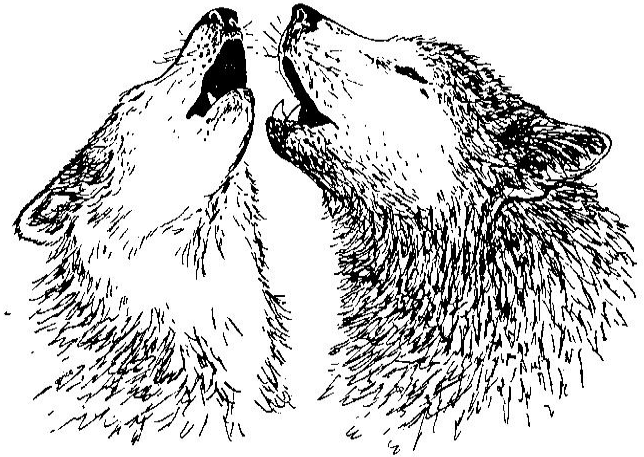


# Osborne Oracle



Fall 2023

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 46 No.2

## Help Us Extend Pony Hollow Trail! by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director

We're hoping you can help us build on our unprecedented momentum in pushing big projects over the finish line to round out the 2023 year!

### **We need your help** building the Pony Hollow Trail Extension.

In 2019, we were awarded a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant for \$192,000 to be available in federal fiscal year 2024 (October 2023).

To accomplish the Pony Hollow Trail Extension, **we need YOUR help!** The Enhance Iowa Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grant could bring in an additional \$250,000 (or 20% of the total project cost). The Conservation Board and Staff have been working to secure other grants including public and private fundraising. To apply for the Enhance Iowa CAT grant we need to have 65% of the total costs of the Pony Hollow Trail Extension secured. That means we need to raise an additional **\$30,000** to be eligible to apply.

### **Can you help us build this trail by committing financial support for this project?**

We are asking you to consider making a **financial pledge** to support this project. Whether you're able to write a check(s) in calendar year 2023, 2024, or 2025 this grant supports financial pledges as secured funds.

We have some flexibility with when we receive the dollars as construction will happen in 2025. This flexibility also offers an

opportunity to consider what size of contribution you can make over the next three years. Your contribution to Clayton County Conservation is a tax-deductible contribution as the current tax code allows.

We would greatly appreciate a response by **February 15, 2024**. In the meantime, Conservation staff will continue working on the grant to move the project forward and try to bring these state dollars back to Clayton County for community betterment.

This past October we welcomed over fifty participants for the **5<sup>th</sup> Annual Pony Hollow Trail 15K** and new this year was a 5K distance as well.

Events like this show us the continued support of the community to see this project happen, and we're thankful for the proceeds from the race that increased our secured funding for the trail extension.

If a financial commitment isn't possible, would you consider **pledging a letter of support**? The Enhance Iowa CAT grant likes to see community involvement and support. The Pony Hollow Trail Extension project came to fruition through community visioning and was backed by public input through community surveys completed by Clayton County Conservation in 2018

and most recently by the City of Elkader in 2020.

*Continued on page 2...*



Runners at the start of the Pony Hollow Trail 15K

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## *Extend Pony Hollow ...continued from page 1*

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This trail expands on healthful opportunities along a scenic corridor east of Elkader. It also helps us attract visitors and new residents to the area while serving as a financial catalyst for the community.

Clayton County has accomplished a great deal in 2023 and you have helped Clayton County Conservation's community projects come to fruition. We are thankful for your support and dedication to grow the future of Clayton County!

The **Inn at Motor Mill** started to undergo renovation in preparation for restoration almost a year ago. We entered that construction contract knowing we still needed to raise \$328,000 for the project. The Iowa Great Places program accepted our application, in partnership with the Turkey River Recreational Corridor, and we were awarded some of the last Iowa Great Places funding (they defunded the Iowa Great Places grant program at the very end of the Iowa FY24 Legislative Session).

We're so *thankful* for the private and public grant dollars that made restoring the Inn possible. It's hard to believe we welcomed our first overnight guests this November! This project has been a labor of love for the Motor Mill Foundation, and several extra volunteers that dedicated their time and talents to make a visit to the Inn memorable and meaningful. We thank each and every one of you for supporting this project be it through a financial contribution or a mention of progress. Thanks for being with us on this journey to return public access and overnight accommodation at the Inn at Motor Mill!

The **Osborne Campground** broke ground in late August and we are eager to return camping to Osborne for the 2025 Camping Season. We know the Osborne Campground project has been a priority for the community and a priority project in our current vision plan. We were delighted to learn in March of 2023 that we

were in fact awarded Destination Iowa Grant Funds in the amount of \$345,000 to complete our fundraising goal. We look forward to the campground being operational and a draw for the community in the very near future!

I hope you'll consider helping us once again to make this trail connection and Enhance Clayton County!



*Above: proposed trail alignment (white line parallel to Hwy 13)*

*The Pony Hollow Trail Extension will expand on the existing four-mile gravel path by adding a mile of paved trail, to allow trail users to experience a scenic, six-mile, looped trail.*

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## *Celebrating the Memory of Lee Lenth*

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*Lee doing what he did best, enjoying the great outdoors*

Lee Lenth, a long-standing Motor Mill Foundation Member, passed away peacefully in his favorite chair at home on Thursday, October 12, 2023.

Born January 15, 1938, Lee enjoyed growing up on his family farm. He served with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Arterial Unit for two years. Lee and his wife Verna moved to the Communia and Littleport area in 1975. Lee had many interests, from horseback riding to genealogy to conservation and eating delicious homemade pies.

An avid craftsman, Lee dedicated many hours to the Motor Mill Foundation. Most recently he completed the basement platform so visitors could view the location of the turbines unearthed in the 2020 sediment removal project. Lee could often be found at the mill working on specialty projects, right to the very end.

Just days before his passing, Lee was at Motor helping with some brush clearing, joking with other members, and planning for the future of Motor Mill. He was hale and compassionate. He always brought a smile to those he greeted, entertaining others with his knowledge and stories, and endowing all those who knew him with happy memories.

Lee was a tireless helper, setting an example in his community through tireless volunteerism. He will be greatly missed.

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# Snowshoes for Rent!

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The Clayton County Conservation Board has several snowshoes available for day or multi-day rentals! For just \$5 per day (plus a deposit refunded upon return of the shoes), you can enjoy the trails at Osborne or anywhere else no matter how deep the white stuff gets.

Available sizes range from youth (age 8+) to adult.

Inquire at the Osborne Nature Center or call 563-245-1516 to reserve a pair!



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## *Clayton County Conservation Board's Upcoming Events & Programs*

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### **Holiday Walk: The Lorax Revisited**

*Thursday, December 7th, 5:00 PM-8:00 PM*

*Osborne Nature Center*

*Registrations Required*

A lot has changed since Dr. Seuss wrote his eco-classic in 1971—what would it look like if he wrote it today? Come and hear some characters deliver an update in classic Seussian rhymespeak.

### **Voyageurs Highway 1971**

*Thursday, January 18th, 11:00 AM*

*Osborne Nature Center*

Come join Larry and Margaret Stone as they share their story of their canoe trip along the Voyageurs Highway in 1971, with Larry's beautiful photography and their memorable stories.

### **Winter Tree & Plant ID Workshop**

*Saturday, February 17th, 1:00-3:00 PM*

*Motor Mill Historic Site*

We'll be partnering with the Iowa DNR and ISU-extension for this wonderful winter workshop identifying trees and plants in their winter condition. Meet in the campground for an approximate 1-1.5 mile hike.

### **Bats, Bats, Bats!**

*Saturday, March 2nd, 2:00-4:00 PM*

*Osborne Nature Center*

Come learn about this amazing creature and why it is in jeopardy. Participants will then put together a bat box to provide roosting habitat for this declining species.

### **Motor Motor 5K/10K Trail Runs**

*Saturday, March 16th, 8:00 registration 9:00 AM start*

*Motor Mill Historic Site*

Come celebrate the always-stellar weather of mid-March in Northeast Iowa! Now in its 8th year, the Motor Motor Trail runs will offer the same rugged and beautiful experience on the trails surrounding Motor Mill, with proceeds going towards the Pony Hollow Trail extension project.

### **May Day Hike**

*Wednesday May 1st, 5:30PM*

Enjoy a guided hike along Osborne's trails as we look for wildflowers, fungi, and other signs of spring.



### **Owl Prowl**

*Friday, February 16th*

*5:30 PM*

*Osborne Nature Center*

Come for a night hike and learn about these secretive nocturnal animals. Visitors will look for wild owls and owl pellets along the trail while we try to call owls in. This fun hike will last about an hour and a half. Remember to bring a flashlight and dress for the weather!

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For more information on any of these programs, call 563-245-1516, or visit [www.claytoncountyconservation.org](http://www.claytoncountyconservation.org)

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## *Back Again— by Abbey Harkader, Naturalist*

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It is now hunting and trapping season and a good time to remember why wildlife and game laws are so important and what they have done for wildlife here in Iowa. Do you remember when it was rare to see eagles, deer or turkeys?

I do, I remember the first time I saw a group of each of these, alerting me that its population was recovering. For many younger than me it is hard to remember a time when these things were rare, but it is a testament to the power of conservation management and species protection that these things are once again common.

Sometimes it is hard to understand why hunting seasons and limits are so important, especially if you never witnessed the time when many species were scarce. One hundred years ago, some hunters were not very good at limiting themselves and over harvest of wildlife nearly wiped out several species.

Today many of these species have recovered and are once again abundant. Seasons and limits are designed to be flexible to allow biologist to adjust them to the needs of wildlife here in Iowa so when species are struggling they can tighten the regulations, but when populations get to high, they can extend seasons and set looser limits.

So next time you grumble because of hunting or fishing restrictions, remember, there is a reason that we need them, that wildlife need them.

The license fees that you spend and the habitat stamps that you buy are a critical source of funding for all the conservation and

habitat work that goes into helping a species recover. It also helps fund research, reintroduction programs, and conservation education.

Conservation management has had many successes. Each decade a new success is added to the list.

In the 80's the deer and the turkey made remarkable recoveries, in the 90's the eagles began to return, then the otter and the bobcat were removed from the endangered species list in Iowa. In just the last few years the number of bobcats sightings has become common in Clayton County. I bet you even know someone who has seen one this year!



*Bobcat caught in trap near Farmersburg, photo from 2021*

Even with all of our successes, there are still many species in jeopardy. Now it is often the smaller species that worry biologists.

Pollinators, songbirds, and bats are at the top of the list right now that biologists are concerned about. It is easier to get the public excited about something big like an eagle than something like a bat. White Nose Bat Syndrome is wiping out colonies across Iowa.

According to ornithologists, our songbird populations have dropped nearly 30% since the 1970's. Research is underway to find ways to address these newer wildlife issues, but the work will be long and difficult.

Thanks to conservation management we can now see beaver, otter, Canada geese, and many other once rare species. The same conservation work that helped these bigger species can also help the smaller ones. What do you think our next wildlife success story will be? Could it be monarchs, rusty patch bumble bees, or little brown bats?

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## O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

**“NE Iowa Ag Tour”** Looking for an excuse to get out of the house, meet friends, and enjoy a good meal while exploring our area? Join us the 3rd Thursday of each month March through November.

The 2024 O.W.L.S season will be filled with fun trips to dairies, farms, and agricultural sites. These events are geared toward retired adults, but any age is welcome to enjoy these learning opportunities.

Join us at the Osborne Nature Center each month to learn about the history of Iowa's agriculture!

Reservations are required for both program and lunch

Call with questions on cost or time



Osborne Nature Center

Phone: 563-245-1516

[www.ClaytonCountyConservation.org](http://www.ClaytonCountyConservation.org)

# Northern Monkshood—Science & Mythology

by Christian Cutsforth, Seasonal Naturalist

Iowa is full of gorgeous flowering plants. These flowers span from cup plants taller than most people to tiny flowers like wood sorrel covering the trails we like to hike through. One of these lovely flowers is known as Northern Monkshood (AKA Wolfsbane, AKA *Aconitum novaborecense*).

When one thinks of the name “Wolfsbane” they may imagine a witch over a cauldron making potions or they might think of werewolves getting taken down by someone using wolfsbane.

But how do the science and mythology of this wondrous little plant come together to make the modern idea of Wolfsbane?

Starting off, how did Wolfsbane get its name? Wolfsbane has been used for thousands of years for its deadly properties, being extremely fatal to humans and other creatures. Other creatures like... you guessed it, wolves!

Ancient Greeks would dip their arrows in the juice or sap of Wolfsbane when hunting large predators. They would do this to ensure that even if their shot itself was not fatal, the animal would die if it was hit at all. Wolfsbane’s other name (and usually a more professional one in the botanical world) is Monkshood. Monkshood is a name that originated from the British because the flowering part of the plant looks like a hood that monks of the time would’ve worn.

In the middle ages, wolfsbane came to be used as a form of protection as superstitious Europeans started to fear creatures like werewolves. These people thought that wolfsbane would deter werewolves from coming near them as a type of ward. Others who suffered from lycanthropy (the delusion that they too were a werewolf) would be prescribed doses of wolfsbane to suppress their ailment. Though this dose would usually be fatal.

Another weird fact: we know how witches “flew.” In the middle/dark ages, witches would concoct a “flying ointment.” These ointments would include many different plants, such as hemlock, henbane (a member of the nightshade family) and, you



Northern Monkshood & Columbine, photo by Brian Gibbs

guessed it, wolfsbane! The potentially deadly concoction of poisonous plants would create a type of delirium when spread on the witch’s broom, causing them to have vivid out of body experiences and make them able to “take off.”

Monkshood comes in a variety of colors. Though the population we have in Elkader just north of the Pony Hollow trail is a deep purple, other species of Wolfsbane can range from deep purple to almost white or yellow!

Monkshood (wolfsbane) is also a relatively rare occurrence in the United States. There are only 3 main large populations around the eastern United States, and that’s it! These populations are found in the Northeastern section of Ohio, the Catskill mountains of New York, and, of course, Southwest Wisconsin and Northeast Iowa!

These plants do well in a more shaded and cool area which includes the talus algific slopes of Northeast Iowa!

To go on a small tangent, Iowa has what is known as “Karst

Topography” meaning that our landscape makes it possible for geologic occurrences like caverns and sinkholes to be easily made below the surface.

Talus algific slopes develop when there is ice inside of a sinkhole or cave and hot air is sucked into it through a hole in the ground. The hot air is then cooled down as it passes the ice and then comes out of a vent aboveground, producing very cold air even in the sweltering summer heat.

The extremely cool cliffsides offer a very different environment than the surrounding areas due to the very cold soils. These soils help species that would otherwise falter to the warming climate thrive, such as monkshood! These slopes can be found at the ice caves in Decorah, Bixby State Preserve, and there’s even a couple vents down at Clayton County’s own Motor Mill!

So that’s just a quick look at this unique and rare plant that situated itself out here in Clayton County.

LEAVE A LEGACY

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
of Greater Dubuque

"To know even one other life has  
breathed easier because you lived.  
This is to have succeeded."  
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Osborne Partners for Education Endowment Fund was started by Susi Nehls and Roy Blair in memory of Susi’s father, Dr. Joe Hickey. Dr. Hickey’s research led to the legislation that protected birds of prey like the bald eagle. Dr. Hickey’s passion for teaching others about the natural world was sparked early by adults who introduced him to the wonders of nature.

<https://www.dbqfoundation.org/donors/giving-center/osborne-partners-education-endowment>

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## *Selfish Volunteerism by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager*

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When I first interviewed for my job with the Clayton County Conservation Board, my soon-to-be-boss asked me a tough question: what would you do to grow volunteerism for the CCCB?

I had no good answer. In my mid-twenties, my experience volunteering was mostly limited to volun-toldism: “service learning” projects mandated by my education or getting dragged somewhere by my parents when they needed another warm body.

I had a few other “volunteer” experiences on my resume—the Americorps program, and some stints with the National Park Service, but really those were backdoor methods to get a little living stipend and some housing while I developed skills to get a big boy job.

But since moving back home to Iowa and enmeshing myself in the community, I have had the great joy to experience volunteerism in the more traditional sense, both recruiting and serving.

It takes a lot to make a community run, and I am more than happy to help my little town of McGregor keep the lights on by serving on the Dock Commission and Tree Board. I also helped with their recent community visioning process.

I also sit on the board of directors for the Iowa Prairie Network, an entirely-volunteer-led organization focused on educating and inspiring prairie stewardship. It’s been one of the most satisfying experiences of my life, professional or otherwise.

It’d be great to take a pat on the back, but in all honesty, there’s always at least some measure of selfishness to volunteerism. And that’s okay.

I became involved in these organizations A) because I was asked, B) because I saw an opportunity to help shape the community towards my own selfish ambitions, and C) because these organizations provide an avenue for personal growth outside of my own 9-5 (well, technically, 8-4:30).

I have also, importantly, learned to say no once or twice. When approached to serve in a capacity where I do not feel like I know enough or care enough to do it justice, I steer clear.

Which brings me back to my initial job interview. If asked again, I would have a few better answers.



*Bill Johnson volunteering his beekeeping expertise*

Namely, I learned the hard way that just “asking for volunteers,” hoping to get a list of names to call when we need help usually won’t get the job done.

It takes a *true* altruist to just say “call me for whatever.” Organizationally, we are beyond fortunate to have several such persons in our rolodex (and yes, some of them have helped us long enough to be in an actual rolodex).

But I am forever impressed at how people come out of the woodwork when we need something specific. I have reached out to local schools and

universities for help with stewardship projects.

I have cold-called random members of the community when I heard they had an interesting story to tell, and asked if they would come present at Osborne. For how much people tend to fear public speaking, they seem to get over it quick when they can speak to their passions.

But nothing beats the feeling of someone approaching us.

We work with natural and cultural and recreational resources, but in the end, we do this work for the people. So when someone comes to us and says they want to repair an old trail on one of our properties, and even maintain it, we jump for joy.

When someone comes to us and says they want to help with field trips because they’re retired from teaching but miss the kids, we’re all too eager to help.

I think a lot of people have the misconception that volunteerism, by definition, shouldn’t be too much fun. It has to be a last resort, something to “do when we’re bored,” or “keep kids out of trouble,” or because no one else would do it.

But I’m here to tell you it’s okay to be selfish, and come to us with a skill set or interest you’d like to explore. Maybe you play music and want to get more experience in front of a crowd. Great, let’s put together a fundraising concert!

Maybe we have a park or trail in your backyard that you’d like to see improved. Great! You bring the elbow grease, we’ll bring the tools.

Maybe you love gardening but you live in an apartment. Great! We also love gardening but we’ve got about 1500 acres of “yard” so yeah, we’ve got a few places for planting and weeding.

Maybe you have a woodworking hobby and your family is sick of getting birdhouses for Christmas. Good news...



*Don Dunbar, volunteer fishing pole fixer extraordinaire.*

Citizen science, construction, mechanics, event support, the list goes on. Endlessly, in fact. No skill set too small, no job to minor, to add value to your community.

Ask not what you can do for your conservation board, but what the conservation board can do for you. We can help you grow. Yes, selfishly, we can usually get a little something in return. But symbiosis is not a curse word in the world of natural resources.

If you’re like most people, you may be thinking “I don’t have the time.” That’s okay. I’ll let you in on a few of the ways you have probably already volunteered without realizing it.

Lift a log off a trail while you were hiking? Thank you.

Pick up a piece of trash you found before setting up your picnic? Thanks a million, on behalf of everyone who might use the park.

## Selfish Volunteerism (Continued)

Volunteering does not have to mean a huge time commitment. It does not have to mean finding the least desirable job and offering to do it for free—though if that brings you joy, by all means, contact our office.

Volunteerism can and should be an act of personal expression, of the values you believe in and the things you believe would make the world a little more livable.



*Chris Schoen volunteering his archaeology skills at the mill*

We have thought a lot about volunteers in the last year. Two of our staunchest advocates, John Nikolai and Lee Lenth passed away leaving a considerable void in the Motor Mill Foundation.

Both John and Lee exemplified this approach to service in the highest order. John knew

and loved Motor Mill like few others, and proved instrumental in kickstarting the foundation in 2004, shepherding through monumental improvements to the site over nearly two decades.

Lee often took a more behind-the-scenes approach, logging countless hours on construction projects to make the mill more beautiful and accessible than it had been since its heyday in the 19th century.

Of course, if you ever met Lee, he was much more than grunt labor. He provided wonderful tours and boundless wisdom to anyone who had the honor to speak with him. Likewise, John was not just a figurehead, more than willing to get his hands dirty with the best of them.

They were not voluntold to do these things. They wanted something and they got it done.

These men were giants, movers and shakers of the highest order who chose to use their energy and talents to make their community more vibrant—and they did so, at least in part, because it brought them personal satisfaction, but we all get to reap the rewards.

On the other side of the coin you have our one-offs, those folks who perhaps have a child or spouse running the Motor Motor 5K. They hate running, but had to drive the runner to the event, so they offer to stand on the course and direct traffic. Maybe we see them again, maybe not. That's okay too.

So what would I do to grow volunteerism for Clayton County Conservation? I would start by reminding each and every citizen that we do not own these properties, we merely tend them. They belong to and have been shaped by the public, and they exist for people to enjoy. If they can think of a way that more people can enjoy them, we can give them the space and the tools to do so.

When you have an idea, share it. Within reason, of course—we probably can't let you feed the bear or check hunting licenses—but you might be surprised what you can get just by asking.

Which brings me to my last point: if I have gotten your wheels

turning, please just don't forget to ask. We have had people "clean up" installations that only *looked* like trash, leaving us vexed at what happened to our fish hides or the flag marking the boundary of a future project.

So long as the intention was pure I believe your karmic record remains unblemished for such infractions, but remember, there just might be more going on in Clayton County parks than meets the eye... and if you want to know more, you should get involved.



*The Kies family reclaiming a long-lost farm lane for hikers to use at the Becker West Wildlife Area*

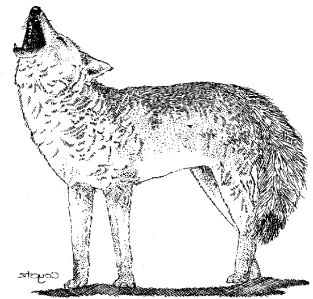
### *Got a skill to share?* *Volunteer with us!*

- *Adopt-a-building*
- *Parks cleanup*
- *Nature Center Greeter*
  - *Landscaping*
  - *Citizen Science*
- *Equipment repair*
  - *Event support*

Call us or email [CCCB@ClaytonCountyIA.gov](mailto:CCCB@ClaytonCountyIA.gov)

**Clayton County Conservation**  
 Osborne Conservation Center  
 29862 Osborne Rd, Elkader, IA 52043  
 (563) 245-1516

*Osborne Public Programs  
 listed inside!*



The Clayton County Conservation Board does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clayton County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

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 Pam Vaske, Strawberry Point.....Vice Chair  
 Gary Kregel, Garber.....Member  
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 Hunter Jensen.....Operations Manager  
 Abbey Harkrader.....Naturalist  
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 Ean Popenhagen.....Office Assistant  
 Nick Moser.....Operations/Maintenance

**Website:** [www.claytoncountyconservation.org](http://www.claytoncountyconservation.org)  
**Facebook:** [Clayton County Conservation](https://www.facebook.com/ClaytonCountyConservation)  
**Instagram:** [@ClaytonCountyConservation](https://www.instagram.com/ClaytonCountyConservation)

**Osborne Nature Center &  
 Gift shop Hours**

**Monday-Friday**

8:00am - 4:00pm

**Weekend Hours**

(Starting April 1)

**Saturday**

8:00am - 4:00pm

**Sunday**

Noon-4:00pm



Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public. See website for details, locations, and past meeting minutes.

*The mission of the Clayton County Conservation Board is to promote the health and general welfare of the people and to encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.*