

In Nature's Care

Conservation News and Programs



*To develop an awareness and appreciation of our natural world
through conservation and education.*



Naturalist Notes

BY HEATHER HUCKA, CONSERVATION EDUCATION MANAGER

Winter reflections are something that many of us do each year. Trying to answer the question of, "Where has the time gone?". Every new year I find myself taking a moment to stop and acknowledge how far the conservation education program has come. We have had the privilege to work with and mentor some amazing interns. Sydney Miller, our most recent naturalist intern, just finished her six months this past fall. Check out her reflections on Page 8.

The staff at Cerro Gordo County Conservation has been busy as always. New park additions, new trails, and new plantings have made 2025 a memorable year. You can see a bit more of what we have been up to on Pages 5 & 9.

As I reflect on the past, I am excited by the future. So much is coming in 2026! Don't miss Page 7 for an exciting addition coming soon.



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Programs

To register call (641)423-5309

Programs may be cancelled due to weather or low registration

WINTER BREAK AT LIME CREEK TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1-3 PM LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

It is time to get the kids out of the house for some fresh air! All ages are invited to join us for a variety of fun winter activities. Come dressed to play outside. There will be a warm fire burning and hot chocolate waiting. **There is no charge, but registration is required. Children must be accompanied by an adult to participate in the program.**

WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1-3 PM

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

The Winter Solstice marks the shortest day of the year. Make the most of it by spending the afternoon at Lime Creek! Stop in to warm up with hot cocoa. Binoculars will be available to watch birds enjoying the feeders and supplies will be provided to make bird seed ornaments!

Please register for this free event by Friday, December 19th.



A YEAR OF NATURE: PHENOLOGY JOURNALS SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 1 PM @ LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

The start of a new year is a great time to start a new hobby. Tracking the natural changes through the seasons is a fun project to get you outdoors! Phenology journals keep a record of your personal nature observations, like the wildlife and plants you see. Make your own phenology journal and observe nature throughout 2026!

Cost is \$5 for members and \$10 for nonmembers.

Participants must register by December 30th for supplies to be purchased.



CONSERVATION COFFEE CLUB ~ LIFE HISTORY OF THE LOON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 9:30-11 AM @ LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER



copyright Ty Smedes Nature Photography

Enjoy some social time with coffee, tea and treats followed by a conservation focused program. As an icon of the north-country, the Common Loon has created magic for all who have enjoyed their antics and that iconic "call of the wild". Join Polk City Iowa writer and photographer Ty Smedes as he lectures about the life history of the Common Loon, and shares many stunning images.

Cost is \$3 for nature center members or \$7 for nonmembers.

Registration deadline is Friday, January 9 by 4 PM



Programs continued

MOTHER NATURE'S MAVERICKS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 6:30-7:30 PM

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

We have all been taught the "rules of nature". But now it is time to discover the rulebreakers! Nothing in nature is black and white. Come learn about animals and plants that exist outside the box. Experience the unconventional!

Cost is free for members and \$2 for nonmembers.

Pre-register by Tuesday, January 20 by 4 PM

POP-UP SNOWSHOE HIKES

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

Winter weather can be unpredictable but also very fun! When the snow gets deep, we can creep. Keep an eye on our Facebook and Instagram pages for these fun, "pop-up" guided winter hikes.

No registration necessary.



WILDLIFE WONDERS: WINTER CONSTELLATIONS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 6:30-7:30 PM

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

Have you heard the story of Orion the Hunter or Taurus the Bull? Spend the evening at Lime Creek to hear these stories and discover more about the bright constellations that light up Iowa's winter sky! This program is open to all ages but is catered towards upper elementary students. Please dress for the weather as we will be heading outside to see what constellations we can spot! **This program is free, but registration is appreciated!**

Sign up by February 2 by 4 PM.

LIME CREEK LITTLES - MIGRATION MADNESS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 5-6 PM

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER

Children ages 4-6, with their adults, will be challenged in a game of survival! Discover how migration is used by many and why it can be so dangerous.

Cost is free for members and \$2 for each nonmember youth.

Pre-register by Tuesday, February 24 by 4 PM



Flora & Fauna

Northern Water Snake

Nerodia sipedon

Nothing adds excitement to a fishing or canoeing adventure quite like spotting a Northern water snake basking on a log or swimming in the water! These snakes are one of the most commonly seen snakes in Iowa. Usually, they can be spotted between April-October in and around rivers, lakes, or wetlands. These areas have plenty of their favorite things to eat like small fish, amphibians, and crayfish. When colder weather comes, Northern water snakes leave the water to find an overwintering site in rocky crevices or burrows abandoned by another animal.

When first encountering this water loving reptile, a common reaction is fear. However, they are completely harmless! Many people mistakenly call them water moccasins, which are venomous snakes that live in the Southern United States. Our native & harmless Northern water snakes can vary greatly with their colors.

Did you know?

They are typically recognized by their light brown/red coloration with dark brown/black splotches down their back. However, when out of the water with their scales dried out, the pattern can be hard to see.

If Northern water snakes feel threatened and cannot escape the situation, they will flatten their head and bodies, making themselves appear bigger. If not left alone, they will strike and release a smelly musk. This species of snake is often cautious around humans, slipping off their basking area and swimming away quickly when they notice a person approaching. So, if you are lucky enough to catch a glimpse of a Northern water snake, appreciate such an unique and amazing encounter!



Conservation Comment

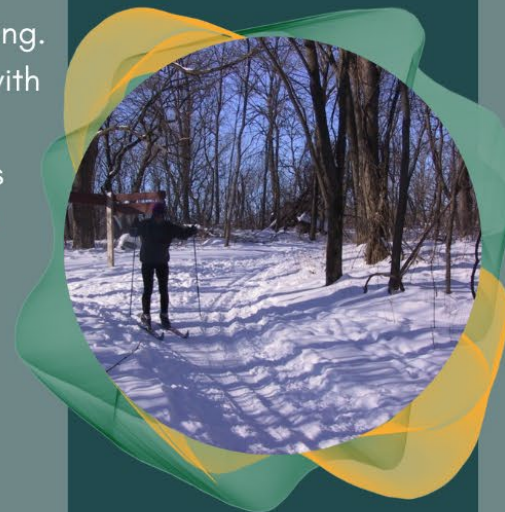
BY JOSH BRANDT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As you navigate your way around the trails at Lime Creek Conservation Area this winter you will notice that finding your way has gotten much easier. This fall, the conservation staff installed new trail markers to help identify trails and points of interest within the park.

Our primary multiuse trails are labeled with green signs. These trails are grass and crushed rock surface, typically 4-5 feet wide, and many are groomed for winter activities such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Our secondary trails, commonly referred to as single track, are labeled with blue signs. These trails are mostly dirt and rock surface, may have more uneven terrain, and are typically 2-3 feet wide. During the winter months these trails are best suited for hiking, snowshoeing, and snow biking. You will also note some brown trail signs that will assist you with finding your way to the Nature Center, our primitive campsites, and Mason City.

We have made some changes to the trail system at Lime Creek that will require some updating of the maps we have posted online and in our information kiosks. We are hoping to roll out new maps sometime this spring.

“Finding your way has gotten much easier.”





Beyond Lime Creek

County Parks and Natural Areas



Winter Garden Recreation Area

Hiding just outside the city limits of Clear Lake, this recreation area is a quiet get away from the bustle of town. A thick layer of peat moss is evidence that this 70-acre area was once a glacial lakebed, deep beneath the waters of Clear Lake. Today, this park is primarily open grassland with a small upland timber near the parking area.

The park is a refuge for native flora and fauna. Providing vital habitat for wild turkey, fox, and song birds galore. Beautiful oaks and white pine dominate the woodland.



Cerro Gordo County Conservation acquired the land in 1969. It originally offered sledding and other winter recreation opportunities, giving this park it's unique name.



Amenities

Hiking

Hunting

Photography

Wildlife Viewing

1220 N. 16th St. W.

Clear Lake, IA

50428

Volunteers and Donors

Weekend Volunteer Hosts: Kay Larson, Mike & Nancy Roddy, Sam Hunt, Bob & Sally Becker, Dave & Patty Hansen, Bruce Trimble, Ron & Lea Norlinger, Jim Degen, Bruce & Suzanne McKee, Bob & Debby Friedrichs

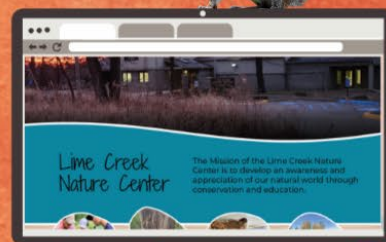
Program Volunteers: Thank you for your time and commitment in support of our Conservation Education programs; Carrie & Bob Berg, Mick & Rachelle Meyers, Alf Larson, Lane Hansen, Lori Casey, Jim Degen, Alice Phillips, Bruce & Suzanne McKee, Paul Hertzal, Dale Mills, Jamey Medlin, Maeve & Nick Gales, Kathy Deluca Strunk, and Scout Troop #1012.

New Nature Center Website

Lime Creek Nature Center is getting it's own website!

This fall we launched a new way to experience Lime Creek. Soon you will be able to register for programs, make a donation, and renew your membership all online. We have added **MonarchMania** into the mix as well. Our new site is a one stop shop for all things Lime Creek. Easy access to coming events and programs, read our newsletter, and get a peek at what our nature center has to offer both inside and out! Thank you for your patience as we learn our new system!

The perfect place to stay connected! **LimeCreekNatureCenter.com**



In memory of...

Rita Bigger

Thank you Paul Weitzel, Stephen Schaible, Jean Schaible, Dick & Margaret Rodgers, Carrie Topp, Jeaneal Weeks, and Susan & Rodney Simmons for your gifts in memory of Rita.

Luella Ames Bonner

Thank you to Mark Ames for the memorial donation in honor of Luella.



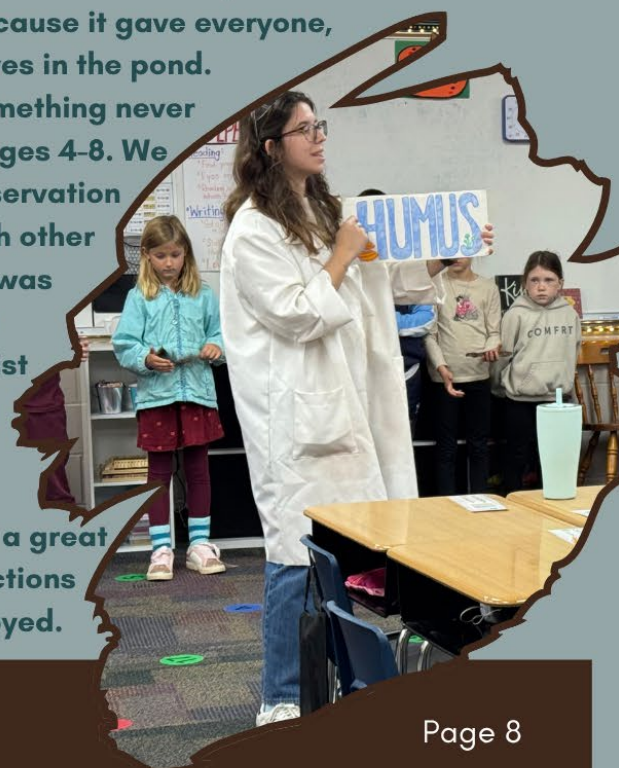


Intern Reflections

BY SYDNEY MILLER, NATURALIST INTERN

This internship was an entirely new experience for me and boy did I learn a lot. I'm SO glad I decided to see what county conservation was all about after working for the national park service the last couple of years! Local conservation is completely different than at the federal level in all the best ways. I was given SO many opportunities to learn and grow. I was so excited to gain more experience with school age children when it comes to environmental education and it did not disappoint. Getting to experience all that the Cerro Gordo's County Conservation education program encompasses was such a gift! I'd be lying if I said walking into the education program office for the first time wasn't overwhelming. It was hard to comprehend how all the supplies and different programs in the office would all be used and kept in order. I learned quickly and was very impressed by just how many programs our education program provides which explains all the supplies and program tubs I saw walking into the office that first day.

There are so many programs to choose from but I would say my favorite were the pond studies, the summer camps and the Dr. Dirt school program! I enjoyed pond studies because it gave everyone, including me, a reason to get dirty and have fun exploring what lives in the pond. Seeing the excitement and joy from children when they caught something never got old. I got the chance to lead two summer camps for children ages 4-8. We explored the pond, prairie, and forest you find at Lime Creek Conservation Area. I had SO much fun leading these camps and helping out with other summer camps. Then after watching many classroom programs I was given the chance to lead a few myself and my favorite program to present was Dr. Dirt. I really enjoyed becoming the silly soil scientist character that Dr. Dirt is. The program gives a fun spin to learning how dirt is formed. This program really showed me that the more excited the presenter is the more the kids will enjoy the program! Overall, my time with Cerro Gordo County Conservation was such a great experience. I learned so much, and I got to meet and make connections with so many children and community members which I really enjoyed.



County Conservation at a Glance

2025

233
Nature Center
Members



4 Boat Ramps

8 Canoe/Kayak
Launches



324

VOLUNTEER
HOURS

200+
Wood Duck
boxes



37
Public
Properties



Pickleball
Court



122 ELECTRIC
CAMPSITES

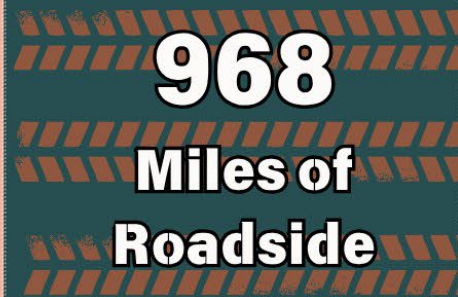
7 PRIMITIVE
CAMPSITES



425
Educational
Programs

968

Miles of
Roadside



11,280

Participants in
Conservation Programs

6 **ANIMAL**

AMBASSADORS

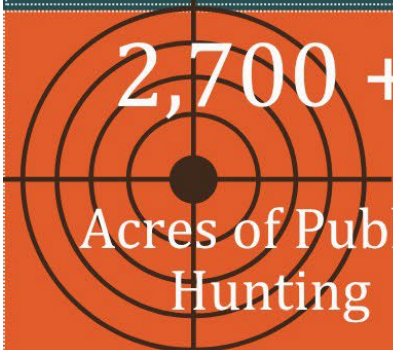


700
pounds of seed
harvested



2,700 +

Acres of Public
Hunting



Approximately

39

Miles of Trail





Happy Holidays

Give a gift this season that has a lasting impact on your community and beyond. Provide opportunities for generations to explore, discover, and connect to our natural world.

A tax-deductible gift, membership, or monetary donation to Lime Creek Nature Center is a gift that many benefit from. The environmental education team provides opportunities to all who wish to deepen their connection to nature.

The nature center relies on donations and memberships to fund our environmental education activities, programs, and internships.

Please send your donation to:

Lime Creek Nature Center
3501 Lime Creek Road, Mason City, IA. 50401

Or visit our website:

LimeCreekNatureCenter.com

Thank You



Building Hours & Information

Mon. - Fri.: 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM

Sat. - Sun.: 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Address: Lime Creek Nature Center

3501 Lime Creek Road

Mason City, Iowa 50401

Phone: (641)423-5309

Website: CerroGordo.gov

Social Media: Facebook & Instagram



CERRO GORDO COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBERS:

Shannon Anderson - Secretary/Treasurer

Stephen Gales - Member

Dudley Humphrey - Member

Jacquelyn Arthur - Vice-Chair

Jim Roseland - Chair

LIME CREEK NATURE CENTER FOUNDATION BOARD OFFICERS:

Jim Degen - President

Maeve Gales - Secretary/Treasurer

Mareah Van Zante - Vice President

STAFF

Josh Brandt - Executive Director

Heather Hucka - Conservation Education Manager

Kari Jeffrey - Naturalist

Ryan Wilcke - Roadside Vegetation Manager

Lakota Kirst - Roadside Vegetation Specialist

Ryan Theel - Roadside Vegetation Specialist

Todd Hansen - Operations Supervisor

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Mary Ermer - Office Manager

