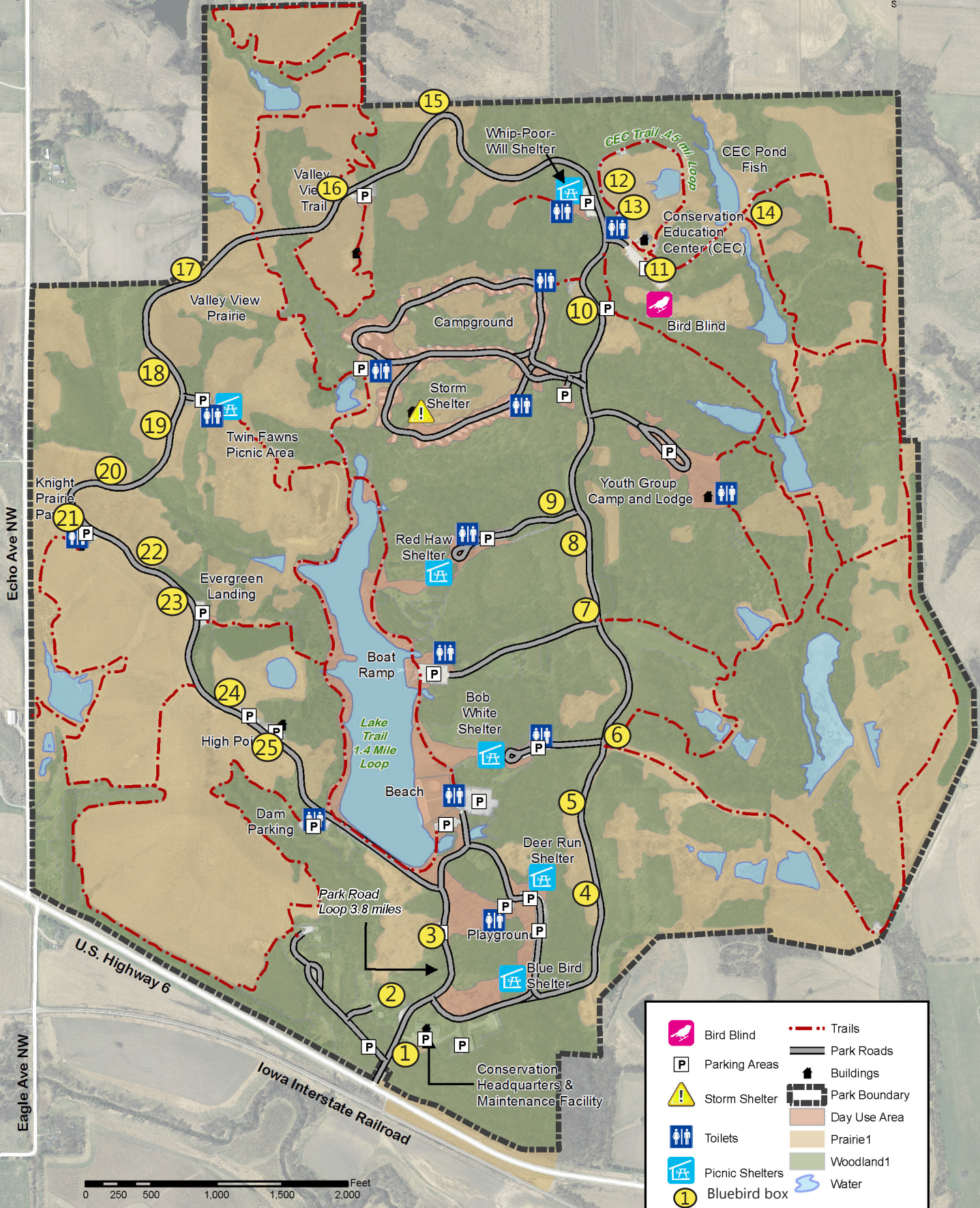


Bluebird Box Trail Map

F.W. Kent Park





About Bluebird Trails

Eastern Bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) were once as ubiquitous as robins. Starting in the 1930s, however, they started to decline. This trend continued for the next fifty years, and some feared their extinction was near. The reasons for their steep decline were plenty, but at the top of the list was habitat loss and non-native competition. Bluebirds are cavity nesters, meaning they rely on cavities in dead and dying trees as homes (often utilizing leftover holes made by woodpeckers in past seasons). But prime habitat like this was disappearing everywhere as dead standing trees (snags) were seen as ugly scars and cut down, and forests generally were reduced from the landscape. In addition, competition for the limited habitat was on the rise from two non-native and aggressive cavity nesters: European Starlings and House Sparrows.

In the 1970s, passionate conservationists and birders took action to restore the species and launched the bluebird box movement. This campaign encouraged people all across the eastern U.S. to build bluebird boxes as a substitute for cavities in snags. The movement also promoted the creation of bluebird trails, trained volunteers to monitor the boxes and collect data, and worked with grassroots organizations in public education efforts. Amazingly, this movement worked. The steady climb of Eastern

Bluebird populations since 1978 represents one of the greatest recoveries of a songbird population in conservation history. Today, populations are at a 50-year high.

Johnson County Conservation has been involved with this movement since 1997, when a bluebird trail was established in F.W. Kent Park. Today, 25 boxes are placed throughout the park along the main road loop. In 2019, the trail was updated; new boxes were added and some old boxes were relocated for better bluebird success. This effort was led by volunteers Ben Rowold and Jim Walters.

It is important to monitor nesting boxes throughout the nesting season. Since 2016, Volunteer Ben Rowold has taken on this duty for Johnson County Conservation. Ben visits the park weekly to check on the boxes, collect data, and deter pests. Monitors also need to be able to differentiate the nest and egg appearances of various species. Nests from non-bluebirds are removed from the boxes before eggs are laid (typically, these are from species with healthy populations).

For questions on establishing and caring for bluebird boxes and trails, call the Conservation Education Center at 319-645-1011.

