead of completely removing these trees in the Children's Forest, we decided to turn the stumps into natural works of art.

Gary Keenan, a Des Moines Area tree carving artist, was able to transform six tree stumps into characters from Dr. Seuss' Book, The Lorax. These stumps will be



part of a new Storywalk Trail, a .3 mile trail that will wind its way through the Children's Forest. The Storywalk is a "read-along" trail where a nature-themed book is posted at a variety of stations along the trail. The stories will be changed throughout the year. Watch the Webster County Conservation Facebook page for updates on this project and story changes.

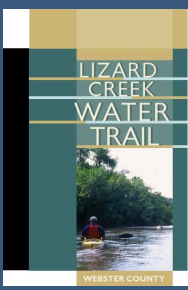
We are excited about these new additions to the Children's Forest and hope they will make your experience to the park a memorable one!

By Erin Ford, Naturalist



This project was made possible by the Friends of Webster County Conservation





Lizard Creek Improvements

The Webster County Conservation Staff took advantage of the recent warm weather and low water conditions to complete a series of improvements along the Lizard Creek Water Trail.

A special "Thank You" to Joe & Sue Cunningham, the Rasch Family, Amy Dencklau, Molly Van Arnam and Tim & Michelle Lentsch for providing public access to this beautiful creek!

Rasch Access

BEFORE



AFTER



Cunningham Access



Lentsch Access



Play it Safe on the Ice this Season

Safety tips on the ice

- No ice is 100 percent safe.
- New ice is usually stronger than old ice.
- Don't go out alone - if the worst should happen, someone will be there to call for help or to help rescue.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you will return.
- Check ice thickness as you go out - there could be pockets of thin ice or places where ice recently formed.
- Avoid off-colored snow or ice. It is usually a sign of weakness.
- The insulating effect of snow slows down the freezing process.

Bring along these basic items to help keep you safe: hand warmers, ice cleats to help prevent falls, ice picks (wear around your neck) to help you crawl out of the water if you fall in, a life jacket, a floating safety rope, a whistle to call for help, a basic first aid kit and extra dry clothes including a pair of gloves.



Moorland Pond Trout Stocking

Tax Time is for... All Wildlife!

Since 1982, when the Iowa legislature created the Fish and Wildlife Fund Tax Check-off, Iowans have been able to bring a little wildness into the tax season. The Fish and Wildlife Tax Check-off, affectionately called the Chickadee Check-off was created to allow people to make a charitable donation to wildlife conservation in Iowa out of their tax refunds or by tacking a few dollars on to any taxes owed. When filling out the state income tax form, just look for the contribution line in Step 9 of form 1040 and write in any dollar amount next to Fish/Wildlife.

All the money contributed through the chickadee check-off helps support the Wildlife Diversity Program at the Iowa DNR. This program has statewide responsibility for all the wildlife that can't be hunted, fished or trapped from Peregrine Falcons to Poweshiek Skipperling butterflies. You

can learn more about the program on their website: www.iowadnr.gov/wildlifediversity.

Please consider donating to the Chickadee Check-off this tax season and supporting wildlife conservation in Iowa!

Check it & Protect it!

Help keep an eye on Iowa wildlife when you donate to the Fish/Wildlife Trust Fund on your state tax form.



photo by: Doug Harr

Learn more at
www.iowadnr.gov

DNR CONTACT: Stephanie Shepherd at
515-230-6599 or
stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov



Upcoming Public Programs & Events

Your Guide To The Outside

Webster County Conservation Cross Country Ski & Snowshoe Rentals

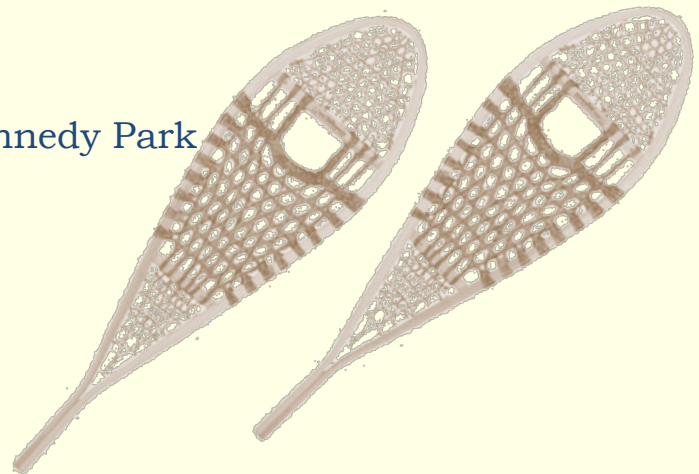
What you need to know....

- Rentals can be made **Monday - Friday only** 10:00 am - 4:00 pm by calling the Kennedy Park office at 515-576-4258. (Exceptions include weekend rentals following clinics)
- All equipment will be loaned out on a first-come, first-served basis. No holds.
- Same day rentals at Kennedy Park must have equipment returned to park office by 4 pm
- Weekend rentals must be picked up no later than 4 pm Friday and returned to park office by 4 pm Monday
- When there is at least 3" of snow, clinics can be scheduled. Please check our Facebook page or call 515-576-4258 for classes and rental information

Fees....

Cross Country Skis & Snowshoes:

- **\$10** for daily rental to stay at Kennedy Park
- **\$20** for weekend rentals
- Kids under 10 are **FREE** with an adult rental



For the most up to date information,

LIKE us on Facebook:

Webster County Conservation



mycountyparks
.com



Let's Be Friends!

With your support, we can make a difference in Webster County now and
for future generations



Sign Up Today!

Fill out this form and mail to:

Friends of Webster County
Conservation
1415 Nelson Ave
Fort Dodge, IA 50501

Membership Form

Membership \$25 _____

Business \$100 _____

Name

Address

City, State Zip

Email

Phone

The mission of the Friends of Webster County Conservation is to provide awareness, appreciation, and the preservation of Webster County's natural resources for future generations.

The "Friends of Webster County Conservation" is a non-profit, 501c3 organization that helps the WCCB with volunteers and raising funds to enhance environmental education, outdoor recreation, and conservation projects in Webster County.

1415 Nelson Ave
Fort Dodge, IA 50501
515-576-4258

conservation@webstercountyia.org

www.mycountyparks.com/Webster.aspx



Webster County Conservation

STAFF

Matt Cosgrove	Director
Cody Peterson	Operations Supervisor
Darren Herzog	Park Ranger
Joe Sherbon	Park Ranger
Karen Hansen	EE Coordinator
Erin Ford	Naturalist
Andy Stanberg	IRVM/Vegetation Specialist
Tasha Nielsen	Natural Res./Trail Tech
Adam Moeding	Natural Res./Trail Tech
Kyle Redmond	Natural Res./Trail Tech
Joni Hefley	Office Manager

BOARD MEMBERS

Nick Carlson	Fort Dodge
Geri Winge	Fort Dodge
Jerry Beck	Fort Dodge
Kirk Seltz	Badger
Beth Collins	Fort Dodge

The Webster County Conservation Board meets monthly on the second Tuesday of each month. The meetings are held at the Kennedy Park Office building at 5:30 p.m. All meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome.



The Webster County Conservation Board in the provision of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age, or disability. If anyone believes he/she has been subject to such discrimination, he/she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Webster County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.