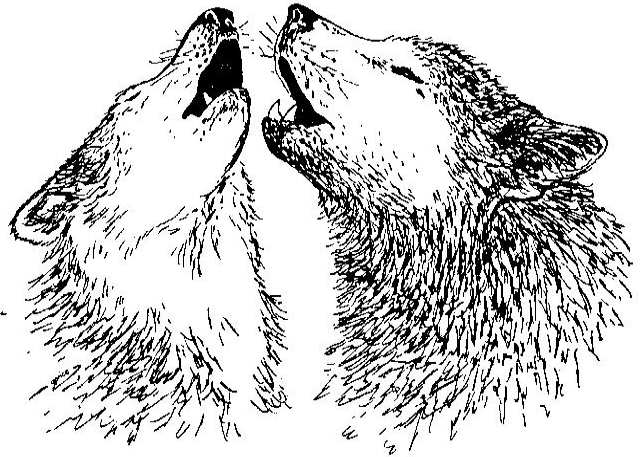


Osborne Oracle



Spring 2022

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 45 No.1

Turbulence: Comparing the Emerald Isle to NEIA by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director

Five hours into an eight-hour plane ride, somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean, vibrations rattled the seats and overhead luggage compartments causing passengers to gasp. A few minutes later the pilot apologized for the brief pocket of turbulence, and it got me thinking about the meaning and origins of the word. With roots in the Latin language, the word, meaning, “full of commotion, a disturbance in water or air motion, and synonymous with conflict or confusion,” lends itself to be a fitting description for the history of Ireland.

In a country full of 30,000 castles, 40,000 ring-forts and innumerable churches and monasteries, it’s no surprise that Ireland has a longer documented human history than our land of liberty. The Vikings landed and established the first city of Ireland in Waterford in 914ad. From there turbulence ensued and the Irish experienced a myriad of dominating powers trying to take ownership of the lush green land.

Our tour guide corrected the inaccuracy that Ireland experienced a holy war- the protestants trying to overthrow the Catholics. Instead he explained the English, a predominately protestant group, were trying to control the

Irish, a predominately catholic group. It wasn’t so much about religion as it was about control. The Gaelic people, the Irish or the Kells, weren’t successful and the European Union controls Ireland. To this day there’s a difference in people depending on ancestry- whether their ancestors originated in Ireland or the United Kingdom. This turbulent history was cited as one of the reasons Ireland has a fairly open-arms policy. They’re currently accepting Ukrainians in need of shelter from the Russian conflict.



*Above: The Cliffs of Moher, Ireland
Below: The Cliffs of Bluffton, Iowa*



Today, Ireland entertains a growing tech industry and they also rely heavily on tourism. Tech companies take advantage of Ireland’s lowest-in-the-world corporate tax rate. Other taxes in Ireland, 24% income tax for those making less than \$35,000, and 55% for those making over \$35,000, regulate a number of social services in their country including healthcare and a college education that can’t cost a student more than \$3,500 a year.

I struggled to reconcile some of the more recent accomplishments in Ireland. The longer human history hasn’t necessarily outpaced our practices. Listed buildings or what we’d consider buildings on the National Register of Historic Places in the US, didn’t come about until 1972, 6 years later than our National Historic Preservation Act.

Turbulence: Comparing the Emerald Isle to NEIA (Continued from pg. 1)

A similarity observed during the trip came in the form of protesting signs supporting cycleways. The government in Ireland is proposing to reclaim their railroad corridors, which were previously returned to private landowners, in promotion of bike trails.

While most are in support of the cycleways, landowners would like the government to work with them on the location rather than bisecting their land the way the rail corridor previously cut. The protest is against “compulsory purchase orders,” where the government has the right to take land, similar to eminent domain practiced in the US.

Perhaps one of the main reasons I felt drawn to visit Ireland was for the comparable landscape features and pleasant temperature. The Emerald Isle was formed in a similar fashion to Northeast Iowa. Glaciers shaped the landscape. The temperate climate is responsible for the lush green, as throughout the year the temperature rarely soars above seventy degrees and

overnight temperatures remain above freezing.



Millstones from the Kilbeggan distillery, Ireland



Millstone from the Motor Mill Historic Site, Iowa

In contrast to Northeast Iowa, Ireland lost their native forests. The sturdy oaks were toppled and used to build the infamous English Navy. Pine plantations dot the landscape, and harvest practices clear cut a plantation and then replant after five years of fallow ground. Some older oaks, labeled with the Latin name *Quercus*, can be found in park areas that were protected for the elite and rich to wander during times of contention.

Undoubtedly, the Cliffs of Moher is a major draw for tourism in Ireland and it was certainly a sought after part of the tour for travelers in my group. Upon seeing the shale and sandstone rock cliffs towering 700 feet above the water, I couldn't help but feel I was right at home, standing out at Pikes Peak, 500 feet above the Mississippi River. I'm not sure Prairie du Chien is quite the same as the Aran Islands, but I'd recommend a trip to Ireland if you're looking to travel but long for the Northeast Iowa landscape.

Your Friendly Neighborhood Ranger by Zach Dingbaum, Park Ranger

Throughout my life I have always had a calling to work in nature. Starting from a young age I have always spent as much time outside and in the elements as possible.

Growing up outside of Los Angeles it's hard to believe that I could see nature to its fullest, but it allowed me to see a large variety of different climates and ecosystems. I lived about 20 minutes off the coast, sandwiched between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Angeles National Forest.

This helped section off the coastal climate from the high desert climate. I spent my days in the Santa Monica mountains looking at rocks and waterfalls on one side, and lush Pine forests in the Angeles National Forest on the other. It was the best of both worlds.

When I graduated high school, I knew that being in California was not for me, so I decided to go back to my family roots and came out to Iowa. My Dad grew up in Oelwein and my mom grew up in Waukon, so what better

school that Upper Iowa University which is smack dab in the middle?



While at Upper Iowa, I completed my undergrad with a double major in history, and research and interpretation of geoscience, with a minor in Earth systems science. Hunting and fishing was my escape from classes and it offered the freedom I had always looked for growing up. I was spending more and more time on the public land surrounding Fayette and north east Iowa. Then it clicked.

In my sophomore year of college I began working for the Iowa DNR at George Wyth State Park seasonally, and couldn't get enough of it. After 2 years there I decided to move on the Backbone State Park where history and conservation went hand in hand. So when the Clayton County Park Ranger job came open I thought what better place to start my career? The county's treasure trove of natural and historic resources are unmatched.

This May, I'll take off for the Iowa Law Enforcement Academy for an 16-week training to become a certified officer. After that, I'll be back to work keeping Clayton County parks and wildlife areas safe and sound. Say hi!

NEED A CAMPFIRE?

We've got you.



Starting in the 2022 camping season, the Clayton County Conservation Board will begin selling firewood harvested from routine trail and forest clean-ups to campers at CCCB campground firewood kiosks.

Transporting firewood long distances introduces devastating forest pests. All CCCB firewood comes from within Clayton County parks, and sales will help fund future habitat improvement projects across the county.

Leave the wood at home! We've got plenty.

Clayton County Conservation Board's Upcoming Events & Programs

iNature Bioblitz

Monday, May 2nd 5:30 pm

Osborne Nature Center

Come out to the park with your phone to learn what a bioblitz is. Participants will find and upload all the organisms we can find to iNature. Participants can help by downloading the iNature app ahead of time and then come join us to learn how to use it.

Disc Golf Tournament

Saturday, May 14th, 9:00 AM (Rain Date: May 21st)

Osborne Park

Registrations Required

Bring your A-game to Osborne Park for this tournament on the Osborne Park 18-hole disc golf course. Long prairie shots and short technical throws through the woods will test all aspects of your game while providing some beautiful scenery to boot!

Fishing Clinic

Saturday, June 4th,

Backbone Lake

Registrations Required

Children of all ages, cast a line and try to catch the biggest fish of the day! The weekend is designated as **"Free Fishing Weekend"** by the IDNR; adults will not need a fishing license.

National Trails Day Hike

Saturday, June 4th, 2:00 PM

West Becker Wildlife Area

National Trails Day celebrates trails in all their forms! Come on out to the West Becker Wildlife Area for a hike on a trail constructed in 2021 through the generous volunteerism of a neighboring landowner, weaving through prairies, woods, and stream corridors of the beautiful site.

Naturalist's Choice

July

TBA

Clayton County Conservation's seasonal naturalists take the reins on this annual fan favorite. Past events have included geocaching, STEAM activities, fishing, paddling, and whatever else the team dreams up!

National Public Lands Day Habitour

September 24

Depart from Osborne Park

Registrations Required

Hit the road with the CCCB on this bus tour exploring public lands and habitat success stories from over a half century of conservation in Clayton County.

Motor Mill Open Weekends

Saturdays & Sundays May 28-Sept. 3rd

Motor Mill Historic Site

Noon-5:00 PM

September 17th Noon-5:00 PM

October 1st Noon-5:00 PM

October 8th Noon-5:00 PM

Seed Harvest Saturdays—9:30 AM

Learn plant ID, get some fresh air, and be a part of CCCB restoration efforts with this great family program!

June 25—Bloody Run August 27—Motor Mill

July 30—Bloody Run September 24—Motor Mill

October 29—Osborne Park

For more information on any of these programs, call 563-245-1516, or visit www.claytoncountyconservation.org

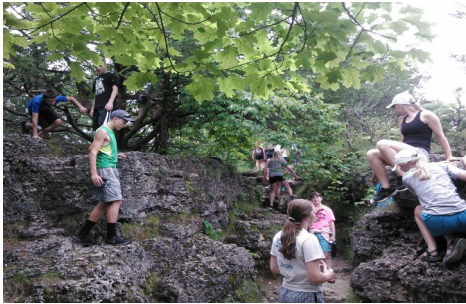
Osborne Junior Naturalist Camp

The Osborne Junior Naturalist Program is an exciting program held during the summer at the Osborne Nature Center. Offered to 6th - 10th grade students in the Clayton County area, it is an overnight camp that focuses on exploring nature, making friends and getting muddy! Programs are led by naturalists at the Osborne Center, local resource specialists and outdoors experts.

Gateway to Adventure- June 21-22 (6th grade)
Exploring Hidden Treasures- June 28-29 (6th/7th grade) or July 12-13 (7th/8th grade)
Expedition: No Boundaries- July 26-28 (8th-10th grade)

The deadline for sign up is **May 1**. Students will receive information at their school. However, if you need an enrollment form or have more questions, please call the center at 563-245-1516 or visit our website:

www.claytoncountyconservation.org



Gateway to Adventure
6th Grade

This camp is designed to get your feet wet. Activities include an introduction to basic camping techniques, canoeing, archery, trout fishing, night hikes, campfire activities, team building, and tubing!

Two days, one night



Exploring Hidden Treasures
6th-8th Grade

This camp will help campers explore nearby natural areas unique to Northeast Iowa. Participants will explore prairies, caves, hike the backbone trail, paddle, and explore the talus-algific slopes of Bixby State Preserve

Two days, one night



Expedition: No Boundaries
8th-10th Grade

This camp will push adventure further. Participants take a two and a half day expedition along the Turkey River learning backpacking, paddling, and expedition techniques to enjoy nature and the outdoors.

Three days, two nights

O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

“Discover Our Museums 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. Attendees are welcome to drive themselves or catch a shuttle from Osborne Park.

April 27—Buffalo Bill Museum & Antique Archaeology
May 26—Garnavillo Historical Museum
June 16—Lidtke Mill
July 21—Becker Woodcarving Museum
August 18—Porter House

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

The Forest is Full of FBI - by Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist

The forest is coming alive, and so are the FBI, the caretakers of the forest. The forest is full of these FBI: Fungi, Bacteria, and Invertebrates. These three superheroes are hard at work on the forest floor as it begins to wake up from its long winter slumber.

We call these three decomposers, and they are taking care of all the leaf litter that fell last fall, turning it into humus and soil, cleaning up the forest, and renewing it.

Decomposers like fungi, insects, and bacteria get their energy by breaking down dead leaves, branches and animals, and then returning those nutrients to the soil for future generations to use. Decomposers play an essential role in the forest creating nutrient-rich soil, which sustains all life throughout the forest.

Fungi

Let's start with the fungi. Fungi break down matter that many other things cannot. This makes them an integral part of the FBI. It is not the mushroom you see that does the work, but the mycelia of a fungus



that is hard at work. Mycelia are webs of tiny filaments below the surface that grow into decaying materials, break them down with enzymes, then absorb these digested nutrients. After breaking down this organic matter, they return these nutrients to the soil.

Bacteria

The microscopic bacteria are even more hidden than

fungi. Armies of tiny bacteria break down organic matter similarly to fungi, but they go further. Some bacteria can continue to work in anaerobic conditions, without oxygen, to continue their job of recycling materials.

Invertebrates

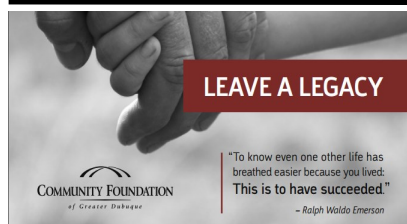
Now the last group, Invertebrates like ants, termites, nematodes, millipedes, and beetles are easier to find.



These small decomposers kick off the decomposition process. They break down material into smaller pieces for the rest of the team to work on. Invertebrates also help to aerate the soil. Fungi and bacteria need oxygen to do their jobs, and the invertebrates help loosen materials, adding more oxygen to speed up their work.

Imagine what would happen if the FBI no longer performed their duties. Dead matter and waste would pile up on the forest floor and the energy flow of nutrients like nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus, crucial for plant growth, would cease to move. They would remain locked in the dead materials accumulating in the forest. The ecosystem would stop functioning properly without releasing the nutrients and energy for other living organisms. None of your favorite things in the forest would be possible without the F.B.I. recycling nutrients from dead organic matter back into the soil.

Fungi, bacteria, and invertebrates rarely get the credit they deserve as they keep our forests beautiful. So get out in the forest and take a look down by your feet to see if you can find the FBI.



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>

America the Beautiful by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager

Over the last couple of years I've started bringing a new program to county classrooms called "fix this forest." My goal for this choose-your-own-adventure style program was twofold: introduce the challenges we face in the conservation field in regards to forest health, and introduce the tools utilized to address them.

I always start with a basic question—how do we fix a forest?

The answers that follow are remarkably consistent across age groups and school districts. Moreover, they progress in a way surprisingly similar to the changes in attitude over the last hundred and fifty years or so of conservation.

The first hands that shoot up exclaim with confidence, "don't leave trash!"

Yep, first and foremost, try not to make things worse. Extremely sensible, and although virtually any fourth grader can spell it out it's a lesson that somehow seems to have escaped any number of adults based on the state of some county roadsides and high-traffic parks.

"What else?"

"Maybe, like, don't cut trees or pick flowers or if you see a bug don't squish it?"

Also sensible, and reflective of the attitudes towards stewardship from the early days of John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt through the Wilderness Act of 1964. During this period, we collectively developed the notion that protecting wild places means getting humans out of the picture.

"Sure, that's good too. Anything else we can do to fix a forest?"

Less hands now. We're approaching the limits of adolescent imagination. One or two more hands go up, less confident this time.

"Maybe plant stuff, or if you see an animal that's like hurt or sick try to take care of it?"

Now we're getting somewhere. Cautiously, the students start to envision ways that they can reinsert human beings into the equation for the better.

The trepidation from elementary students reflects the same debate underway at the highest levels of conservation and environmental stewardship, evidenced by the first annual [*America the Beautiful* report](#) released at the end of 2021.

The report is part of the rebranded 30x30 initiative, a moonshot aimed at combatting the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity collapse by protecting 30% of

America's lands and waters by 2030. From the federal level down to counties, cities, and private landowners, the initiative takes a true "all-hands-on-deck" approach to reach the goal.

The America the Beautiful initiative has a number of laudable traits that represent a departure from major conservation legislation of the past. The initiative puts a marked focus on local partnerships, tribal communities, working lands, and underserved communities.

By getting input on a community-by-community basis, it recognizes that addressing the climate and biodiversity crises will require a different approach for each ecosystem and land use paradigm. It recognizes the value of traditional ecological knowledge, the oft-overlooked wisdom of peoples who operated within the ecological community for thousands of years before western science came along.

It recognizes the differing health and socioeconomic outcomes based on access to nature and outdoor recreation.

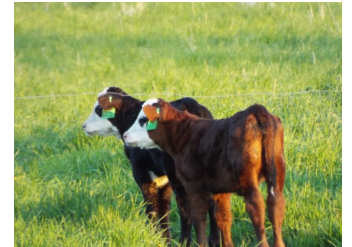
It recognizes that ecological function, climate resilience, and nature-based economics like agriculture, forestry, grazing, and tourism can and must coexist through thoughtful integration.

In other words, it's a lot more like the uncertain hands during my "fix this forest" program. Maybe we can do better than just walking away. Maybe we can get in there and help.

But almost immediately, the initiative became divisive over what truly constitutes a "protected" area. On one end of the spectrum are the preservationists with stringent definitions of protection. They've challenged the idea of timber harvests, public grazing, managed fisheries, or hunting, and not without reason.

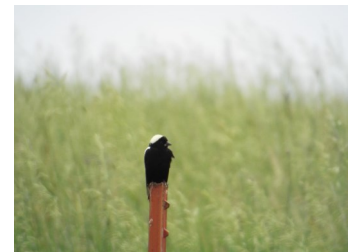
On the other end of the spectrum sits the ranchers, the timber harvesters, the farmers, the commercial fishermen, the hunters, all of whom *must* be in the conversation for the initiative to have any chance at all of success.

To me, sticking too close to the preservationist's side of the table risks making the same mistakes made in the Wilderness Act. Protecting only the most pure examples of human-free ecology is an affront to 20,000 years of human history on the North American continent.



Above: cattle grazing on a private preserve managed for dairy production and bird diversity.

Below: Bobolink on the pasture fence.



America the Beautiful by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager

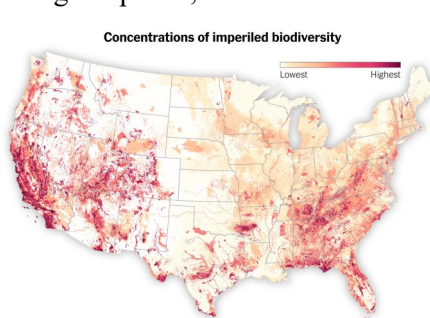
I'm reminded of a visit to the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, a sprawling landscape of remnant and reconstructed prairies in central Iowa. At over 10,000 acres, it meets the size criteria for a Wilderness designation. I asked the ranger about that.

"We'd never be able to manage it. It'd be too hard to do burns and move cattle and bison around."

Interesting. Anyone who has seen a healthy prairie cannot deny the awe-inspiring sense of wildness present at all trophic levels, in all times of year, but prairies somehow do not meet the definition of "wilderness" simply because they need humans. Even the gold standard of conservation legislation still draws a line between humans and everything else.

This hardline stance also has the potential to work *against* biodiversity goals. I'm on a listserv for the 30x30 initiative where emails come in multiple times a day to "share widely!" some campaign to issue protections for another empty stretch of the desert southwest or some craggy mountain range, both landscapes of inherently low biodiversity. Others call to "amplify" a petition to cancel grazing leases on an abused piece of public land, whether or not those habitats depend on some level of herbivory.

I don't want to dismiss these endeavors, but I'm in Iowa. Before the industrial revolution, we had one of the most thriving and biodiverse ecosystems anywhere on earth. It's the center of everywhere, a melting pot of the great lakes, the great plains, the eastern hardwoods, and here in the



driftless, goat prairies and talus algalic slopes found nowhere else.

The Mississippi is home to ancient sturgeon, paddlefish, and catfish the size of bathtubs. The great artery of the

midcontinent is fed by coldwater streams harboring brook trout. Her backwaters offer nursery accommodations for waterfowl and mussels and fish, many of which are imperiled but not gone yet.

This diversity developed amidst a heavy human presence, not in spite of it. The relationship was not always totally harmonious, but 500 years ago indigenous people had one major advantage for restoring the balance. They had the ability to step aside from a piece of abused land and let nature fill in the gaps with native species waiting in the wings.

We have let far too many worms out of the can to expect

stepping aside alone to fix our forests, our waterways, our grasslands. An army of invasive species have positioned themselves along the flanks of any spot left unguarded.

America the Beautiful has already reconstituted an invasive species advisory committee to inform and prioritize federal investments. But here too, the "sacrificial lands" of the Midwest take a backseat.

Perhaps I'm biased—well, I definitely am—but for all the focus on habitat connectivity, biodiversity, restoration, equitable access, etc. it would seem Iowa would offer a *lot* of bang for the buck when it comes to investing in nature. Our lands connect the east and west. Our rivers connect the north and south. Animals don't read "park boundary" signs. We can be a bridge, or we can be a dam.

We're learning how to use species like bison and cattle for both production and restoration. We've even had success [*reintroducing missing pieces of the puzzle*](#).

Iowa, though, is in something of a feedback loop when it comes to America the Beautiful. We're not the target of major protection campaigns because there's so little left to protect. We don't have anything close to 30% of our land in a "natural" condition. The funding goes somewhere else, we fall further behind, and the cycle continues. But this ignores what we once were, and what we could be.

The mechanisms are there, through things like the Conservation Reserve Program and USDA cost sharing for forest stand improvement to *reconstruct* of the habitat we've lost.

This is the last lesson I try to convey in "fix this forest." A lot of the time, getting things back to normal looks pretty aggressive, and it won't happen on its own. The kids are always shocked when I show them a picture of a honeysuckle removal project, with stumps and brush scattered haphazardly on the forest floor like something out of the darkest pages of the Lorax.

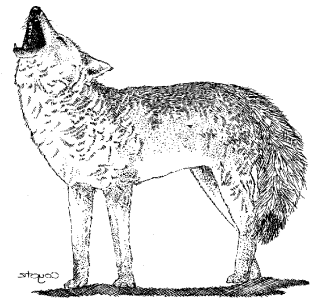
But then I show them the "after" pictures, with a rich herbaceous layer of sedges and woodland wildflowers.

I would argue the cornbelt, as a whole, needs this initiative most. Mere protection isn't enough here. We need real, transformative restoration. To do that, we need more resources devoted to the cause.

We won't get help without making our voices heard and sharing our success stories to demonstrate what's possible. To do that we have to get involved. Part of the initiative includes listening sessions, slated quarterly, to prioritize and strategize with the help of the people who know their land best. We have to put our hands up, with all the confidence of a fourth grader asserting that litter is bad.

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
Marilyn Lenth, Postville.....Secretary
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Kenny Slocum...Naturalist/Resource Manager
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Ean Popenhagen.....Office Assistant
Nick Moser.....Operations/Maintenance

Website: 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-Saturday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Sunday

Noon-4:00pm



Native Wildlife Exhibit Hours

Everyday (starting April 1): 8 am-dusk

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 model and encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.