

SEVEN RIVERS RECORD

Newsletter of the Chickasaw County Conservation Board - Conserving our natural resources since 1957 Winter 2024

Director's Dialogue Director, Chad Humpal

Airport Lake Park and Campground

2023 was a very busy year for Airport Lake Park and Campground. We added sewer and a concrete patio to 21 sites on the north end of the campground. The Conservation Board decided to make 11 of these sites available for seasonal camping. Meaning they would be rented for the entire season. The remaining 10 sites would be offered as extended stay sites. Meaning if a camper were pre-approved, they could stay longer than 2 weeks. We have seen an increase in construction, temp jobs and traveling nurses. And with that, an increase in demand for site rentals of a month or two.



Those interested in a seasonal site needed to have proper paperwork along with a deposit sent to the Conservation Board by March 3, 2023. At the March board meeting the board had a lottery drawing to determine who was awarded the 11 sites. The board had 7 applicants at the time of the lottery. All applicants were awarded a site for the 2023 season.

Shortly after the March meeting we started receiving phone calls from workers coming to the county to install the new wind turbines on the north end of the county. It didn't take long, and the 4 remaining seasonal sites and the 10 extended stay sites were filled for the season. We anticipate that these full hook up sites will be available for a larger variety of campers to use this summer. If you are interested in a seasonal site for 2024 please call us at (641-394-4714).

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Director's Dialogue by Chad Humpal

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Camping revenue going into the winter was up 23% over the previous year. Last year we set a record high for revenue at Airport Lake of \$80,449, and we brought in just over \$105,000 for the entire county in camping revenue. As our revenue is based on a fiscal year and not a calendar year, we still have several months to add to the income for this fiscal year. We hope that we will be able to once again go over that \$100,000 mark.



Late this fall, Park Managers Justin and Caleb were able to install an ADA compliant fishing dock and sidewalk. We are extremely excited for this new addition to the park as it allows us to provide opportunities to individuals that we could not in the past. Anytime we can help people get out and enjoy the outdoors is a win for our department. The first photo is of the completed dock install. The dock is safe to let freeze in for the winter and will be there ready to go in the spring. We would love to see pictures of you using our new dock. Please send to us or tag us on Facebook.

Before I finish up this article, I wanted to look at how we funded these 2 wonderful projects. We were able to secure \$60,000 from the Board of Supervisors out of the County Betterment Fund for the installation of the seasonal/extended stay camping sites. The Dock was founded by a \$10,000 Community Foundation grant, \$5,000 New Hampton Hotel/Motel grant and \$2,000 from the First Citizens Charitable Foundation. The Chickasaw County Conservation Board funded the remainder of the balances on both projects.

It takes many people and organizations to make these projects happen. It is at times like this, that I am truly grateful that I live in a small community that is willing to come together and get things done. I would also like to thank all of our park users/campers. It's because of you enjoying our facilities that we keep trying to improve what we have to offer. Thank you all for a great 2023 season, See you in 2024.

If you or your organization have a project that you would like to help with or help fund, please reach out to me at c.humpal@chickasawcounty.iowa.gov. I would love to hear from you .

Giving Back

Ever want to give back something to your community? Well, here is how you can make that happen!

Joining the **Friends of Chickasaw County Conservation** is a great way to give back to Chickasaw County Conservation. The Friends organization was founded to get the nature center built and help with environmental education here in Chickasaw County. Joining the Friends (FCCC) group is an easy way to support County Conservation and Environmental Education. Memberships are priced as follows: \$5 Student, \$20 Individual, \$30 Family, \$50 Business. If you would like to send your membership fee or a **donation** to the Friends of Chickasaw County Conservation, please send it to the Friends of Chickasaw County Conservation, 1811 240th St, Ionia IA 50645. Please include your name, address, phone # and email. If you are a new business sponsor, please send a business card to be enlarged and displayed in the front entryway of the nature center.



Visit mycountyparks.com to check out what is going on with Chickasaw County Conservation as well as other county conservation throughout the state of Iowa.



Bypass Basin Addition

We are always thrilled when we are approached by local scouts looking to make a difference for their community with an Eagle Scout project. Some of the projects you may be familiar with include the viewing blind structure along the wetland pond at Twin Ponds, the bat houses outside of the nature center, and the natural playscape that joined the playground outside of the nature center.

In the recent past, the conservation board was approached by Aaron Holschlag about the possibility of putting up a grain bin gazebo at Bypass Basin (the area to the North of Klunder's Kafe and North of the large borrow pond along highway 63 on the outskirts of New Hampton). The board agreed unanimously to go ahead and let Aaron make that addition.



In November, the Eagle Scout project was finished. If you head out to Bypass Basin, you will find the grain bin gazebo, and a great view from it. In the coming year, we are planning on making a driveway and parking area for the gazebo and building picnic tables to sit inside of the gazebo. Thanks to Aaron and his hard work on making this project a reality!

It's an Award

The Isaak Walton League of America has a long history in conservation. For over 100 years, they have been trying to protect our lands and waters, wildlife, and outdoor recreation. The Chickasaw County Conservation Board has received a 2nd place award for Wildlife Habitat Improvement in a county under 20,000 in population.

Here are some reasons that CCCB won the award:
Acquired 205 wildlife acres adjacent to existing public land, planted 700 trees/shrubs on 2.5 acres, planted 499 lbs of prairie/ground cover on public land, burned or mowed 175 acres of prairie species on public land, developed/restored 14 acres of wetlands, completed timber stand improvement work on 4 acres including savanna restoration, provided equipment for establishment of 21 acres of wildlife habitat on private lands, distributed 350 trees/shrubs.



Forestry Field Day

Who: General public, nature enjoyers, natural resource professionals, bird watchers, hunters, farmers, landowners etc.

What: Forestry Field day with WMI Forestry Specialist Maison Hubrig

When: Saturday, February 3rd at 1:00pm

Where: Twin Ponds Nature Center: 1811 240th St, Ionia, IA. Meet In Lobby

Why: To improve our tree identification skills in the winter.

Do you enjoy a good walk in the woods? Do you like to identify trees when you are outdoors? Do you wish you could identify trees with confidence in the winter? If this sounds like you, then please join me on Saturday February 3rd at 1:00pm at the Twin Ponds Nature Center in Chickasaw County for our Winter Forestry Field Day. We will focus on methods to identify native and non-native trees and shrubs. The 1-2-hour field day will consist of a pleasant (and possibly chilly) walk through the woods surrounding the nature center. We will use some tried and true methods of identifying trees in the winter, such as: branch structure, bark, buds, leaf scars, and others. This will be a fun and informal walk, and the floor will always be open to any questions relating to forestry.

Nature Center News & Events

Snowshoe/Cross Country Ski Night

Thursday, January 11th: 5-7 pm @ Twin Ponds

Thursday, February 8th: 5-7pm @ Twin Ponds

Come on out to Twin Ponds to snowshoe or cross-country ski between 5:00 and 7:00 pm. The nature center will also be open during this time for those that want to visit. Short introductory lessons are available to help get you fitted to skis and shoes, and to get you going. These events are FREE and no registration is needed. If you require an abnormal size, please let us know.

Snowfall will determine whether or not there is enough snow to ski/shoe. If you aren't sure if there is enough, please call to make sure that the program is still going on.

Owl Prowl and Make Your Own Call!

Tuesday, January 30th: 6:00 pm @ Twin Ponds

Join us as we talk about some of the adaptations that help owls thrive. We will then make our very own owl calls. We'll then head out on the trails to quietly seek out the opportunity to see and/or hear an owl in the wild. There is no cost for this program, but pre-registration is required by calling 641-394-4714.

Winter Tree ID

Saturday, February 3rd: 1:00 pm @ Twin Ponds Nature Center

Join Iowa DNR forester Maison Hubrig to learn how to identify tree species in the winter time when there aren't leaves on the trees. We will walk the woods, so make sure that you dress appropriately.

Hunter Education Class

March 16th @ Fredericksburg Sportsman's Club

Spring Turkey season is coming quick. This is a one-day session to take care of all hunter education requirements prior to purchasing a hunting license. This is a full classroom course and NOT an online field day. Online Registration with the Iowa DNR is required by going to <https://license.gooutdoorsiowa.com/Event/EventsHome.aspx>.

If you have questions, feel free to call us at 641-394-4714.

**TWIN PONDS NATURE CENTER
1811 240TH ST - IONIA
641-394-4714**

Public Hours

Monday - Friday Noon - 4:30 p.m.

Closed for Holidays.

You may also call for an appointment if those times don't work for you.

More Events!

Atlatl

Thursday, April 11th: 6:00 PM @ Twin Ponds

The atlatl is a tool that was used long before firearms for hunting. Join us as we will talk about the history of the atlatl before going out and testing our skills target shooting with the atlatl. This is a free program, but registration is required by calling 641-394-4714.

Wildflower Walk

Wednesday, May 15th @ 5:00 PM @ Twin Ponds

May is a wonderful time to explore the woods. Come on out as we hike around the woods at Twin Ponds in search of Spring Wildflowers and other signs of life.



Chickasaw/Floyd Evening River Float

Thursday, June 13th @ 5:00 PM

Want to go on a great river float with naturalists from 2 counties? This is your opportunity. Join Heidi and Matt on a float from the Rockford Fossil and Prairie Park to Tosanak Recreation Area. There is no charge for this program, but pre-registration is required by calling 641-394-4714.

Nature Center Wish List

- Fly fishing-rods, reels, flies and other equipment
- Birdseed
- Donations toward future displays at TPNC

These items are used for the nature center, school programs, scout programs, and other public programs. We appreciate any and all support.



Check out mycountyparks.com for great information and mapping for all of the public areas managed by Chickasaw CCB as well as anywhere else that you travel in the state.

- **THANK YOU:** Brian Moore for the donation of 2 raccoon hides
- **THANK YOU:** Aaron Holschlag for his Eagle Scout Project: Grain Bin Gazebo at Bypass Basin
- **THANK YOU:** Chuck Stanton for the Pheasants Forever Collage located in the entryway of the Twin Ponds Nature Center
- **THANK YOU:** Kellogg's Honey for supplying and maintaining the Twin Ponds bees.
- **THANK YOU:** .

Creature Feature by Matt Crayne, Naturalist

Mountain Lion

Puma concolor

With a recent reported sighting of a mountain lion in Northeast Iowa, I am taking this opportunity to share some information about mountain lions and why there is very little reason to worry about them being in Iowa.



While mountain lions are quite impressive, the ones travelling through Iowa have not been linked to any attacks on people, pets or livestock. There is no record of a breeding population in Iowa. In a publication from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (https://www.iowadnr.gov/Portals/idnr/uploads/education/visitors/mtn_lion_status.pdf), between 1995 and 2021, there were 36 confirmed sightings of mt. lions (there could be more actual occurrences of mt. lions in Iowa, these were the ones confirmed by the Iowa DNR). There have been NO recorded attacks. It also states that you are more likely to be killed by a dog or struck by lightning than be attacked by a mountain lion. If you are fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of a mountain lion, my suggestion would be to observe it quietly. Once that it knows that you are there, it's highly likely to leave the area immediately.

The mountain lion is one of the common names used for the large wildcat *Puma concolor*. Other names that are used for the mountain lion include panther, cougar and puma. I tend to use the name mountain lion based on it being the most commonly used name for it around here. Regardless of which name you prefer to use, it is one of the largest meat eating animals in North America.

The mountain lion is a long, slender cat with a tail that is about 1/3 of its length. They are mostly one general coloration, a grayish to tannish or brownish. The upper portion of the body is darker in color than the underside, which is whitish in color. There are also very dark portions of its fur that are on the sides of the muzzle, back of the ears, and the end of the tail. Adult mountain lions range in length from 5 - 8 1/2 feet long and weigh up to around 265 pounds, with an average between 135-175 pounds.

While the mountain lion once ranged across the entire continental U.S., it was greatly persecuted by European settlers. The mt. lion population in Iowa was extirpated in the 1800's. Most of the mt. lion population in the continental U.S. exists in the western states. The state of Iowa currently does genetic testing on the mountain lions that they are able to get samples of, and the testing shows that these individuals have originated in the Dakota states or Wyoming.

The preferred habitat of the mountain lion is good vegetative or rocky cover. As far as cover in Iowa goes, they are more likely to be seen in wooded areas. Northeast Iowa, would allow them to find more cover in the hills of the driftless region. They tend to avoid areas with lots of human activity. They are fairly nomadic and don't have a "home" location. The average home range for most mountain lions is from 15-35 square miles. Mountain lions tend to wander to wherever they may find food. As nocturnal animals, they are less likely to be seen by people.

The diet of mountain lions is largely driven by deer. They live a feast or famine lifestyle. This means that they may have to go for days without food, but when food is available, they will eat very large quantities of food to the point of a distended belly. (Think of what you look like after a Thanksgiving feast!) Mountain lions are opportunistic hunters. Other animals that they may eat include rabbit, beaver, opossum, raccoon, domestic cats, skunks, coyotes and occasionally livestock. According to the book, *Wild Mammals of Missouri*, one mountain lion may take about 35 deer in a year. So for you deer hunters/watchers out there, they are likely to have little to no impact on the whitetail deer population in Iowa if they were to return.

Fall Burns



The tallgrass prairie once covered the majority of Iowa. It is one of the most complex and bio-diverse ecosystems in the world.

When European settlers migrated westward across what is now the United States, they settled and plowed up the prairie to plant crops. Less than one tenth of one percent of the tallgrass prairie remains in Iowa.

Several conservation organizations in Iowa have made an effort to keep the prairie alive through prairie plantings. Here in Chickasaw County, there are several. However, there are only a couple of chunks of remnant prairie remaining. Joachim Prairie sits East of Alta Vista along

the blacktop and is our best remaining chunk of remnant prairie.

Whether the prairie is a remnant, or a newer planting. It requires some maintenance. Historically, wildfires maintained the prairies. For thousands of years, since the last glaciers came through Northeast Iowa, fire kept the trees at bay and burned them off and rejuvenated the prairie. They would burn off excess vegetation from past years of growth and bring sunlight to the soil to help 'revive' prairie species that may have gone dormant. Fire also can help keep invasive species from taking over. Native Americans even used fire as a tool to help them with farming and gathering.

Chickasaw County Conservation also uses fire to help maintain the prairies that we manage. You might see us out in the spring or fall trying to burn some of the prairie. In fact, it's been so warm this December that we were actually able to get some burning done in December. Depending on the property, the burning may be done for different reasons. Some may become burdened with encroaching tree growth, and others may be burnt to help certain species of plant to thrive. Some are burnt to curb the spread of invasive plants, while others may be burnt to help provide better wildlife habitat.

Hopefully the next time you see some people with funny looking green and yellow outfits on running fire through a public ground, you'll have an idea of what's going on, and not just think that the Green Bay Packers have lost their mind and are trying to light the world on fire!

Upper Picture: Park and Natural Resource Manager lighting the prairie growth at Twin Ponds West with a drip torch.

Lower Picture: Park and Natural Resource Managers Justin Van Driel and Caleb Ciavarelli finishing up a burn at Nelson Wildlife Area



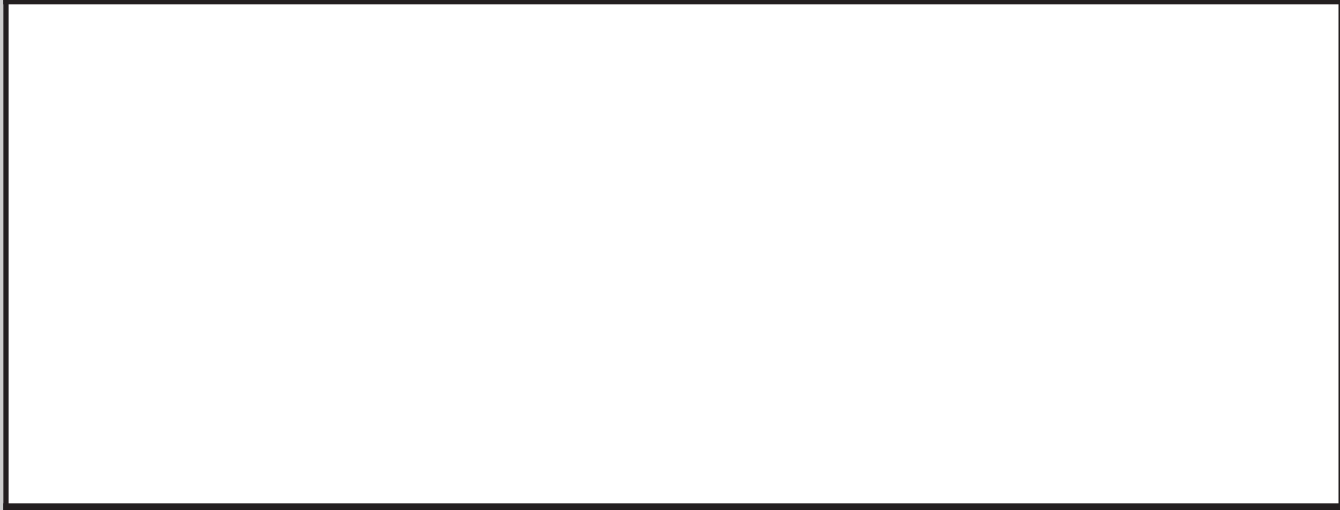
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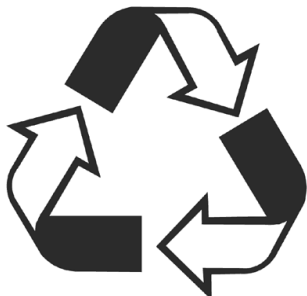


Board Members

Lori Carey	New Hampton
Mike Pickar	New Hampton
Ray Armbrecht	Fredericksburg
JoAnn Myrsiades	Alta Vista
Jim Allison	Ionia

Staff

Chad Humpal	Director
Matt Crayne	Naturalist
Caleb Ciavarelli & Justin Van Driel	NR & Park Managers



**This newsletter is printed on
recycled paper.**

Board Meetings

Conservation Board meetings are open to the public. Visitors are welcome to attend. Meetings are held the first Monday of the month at the Conservation Headquarters located in Twin Ponds Nature Center at 1811 240th St, Ionia. Watch your newspaper for notice of the monthly meeting, the agenda and a start time. Please note that meetings may be scheduled for dates other than the first Monday. Changes are noted in the newspaper. For more information, call Chickasaw County Conservation at 641-394-4714.

Nature Center Hours

Monday - Friday Noon - 4:30 p.m.

Or by Appointment - Closed for Holidays.

www.mycountyparks.com or <https://chickasawcounty.iowa.gov/conservation/>

The CCCB does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or handicap.

Mailing List

If you would like to be placed on our mailing list or need to change your address, call the County Conservation office at

641-394-4714 or email: m.crayne@chickasawcounty.iowa.gov

You will receive the newsletter at no cost.

Donations to FCCC to cover costs for printing and postage are welcome.