### Spring 2019

# **Conservation Connection**

# Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

### **H**ealthy Aquatic Communities Include Aquatic Plants

Brad Freidhof - Conservation Program Manager

Restoring a lake and the associated wetlands within the watershed can be difficult and complex. Simply removing sediments, adding structure to the lake bottom, and constructing a few wetland areas above the lake are unlikely to provide the full array of ecological services a healthy aquatic ecosystem can provide. Understanding the diversity, density, and distribution of macrophytes (large aquatic plants), around and within a lake, is essential to understanding the health of a lake community due to the important ecological role aquatic plants play in relation to other aquatic organisms and water quality.

All other life in a lake depends on the plant life. Aquatic vegetation provides food and shelter for fish, wildlife, and the invertebrates that in turn become food for other organisms. Plants improve water quality, protect shorelines, and add to the aesthetic quality of a lake. Studies have shown that non-vegetated lake bottoms support less diverse invertebrate populations and this in turn will support less diverse fish and wildlife populations.

The current lake restoration at F.W. Kent Park has increased the depth of the majority of the lake basin to a depth of 12 feet or greater. At this depth it is less likely that aquatic plants will become established in undesired locations. Three reefs have been constructed at a depth of four feet below the water surface. In these locations native plant communities, including American Eelgrass, Pondweed, and White waterlily, will be established to create aquatic habitat, improve water quality, and add to the aesthetics of the lake. Emergent plants such as Hard-Stemmed Bulrush, American

Sweet Flag and Blue Flag Iris, will also be established in several bays and adjacent wetlands to utilize nutrients during the growing season and reduce the availability of these nutrients to non-desirable plants including a variety of algae. The highly productive waters of Iowa have made aquatic plant management a complex and difficult

... continued on page 3



## THE PEOPLE OF JCC

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# A Note from the Director

Larry Gullett - Executive Director



#### Sustainable Funding for Natural Resources

In 2010, 63% of Iowans voted for a constitutional amendment to create the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. This Fund would be a permanent and protected funding source that would support programs to improve our water quality, protect our soil, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase

outdoor recreation opportunities throughout Iowa. Nine years later, the fund sits empty, but that could change this year if the legislature and governor raise the state sales tax by 3/8ths of a cent.

Thus far many organizations have endorsed the program, named the Iowa's Water and Land Legacy (IWILL), for its long-term solution to a sustainable funding source for natural resources. The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC), comprised of all 99 counties in Iowa, made the initiative their number one legislative priority this year. In addition, many county level health boards across the state have adopted the program as a priority this year, including the Johnson County Board of Health. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors and Conservation Board have also endorsed the program. Hopefully, the legislature and governor will follow suit.

When voters approved the constitutional amendment back in 2010, a formula for dividing the estimated \$187.5 million per year was part



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of the package. It is in the best interest of the state's diverse conservation needs that the legislature and governor do not change the formula that voters chose to support. The formula currently divides the funding into programs addressing the enhancement of natural resources, including programs for improving water and air quality and for providing additional outdoor recreation opportunities. If the legistlature were to change the formula, as has been discussed, this could reduce public access to public lands and waters. The current formula provides funding to land managers of both public and private lands in order to help them implement sustainable practices to improve water quality. The formula changes being discussed by the legislature would shift the funding primarily to land managers of private lands. This change would reduce the effectiveness of the overall program vision. A shift focusing the program on private land will reduce the effectiveness of the overall vision.

The primary benefits of the funding will be focused on water quality, economic development, rural revitalization, and public health. Up to 2/3rds of the revenue is available for voluntary conservation

projects outlined in the Nutrient Reduction Strategy plan that keeps nutrients on the land rather than in the water. In Iowa, outdoor recreation accounts for \$8.7 billion per year in consumer spending, 83,000 jobs, and \$649 million in state and local tax revenue. The rural revitalization component comes from guality of life initiatives associated with outdoor recreation and keeping educated, young Iowans living, working, and raising families in our rural communities. The health benefits of participating in outdoor recreation is immense. Nearly all people who participate in outdoor activities recognize the benefits associated with taking time to rejuvenate and re-energize their mental and physical well-being. At this point, water resources in Iowa are becoming an increased health threat every year-not only for humans, but also the myriad of fish and wildlife that depend on a healthy environment.

In 2010, the voters of Iowa recognized the benefits of this program and voted to prioritize it, and support has only grown. If you want more detailed information about the initiative, please contact our office staff at Kent Park or visit the website: http:// www.iowaswaterandlandlegacy.org.

#### Healthy Aquatic Communities ... continued from page 1



task, and many of Iowa's shallow lakes are inundated with aquatic vegetation and invasive aquatic plant species. The intention of adding these native plant communities is to create a competitive plant ecosystem that has the ability to compete with non-desirable plant species and also provide necessary wildlife habitat.

Establishing these macrophyte beds within the lake at F.W. Kent Park will require a lot of manual labor. Staff are preparing for the installation of these plants in mid-June and will be organizing volunteer opportunities to assist with this massive effort. Please contact Brad Freidhof at bfreidhof@ co.johnson.ia.us if you are interested in being added to a contact list for these pop-up volunteer events.

Photo Credits: White Waterlily, on front cover, (User:Sloanep/CC-BY-SA-3.0); Eelgrass ,above left, (User:Fredlyfish4/ CC-BY-SA-3.0); Blue Flag Iris, bottom left, (Frank Mayfield/CC-BY-SA-3.0);

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# **IDAHO WILDERNESS TREK**

JULY 10-19Every year, Johnson County Conservation staff take<br/>high school students on a 10-day backpacking trip to the<br/>Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, which contains 1.3 million<br/>acres of pristine wilderness. Students will participate<br/>in stewardship projects, experience wilderness and the<br/>ecology of the area, as well as gain valuable outdoor skills.

# ARE YOU READY FOR ADVENTURE?

Email fowen@co.johnson.ia.us for your application today! The application and letter of support are due Friday, April 19th.

Learn more about the trip! Attend the parent/student informational meeting at 6:30 pm on March 28th at the Conservation Education Center in F.W. Kent Park.

Final applicant selections will occur in early May.

# HELP MAKE THIS TRIP A REALITY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS!

Donate your gently-used outdoor/backpacking clothing, such as lightweight hiking pants, fleece jackets, rain jackets/pants, long-sleeve lightweight button-up shirts, and hiking boots. These items will add to our stash of backpacking clothing we are able to loan out to students for the Trek. The cost of these personal gear items can add up quickly, and every item we can loan helps to make this trip possible for more students.

You can also donate directly to our Wilderness Trek Scholarship Fund. Contact fowen@co.johnson.ia.us for more information on how you can help!



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# THE INCREDIBLE EDIBLE NETTLE

In English, the word nettle can be used as a verb literally meaning to irritate or annoy, and Stinging Nettle's genus *Urtica* comes from the Latin uro meaning "to burn." As a kid, I simply called it itch weed.

I encountered it often, and I learned from a very early age to break open the stems of jewelweed plants and rub the sap on the tell-tale raised stinging bumps that formed on my skin after exposure. This remedy from Mother Nature herself provides soothing relief. Fortunately, both nettles and jewelweed like the same types of wet soil near rivers or streams, so they are often seen growing near each other. It was not until a few years ago that I discovered nettles were actually edible. Now instead of avoiding nettles, I track them down for harvest!

We have two common species of nettles in Iowa: Stinging Nettle *(Urtica dioica)* and Wood Nettle *(Laportea Canadensis).* Both have tiny needle-like projections on their stems which, when brushed up against, inject chemicals into the skin causing a burning sensation. Fortunately, those tiny needles and the acids inside are extremely fragile, so it is easy to get rid of the stinging bits and keep all the tasty, nutritious parts for yourself. Nettles leaves are packed full of protein (4g per 100g cooked nettle), Vitamin A (100% DV), Calcium (46% DV), and Iron (4% DV), and are as nutritious (and in some cases more nutritious) than spinach!

Are you convinced yet? Grab some gloves! Spring is the best time to harvest nettle leaves when plants are less than one foot tall and leaves are most tender. I still harvest them throughout the summer and the fall until the plants die back, picking the newest leaves from the top several inches of the plant.

There are many different ways to prepare nettles for eating. The simplest is by adding nettle greens into any cooked dish you would use spinach in – especially soups. I just prepare my dish normally, then throw the leaves in during the last couple minutes of cooking. It only takes seconds for the stinging hairs to dissolve in the high heat. I will be experimenting this year with adding the raw leaf to bread dough and freezing the leaves for smoothies. There are honestly so many possibilities! How will you use this superfood this spring?







**Above, from top to bottom:** Stinging Nettle *(Urtica dioica)*, Wood Nettle *(Laportea canadensis)*, Stinging hairs from a nettle showing the fluid-filled bulbs at base of each needle. *Photo Credits: Stinging Nettle, Brennnessel1/CC-BY-SA-3.0); Wood Nettle, Raffi Kojian/CC-BY-SA-3.0); Stinging hairs, Jerome Prohaska/CC-BY-SA-3.0)* 



#### Kristen Morrow - Naturalist

Visit the Clear Creek Area and Trail in August and you'll find a shady oasis, a perfect respite from the unyielding sunshine that scorches the prairie. While there, you'll likely hear the thrumming of many different kinds of woodpeckers; after all, the woodlands on either side of the trail are filled with dead trees, each breathing life into the forest after their own time has passed. Halfway down the trail, you might spot the bright red Cardinal Flowers, and if you're lucky, a hummingbird drawn to their vibrancy. All of these qualities make this little patch of woods worth your visit. But the real glory of these woods is revealed for a short window earlier in the year. Visit in April and May, and you'll find a woodland filled with spring ephemerals, wildflowers that bloom for a short time before the canopies above leaf out, blocking the sunshine for these somewhat shade-intolerant plants.

The most common of these blooms is likely known by even the least botanical among us -Virginia Bluebells. These woods are blessed with an abundance of their colonies, turning the whole understory violet for weeks at a time. They thrive, as do most spring ephemerals, in moist loamy soil. The Clear Creek floodplain, with its standing pools of water high above the creek itself, signs of the creek's scrolling path over the millennium, provides the perfect habitat for them.

Amongst the carpet of blue, you'll find White Trout Lily, which can also spread into vast colonies in undisturbed woodlands. This species can be distinguished by the one nodding white flower with bright yellow anthers, and also by the one or two basal leaves on each plant, which are mottled like the bellies of their namesake fish. In places where these flowers are widely abundant, try munching on a leaf or two. These edible leaves have a bright lemony taste. However, keep picking to a minimum, as each plant can take seven years to bloom, and picking both leaves off one stalk is a death sentence for that individual.

The lucky visitor may spot the more rare Rue Anemone. This dainty flower in the Buttercup family is one of the first to appear, thanks to gnarly tuberous roots, giving it the energy to sprout up straight away. Other dainty ephemerals can be found too, including patches of Spring Cress, a Mustard family plant with a horse-radish-like bite and clusters of small white flowers growing amidst the wettest of soils.

In addition to the four described here, the spring visitor will likely find the full lineup of floral favorites: Hepatica, Bloodroot, Spring Beauties, Dutchman's Breeches, Buttercup, Wild Ginger, Jack-in-the-pulpit, Mayapple, and Violets galore. Be sure to plan a chance to explore and be present for these seasonal gifts of the natural world.

**Visit:** This section of the Clear Creek Trail can be accessed by the trailhead at 3196 Half Moon Ave NW, Tiffin, IA 52340. Currently, Johnson County Conservation manages 1.3 miles of the trail, between Half Moon Ave. and Ireland Ave., and 87 acres of surrounding woodland. Plans are underway to extend the trail west towards F.W. Kent Park.



Virginia Bluebell (Mertensia virginica)





White Trout Lily (Erythronium albidum)



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# **Looking for Ways to Volunteer in 2019?**

Help Johnson County Conservation host a smooth sailing Great Iowa River Race!

**About the race:** This 9.25-mile paddle race draws serious competitors from around the region, as well folks from the community looking for a fun day on the water. The race serves as the primary fundraiser for Johnson County Conservation's environmental education department. For example, in 2018, JCC used the profits from the previous three years of this event to purchase a trailer of ten kayaks. The education staff already have day camps and free educational programs scheduled throughout the summer for local kids to learn how to kayak!

**About volunteering:** People are needed to help with rental distribution, assisting with the check-in table, photography, lunch logistics, and more. All volunteers receive a race t-shirt as a thank you. To volunteer, call the Conservation Education Center at 319-645-1011 or email kmorrow@co.johnson.ia.us.



#### **JCCB Public Use Areas**

1	Codar Divor Crossing	E14 acros
⊥.	Cedar River Crossing	514 acres
2.	Ciha Fen	81 acres
3.	Clear Creek Area & Trail	87 acres, 1.3 miles
4.	Frytown Conservation Area	94 acres
5.	F.W. Kent Park	1,052 acres
6.	Hills Access	40 acres
7.	Hoover Trail	6 miles
8.	Iowa River Trail	3.5 miles
9.	Iowa River Water Trail	22 miles
10	River Junction Access	12 acres
11	. Pechman Creek Delta	380 acres
12	Schwab-Burford Property	132 acres
13	Scott Church Park	5 acres
14	. Solon Prairie	3 acres
15	. Sutliff Bridge & Access	1/2 acre
16	. Walker Park	3 acres
17	Williams Prairie Preserve	21 acres



More information about JCC public use areas such as trails, fishing, and camping can be found through our website: **bit.ly/JohnsonCoConservation** -click 'Public Use Areas'

www.johnson-county.com/conservation

# Spring Program Calendar

MarchTimeEventLocationTuesday, 195:30 p.m.JCC Board MeetingTBD; Call for uFriday, 2210:00 a.m.Hike It BabyClear Creek TuSunday, 242:00 p.m.Community Seed ShareIowa City PubTuesday, 267:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session IICECThursday, 286:30 p.m.Idaho Trek Informational MeetingCECSaturday, 3011:00 a.m.Habitat for Critters with TAKOKiwanis Park,	rail
Friday, 2210:00 a.m.Hike It BabyClear Creek TrSunday, 242:00 p.m.Community Seed ShareIowa City PubTuesday, 267:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session IICECThursday, 286:30 p.m.Idaho Trek Informational MeetingCEC	rail
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Tuesday, 267:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session IICECThursday, 286:30 p.m.Idaho Trek Informational MeetingCEC	olic Library
Thursday, 286:30 p.m.Idaho Trek Informational MeetingCEC	
Saturday, 30 11:00 a.m. Habitat for Critters with TAKO Kiwanis Park,	
	Iowa City
April Time Event Location	
Tuesday, 27:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session IIICEC	
Wednesday, 38:00 a.m.Kent Park Bird WalkCEC	
Friday, 57:00 p.m.Turkey Vultures on the Move!CEC	
Tuesday, 9 7:00 p.m. Beginning Birder Course: Session IV CEC	
Wednesday, 10 10:00 a.m. Nature Buds: Animal Homes Kent Park	
Thursday, 117:00 p.m.Gladys Black PresentationIowa City Pub	olic Library
Friday, 1210:00 a.m.Hike It BabyClear Creek Tr	rail
Sunday, 141:00 p.mSay YES to Foraging in SpringCEC	
Tuesday, 167:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session VCEC	
Tuesday, 165:30 p.m.JCC Board MeetingTBD; Call for u	updates
Wednesday, 178:00 a.m.Kent Park Bird WalkCEC	
Tuesday, 237:00 p.m.Beginning Birder Course: Session VICEC	
Saturday, 27 3:00 p.m. Earth Fest Terry Trueblow	od
May Time Event Location	
Wednesday, 1 8:00 a.m. Kent Park Bird Walk CEC	
Tuesday, 145:30 p.m.JCC Board MeetingTBD; Call for u	updates
Wednesday, 158:00 a.m.Kent Park Bird WalkCEC	
Saturday, 25 9:00 a.m. Spring Bird Banding CEC	
Saturday, 25 12:00 p.m. CEC Opening Day CEC	
June Time Event Location	
Wednesday, 58:00 a.m.Bird WalkCEC	
Saturday, 810:00 a.m.Great Iowa River RaceSturgis Ferry R	Park
Saturday, 81:00 p.m.Raptor Meet and GreetCEC	
Friday, 1410:00 a.m.Hike It BabyCEC	

Sign up to receive our newsletter via email by visiting: http://bit.ly/JCCNewsletter



# Program Guide

#### **Conservation Center Open**

Select Saturdays and Sundays May 25 - September 1, 12:00 - 4:00 p.m.

#### Kent Park Bird Walks

1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month, 8:00 a.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

## March

#### **Hike It Baby**

Friday, March 22, 10:00 a.m. Clear Creek Trail (3196 Half Moon Ave NW, Tiffin)

Hike It Baby is a national group with the goal of raising a generation to love the outdoors. Join in by bringing your little one (all ages invited, not just babies!) on this casual naturalist-led hike. Please arrive 15 minutes early. Contact 319-645-1011 for updates or questions.

#### Third Annual Community Seed Share

Sunday, March 24, 2:00-3:00 p.m. Iowa City Public Library, Room A

This is a great opportunity to share seeds you've saved or get some free seeds and try growing something new! The event is free and open to all. Seeds will be available on a first-come, first-served basis, so arrive early. Gardeners who wish to share their seeds with the public should place seeds in a bag or envelope, and label the package with seed ID and planting instructions. For more information, contact bethfisher@icpl.org or call 319-356-5200.

#### Beginning Birder Course: Session II

Tuesday, March 26, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

This is the second session of the Iowa City Bird Club's six-session birder course. Participants can attend one or all sessions and optional field trips. Beginning Birder Course is a continuation of Session I, focusing on bird ID and equipment. Pre-registration is required by Tuesday of each session. To register, call 319-645-1011 or email fowen@co.johnson.ia.us. The course is \$5/ session for non-club members; children are free.

#### Idaho Trek Informational Meeting

Thursday, March 28, 6:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Join trek leaders for an informational meeting about

the Idaho Wilderness Trek, a 10-day trip to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness in northeast Idaho. The meeting will cover logistics, safety, gear, and what participants can expect on the trek. After the presentation, attendees can ask questions to the trek leaders and past trek goers. For more information, email fowen@ co.johnson.ia.us.

#### Habitat for Critters with TAKO

Saturday, March 30, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Kiwanis Park, Iowa City

Come explore animal habitats with TAKO and JCC. Together, we will turn over rocks, check under the leaves, and investigate tree trunks and branches to see what we can find. Participants should be ready to walk on muddy woodland trails. TAKO will provide food and drinks at this free event. Please help reduce waste by bringing a water bottle, plates, and silverware. To register, visit the event on TAKO's Facebook page. Contact judy@takeakidoutdoors.org for questions.

# April

#### Beginning Birder Course: Session III

Tuesday, April 2, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center

Session III of the course will reveal the best birding spots in Johnson County, including a few secret areas.

#### **Turkey Vultures on the Move!**

Friday, April 5, 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. Conservation Education Center

Presenter Joan Schnabel from Raptology will introduce us to Gonzo the Turkey Vulture and the amazing seasonal migration his wild kin take every spring and fall. Registration is required by Monday, April 1st. Space is limited; register early by emailing fowen@co.johnson. ia.us.

#### **Beginning Birder Course: Session IV**

Tuesday, April 9, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park



The fourth session of the course will cover the types of birds that visit backyard feeders and how to attract them.

#### **Nature Buds: Animal Homes**

Wednesday, April 10, 10:00 a.m. Youth Group Campground, F.W. Kent Park

Nature Buds is a monthly program for children 3 to

5 years of age. This series encourages adult/child interaction through indoor stations and outdoor activities; one adult to every two children is required. Email fowen@co.johnson.ia.us to register.

#### Gladys Black: The Legacy of Iowa's Bird Lady

Thursday, April 11, 7:00-8:00 p.m. Meeting Room A , Iowa City Public Library

This program was made possible thanks to Humanities Iowa, a private, nonprofit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. A cultural resource for Iowans since 1971, Humanities Iowa offers many cultural and historical programs and grants to Iowa's communities. The late Gladys Black of Pleasantville, IA was widely known throughout Iowa as a conservationist, educator and amateur expert on birds. Presenters Larry Stone and Jon Stravers will detail this colorful woman's impact on so many Iowans. This presentation is free and open to the public. If you are a person with a disability who requires special assistance, please call 319-645-1011 in advance.

#### **Hike It Baby**

Friday, April 12, 10:00 a.m. Clear Creek Trail (3196 Half Moon Ave NW, Tiffin) See page 10 for details.

#### Say YES to Foraging in Spring

Sunday, April 14, 1:00-3:00 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Take a walk with a JCC naturalist and learn about some of the foods and medicines that can be foraged, in spring! This program is outside and features a walk over uneven terrain. Registration is required; email fowen@ co.johnson.ia.us to register.

#### **Beginning Birder Course: Session V**

Tuesday, April 16, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Session V of the course will highlight the birds that visit Terry Trueblood and Waterworks Parks in Iowa City.

#### **Beginning Birder Course: Session VI**

Tuesday, April 23, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

In this last session of the course, the interesting but confusing species group of warblers will be discussed.

#### **Earth Fest**

Saturday, April 27, 3:00-5:30 p.m. Terry Trueblood Recreation Area Earth Fest will be fun for all ages with indoor and outdoor activities related to the environment, animals, and sustainability. This event is hosted by Green Iowa AmeriCorps in collaboration with the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department. This event is a family fun event and admission is FREE.

### May

#### Spring Bird Banding

Saturday, May 25, 9:00 a.m.-Noon Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Spring is a great time to observe birds, especially those migrating through! This spring, join federally certified bird banders for an opportunity to learn about and see songbirds up close. The program will demonstrate the safe practices of banding through observation of banding equipment, operations, and viewing banded birds. Participants can come and go as their schedules allow, and no registration is necessary. This is a free program; for more information, call 319-645-1011.

#### June

#### **Great Iowa River Race**

Saturday, June 8, 10:00 a.m. Sturgis Ferry Park, Iowa City

Save the date for the 10th Annual Great Iowa River Race! The race is open to both recreational and competitive paddlers and includes canoes, kayaks, and paddleboards. The course covers 9.25 miles of the Iowa River, starting at Sturgis Ferry Park and ending at Hills Campground. The entry fee is \$30 per person and includes a t-shirt and lunch. There is no day-of registration, and all registration closes June 5th. Rentals are available for \$10 while they last. To learn more and to register, visit: https://paddleguru.com/races/ GreatIowaRiverRace2019.

#### **Raptor Meet and Greet**

Saturday, June 8th, 1:00-2:00 p.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Join the folks at Raptology and meet a real live bird of prey! Stop in at the Education Center any time between 1 and 2 p.m. to get up close and personal with some of Iowa's native raptors. No registration is necessary.

#### **Hike It Baby**

Friday, June 14, 10:00 a.m. Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park See page 10 for details.



Johnson Johnson County Conservation 2048 HWY 6 NW Oxford, IA 52332



# Discover:

In spring, pollinators in depend upon early blooms for pollen and nectar. Even the dandelions in your yard can provide food for bees and butterflies.