

# Conservation Connection

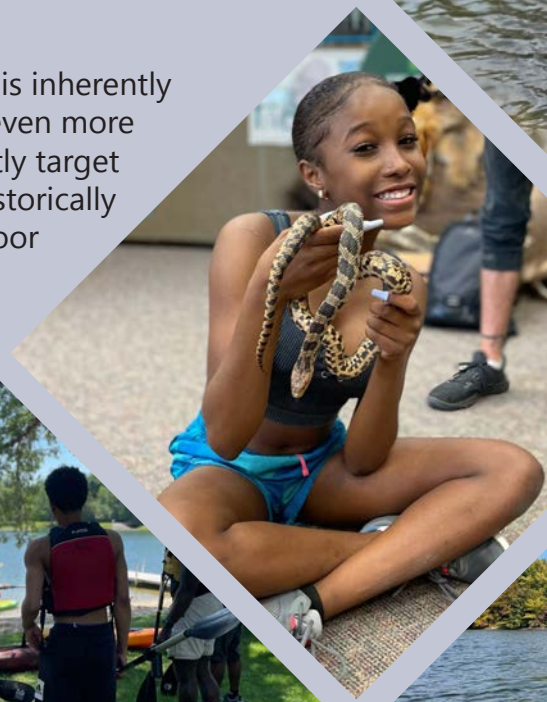
## Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

### Sparking a Love for the Outdoors for Local Teens

**Kristen Morrow** – Naturalist

In 2022, the Johnson County Conservation (JCC) education team launched into an exciting partnership with United Action for Youth's new SPARK program. Overall, the SPARK program helps to expose local teens to a wide breadth of interests, activities, and potential careers that may "spark" a new passion inside of them. The JCC naturalists help with this mission by contributing to the nature-oriented wing of the SPARK program. Since the first program in June, the naturalists have helped to guide groups of young people out on a variety of immersive outdoor recreation experiences, along with United Action for Youth's SPARK coordinators, Tony Branch and Dustin Eubanks. So far with JCC, the teens have gained exposure to and built skills with kayaking, canoeing, fishing, hiking, backpacking, and have even gotten some reptile introductions! Plans throughout the rest of the school year include archery, winter camping, ice fishing, snowshoeing, orienteering, and fly fishing.

While the SPARK program's mission is inherently worthwhile, the program becomes even more meaningful by its emphasis to directly target and include individuals who have historically been left out of these kinds of outdoor activities. This program helps young people of all skin colors, family backgrounds, body types, sexual orientations, and gender identities to know that these outdoor spaces and outdoor activities are for them too. Participants are regularly



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# A Note from the Director

## Special Interview Edition



We bring you another interview style note from our director. Our theme this time around is with regard to reflection on the past year and looking forward to the upcoming year. We hope you enjoy!

**There has been so much going on in the JCCB areas this year. Could you share a list of updates that have happened or are in progress?**

- *The Board closed on acquisition of 83 acres known as the Two Horse Farm, culminating a two year planning process. Many people are already enjoying the site, and the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska now own land again in their homeland.*
- *The west side of the Cedar River at Sutliff has seen some big improvements with hard surfacing of a roadway and parking area and construction of a latrine for visitors to the Sutliff Bridge and Cedar River Crossing. This project also was in the planning stages for years and we needed to wait until we finished the main wetland development at the site.*
- *The 26-acre Phebe Timber was donated by the Williams Family. The forest is located along Old Man's Creek off Kansas Ave and includes an impressive display of spring ephemeral wildflowers.*
- *The public parks are as busy as ever as people return to somewhat normal after a 3-year pandemic. All the parks are experiencing increased usage and we are happy about that. In addition, the education program is back to pre-pandemic programming levels and are setting attendance records almost each month. It is great to see so many people actively involved in environmental programs!*

**As we head into the winter season what areas would you encourage the public to explore and why?**

*There are many options. If you like ice fishing we have the ideal place at [Kent Park](#). Many of the ponds are outstanding for fishing and in some cases were custom designed for ice fishing. Get a contour map from our webpage and enjoy the fishing. For those just wanting to unwind, visit [Cangleska Wakan](#), [Two Horse Farm](#), [Cedar River Crossing](#) or [Pechman Creek Delta](#). Hike, snowshoe, or cross country ski the forests and wetlands at these sites. Depending on your timing, you may see a fair amount of wildlife.*

**Thinking ahead to spring, what projects and goals are you most excited to start or finish as we head into the warm season again?**

*We would like to get the residence/cabin at Two Horse Farm functioning as a rental for families to gather and enjoy. The rental facility would be available for a span of one week or two and would allow the park users to immerse themselves in nature each day.*

*Also, the Ioway people may visit the site next spring and bring a drum and some singers to celebrate the returning of their land. This should be a lot of fun. Also next spring and summer we will install a parking area at the new Malinda Reif Reilly Fen and Prairie. This parking area is needed to allow much needed safe parking off the highway.*

Sometime next year the Clear Creek Trail extension from Half Moon Avenue to Kent Park should start construction. This project has been in the planning stages for years and it will be a huge asset to Johnson County. You will be able to ride a bike from anywhere in Iowa City or Coralville all the way to Kent Park!

### Heading into the New Year and reflecting on the past year...

#### What areas have you most enjoyed?

The diversity in our areas makes it difficult to select one area over another, but this past season I probably enjoyed seeing and experiencing the continued adaptation of the plant communities at Cedar River Crossing. The occupation of the space by the expanding root systems of the prairie and wetland plants is fascinating and has tremendous impact on what you see above ground. The entire 226 acre restoration is in this race to occupy the space within the soil subsurface. Also, observing the continued growth from the lake restoration and catch basin development at Kent Park has been fascinating.

#### What flora and fauna discoveries did you have this past year?

We documented many uncommon or rare species of plants in newly acquired conservation areas (to name just a few; Indian pipe, Purple giant hyssop, Nannyberry, Slender false foxglove, Kentucky coffee tree, carex sprenghalii, October lady's tresses orchid, Carex bushii, Beakgrass, Prairie crab, and Ontario aster). On the other hand, the profound negative impact of invasive species such as oriental bittersweet was probably the most notable plant association this past year. The forest areas along Sugar Bottom Road in Johnson County are especially bad with oriental bittersweet and we will be fighting this plant for decades. It will overtake and kill many of our native oaks and hickory trees.

#### What were your favorite moments this past year?

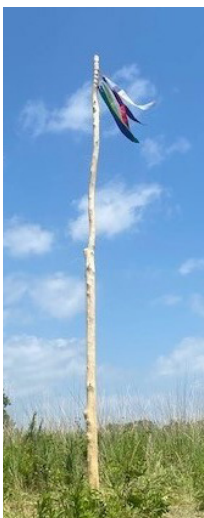
Without a doubt, closing on the new, 83-acre Two Horse Farm with the Melloy donation of seven acres to the Iowa Tribe. This project is historic in terms of returning land to an indigenous tribe and creating an environment we will continue to grow and learn from for hundreds of years. Also, seeing the parking areas, road system and new restroom facility constructed at the Sutliff Bridge and Cedar River Crossing was rewarding. That project has been in the planning phase since 2015.

#### What was the most difficult challenge this past year?

Working our way through rerouting of the Clear Creek Trail extension to Kent Park. Discovering several previously undocumented historic sites was shocking. We have done everything possible to protect these newly discovered sites. Avoiding these historically important sites by rerouting the trail will cost an additional \$1.6 million.

#### What was your greatest accomplishment this year?

Receiving two unexpected awards for the lake restoration, one of national recognition and one of statewide recognition. In addition to the lake restoration, the department has received first and second place statewide for our overall natural resource work for two consecutive years. The entire staff, Board, and people of Johnson County should be proud of these accomplishments.

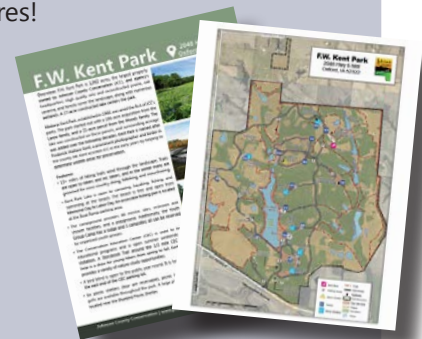


## Need a Park Guide/Map?

Each of our 20 conservation areas/trails have their own park guide. These guides include details about each area as well as a comprehensive map of any trails or notable features!

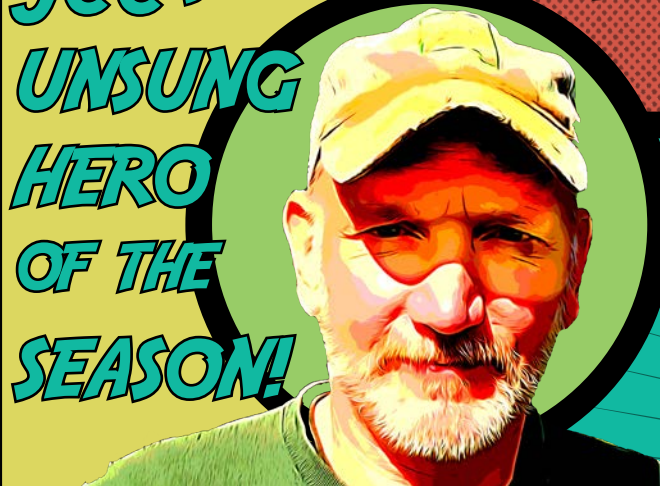
To locate these, follow the link below:

<https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/public-use-areas>



WE'VE ADDED A NEW, REGULAR, SEGMENT TO OUR NEWSLETTER! THE SEGMENT BELOW WILL ATTEMPT TO HIGHLIGHT AND SHOW GRATITUDE TO THOSE UNSUNG HEROES WITH IN OUR ORGANIZATION. THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO TIRELESSLY WORK TO MAKE OUR LIVES AND JOBS RUN SMOOTHLY.

**JCC'S  
UNsung  
HERO  
OF THE  
SEASON!**



**DAVE "GUS" GUSTAFSON**

Assistant Operations Superintendent

DAVE GUSTAFSON IS A DOER. HE NEVER ASKS ANYONE TO DO ANYTHING HE WOULDN'T DO FIRST. HE IS A JACK OF ALL TRADES; SMALL ENGINE MECHANIC, UTILITY SPECIALISTS, WOODWORKER, ETC. THERE IS NO JOB THAT IS BENEATH HIM AND HE ACCEPTS A CHALLENGE WHEN IT IS PRESENTED TO HIM. HE IS AN INCREDIBLY HARD WORKER & ALWAYS GOES ABOVE & BEYOND  
THANKS FOR ALL YOU DO GUS!

## JCC Staff Updates

### Liz McVey: Our First Americorps Education Assistant!

I grew up in Newton, Iowa where I created many fond memories exploring a nearby Izaak Walton League pond catching frogs, digging up worms, and searching for insects! My curiosity and love for the outdoors continued to intensify as I grew up, which ultimately led me to pursue a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences from the University of Iowa. During my time in college, I was a Field Assistant on a small mammals of Iowa research project and a Tree Surveyor during the summers. I graduated this past May 2022 and had the opportunity to be a Seasonal Naturalist Intern here at Johnson County Conservation over the summer. Most recently, I accepted an eleven-month position through Bur Oak Land Trust as an AmeriCorps Conservation Education Assistant. Luckily for me, I am stationed back at the Conservation Education Center within Kent Park. This position is similar to my summer internship where some of my responsibilities include caring for JCC's animal ambassadors and implementing environmental education programming with

the three full-time Naturalists: Kristen, Frances, and Marci. I am eager to grow and continue learning from the education staff! Being able to connect people with nature and foster a love and appreciation for it has been my favorite part of this position.



# Winter Tree ID

Kristen Morrow - Naturalist

The winter forest, a palette of drab grays and browns, can seem like a cold and dreary place to hike. But there are still so many natural wonders for those with a curious mind! One of my favorite ways to engage my naturalist brain in the winter months is to practice identifying trees. Trees can seem impossible to identify without their leaves, but so many clues remain! The bark of each tree has its own distinct pattern. The silhouette of the tree can help you narrow down options at a distance. Hiking under a tree and over fallen fruit and nuts is a quick and easy way to discover its identity. And a tree's twigs are packed full of clues, from the way they grow on a branch to the buds waiting through winter to unveil fresh life.

Check out the diagram below to learn about all of these twiggy clues and their roles, and flip to the back for a twig guide of your own (you can even cut out this page as your own pocket guide!) Finally, you can dive in deep by attending the Winter Tree ID course on Saturday, February 25, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. See page 18 for details.

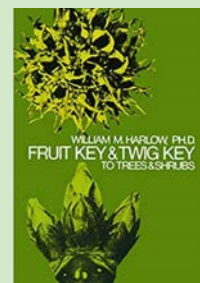
Get started on your winter tree ID skills with these two book recommendations from JCC naturalists:



## **Bark: A Field Guide to Trees of the Northeast**

by Michael Wojtech

This guide will help you learn to see the subtle patterns of tree bark, and will give you useful language to describe the patterns.



## **Fruit Key & Twig Key to Trees & Shrubs**

by William M. Harlow, Ph.D.

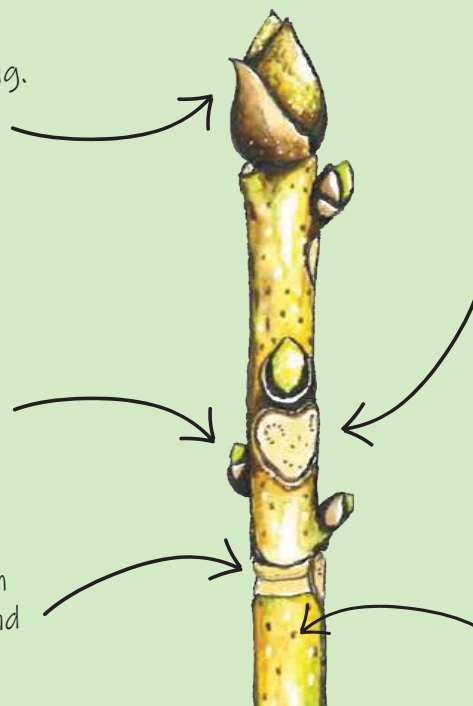
This advanced key is an invaluable resource for learning to distinguish fine details on twigs. Use the diagram below to help navigate the terms in the key.

## Twig Anatomy

**Terminal Bud:** The bud or buds at the tip of the twig. These can be singular or clustered.

**Lateral Buds:** Leaf and flower buds that emerge from the side of the twig. These are a useful way to determine if a tree is opposite or alternate.

**Node:** the points on a stem where the buds, leaves, and branching twigs originate.



**Leaf Scars and Vascular Scars:** Leaf scars are the point where the leaf attached to the twig. The scar that is left behind after the leaf has fallen can be a variety of shapes, from circles to hearts to "U" shapes to "monkey faces." The vascular scars are the minute dots inside the leaf scar. These are portals, connecting the xylem and phloem of the greater tree to the leaf.

**Lenticels:** Pores that allow gas exchange between atmosphere and internal tissues.

# Twig & Bud Identification

Illustrated by Kristen Morrow



Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*)



Bigtooth Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*)



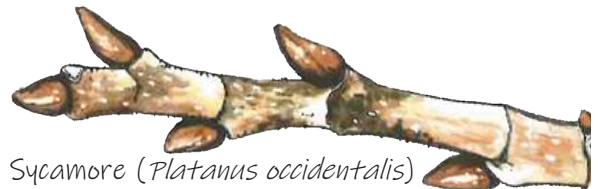
Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*)



Hackberry (*Celtis Occidentalis*)



American Elm (*Ulmus americana*)



American Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)



Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*)



Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*)



Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*)



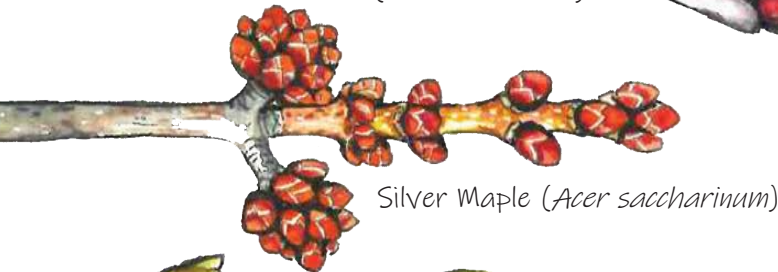
Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*)



Basswood (*Tilia americana*)



Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*)



Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)



Wild Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*)



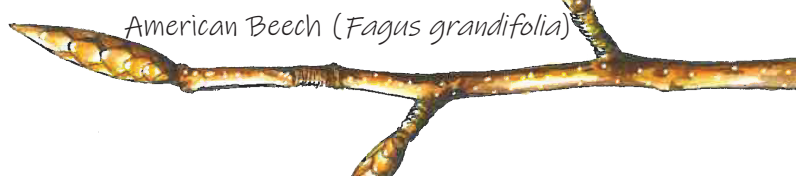
Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)



River Birch (*Betula nigra*)



Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)



American Beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)

## Kent Park Bird Banding Brief Report

**Mark Bowman** – Federally Permitted  
Bird Bander & Longtime JCC Volunteer

Myself, Marci Trana, and Debbie Bryant (together with many volunteers) led a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) trial season this past summer after receiving a small grant from Iowa Audubon. We documented the sex, breeding status, molt status, and age of



many common Kent Park residents, such as Gray Catbirds, Indigo Buntings, Field Sparrows, and Common Yellowthroats. We were delighted to encounter some less common residents including two Eastern Kingbirds and a Yellow-breasted Chat. University of Iowa undergraduates contributed yet again to our research, a trend that we hope to sustain.



## BUILDING BETTER BIRDERS WORKSHOP SERIES

**Sat Feb 4, 2023**

AM Bird Hike | Common Feeder Birds  
of Iowa | Woodpeckers, Doves, and  
Similar Species of Iowa | Bird Banding  
| Milan Bottoms Bald Eagle Night  
Roost Survey | PM Bird Hike and  
Eagle Viewing

**Fri/Sat Sep 22/23, 2023**

Fri: Nocturnal Raptors of Iowa  
| PM Owl Prowl  
Sat: AM Bird Hike | Diurnal Raptors of  
Iowa | Live Raptor Program | Midwest  
Raptor Population Trends Using 40  
Years of Christmas Bird Count Data



**Sat May 18, 2024**

AM Bird Hike and Bird Banding |  
Warblers of Iowa | Flycatchers, Vireos,  
Swallows, and Similar Species of Iowa  
| Shorebirds of Iowa | PM Bird Hike

To learn more  
or to register  
scan QR code!



<https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>



The SPARK program is free for all students. They provide transportation and outfit teens with gear when applicable. If you would like to contribute to this program, please visit United Action for Youth's website: <https://www.unitedactionforyouth.org/donate>, and write "SPARK" in the comment.





experiencing something completely new to them. These first time experiences are often the most fulfilling for the education staff as we get to live through that experience with them and help guide them through. A wide range of emotions are encountered, from initial fear and uncertainty, to gaining confidence and joy, and finally (usually) ending with big smiles and declarations that they cannot wait to do that activity again.

As an educator, I collect anecdotes of meaningful interactions with students and participants. These moments show me that the programs our team is helping to provide are making a difference, that we're helping to empower people to feel confident outdoors, or that we've been able to share and spread a passion and curiosity for the infinite details of the natural world. The following is a sampling of anecdotes from our partnered SPARK programs so far:

On a late summer kayaking program, one participant, a teen woman, was certain that kayaking was not for her. She did not know how to swim, felt dubious about the effectiveness of our personal flotation devices (PFDs), and thought that the kayaks would toss her around like a weeble-wobble. On her own, she made the choice to try it out anyway, starting with her kayak tied to mine. Halfway across the lake, confidence building, she decided to strike out solo. By the end of the program, she returned to the boat ramp with a huge grin, and when I asked if she would do this again, she agreed with enthusiasm and a clear pride at her new skills.

This November, another crew came out to Cangleska Wakan for a hike through the fallen leaves. The group was made up of young teenagers, all 13 or 14 years old and in the

prime age to think that the planned activity is not that cool. They humored me throughout many stops to inspect bald-faced hornet nests and puffball mushrooms, but eventually asked to play hide-and-seek. While hiding on their own, off-trail, tucked amongst the old oaks and fallen hickories, with woodpeckers cackling above, the teens made discoveries of their own. After the game, a 14 year old boy, one that seemed a little "too cool" for the hike earlier, asked me to come look at two of his discoveries: a decomposing elm and a "tree butt," a massive burl on an old oak that, indeed, looked like a large bark-covered derriere. At the end of the hike, when asked for each student's highlights, he said, "learning all of the facts about the woods."

Finally, while on the capstone backpacking trip this summer, a free three-day trip to the Yellow River State Forest in northeast Iowa, two siblings found out that they may be perfectly cut out for a life in outdoor high adventure. Though the experience was completely new, their positive mental attitudes and physical stamina helped them to thrive with the rigors of backpacking, especially in the humid and mosquito-filled Iowa forest. On the trip, they led the pack and cheered on their crew-mates as they struggled up long hills. Since the trip, they have attended many of the fall events, and each has declared that, without any doubt, they will be applying to the ten-day Idaho Wilderness Trek that our JCC education team annually leads. For them, it seems certain that a strong spark was ignited, and thanks to the SPARK program and our ongoing partnership, they have the chance to continue gaining skills and exposure to outdoor activities all year round.

We'll keep collecting stories with these young people, of meaningful moments both big and small. We're grateful to have wonderful partners in United Action for Youth, and to be doing the work to get these teens on outdoor adventures.

# A New Crossing for

**Ed Kringle** - Trails Field Worker  
**Marci Trana** - Naturalist

## Why we needed a new crossing

A culvert allowing access across an unnamed creek at Cedar River Crossing was no longer holding in water. Water flowed generously around the culvert and a small sink hole had begun developing on the path (Photo 1).

## How the bridge was built

JCC staff went to work making the plans to remove the old culvert and install a new bridge. Have you ever wondered what it takes to build a bridge? Take a walk with us as we explain the process. All lumber used for the bridge was white and red oak trees that fell during the 2020 derecho at Cedar River Crossing, Ciha Fen, and other JCC properties. Additionally, all lumber was sawn at JCC's Cangleska Wakan sawmill. Given the size of the mill and the dimensions of the needed bridge we needed to splice two sections of wood together for each of the three cross beams (Photo 2). We paired the roughly 10x10 inch cants (a partially sawed section of wood) together and created a bridge that would span 21 feet. We needed to consider all the types of equipment that may need to travel across the bridge to determine the width (8.5 feet). Deck boards measured two inches thick and ranging in widths 8-16 inches wide. To best match the two butt ends of each of the cross beams, we ran a string line down the beam lengths and used a chainsaw to cut the ends flat, we pushed them together again and again until the ends were as tight as possible. The beams were then bolted together with six half inch bolts on each side of the joints (Photo 3). The deck boards were fastened with 4.5 inch long lag bolts.

## A few unexpected events!

In late June and early July 2022, two heavy rain events dumped a total of ten inches of water

into the watershed feeding the creek. These two events caused the water to overflow the trail crossing made by the culvert and left a channel as wide as 14 feet in some sections (Photo 1)! These rain events were good and bad. We now knew how wide the creek naturally needed to be but would our bridge be long enough to span the distance? We hope so!

## Moving the bridge from the shop to the site

To get the bridge out of the shop and down to the creek, we had to use a special piece of equipment called an expandable axle. One end of the axle was placed under the beams of the bridge making the bridge it's own trailer! A tongue (the part of the trailer that sticks out ahead of the cargo area) was fastened to the other end of the bridge, the bridge/trailer was balanced by removing some of the deck boards. Finally it was ready to be towed to the creek (Photo 4).

## Securing the bridge in place

Six recycled power poles were cut to eight feet in length to serve as posts. An auger (a large vertical drill) attached to a skid loader was used to drill holes (Photo 5), and the eight foot poles were buried in the ground (Photo 6), cut to be level with each other. We set the bridge on the sawn power poles and bolted metal plates to connect the bridge to the posts.

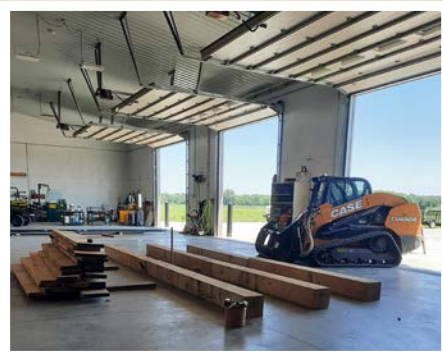
## Preparing the ground around the bridge

Soil was backfilled around the work areas to smooth out any surfaces and to make sure the ground met the bridge ends for smooth crossings and to prevent any future washouts. Finally, the Natural Resource Crew seeded the exposed ground around the bridge and installed erosion control matting to help hold the soil until vegetation comes up next spring.

# Cedar River Crossing



1



2



3



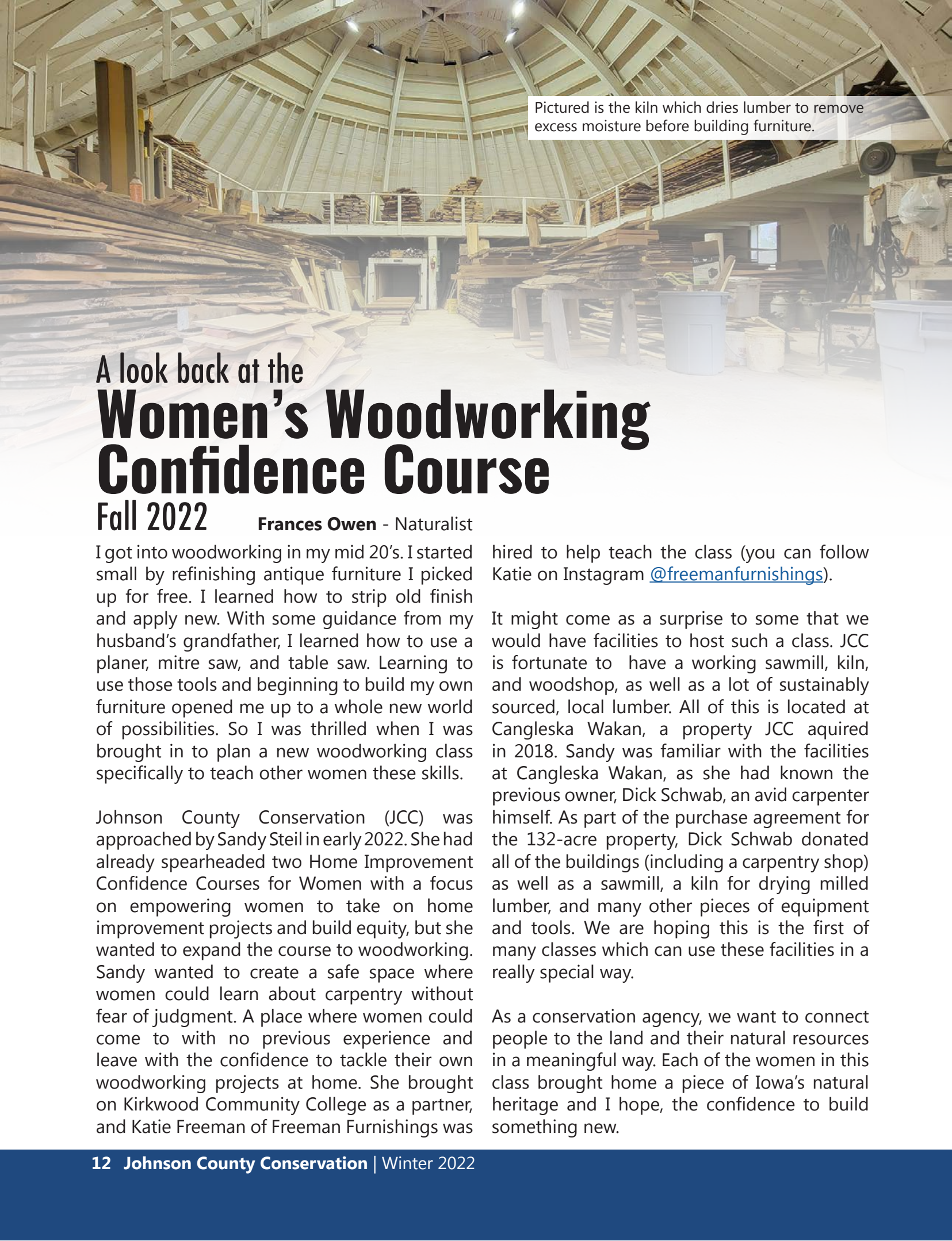
4



5



6



Pictured is the kiln which dries lumber to remove excess moisture before building furniture.

# A look back at the **Women's Woodworking Confidence Course** Fall 2022

**Frances Owen** - Naturalist

I got into woodworking in my mid 20's. I started small by refinishing antique furniture I picked up for free. I learned how to strip old finish and apply new. With some guidance from my husband's grandfather, I learned how to use a planer, mitre saw, and table saw. Learning to use those tools and beginning to build my own furniture opened me up to a whole new world of possibilities. So I was thrilled when I was brought in to plan a new woodworking class specifically to teach other women these skills.

Johnson County Conservation (JCC) was approached by Sandy Steil in early 2022. She had already spearheaded two Home Improvement Confidence Courses for Women with a focus on empowering women to take on home improvement projects and build equity, but she wanted to expand the course to woodworking. Sandy wanted to create a safe space where women could learn about carpentry without fear of judgment. A place where women could come to with no previous experience and leave with the confidence to tackle their own woodworking projects at home. She brought on Kirkwood Community College as a partner, and Katie Freeman of Freeman Furnishings was

hired to help teach the class (you can follow Katie on Instagram [@freemanfurnishings](https://www.instagram.com/freemanfurnishings)).

It might come as a surprise to some that we would have facilities to host such a class. JCC is fortunate to have a working sawmill, kiln, and woodshop, as well as a lot of sustainably sourced, local lumber. All of this is located at Cangleska Wakan, a property JCC acquired in 2018. Sandy was familiar with the facilities at Cangleska Wakan, as she had known the previous owner, Dick Schwab, an avid carpenter himself. As part of the purchase agreement for the 132-acre property, Dick Schwab donated all of the buildings (including a carpentry shop) as well as a sawmill, a kiln for drying milled lumber, and many other pieces of equipment and tools. We are hoping this is the first of many classes which can use these facilities in a really special way.

As a conservation agency, we want to connect people to the land and their natural resources in a meaningful way. Each of the women in this class brought home a piece of Iowa's natural heritage and I hope, the confidence to build something new.



**Pictured left:** Our lead instructor, Katie Freeman goes over table saw safety with the class before demonstrating and helping participants make their first cuts. Safety was clearly very important, and continually emphasized throughout the class.

**Pictured right:** A student uses the jointer for the first time. A jointer is used to completely flatten the surface of a board. We mostly used this to flatten the edges of boards so they could be glued together properly.



**Pictured left:** Sandy Steil, the visionary for this class learns how to use the band saw to cut a decorative piece out of the legs for her project. Sandy volunteers her time to make the Confidence Courses happen and she is passionate about empowering women to build skills that were traditionally seen as men's work.



**Pictured right:** A bench made during the class. All of the students made a bench but each of them added their own unique flair. Look for another Woodworking Confidence Course next Fall 2023.



# PRAIRIE RESTORATION ROUND UP

At the end of every year, we look back at the cumulative efforts of JCC's prairie restoration program. We reflect on progress made in terms of acres planted, seeds harvested, and volunteers engaged in the effort. Take a look at this year's prairie progress:

- 14 seed harvest events and field trips
- 20 species of native wildflowers targeted
- 145 volunteers that helped harvest seeds
- 175 volunteer hours spent harvesting seeds
- 7 acres of prairie seeded in 2022
- 381 acres of prairie reconstructed to date

## Recent JCC Awards



The Izaak Walton League of America's 2022 Wildlife Improvement Award was given for outstanding efforts in establishing habitat for wildlife. To learn more about this award follow this link: <https://www.iwla.org/chapter-resources/awards/award-winners-2022>



The American Academy of Environmental Engineering and Science Award for Excellence in Engineering and Science was given for the restoration of Kent Park Lake. To learn about this award follow this link: <https://www.aees.org/e3scompetition-2022honorsmallprojects>



The Iowa Storm Water Education Partnership Award for Stormwater and Urban Watershed Development was given for the addition of green infrastructure during the restoration of Kent Park Lake. To learn about this award follow this link: <https://www.regcytes.extension.iastate.edu/iwc2022/program/>



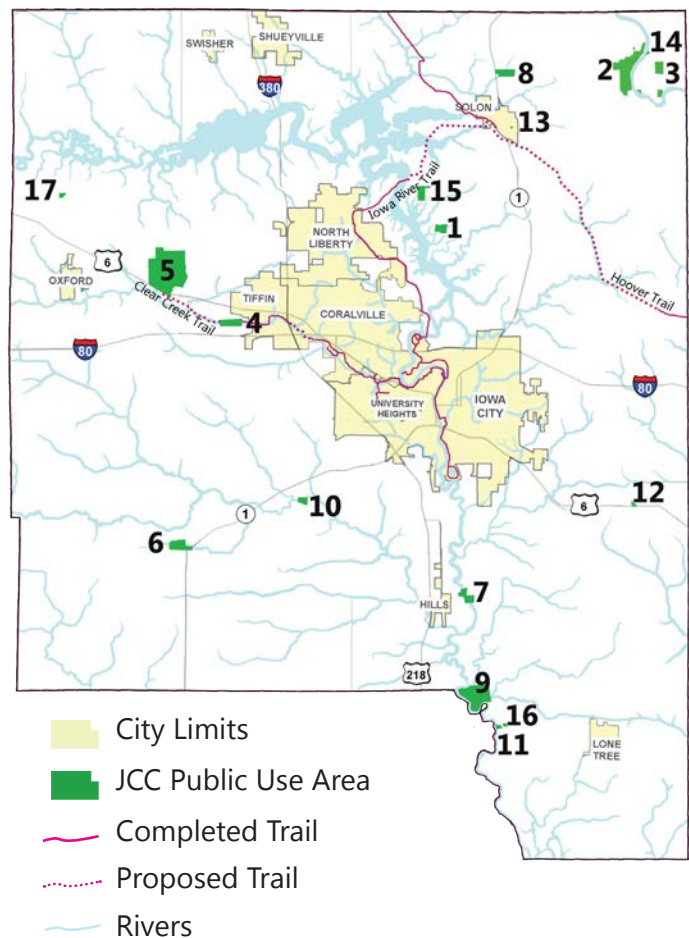
14 sets of snowshoes in youth and adult sizes are available for free check-out! To reserve for weekend check-outs, visit:

<https://tinyurl.com/jccsnowshoes2023>

To check weekday in-park availability, call: 319-645-1011

## JCC Public Use Areas

1. Cangleska Wakan	132 acres
2. Cedar River Crossing	560 acres
3. Ciha Fen Preserve	81 acres
4. Clear Creek Conservation Area	87 acres
5. F.W. Kent Park	1,062 acres
6. Frytown Conservation Area	94 acres
7. Hills Access	40 acres
8. Malinda Reif Reilly Fen & Prairie	100 acres
9. Pechman Creek Delta	380 acres
10. Phebe Timber	27 acre
11. River Junction Access	12 acres
12. Scott Church Park	5 acres
13. Solon Prairie	3 acres
14. Sutliff Bridge & Access	1/2 acre
15. Two Horse Farm	83 acres
16. Walker Park	3 acres
17. Williams Prairie Preserve	21 acres



## Paved Trail Segments Managed by JCC

Clear Creek Trail	1.3 miles
Hoover Trail	6 miles
Iowa River Trail	3.5 miles

More information about JCC public use areas can be found through our website:

[www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation](http://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation)

# Program/Event Guide

## How to Sign Up:

Programs are free unless a fee is listed. Sign up for all programs is online at the link below, unless stated otherwise. To sign up, **click or scan** the QR code to the right or go to: <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>. For questions or sign-up help, call **319-645-1011**.



## Accessibility

Do you require any specific accessibility measures in order to comfortably participate in these programs? Reach out to us at 319-645-1011 for specific accommodations.

## December

### Sunrise Solstice Saunter

Wednesday, December 21, 6:45-9:00 a.m.  
Cedar River Crossing

The winter solstice is often seen as a time for re-birth, renewal, and self-reflection. Celebrate the first day of winter and the lengthening of daylight as we watch the sun rise over the astronomical clock in this beautiful natural area. The walk is about 2.5 miles round trip.

exploration. This program encourages mentorship through shared learning and exploration experiences; one adult to every three children is required.

### Introduction to Ice Fishing

Saturday, January 14, 9:00 – 11:00 a.m.  
F. W. Kent Park Lake (Beach)

If you have always wanted to learn to ice fish this is the event for you! Join our naturalist as we all learn from ice fishing experts and fellow JCCB staff members Brad, Charlie, and Aaron. You will want to have nice warm clothing and boots for this event.

## January

### Nature Buds - Winter Wonderland

Wednesday, January 11, 10:00-11:30 a.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Nature Buds is a program for children 3 to 5 years old. This series encourages adult/child interaction through hands-on indoor STEAM-focused stations and outdoor exploration; one adult to every two children is required.

### Junior Explorers - Winter Wonderland

Thursday, January 12, 3:00-4:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Junior Explorers is a new program designed for kids in grades K-2. Each month, this program will explore a new topic through self-guided hands-on activities and outdoor

### Animal Track Hike

Saturday, January 14, 12:30-1:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Learn some track ID basics before heading out on a guided hike to search for animal signs. This hike will be on and off trail, and on frozen ponds if conditions allow. This hike is designed especially for upper elementary through middle school students, but all are welcome! This event is snow dependent.

### CEC Open Hours

Saturday, January 14, 12:00 - 3:00 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Come out to explore the CEC and enjoy a winter



hike or trip to the bird blind. The CEC will be open for free self-guided exploration, and hot drinks will be available inside. Winter scavenger hunt guides and a winter birding guide will also be available to enhance your trip to the park.

### Little Tike Hike

Tuesday, January 17, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

This hike is designed for infant kiddos, carried kiddos, and up to preK/elementary-aged kiddos, and their accompanying parents, grandparents, aunties, uncles, and friends. The hike will be kid-paced, led by little legs and guided by their discoveries. We will hike the ½-mile loop around the CEC. Afterwards, hikers are welcome to warm up and explore the displays, animals, and reading nook inside.

### Mushroom Cultivation for the Beginner

Tuesday, January 17, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
Fee: \$10/log

This is a beginner friendly class to introduce the practice of cultivating different types of edible mushrooms. Various types of cultivation practices will be discussed, with an emphasis on growing mushrooms on logs. As part of the class, you will inoculate a log so you can grow your own mushrooms at home.

### Introduction to Ice Fishing

Sunday, January 29, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.  
F. W. Kent Park Lake (Beach)  
See January 14 event for details.

## February

### Woodworking for Wildlife: Bird Houses

Thursday, February 2, 3:00 - 5:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
Fee: \$10

Learn about the birds in your backyard and build

## Cricket is Back!



Cricket the elf has decided to visit Johnson County again! This year she'll be exploring two new parks throughout the month of December. Cricket is planning to enjoy **Two Horse Farm from Dec 1-19, and Cangleska Wakan from Dec 19 to Jan 2**. Visit the JCC events webpage (<https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>) for a trail map and clues to guide you in finding her.



Back from the northwoods, a yeti is once again on the loose in Johnson County! Help track her down as she explores county parks this winter. Starting January 9, clues of her current whereabouts will be posted to the JCC events webpage (<https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>) and JCC social media pages. Decipher the park and location within the park, then head out on a winter adventure to find her! If you find her at each of her four hiding spots, and send a photo with her after each discovery to [kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov](mailto:kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov), you will be entered into a drawing for a free night of camping at a JCC campground.

a birdhouse! The bird house will be appropriate for American Robins, House Finches, Barn Swallows, and Eastern Phoebes. This is a great activity for families! Along with the bird house, participants can take home some native seed to enhance their backyard habitat.

### Luminary Night Hike

Friday, February 3, 5:30-8:45 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Experience hiking under starlight on this 1.5-

mile hike. This self-guided hike will be lit by luminaries to help direct hikers along the way. Luminaries will be taken down at 8:45 p.m. The hike will be along unplowed limestone trail, and hikers may be trekking through snow. The Conservation Education Center will be open for exploration during the hours of the hike.

### **Little Tike Hike**

Tuesday, February 7, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
See Jan 17 hike for details.

### **Foraged Paper Valentines!**

Thursday, February 9, 5:30-7:00 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Join a JCC naturalist to create your own homemade valentines this year with foraged material found at F.W. Kent Park! Participants will learn the process of papermaking and have the opportunity to add native prairie seed to valentines so that they can be planted to bring yearlong beauty and wildlife habitat to those you love. All ages welcome!

### **Nature Buds - Reptiles**

Tuesday, February 14, 10:00-11:30 a.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
See January 11 program for details.

### **Junior Explorers - Reptiles**

Wednesday, February 15, 3:00-4:30p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
See January 12 program for details.

### **Making Maple Syrup**

Thursday, February 16, 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.  
Saturday, February 18, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.  
Cedar River Crossing, North Access  
Fee: There is a small fee for individuals who would like to harvest their own sap - please see the online sign-up page for more information.

Learn all about making your own maple syrup during this hands on program. We

will walk into Cedar River Crossing to identify appropriate trees and set them up for collecting sap. You will get some sticky history and an introduction to different types of equipment. Interested participants can harvest the sap from the tree they tap and boil it themselves!

### **Naturalist Hike**

Tuesday, February 22nd, 10:00a.m. - 12:00p.m.  
Cedar River Crossing, North Access

There will be an emphasis on edible plants and mushrooms during a 2.5 mile walk. Dogs are welcome on this hike – dogs must be kept on leash (up to 6 feet long) and their waste bagged and removed.

### **Winter Tree ID**

Saturday, February 25, 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Participants will learn advanced tree ID skills such as bud, twig, and bark ID, as well as natural history snippets about many of Iowa's trees. This program will primarily be outdoors, hiking both on and off trail. This class is designed for adults.

## **March**

### **Cooking with Wild Meats**

Monday, March 13, 5:00 - 8:00 p.m.  
Location TBD  
Fee: \$10

Learn how to prep and cook various wild caught meats. You'll leave with some skills and a few recipes. This course is designed for adults.

### **Foraging in Spring**

Tuesday, March 14, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Take a walk with a JCC naturalist and learn about some of the foods that can be foraged,

in spring! The focus of this class will be on beginner plants and simple recipes for the whole family to enjoy.

### **Intro to Orienteering**

Wednesday, March 15, 1:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.  
Youth Group Camp, F.W. Kent Park

Learn compass basics indoors before heading out to try navigating through Kent Park's Orienteering Course! Participants will hike primarily off trail through rolling forest while navigating the course. This program is designed for middle school through adult ages. Youth must be accompanied by an adult.

### **Forts and Fires**

Thursday, March 16, 9:00-11:30 a.m.  
Youth Group Camp, Kent Park

Join our naturalist to learn a bit about surviving in cold conditions as we break into family groups to build shelters and fires using basic survival tools and skills. All ages and skill levels are welcome.

### **Beginner Fly Tying**

Thursday, March 16, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.  
Location TBD/Fee: \$10

Learn to tie flies and prepare for your next fly-fishing adventure. Come with your fly rod and reel if you need help getting it all tuned up and set up for the season ahead. This course is designed for those 16 and older.

### **Mini Mushroom Growing Kits**

Friday, March 17, 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.  
Kent Park, detailed location TBD/Fee: \$10

If you would like to start out simple (and small) on your journey to growing mushrooms this is the program for you. All materials we use will be re-purposed from items that would otherwise be tossed. All ages welcome but young children might need an adult to help.

### **Naturalist Hike**

Friday, March 17, 2:00-4:00 p.m.  
Cangleska Wakan

Hike through the forest trails at Cangleska Wakan and Big Grove Preserve. This 3.5-mile hike is open to all. We'll hike up and over many hills and cross a couple streams. Dogs are welcome on this hike – dogs must be kept on leash (up to 6 feet long) and their waste bagged and removed.

### **Sunrise Equinox Saunter**

Monday, March 20th, 6:20 - 8:45 a.m.  
Cedar River Crossing, North Access

Celebrate the first day of spring as we watch the sun rise over the astronomical clock in this beautiful natural area. The walk is about 2.5 miles round trip.

### **Nature Buds - Worms!**

Wednesday, March 22, 10:00-11:30 a.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
See January 11 event for details.

### **Junior Explorers - Worms!**

Thursday, March 23, 3:00-4:30 p.m.  
Conservation Education Center, Kent Park  
See January 12 programs for details.

### **Beginner Willow Basketry Class**

Saturday, March 25, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
Location TBD

Learn how to identify, harvest, and prepare the willow stems for basket making. Participants will spend 2-3 hours making a woven basket from the materials they gather. Basket making will take place outside, weather dependent.

### **Queer Hikers of Iowa - Spring Sunset Hike**

Tuesday, March 28, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.  
Location TBD

LGBTQ+ and allies, join a JCC naturalist and watch the plants and animals warm up from the long winter.

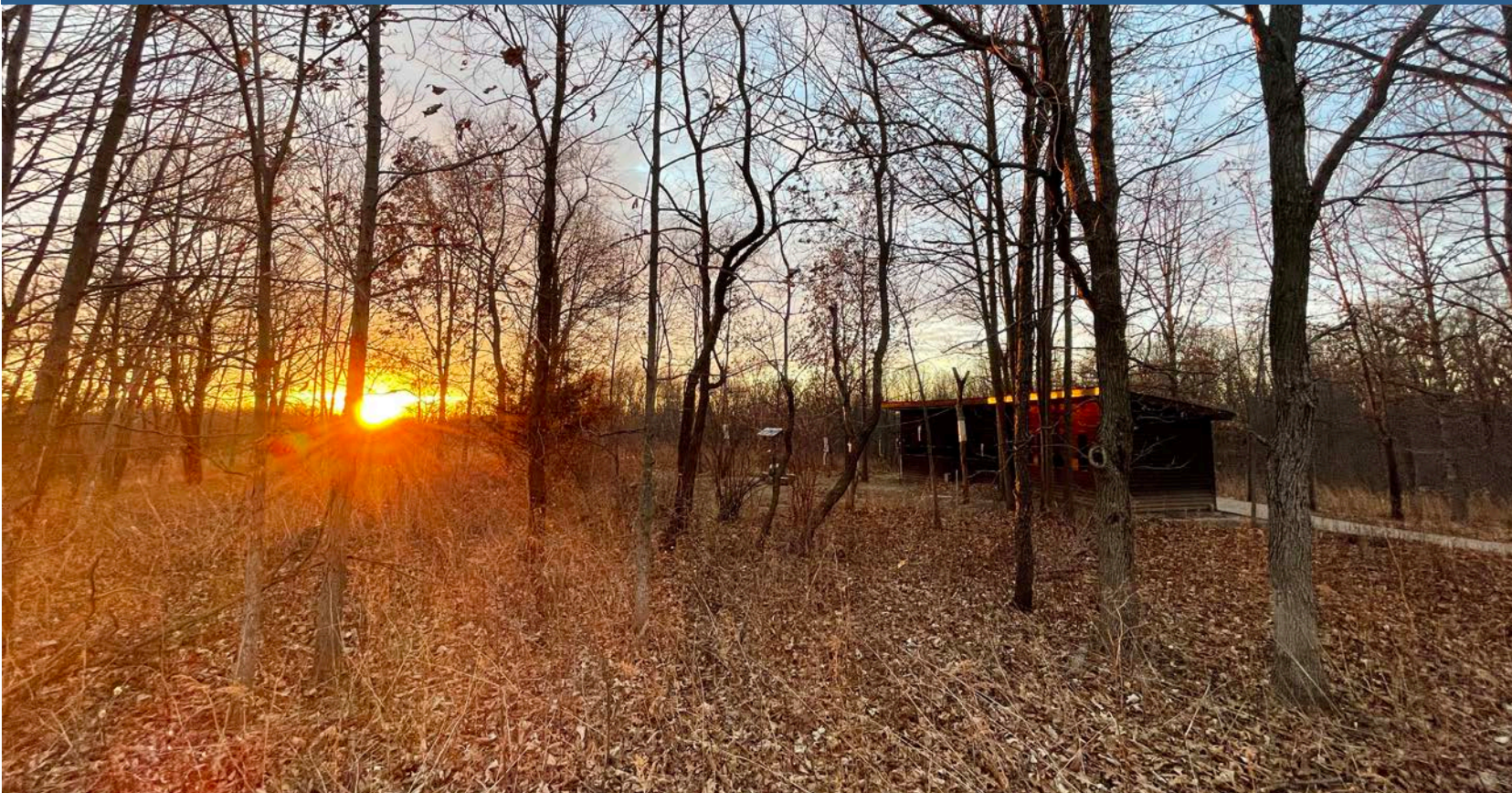


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Winter sunrises at Kent Park's bird blind are magical! Did you know the bird blind is open to the public anytime Kent Park is open? Even on holidays, evenings, and early mornings.