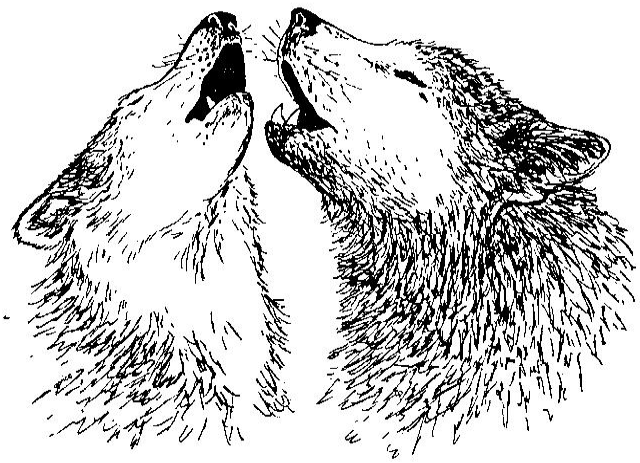
Osborne Oracle



Spring 2021 *Clayton County Conservation* *Vol. 44 No.1*

Motor Mill Trail Grand Opening *by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director*

Please join us for the **Motor Mill Trail - Grand Opening**, Saturday, March 20, 2021. The celebration will commence at 9am that morning in the Motor Mill Campground. We will recognize our neighbors along the route, and the partners who have provided strategic planning, promotion, and financial support for the Motor Mill Trail project. We especially appreciate that each of you has helped bring the Motor Mill Trail project to fruition. Please join us for this celebration!

The Motor Mill Trail winding cross-country

The Grand Opening will also serve as the official start of the **Annual Motor Motor 5K** race on Saturday, March 20, 2021. With the construction of the Motor Mill Trail, we've been able to add a **10K** race option that follows the Motor Mill Trail. The traditional 5K race will follow the rugged, single-track trails that mirror the river valley at Motor Mill. We sincerely hope you'll consider joining us on Saturday, March 20, 2021 at 9am at the Motor Mill Historic Site.

If you or friends want to participate in the race, please visit the events tab on **www.claytoncountyconservation.org** to register for the race. It's time to celebrate! We hope to see you, but if your schedule does not allow, please accept our heartfelt congratulations to the entire community and our sincere gratitude for helping build the Motor Mill Trail.

Motor Mill Trail Sponsors

Transportation Alternatives Program Funds (Federal Highway Administration) - **$600,000**
State Recreation Trail/Enhancement Funds (Iowa Department of Transportation) - **$250,000**

$5,000+
FreedomBank
Alane & Roger Swales
Randy & Mary Ann McMillin
Jim & Joleen Jansen

$2,000+
Alpine Communications
Daniel & Karen Slagel

$1,000+
Larry & Margaret Stone
Dr. Ken & Fran Zichal
Steve & Ann McCorkindale
Tim & Patty Engelhardt

$500+
Dr. Andy & MJ Smith

$250+
Allamakee-Clayton REC
Black Hill's Energy
Citizen's State Bank
Deb's Brewtopia

$50+
Brown's Sales & Leasing
Madonna Hosch
Marnell E. Scheeper
Lee & Verna Lenth
Kenny Slocum
Warren Wood
Mary Streicher
Leah Beaman
Whistlin' Bit Saddle Club
Network for Good - Anonymous Contributions

Best of Intentions *by Jenna K. Pollock, Executive Director*

As individuals we start 2021, like every year, with optimism and a commitment to resolutions. Similarly, as an organization, we evaluate our goals, see how they align with funding, and try to map out a plan for implementing priorities in the year ahead. 2021 looks to be a year of lining up matching funds for future projects, but our residents and visitors will also see investment from our efforts of years past.

The spring of 2021 will bring a new hard-surface trail through the Native Wildlife Exhibit and Pioneer Village at Osborne to accommodate visitors with mobility restrictions. This project comes to fruition in partnership with the Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation which granted Conservation $55,900. The McElroy Trust contributed $5,000 to ensure all school-age children can safely access the exhibit and historic village. A grant from the Foundation of Cornerstone Communities accounted for another $3,000. Generous contributions from visitors accounted for the remaining match needed to complete the project. While improving accessibility year-round, the project will also aid in maintenance and wayfinding of the amenities at Osborne Park.

The stable at Motor

As spring transitions to summer, restoration of the Motor Stable will provide public use to the structure for picnics, family gatherings, and small ceremonies and receptions. Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation granted the Motor Mill Foundation $35,000 for the $50,000 project. The vision, to utilize the space for community events, was driven by community feedback, interest and support. An open-air concert was hosted on the lawn Summer of 2020 and generated $2,000 to kickstart the project.

As summer transitions to fall, two fish habitat construction projects will take place in Clayton County parks. $17,062.50 from fishing license habitat fees was granted to add fish habitat structures and bank stabilization to the highly prized access along the headwaters of the Maquoketa River in Joy Springs County Park. An additional $10,500 will be invested to extend previous streambank benching and install fish habitat structures along the Volga River within Osborne Park. Both of these projects aim to improve fishing habitat and ultimately enhance angler success for years to come.

Amid feverish snow shoveling efforts, Conservation staff are rapidly writing narratives to meet the bevy of early grant deadlines in 2021. Among the horizon projects we aim to accomplish in the coming years, the Osborne Campground has been lifted up with the most support from our patrons. At just shy of a million-dollar investment, the project will likely take a few years to fully fund. Conservation Staff are working hard to identify grant dollars that can kickstart the project, and other complementary funds that can help fulfill the capital needs to complete the development.

Cresting floodwaters in 2008

Another hefty lift will be needed to move revitalization efforts of the Motor Inn forward. After flood events in 2008, the main floor was gutted to prevent interior deterioration. The Foundation has identified a compatible use of the structure, as a welcome and retreat center offering overnight accommodations for guests. Projected expenses total $450,000 to restore the Inn and make it open for public use once again. Completion of the project means a more immersive experience for visitors of the Motor Mill Historic District and a sustainable amount of revenue for future maintenance.

Several trail enhancement projects round out the capital project list for Clayton County Conservation. Funds are being sought to match dollars awarded to the Pony Hollow Trail Extension on the east side of Elkader. A preliminary study of the route alignment connecting Elkader to Elgin along the Turkey River Corridor will wrap up in 2021, and the project will transition to implementation as funds are secured.

Yellow: Pony Hollow
Red: Phase 1 extension
Purple: Phase 2 extension

Clayton County Conservation endeavors to accomplish our mission, and invest our time to implement projects prioritized by the community. Feedback and financial support drive the success of this organization, and partnerships that promote these public use facilities and areas we work to maintain for future use. If you're excited to see these 2021 resolutions become revolutionary, we'd love to hear from you.

NEED A CAMPFIRE? We've got you.

Starting in the 2021 camping season, the Clayton County Conservation Board will begin selling firewood harvested from routine trail and forest clean-ups to campers at CCCB campgrounds.

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'll bring it to you.

Clayton County Conservation Board's Upcoming Events & Programs

Nature Kids
Monthly
Osborne Nature Center
Bring your 3-6 year olds out to Osborne for a little nature exploration. Each month will feature hands-on activity, outdoor play, and maybe even a little learning. For each month's topic, check out our facebook or website.

Motor Motor 5K/10k & Motor Mill Trail Grand Opening
Saturday, March 20th, 9:00 AM
Motor Mill Historic Site
NEW for 2021, this year's event will feature a 10K distance utilizing the new multi-use Motor Mill Trail. Dirt dogs can still get their singletrack on with the 5K distance. Registration info can be found at www.ClaytonCountyConservation.org

Building Better Birders
Thursday, April 8th, 6:00 PM
Osborne Park
Registrations Required
Birding expert Kelly McKay will help lead this deep-dive into birding skills. Learn about birds of prey before leaving for a guided owl prowl through the Osborne forest.

Nature All Around Us Art Series

Osborne Nature Center is hosting a series of monthly nature and art-inspired fundraising workshops. The next class will be:

"Pine Needle Baskets" on March 26th at 6 p.m.

Watch for other classes throughout the season.

Monarch Release Party
Friday, September 3rd, 5:30 PM
Osborne Nature Center
Come celebrate the Monarch Butterfly with a program about the life cycle of these amazing creatures, topped off with the tagging and release of live monarchs!

National Public Lands Day: Prairie Seed Harvest
Saturday, September 25th, 10:00 AM
Osborne Pond
Take some time to give back to your public lands with this volunteer opportunity. Prairie seed harvesting is simple, but Osborne staff will guide you on the basics of plant ID and harvesting techniques.

Motor Mill Open Saturdays
Saturdays May 29-Sept.11th
Motor Mill Historic Site
Noon-5:00 PM

Field Day Fridays

Come and see some of the ongoing habitat improvement projects around Clayton County!

May 28—Becker East **June 25**—Becker West
July 30—Bloody Run **August 27**—Motor Mill
September 24—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	Exploring Hidden Treasures	Expedition: No Boundaries
6th-7th Grade: June 15-16 or 22-23	**7th –8th Grade:** July 6-7	**8th-10th Grade:** July 20-22

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

Summer Day Camps

Osborne Day camps are full-day outdoor programs from 9AM-4PM for children ages 6-12. Each camp will offer the chance to search for wildlife, make crafts, go on hikes, and hone their nature awareness while exploring the parks of Clayton County.

Each camp costs $10. Campers will enjoy a snack, but should pack a sack lunch and water bottle along with play clothes, appropriate footwear, sunscreen, and bug spray. Spots are limited, so register early! For more information please call 563-245-1516 or visit our website: www.claytoncountyconservation.org

Scaly & Slimy Adventures	Budding Naturalist	Undercover Critters
June 4th	July 2nd	August 13th
Osborne Park & Pond	Osborne Pioneer Shelter	Osborne Pioneer Shelter

O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

"O.W.L.S. Favorites." 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. This year, due to covid, we are including many open air events and ask that attendees drive themselves to meet at each location to reduce risk.

March 18—Sny Magill
April 15—Pleasant Ridge Wildlife Area
May 20—K & K Gardens
June 17—Kleve-Schneider Fen Walk
July 30*—The Voyageurs
August 19—Humanities Iowa Speaker
September 16—The Maiden Voyage on the Mississippi (*Tuesday)
October 21—Fossil and Prairie Park Preserve
November 18—Allamakee Conservation Board's Driftless Center

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

Spring Fever *by Abbey Harkrader, Naturalist*

Watching nature come out of dormancy each spring is one of the most anticipated time of the year. We have been waiting patiently for nature to perk back up and come back to life, leaving the long cold winter behind. Each species of plant and animal has its own unique clock and way of waking up to the new season.

Hepatica, one of the earliest bloomers and surest signs that spring has sprung

Phenology is the study of the cycles of organisms on earth, known more simply as nature's calendar. These natural cycles have been observed and recorded by both professionals and non-professionals for centuries. Everything is connected in nature's web and the organisms here have developed and evolved in harmony with one another. The plants begin to poke their heads out of the ground and the tree buds begin to pop open in time for the insects to begin emerging. Insect emergence is synchronized with the time their host plants leaf out. Nesting birds time their egg laying to coincide with when insect populations have returned enough to feed their hungry broods. Phenological cycles influence the distribution and abundance of organisms, food webs, and global patterns.

Changes in temperature and precipitation can significantly alter the phenology of the natural processes and the organisms around us. Plant bloom times and animal migration patterns biological processes highly sensitive to climate change. Throughout the world, spring is coming earlier and fall is lasting longer than in the past. Unfortunately, there is a vast difference in the way each species responds to these changes. Changing at different rates and in different ways leads to mismatches. The impacts of these disruptions are even now being felt, but the big picture has yet to play out. How plants and animals respond will determine if their populations grow or shrink. The more adaptable species may weather the storm, but sensitive species will be more dramatically affected.

Hoping for an early spring is not necessarily a good thing. Animal migration, insect metamorphosis and plant growth all rely on specific cycles in nature. In order to function correctly, organisms depend on the predictability of these natural cycles. Migrating species are particularly dependent on the predictability of these cycles. For instance, a shift in seasonal life cycles of insects could result in a fewer bugs available during migration and a food crisis for traveling birds. A cold wet spring can spell doom to nests in or on the ground of many species and make it rough on nectar dependent species like bees. Mild winters may prompt trees to bud out too early and become victim to killing frosts. A late fall, on the other hand, can damage plants that come out or bloom in the wrong season.

Dutchman's Breeches provide a dazzling display

Phenology is considered one of the most important indicators of climate change. Predicting these consequences and working on ways to mitigate the effects is a growing science. Our ecological communities are highly fractured and segmented, making it even more difficult for organisms to adapt and adjust to the changes happening around them. These struggles are not just limited to plants and animals, we must adjust and adapt to the ongoing changes. Allergy seasons, gardening, mosquito populations, and adjusting to changes in farming needs are just a few ways changes in phenology will affect us directly. Change is coming, resiliency and ability to adapt will be the keys to overcoming these changes and mitigating their effects.

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

Setting the Bones *by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager*

When I was maybe 5 or 6 years old, my brother, my father, and I rode our bikes one beautiful early summer evening up the gravel road to a nearby middle school to mess around on the playground. It was a great place, full of that old-school equipment made of rusty steel installed straight into the ground, none of this rubberized fall material or careful adherence to height standards that makes the modern playground safer.

But on that particular night, we discovered the hard way why we've evolved as a society on just what constitutes a safe environment for clumsy children.

My brother took a fall off a set of monkey bars and broke his arm. These being the days before cell phones, my dad had to ride a mile back home to get a car so we could take him to the hospital. That left me and my brother alone on a bench, waiting for him, my brother doubled over in pain while I peppered him with the questions only a young kid would have in those situations: does it hurt? How bad does it hurt? Can I look at it again?

He still hasn't forgiven me for unintentionally keeping him focused on the considerable pain for the entire length of time my dad was away. I just thought it was interesting.

When we got to the hospital, the doctor told my brother it was the worst break he'd seen in his 25 years. And of course, as if the initial break wasn't bad enough, they had to reset the bone.

I've come to think of that experience often when I'm out working on a restoration. Ecologists often analogize habitats to a single organism, with each serving a role in maintaining the dynamic equilibrium much the same way our muscles, tendons, bones, nerves, and fluids all come together to make one body that can run, jump, throw, think, and speak—with varying degrees of success.

In many ways, the habitats we seek to restore resemble a body without all the parts working right. When we think of the biodiversity crisis, we often think of the decline or extinction of plants and animals. Typically, we can point to habitat loss as a major driver of those declines or disappearances.

But when we want to bring those organisms back, we can't just drop them onto a piece of property and hope they prosper. Just like the doctor did to my brother, we have to set the bone first. We have to get things aligned before the muscles and tendons can pull properly once again. So it is with two major habitat projects we have lined up for the coming year.

First on the list is a prairie expansion planned for Osborne Park. To the untrained eye, there may not be much difference between the retired pastures along the archery range drive and the restored prairie along the hunter ed course.

But upon closer examination, an important difference emerges. The restored prairie is dominated by big and little bluestem and indian grass, vertebrae in the backbone of Iowa's native prairie. The grassland, however, is dominated by smooth brome, a common pasture grass turned invasive species. Our native birds and insects serve as the lifeblood of habitat, providing pollination services and transporting seeds from one patch of dirt to another. Many have little use for smooth brome, especially the pollinators who have specific floral associations like milkweed and monarchs.

Prairie expansion site highlighted in blue

The brome forms a thick sod, resprouting from rhizomes and crowding out their native counterparts. To reset this bone, we have to break it again first.

That will require spending an entire growing season aggressively treating the brome, first with a prescribed fire to remove the thatch, and then repeated herbicide applications before the resprouted plants reach maturity.

I understand the trepidation surrounding herbicide use. It's a wonderful thing that the public understanding of herbicide impacts on pollinators has grown so substantially. But trying to restore native vegetation without first eliminating the invaders would be like letting a displaced bone heal on its own. The resulting limb would be weaker, less functional, and require long-term therapy to have any chance at regaining full function.

Rest assured, we consulted the doctors on this one. NRCS officials, Iowa DNR wildlife biologists, and Pheasants Forever habitat managers all weighed in on the treatment options. On flatter terrain, with perhaps more suitable soils, we could try converting the area to soybeans for a few years which would eventually shade out and starve the brome's root reserves. But we'd still have to terminate the grasses at least initially, and the area would be poor habitat for a lot longer, to say nothing of the difficulty in establishing row crops on the site anyway.

Continued on page 7

Setting the Bones (cont.) *by Kenny Slocum, Naturalist/Resource Manager*

Another example will come this fall at the Becker West wildlife area. A walk on the west end of the property, past the hayfield, feels positively magical. Ancient wolf oaks stand sentry, their massive trunks and sprawling limbs towering over dense thickets of multiflora rose and young maple seedlings. This is the typical composition of a degraded or "masked" oak savanna.

Savannas, like prairies, depend on fire. Fire depends on fuel. Historically, the herbaceous layer of grasses and forbs would have provided excellent fuel. The curling, crispy oak leaves and the abundant air gaps further facilitate the movement of fire through an oak savanna—after all, the oaks don't mind a fire. Keeps out the riff raff.

"Masked" savanna at Becker West

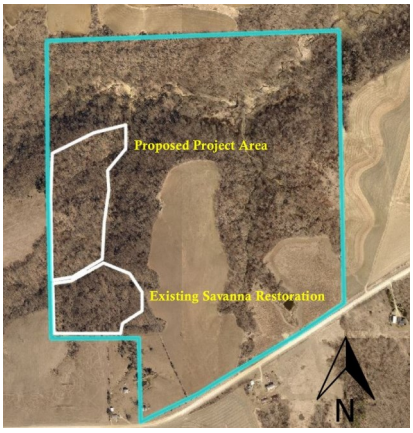
But the maples and multiflora rose? Fire is not their friend. The flattened leaves of maples hold dew like a pile of soggy newspaper, and the dense shade of small trees and shrubs suppresses that herbaceous layer. So to return fire to it's historic role as "white blood cells" attacking invasive and woody species on a grass-dominated habitat, we will again have to have a little short term pain.

This fall we'll bring out a crew from the Conservation Corps of Iowa to remove the shade makers from between the sentry oaks. We'll plant—and protect from deer predation—some young oak trees to bolster the stock, so that when the ancient oaks finally succumb to the sands of time there will be ready replacements waiting in the understory.

In the meantime, it gets a little messy. Brush piles, fresh-cut stumps, tree tubes, and the vrnnn-vrnnn-vrnnn of chainsaws will, in the short term, detract from the "natural" appearance of the site. But once the bone is set, just like with the brome termination, the rest of the ecological anatomy will have a better chance of returning to normal.

Which brings me to one last point—what is normal, anyway? We have a pretty good sense of the interior workings of the human body, but the ecology of a prairie or oak savanna has a lot more parts. Even the most dedicated site steward would never likely be able to document all of the tiny invertebrates, soil microbes, and fungi that serve to tie the whole thing together. We'd like to think we have a pretty good handle on our habitats' major vitals, though. But increasingly, it looks like we've historically overlooked a major organ that shaped the prairie and kept the blood pumping for thousands of years.

Us. We have a tendency to see ourselves on the outside looking in. We come into the prairie or the forest, do our stewardship, and get out of the way so that "the stuff that lives there" can thrive in our absence. But with each study of the Midwest's natural history, we're learning that the grasslands and open woodlands are highly anthropogenic—human in origin.



Site map for Becker West 2021 habitat project

In this part of the upper Mississippi river valley, lightning-caused fires would have been rare. We get our share of lightning, but unlike the parched lands of the American west, that lightning usually comes with a soaking rain. Not a good recipe for fire.

To be sure, it would have happened occasionally. But far less commonly than would explain the widespread nature of fire-dominated ecology throughout the Driftless. There would have been many reasons for people to burn in ancient times. Eliminating fuel around a habitation site. Attracting game to fresh growth. Opening up woodlands for easier travel.

The conception of Wilderness, then, as a place where "man himself is a visitor who does not remain," might not be wholly appropriate for our beloved local landscapes.

In the ocean, or the craggy peaks of the rocky mountains, or the barren canyons of red rock country, humans act as invasive species. Here, we are a keystone—at least historically.

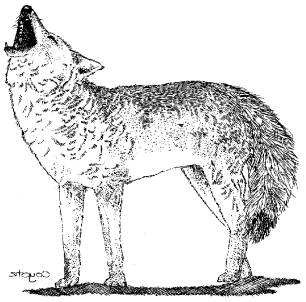
Humans assisted with the migration of plants and animals, transplanting sweetgrass and goosefoot, plum trees and Jerusalem artichoke, burning plots to move grazing bison and elk across the landscape.

To fully restore these landscapes, we have to restore our relationship with them. We have to reset the bones before they can heal.

Hopefully, you'll join us for several opportunities over the next year to do just that. **Field Day Fridays** will take place the last Friday of each month, May-September, to visit these and other habitat projects. Come and join us!

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

Osborne public programs listed inside!



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Tammie Kraus…….…..…..…Office Assistant
Nick Moser……Operations/Maintenance

Website: ***www.claytoncountyconservation.org***
Facebook: ***Clayton County Conservation***
Instagram: ***@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 encourage preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.