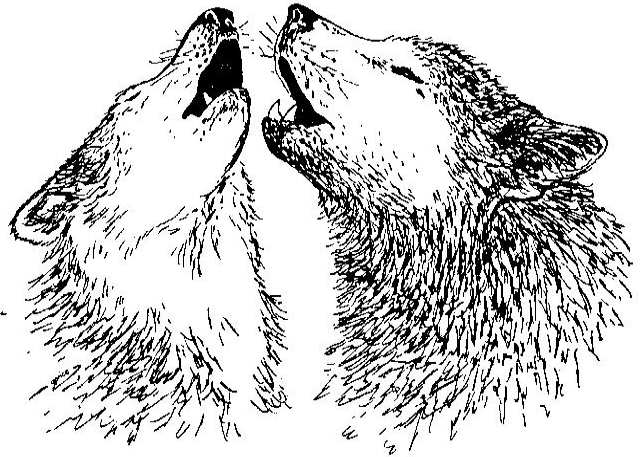


# Osborne Oracle



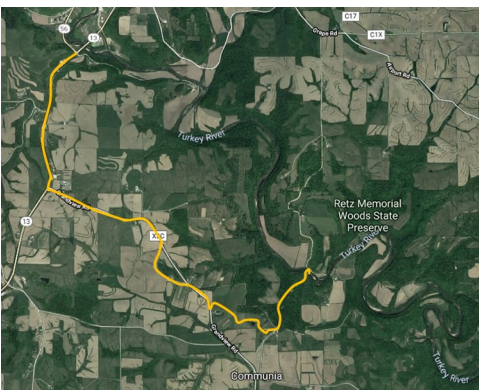
Fall 2019

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 42 No.2

## *Tipping the Scale for the Motor Mill Trail by Jenna K. Pollock, Director*

In 2020 the Clayton County Conservation Board along with the Motor Mill Foundation will celebrate the sesquicentennial of the Motor Mill Historic Site. That's a celebration of 150 Years since the Mill was officially built and the Founders opened for business in 1870. There will be a year of celebrations and special events ahead to showcase the Historic Site and surrounding amenities. I'm hopeful that you will consider joining me, the Clayton County Conservation Board and Staff, the Motor Mill Foundation, and a team of dedicated recreation enthusiasts



*Planned route of the Motor Mill trail*

to accomplish another goal: to complete a Capital Campaign for the Motor Mill Trail, to meet a 2020 construction milestone. The Motor Mill Trail will be a 7.5 mile pedestrian trail that connects the thriving community of Elkader to the Motor Mill Historic District. Boutique shopping experiences, historic attractions, restaurants, coffee shops, specialty food stores, breweries, bait and tackle shops, an outfitter with canoe and kayak rental, and recreational guide services, will meet the grandeur of the restored 1869 grist mill at Motor. The site is situated along the Turkey River Recreational Corridor along with hiking trails, fishing, hunting, guided tours, interpretive displays, rustic camping, and water trail access.

The trail alignment compliments the rolling hills of Northeast Iowa and shows off the scenic vistas we're accustomed to as residents of Clayton County. The route provides a recreational corridor allowing river users to paddle from Elkader to Motor Mill and bike back into town. Users will enjoy access to a variety of amenities through the connections fortified by this trail development.

The Conservation Board hopes to see the project under construction in summer 2020, and with your help that can be a reality. In 2011, \$850,000 in state and federal grant dollars were secured to supplement the development of the trail. Since that time a tremendous amount of energy has gone into identifying the best route.



*More trails means less sharing*

*Continued on page 2...*

## *Tipping the Scale for the Motor Mill Trail continued from page 1*

As we move into the construction phase, we find we need additional dollars to complete the project. The goal of the Motor Mill Trail Capital Campaign is to raise \$250,000 for the Motor Mill Trail Project.

Would you please consider making a pledge to contribute to the Motor Mill Trail Campaign so we can Tip the Scale for the Motor Mill Trail?

### CLAYTON COUNTY CONSERVATION

*Tipping the  
Scale for the  
Motor Mill Trail*

### CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

GOAL: \$250,000

CONSTRUCTION TO BE  
COMPLETED IN 2020

A 7.5 MILE PEDESTRIAN TRAIL THAT  
CONNECTS ELKADER TO THE MOTOR  
MILL HISTORIC DISTRICT.

\$850,000 OF FUNDS HAVE BEEN SECURED.

**WHAT WILL YOU PLEDGE?**

CONTACT INFORMATION:  
CLAYTON COUNTY CONSERVATION  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: JENNA POLLOCK  
29862 OSBORNE ROAD  
ELKADER, IA 52043  
563-245-1516  
CCCB@CLAYTONCOUNTYIA.GOV

### ***By The Numbers: Trail Impacts***

• **150,000**

*The number of recreational  
bicyclists in Iowa*

• **\$250,000,000**

*The annual direct spending of  
recreational bicyclists*

• **\$300,000,000**

*The annual health care cost  
savings to the state of Iowa by  
bicyclist's improved health*

• **9,000**

*The number of jobs in Iowa  
supported by recreational  
bicycling*

*\*Source: "Economic and Health Benefits of  
Bicycling in Iowa," Iowa Bicycle Coalition &  
University of Northern Iowa, 2011*

### **Motor Mill Open Weekends** *Tours Offered Noon-5p.m.*

September 14-15  
September 28-29  
October 12-13



**150th Anniversary & Bridge Lighting**  
**November 23rd - 4:30 P.M.**

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# Clayton County Conservation Board's

## Upcoming Events & Programs

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### National Public Lands Day: Prairie Seed Harvesting

*Saturday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 AM*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Celebrate National Public Lands Day celebration by helping gather seed for Clayton County Conservation's restoration efforts!

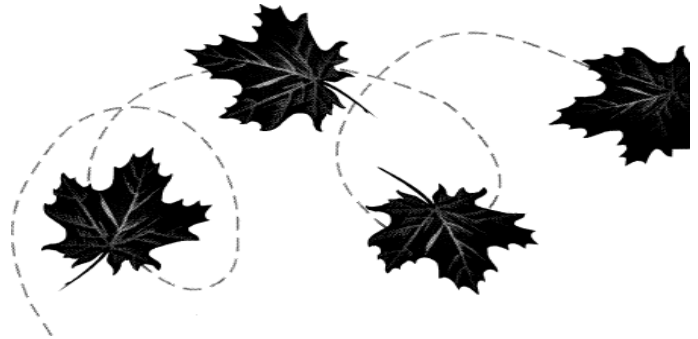
### Nature Kids — Fall Wreaths

*Saturday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 10-11:30*

*Osborne Nature Center*

Children 3-6 years are invited to Osborne where we will collect natural items in the park and create a fall wreath.

**Reservations Required.** Call to reserve your spot.



### Pony Hollow 15K Trail Run

*Saturday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 AM (8:00 registration)*

*Pony Hollow Trail, Elkader, IA*

A run to raise funds for future expansion of Pony Hollow Trail. Register before Oct 25<sup>th</sup> to guarantee a long-sleeve performance shirt.

### Holiday Walk: Mammoth Hunt

*Thursday, December 5<sup>th</sup> 6:00 PM*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Rumor has it there's a mammoth in the woods at Osborne... With the help of a trusty guide, Holiday Walkers just might find it. **Reservations Required**

### Owl Prowl

*Friday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 PM*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Come for a night hike and learn about these secretive nocturnal animals. This fun hike will last about an hour and a half. Remember to bring a flashlight and dress for the weather!

### Snowshoeing

*February TBA*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Shake off the cabin fever and stretch your legs. Attendees will have the chance to learn to use snowshoes as we explore the park.

### Bluebird House Building Workshop

*Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>*

*Osborne Park, Elkader, IA*

Bluebirds have long been a welcome sign of Spring in Iowa. As timber became crop lands, their population declined dramatically. Be a part of one of conservation's great success stories. \$5 covers the cost of the workshop and nest box to take home. **Reservations required.**

45<sup>th</sup> Annual

Heritage Days  
October 12-13

Exhibits, Demonstrations and Center Open

10am-4pm each day

*Pioneer food, games, crafts, demonstrations  
and farmers market*

#### SATURDAY:

Storytelling in Old School  
Gary Froiland's One-Man-Band  
Butter Shake Contest  
Schech's Mill Presentation  
Beekeeping Presentation

#### SUNDAY:

Pioneer Church Service  
KCTN Pumpkin contests  
Purdy River Bluegrass Band  
Fundraiser Auction  
Beekeeping Presentation  
Buffalo Chip Throwing Contest

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## When It Works by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist & Resource Manager

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Last fall I had the chance to add a little to my title and its requisite duties here with the Clayton County Conservation Board. The fancy new addition of “resource manager” sounds more glamorous than it often looks and feels in practice. And that’s okay. I stumbled into the conservation field by falling in love with the back breaking labor of trail work, before transitioning to interpretation and environmental education. I’m thankful every day for the chance to do both.

Few feelings exist that can match the satisfaction of watching a student’s delight in learning about a new plant, or shrieking when they get their first chance to handle a live snake. Having a voluntary audience attend a guided hike or powerpoint program, and seeing the twinkle in their eye when a powerful moment lands—those are the moments interpreters live for.

But like everyone in this field, my first love will always be for the landscapes themselves. Watching the drama unfold from season to season, the transformation from seedling to flower to autumnal senescence, welcoming the birds and insects each spring and saying goodbye to them in the fall, seeing the steam rise from the mouth of a chuffing deer in the depth of winter—these are the muse of the interpreter and environmental educator, not textbooks nor journal articles, important as they may be.

Conversely, that love comes with a certain anguish. The term *Plant Blindness*, coined in 1998 by professors James Wandersee and Elizabeth Schussler, refers to “the inability to see or notice the plants in one’s own environment, leading to the inability to recognize the importance of plants in the biosphere and in human affairs.”



*What do you see in this photograph?*

The classic example is to take a picture of an animal in its natural habitat and ask a person what they see. In the image above, most people would state they see a bird. When

pressed further, perhaps a few very savvy folks might say the bird is a Dickcissel. But shockingly few, even when asked if they see anything else, would mention the plant on which the bird is perched. That’s plant blindness, in a nutshell.

The plant is Canada Thistle, *Cirsium arvense*, an officially listed noxious weed in Iowa. The plant is particularly problematic because unlike many other thistles, even many invasive thistles, *C. arvense* is perennial, reproducing not only from seeds but also by budding from rhizomes spreading underground.

For those afflicted with plant blindness, passing a field inundated with Canada Thistle may see the showy flower heads and think “how pretty.” Indeed, in midsummer their dense clonal colonies can be quite a sight—their lush green stems and brilliant pink flowers contrasted by the dozens or hundreds of equally colorful pollinators and birds enjoying their nectar and seeds provides an amazing spectacle that masks the devastating affect Canada Thistle infestations can have on plant diversity. Hence, the anguish of the conservationist. It can feel like watching a house fire that no one else can see.

In times like these, plant blindness becomes almost enviable. To enjoy a walk in the woods without shaking one’s head muttering “Honeysuckle...Garlic Mustard... Dame’s Rocket...” sounds delightfully refreshing. If ignorance is bliss, what does that make knowledge?

It is difficult to make the transition from plant-blind to plant-blinded (my own term, for when knowing what’s growing becomes overwhelming) without feeling compelled to action. That desire to see more stable, diverse environments guides most decision making from day to day in deploying management strategies.

Ecological restoration is as much art as it is science; determining what you want out of a landscape, how you want to do it, when many options exist, presents a challenge. Further complicating the picture is the relative infancy of the science itself; new techniques (August prairie burns anyone?) emerging alongside clearer pictures of ecological problems demands flexibility and ingenuity.

So coming up on a year spraying weeds, cutting trees, getting stung, bit, frozen, sunburned, dehydrated, and scratched by Clayton County’s impressive cast of thorny, pokey, and itchy plants, I’m starting to experience a new sensation: the feeling when something works.

*Continued on page 5...*



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## When It Works (continued)

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Some projects are simple. Build a trail, and when you're done you can see that it's done. Do some timber stand improvement, and you can immediately see the increased sunlight penetration that will lead to a healthier understory.

Others lead to a little more collar tugging, a little more whispering "I sure hope this works" to no one in particular. Coincidentally, the Canada Thistle provides one such example. Following a spring burn at our Becker West Wildlife Area near Millville, I noticed several dense colonies of the spiny troublemakers. We're in for a few years of integrated management to eradicate the problem, but a little creativity has already yielded some wonderful results.

With much of the prairie in flower, I hesitated to use herbicides out of concern for pollinators. Their efficacy in June and July is not great anyway. But a few other land managers had mentioned their success in cutting the stems to a height of 12" or so right before the buds open, when the plant has dedicated much of the energy stored in its roots to bolting and flowering. So I waded through the sea of grass, gently nudging Parsnip aside and falling into the occasional hidden gully, with a brush saw and started mowing the patches, working from the outside in.

I had hoped mostly to just curtail this year's flowering, preventing more seeding and hopefully stall the spread until more aggressive methods could be deployed. But I was overjoyed when, upon revisiting the site in late August to see how it had worked, that the plant was almost entirely absent, nothing remaining but brown decaying stems. Likely, they'll be back, but hopefully less dense, and a bit more susceptible to treatment. Patience and persistence are the watchwords.

The Grau Memorial Oak Savanna at Motor Mill offers another "Eureka" moment. Historically, Oak savannas would have burned every 3-5 years to maintain their grassy understory. The Grau Memorial Savanna had not been burned in about 7 years prior to last fall, so woody species had begun to move in.

Several species of *Rubus*, the bramble family including blackberries and raspberries, had overtaken the prairie plants on the savanna. Their large leaves and sprawling growth habit had come to dominate. Despite the fact that they're native, they were still considered detrimental. Their flowers and berries come and go quickly, providing little in the way of food for wildlife the rest of the year. A healthy savanna needs flowers from March to October, along with grass and seeds to feed hungry critters through

the winter. Too much *Rubus*, no matter how native (and many weren't) and the integrity of the ecosystem starts to unravel.

Last November, we burned the savanna and much of the surrounding timber. Quickly, another problem became evident—brambles don't burn so easily. The densest patches especially managed to escape the flames entirely. But where adequate fuel could carry the burn, the understory was opened up to where follow-up treatments became simpler.

In the dead of winter, I hauled the trusty old brushsaw up to the savanna along with a backpack sprayer full of herbicide to try to set the canes back further. Cutting, and then painstakingly treating the small green stems by the thousands, all I could think was how much time I was wasting if this didn't work. Not to mention how long I would have to wait to find out.



*Motor Mill prescribed burn*

But lo and behold, this summer, I finally got to breathe a sigh of relief. The brambles are back, but that's expected. Fire essentially mows the tops, leaving the roots to resprout as *primicanes*, or first-year plants. The plant takes two years to flower, fruit, and set seeds which can persist in the soil for up to 7 years; the savanna this summer consists almost exclusively of *primicanes*, ripe for treatment, and a phenomenal start to the battle against that seed bank. Many of the patches that escaped the fire—those that had to be treated over the winter—are gone entirely, in their place lush deer-tongue grasses and late summer wildflowers including goldenrod, sunflower, and great blue lobelia. The site is well on its way to an acceptable level of brambles; a level that sees them functioning within a broader mosaic, rather than dominating the whole picture.

That experience—observing a changing plant community, and all the cascading effects therein—finds no purchase in the mind of the plant-blind. But luckily, the affliction has an easy cure. You don't even technically need a field guide. All it takes is a little mindfulness; pay attention to the little details, take pictures, and pick a haunt to visit again and again. The rest will take care of itself.

## ***What ~~Can~~ Will We Live With? by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director***

“What can we live with?” was the question posed to a room filled with Iowa’s County Conservation Directors at the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) conference in Des Moines on August 22, 2019. This question referenced compromises Conservation Directors and natural resource supporters across Iowa are considering for this next session of looming legislation.

The question posed brings to mind certain visceral images of ongoing natural resource degradation across the world. The Amazon on fire, starved polar bears crossing perilous melting glaciers, sea turtles swimming amongst the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, and in Iowa, the fate of natural resource funding. What can we live with?

I couldn’t stop focusing on the word “can” which happens to represent a popular acronym and conservation movement across the state, the conservation awareness networks. I also had a strong urge to suggest we replace the word “can” with “will.” The latter being a popular acronym for the voter supported Iowa’s Water and Land Legacy (IWILL) or the Natural Resource and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

In recent years, the Iowa County Conservation System (ICCS) has pulled full-stride ahead of the Iowa State Department of Natural Resources, as the state continues to cut funding from their arm of natural resource management. Compliments and support for the ICCS has surged momentum ahead. Visitation and revenues continue to rise at county-managed facilities, but that could all come to a halt with a looming sunset date for the Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) legislation in 2021.

REAP is a program in the State of Iowa that invests in, as its name implies, the enhancement and protection of the state’s natural and cultural resources. REAP is funded from the state’s Environment First Fund (Iowa gaming receipts) and from the sale of the natural resource license plate. The program is authorized to receive \$20 million per year until 2021, but the state legislature sets the amount of REAP funding every year. The first \$350,000 each year goes to Conservation Education, 1% of balance goes for DNR Administration, and the remaining funds are distributed as follows:

129.4	Dickinson	Reeds Run Wildlife Area	This project will acquire a 43-acre property composed of a combination of wetland and grassland areas. The property is within 1000 feet of the eastern shoreline of Big Spirit Lake and will be purchased by Dickinson CCB so that its wetlands and prairie can be preserved. The area will positively impact the water quality of the Iowa Great Lakes and serve as a natural wildlife area and passive recreation site.	\$153,687	\$153,687
129.2	Polk	Crane Meadows Acquisition	This project will acquire 348 acres of land as an addition to its Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Area. The area will be restored to a combination of wetland, grassland and oak savanna.	\$500,000	\$167,879
125.4	Dallas	Big Bend Wildlife Area Addition	(would have been funded w/REAP at \$20M)	\$344,360	-0-
112.6	Linn	Toms Addition to Buffalo Creek Natural Area		\$70,000	-0-
100.4	Van Buren	Bentonsport Park Enhancement, Step 1		\$41,530	-0-
96.8	Lyon	Lake Pahoja Conservation Education Center		\$400,000	-0-
88.6	Decatur	Savanna Hills Learning Center		\$750,000	-0-
47.2	Greene	Bill and Vesta Dixon Wildlife Area Trail		\$49,000	-0-
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>\$2,948,309</b>	<b>\$961,298</b>

Roadside Vegetation 3%, Historical Resources 5%, State Land Management 9%, City Parks and Open Space 15%, Soil and Water Enhancement 20%, County Conservation 20%, and State Open Space 28%. Since its enactment in 1989, Clayton County has received \$5,412,344 in REAP funds and grants including recent contributions to the Motor Mill Bridge, and Monona Butterfly Trail Project.



*Monona Butterfly Garden, a REAP project*

“What can we live with?” isn’t the question I want you to ask.

The people of Iowa voted in 2010 to see the first 3/8 of a penny in sales tax go towards natural resource management. The legislature has failed to enact legislation or raise the sales tax in that time. The IWILL legislation would generate \$23 million dollars annually. That’s \$1 billion dollars “lost” for the management of natural resources in the state of Iowa since that citizen-driven initiative passed. That’s failing Iowans day in and day out. Do you feel that added weight in your pocket? Not likely.

What will we live with? IWILL? If you support Natural Resource Conservation in the state of Iowa, I ask that you tell your legislators to fund REAP. Tell them to enact IWILL.

*The projects in gray were “left behind” by underfunding REAP. IA Legislature is authorized to appropriate up to \$20 million for REAP projects, but has never authorized the full amount. 2019 saw the authorization of \$12 million. The program will sunset in 2021 without legislative reauthorization.*



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## *Nature All Around Us Mural Project by Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist*

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The Osborne Center will soon have an artist at work designing new murals for the Nature Center. The Clayton County Conservation Board was awarded a grant through the Iowa Arts Council to bring awareness and appreciation of art and nature to Osborne's visitors. The "Nature All Around Us" Mural Project will complement the other new exhibits already completed and will inspire the imagination during educational programs.

The main goal of the project is to provide an enhanced visitor experience that will lead to deeper understanding of our natural world through art. This invaluable investment in art will give visitors and Clayton County residents access to quality art they would not normally have. Using a local artist will bring a sense of ownership and promote the creativity and talents found here in Northeast Iowa. Clayton County Conservation and the Iowa Arts Council will bring awareness and appreciation of art and nature to all who visit Osborne Nature Center.

The local artist will create three murals for the "Nature All Around Us" exhibit. The first mural will cover the entire back wall of the nature center's classroom. This mural will be a river ecology scene. Clayton County borders the Mississippi River with many smaller rivers and trout streams throughout the county. The river ecology scene will visually tie the exhibits of this room

together through art. The second mural will surround the newly built karst cave and will be a deep woodland mural to complement the cave. This mural will bring the cave alive for visitors and families exploring this crawl through exhibit. The third mural will be a forest floor and habitat scene to compliment the live amphibian and reptile displays in the center. The mural project will enhance the environmental education experience by complimenting the natural environment and bringing the rare ecological system of the Driftless Region to life.

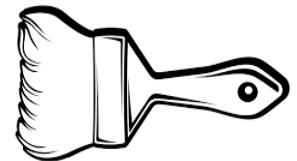
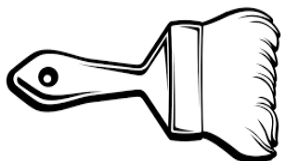
As nature becomes more and more hands-off, the new murals will help visitors get up close to nature through art, allowing children and adults alike to feel more able to touch and interact with nature in a meaningful way as they learn about the plants and animals of Iowa. The new exhibits will give returning visitors and families something new, different, and engaging to see as they immerse themselves in art and the wonder of nature.

The Nature All Around Us Project will begin this fall, with the work to be completed before spring field trip season. The nature center should be full of activity throughout the winter as our selected artist works on these exciting new

murals. Visitors will still have access to the nature center this winter, but if you visit during the development phase you may see our artist busy at work.

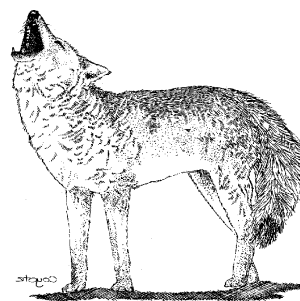


*Future site of the forest floor & habitat mural*



**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

#### ***Conservation Board Members:***

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Daryl Landsgard, St. Olaf.....Vice Chair  
Larry Stone, Elkader.....Secretary  
Marilyn Lenth, Postville.....Member  
Pam Vaske, Strawberry Point.....Member

#### ***Staff***

Jenna Pollock.....Director  
Tucker Anderson.....Operations Supervisor  
Jay Farmer.....Operations/Maintenance  
Abbey Harkrader.....Naturalist  
Kenny Slocum...Naturalist/Resource Manager  
Molly Scherf.....Office Manager  
Tammie Kraus.....Office Assistant  
Deron Hakert.....Maintenance

#### ***Visit:***

**[www.claytoncountyconservation.org](http://www.claytoncountyconservation.org)**  
***and LIKE us on Facebook!***

## **Osborne Nature Center & Gift shop Hours**

**Monday-Saturday**

8:00am - 4:00pm

**Sunday**

Noon-4:00pm



## **Native Wildlife Exhibit Hours**

**Everyday 10-4:30**

Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the  
second Tuesday of every month at 6:00pm in the  
Osborne Center Auditorium.  
Meetings are open to the public.

***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.***