



PRAIRIE HILLS JOURNAL

Bi-annual publication of the
Harrison County Conservation Board

MISSION: To provide, develop and maintain facilities and programs that will enable county residents and visitors to understand, appreciate, and enjoy Harrison County's natural environment and encourage them to preserve it.

FALL / WINTER | 2022- 2023

It's Happening!

by Scott Nelson, Director

Hopefully, many of you have had the opportunity to drive out to Willow Lake to see the progress taking place over the past months on the Willow Lake Nature Center – a lot has been happening! It can be a bit of a blur. A year has passed since construction started in October of 2021. As I'm writing this article, the buzzing of cranes, beating of hammers, and the beeping of back-up alarms constantly reminds me of all the contractors working hard to get things buttoned up before winter comes along.

At the end of every month, there is a Construction and Progress meeting that includes key staff of the HCCB, general contractor Meco-Henne personnel, and the architect/engineers of JEO Consulting. The discussion is on the progression that's been completed over the previous month, any issues that have surfaced, and figuring out the huge array of decisions and choices that need to be made. These range from cupboard designs and countertops, color options for everything, and even the shape and color of the stone façade and carpet. This is where the phase "it takes a village" come to play. Thank goodness for Laura, Connie, and Mike to help with all of this. Anyone who knows me also understands that I have no taste when it comes to these types of things! There's also the discussion

of timelines, and as expected, the anticipated completion date of the building, exhibits, and displays has pushed back a bit. We are still hanging our hats on having a Grand Opening in the Spring of 2023, so make sure to follow our updates on Facebook.

Like I mentioned earlier – it takes a village. I want to thank the HCCB staff and Board members for their help and encouragement along the way. The Harrison County Auditor and Treasurer Offices have also assisted in many positive ways, especially helping with formulating the financial avenues that needed to be taken. And a big thank you to the Harrison County Board of Supervisors for their efforts. Without their moral and financial support, this major undertaking would still be sitting on a shelf. As many of you know, the County allotted \$1M of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, with the understanding that the Willow Lake Nature Center will be a tourism, cultural, historical, and educational draw to the county and region. While controversial in some arenas, these funds were partially designed with this type of project in mind: shovel ready, connectivity, educational, tourism, and community based. Last, but not least, to all the donations and financial support that have been given by users, visitors, and grant sources. What a ride it has been!

But that aspect is still ongoing. If you would like to contribute, either by volunteering or monetary donations, let us know!

And if you needed more to help you understand the significance of the Willow Lake Nature Center, we have been awarded the Iowa Grant Places designation! This distinction will create additional marketing opportunities, assist with future projects, and allow for greater grant funding. The HCCB and Woodbine MainStreet were co-applicants in this distinction due to the interaction of Willow Lake users in the closest community. Stay tuned on how to become involved.



IOWA
GREAT
PLACE

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Spring & Summer Events

New beach latrine at Willow Lake.



Woodbine 4th grade field trip.



Learning for life bug hunt.



Dutch oven program.

thank you
FOR YOUR SERVICE

Connie Betts, Naturalist/Public Relations Specialist, 20 years

Laura Hansen, Administrative Assistant, 10 years



Fall/Winter Calendar

Creepy Campground

Saturday, October 8th, 3-5 p.m.
Willow Lake Recreation Area,
Woodbine



Have the kids dress in their favorite costume and come out to Willow Lake for some fun, not-so-scary trick-or-treating! Campers will have a pumpkin sign at their site if they are giving out candy-don't forget to visit all three loops in the campground. Trick-or-treating starts promptly at 3 p.m. and ends at 5 p.m. There is no cost, however, all children must be accompanied by an adult. Please do not bring pets trick-or-treating. Parking is limited, so carpooling is encouraged. This event will be held rain or shine!

For campers, we ask that you bring enough store-bought wrapped candy for 300 trick-or-treaters. Saturday night camping is free-please use the coupon when you register to camp. There will be a campsite decorating contest for the MOST CREATIVE daytime AND nighttime. The winners will receive a trophy to keep and a coupon book with 7 nights free camping! Decorations must be completed by 2 p.m. on Saturday to be included in the contest and winners will be announced that evening.

CAMPING COUPON

Good for October 8th Only

Please include in camping
envelope at time of
registration.



The old nature center at Willow Lake is CLOSED and public access to the office is limited due to construction of the NEW Willow Lake Nature Center. All programs will be announced through Facebook or local newspapers. If you are camping or staying in a cabin and have questions, please call the office at 712-647-2785, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. After hours, listen to the park ranger voicemail for additional contact information.

Find us on @HarrisonCountyConservation

HCCB OFFICE CLOSED

November 11th

November 24th & 25th

December 26th

Veterans Day

Thanksgiving

Christmas

2023

January 2nd

February 20th

New Year's Day

Presidents Day

Parks & Recreation

Dear Deer

By Jonah Quick, Conservation Technician

As an employee of the Harrison County Conservation Board, I have made a lot of great connections with conservation minded people. Through these connections, I have found opportunities to learn and work with other agencies on multiple research and data related projects. As an outdoorsman, I've enjoyed these opportunities and it has also made me a better conservationist. The harmony between humans and nature is much more complicated than it seems.

In the fall of 2020, I started collecting lymph nodes from deceased white-tailed deer for the wildlife division of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Lymph nodes are collected and tested for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) which is a prion disease affecting the brain of deer and its function, eventually leading to mortality. This disease is most widespread in Wisconsin and some western states but is starting to be an issue in deer populations in some areas of Iowa. Harrison county, luckily, has not had a positive CWD test. While collecting samples from deer harvested by friends or folks staying in our cabins, I've had a lot of conversations about the deer numbers of this county. Most people are noticing a decline in deer population, and there is some information that does back up what people are noticing.

The DNR conducts a spot light survey every spring to collect a general population count of multiple mammal species. I was invited to ride along for the spring 2022 survey of Harrison County. Spot lighting is done every year consecutively on the

same route. To keep research consistent, they will drive with same weather conditions every year but not necessarily the same day. The wildlife division of the DNR provided me with past data and they saw nearly a 70% reduction of deer sightings from 2019 to 2021(2022 data is not available). Riding around at night with a spotlight pointed out of a pickup window isn't an exact science, but there seems to be some consistency in our area. Hunter harvest reports also show a similar trend.

When hunters go to buy doe tags, there is a set quota of doe tags available for each county in the state. These quotas don't just get drawn from a hat. There are multiple groups who weigh in on this decision. Over the years, the quota of Harrison County has increased to reduce crop damage and vehicle collisions with deer. During these high population times, deer hunters had many opportunities for success and more deer were harvested. In the past couple of years, the quota has been reduced, and harvest report numbers have also shown lower success. With fewer crop damage reports, and low harvest counts, the DNR will try to lower doe tag quotas until the deer population is suitable for all parties involved.

The balance of having recreational opportunities and maintaining a healthy deer herd seems to be hard enough, but consideration to cash crop farmers or vehicle deer collisions add a difficult element to this topic. Conservation truly is a balance that we all should continue learning and understanding, both as stewards and consumers of natural resources.



The staff of the Harrison County Conservation Board would like to thank all of our Campground Hosts for 2022. They provide a great amount of support to the program as they help campers, answer questions, sell firewood, and generally make all of our users feel welcomed.

Neil & Bette Jensen, Jason & Jill Stacy, Bob & Nancy McDunn, Bruce & Kris Pauley, Jim & Glenda Gibson, Tony & Connie Casperson, Rick & Marilyn Woodard, and Brian & Kathie Lantz

Natural Resources & Wildlife Management

Wetlands of Harrison County

By Thad Pothast, Natural Resource Technician/Weed Commissioner

Harrison County Conservation Board (HCCB) manages 18 properties. All of them are vastly different from each other. From the Iowa Welcome Center and Historical Village to parks with cabins and campgrounds. Also, a cemetery, scenic overlooks, forests, prairies, and wetlands. Willow Lake Recreation Area is the best-known and most popular. Lesser known, but ecologically essential, would be our wetland areas. There are 6 HCCB properties that are categorized as "wetlands". These wetlands are Vaile, O'Day, Nolan, Missouri Bottoms, Horseshoe Lake, and Gee - Hruska. These six wetland properties can be found in the Missouri River floodplain, located between the present-day Missouri River and the face of the Loess Hills rising to the east.

These wetlands contain a mix of wetland and prairie plant species which is a habitat that is essential for a wide range of aquatic, terrestrial, and migratory wildlife. The Missouri River corridor is an important pathway for migratory birds. In this expansive corridor, Harrison County's wetlands are essential for providing wildlife spaces to overwinter, feed, and breed. Remnant oxbows of the Missouri River can be found at Horseshoe Lake and Gee - Hruska wetlands, which retain water year-round. Three of the wetland properties, Vaile, Nolan, and Missouri Bottoms, have irrigation wells that can be used to manage/manipulate water levels with a series of stop log structures that are within the basins.

Vaile, Nolan, and Missouri Bottoms are on a rotating cycle to help with different management objectives. Every year, one property will have the water pump turned on and the stop logs installed to impound water in the basins. This usually commences in mid-August to ensure the basins are full of water for the migratory season in September. Another would have had the stop logs remaining in from the previous year. Depending on how much water is in the

basins, pumps can be turned on to increase water levels as desired. The other property would have had the stop logs out for a year, allowing the basins to dry out. Drying these basins out allows us to do various management practices in the wetlands. Invasive plants such as Reed canary grass and Canada thistle can be mitigated and reduced. When the basins are dry, the equipment can be brought



in to help mow brush, encroaching trees, and cattails to reduce their vigor. Prescribed fires are also utilized to help manage cottonwood, elm, and willow trees that try to get established in the wetland and prairie areas.

If you have not had a chance to visit our wetland areas, I urge you to go out in the county and explore. Our wetlands are great areas to hunt both upland and waterfowl if that is something that interests you. They also offer great wildlife viewing opportunities and a place to be immersed in nature. Even though they are not one of our properties, I recommend visiting the Desoto National Wildlife Refuge or various DNR properties along the Missouri River corridor. Wetlands are a unique and beautiful ecosystem, and they are right in our backyard to enjoy.

Conservation Education

By Connie Betts, Naturalist/Public Relations Specialist



Would you, your family, or company like to sponsor an interactive exhibit for the NEW Willow Lake Nature Center? Donors will receive recognition on the exhibit so visitors know you support conservation and education! There are several exhibits to choose from-if you would like to know more, please contact Naturalist Connie Betts, cbeatts@harrisoncountyparks.org or Director Scott Nelson, stnelson@harrisoncountyparks.org. Thank you!

Waterfowl Mounts Wanted for Nature Center Display

Do you have mounts of ducks or geese that you don't have room for or would like to be displayed in the NEW Willow Lake Nature Center for visitors to enjoy? HCCB has some mounts but is searching for more to be displayed on top of the aquarium/terrarium room. Please contact Connie or Scott if you would like to donate or loan out a waterfowl mount. Thanks!



WILDLIFE HABITAT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Harrison County Extension and Outreach is starting a WHEP (Wildlife Habitat Education Program) team this fall/winter. They will meet approximately once a month and then more as needed as the competition gets closer. Meetings will take place at the Extension Office in Logan or at Willow Lake Recreational Area outside of Woodbine.

Please reach out by calling 712-644-2105 or emailing xharrison@iastate.edu for more information or to register to be a part of this new educational opportunity!

Harrison County Historical Village & Iowa Welcome Center

Welcome Center Updates By Kathy Dirks, Program Manager

The general store had a much-needed paint job this summer compliments of welcome center Resource Technician, Larry Oliver, and Willow Lake interns Brock Leaders, Hunter Allen, and Jarrett Armstrong. During the scraping process, they discovered the window and door trim had been painted green – as was the style of many homes and buildings - back in the day. We hope you like the general stores “original” look as much as we do.

The vendors and the welcome center would like to thank everyone who supported the 2022 Welcome Center Farmers Market – there would not be a market without your patronage! We would also like to thank the Healthy Harrison Coalition and CHI Health for organizing the special voucher program so fresh locally grown produce could be available to more Harrison County residents. We'd also like to thank Harrison County 4-H for providing vouchers to 4-H members to use at the market, and Harrison County Farm Bureau for their support. If you haven't had a chance to attend the Thursday market this year, there are still a few weeks left. Our last market of the season will be on Thursday, October 20th from 3:30 to 6:30 pm where we will be hosting our annual trick-or-treating with the vendors.

We will be hosting the annual Holiday Welcome Center Farmers Markets inside the welcome center again from 3:30 – 6:30 pm. The Thanksgiving Holiday Market will be Thursday, November 17th – the week before Thanksgiving. The tentative date for the Christmas Holiday market is Thursday, December 8th. It's grown into a great event where you can shop for unique gifts and treats for your holiday parties. There is also free wine-tasting and discounts in the welcome center gift shop. We've been making a concerted effort to increase our Iowa-made products/Iowa vendors in the gift shop so the holiday markets (or anytime!) would be a good opportunity to check it out.

*For further information at the Village/Welcome Center, like
“Harrison County Iowa Welcome Center” on Facebook or give us a call at 712-642-2114.*

Welcome Center Specialists

Kristen Leon, Kristine Underwood, Rhonda Kouma, and Roxanne Westphalen

Harrison County Village / Iowa Welcome Center

20% OFF

Gift Shop/Iowa Products Store

Not to be combined with other discounts!

(Excludes Iowa Wines)

Harrison County Historical Village &

Iowa Welcome Center

2931 Monroe Avenue

Missouri Valley, Iowa 51555

712-642-2114

welcome@HarrisonCountyParks.org

Hours 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday-Saturday

12-5 p.m. on Sunday

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas,

New Year's Day and Easter

Historical Village open April-November

2022 Summer Conservation Interns

HCCB had three Conservation Interns for this summer. Jarett Armstrong, from Logan, is attending South Dakota State University in Brookings with a major in natural resource law enforcement. He enjoys hunting, fishing, and kayaking. Jarett wants to have a career as a game warden in Iowa or the Midwest. Also from Logan, Hunter Allen has plans to become a game warden. He loves to go hunting, fishing, and camping along with building figure 8 and derby cars with his dad. Brock Leaders of Woodbine returned for another internship and is studying Environmental Planning

at the University of Iowa. He wants to pursue a career in conservation and natural resources.



harrisoncountyparks.org

Pictured left to right: Brock Leaders, Jarett Armstrong, and Hunter Allen.

2022 BOARD MEMBERS

Kris Pauley, President, Woodbine
Danelle Myer, Vice President, Logan
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Scott Nelson, Director
Laura Hansen, Administrative Assistant
Mike Weis, Operations Supervisor/Park Ranger
Byron Vennink, Operations Technician/Park Ranger
Thad Pothast, Natural Resource Technician/Weed Commissioner
Jonah Quick, Conservation Technician
Connie Betts, Naturalist/Public Relations Specialist
Kathy Dirks, Welcome Center Program Manager
Larry Oliver, Welcome Center Resource Technician

Contact:

hccb@harrisoncountyparks.org
www.HarrisonCountyParks.org
www.MyCountyParks.com



Headquarters Office

Willow Lake Recreation Area
2725 Easton Trail,
Woodbine, IA 51579
712-647-2785
Mon-Fri 8 am to 4:30 pm
Closed Holidays



Discover. Learn. Enjoy.

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