

Spring 2019

Conservation Matters

Upcoming Events

Full Moons-
March 20th
April 19th
May 18th

Lyrids Meteor
Shower is active
April 16th-25th,
peaking the
21st.

Easter Egg
Scavenger
Hunt-
April 13th

Screen Free
Week-
April 29th-May
5th

Sunset Hike-
May 18th

Mills County Conservation Board

Spring

Spring is finally on its way, or is it already here? Seasons are defined in two separate categories, astronomical and meteorological. The astronomical start date is based on the position of the Sun in relation to the Earth. During the Spring equinox the Sun passes over the Earth's equator and the length of night and day are nearly equal. The meteorological start is centered around the annual temperature cycle and the 12-month calendar. Climate scientists and meteorologists created this definition to make it easier to keep records of the weather. You can choose which date you prefer, March 1st (meteorological) or March 20th (astronomical), but either way we all can look forward to the new start of a beautiful season.

Here are a few things to look forward to this Spring in Mills County:

- Bald Eagles start nesting in early February and their incubation time is 35 days, so March is a great time to catch a glimpse of eaglets in their nest before leaves cover block the view.
- The return of the Turkey Vultures is a true sign of Spring. They typically start showing up between March 7 and 14th. Instead of being on the look out for the American Robin (which is here year-round) keep your eyes on the sky for the Turkey Vultures return. In flight, they are easy to tell apart from eagles by the characteristic way they hold their wings in a shallow V.
- Early April brings with it the first blooms of the woodland wildflowers. Visit Pony Creek Park, West Oak Forest and Foothills Park frequently during this time to see what new flowers are blooming. Along with the new colors that are appearing the frogs begin filling the air with their beautiful music. Chorus frogs are the first to start followed shortly after by cricket frogs.

Tracking the date you first notice Spring events is a fun and helpful way to watch how things change over time. There are numerous nation-wide monitoring programs that could use your watchful eye to help with research. Journey North has a very user-friendly website for citizen scientists to document sightings of hummingbirds, monarch butterflies, American robins, sunlight and seasons, weather and songbird migrations, earthworms, bald eagles, orioles, leaf out, ice out, frogs, barn swallow and several other events.

Check it out at <https://journeynorth.org/>.



Mills County Neighbor

North America's largest rodent, the American Beaver and its smaller cousin, the Muskrat, are both residents of Mills County. Let's compare the similarities and differences of these two semi-aquatic mammals.

American Beavers can weigh up to 60 pounds and are found across North America. They live in wetlands, ponds, lakes, rivers, and creeks. Beavers are famous or infamous (depending on who you are) for their ability to chew down trees with the help of their ever-growing front incisors that have a hard enamel front. Trees are felled to provide food in the form of leaves, twigs and bark but they also offer the materials for building lodges and damming waterways. Beavers are known as "ecological engineers" because of the valuable wetland habitats they build that many other animals rely on to survive.

Secretive and nocturnal, these guys are loaded with special adaptations to help them thrive! A large flat tail and webbed back feet for swimming, nostrils that shut to allow the beaver to dive for up to 15 minutes and agile little hands that can hold onto tree limbs make them the ultimate engineer. The creek that flows along the trail at Foothills Park on the Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve is a nice spot to see beaver sign and if you are lucky enough, maybe even a beaver!

Muskrats are often mistaken for young beavers. Muskrats are much smaller, only weighing 4 pounds as an adult and have a skinny, laterally flattened tail. Vegetation such as cattails and reeds are their main food source. Although muskrats can be found in lakes, ponds, and rivers; they prefer marshy areas with only 4-6 feet of water. Burrows are dug into the bank in areas that have deep water but in shallow waterways impressive mounds are built. A mound starts with a solid object such as a tree stump as its foundation and then vegetation and mud are piled on top. An open cavity inside the mound gives them space to raise young and store food. The shallow ponds at Pony Creek Park are a great place to spot muskrats.



Beaver swimming at Foothills



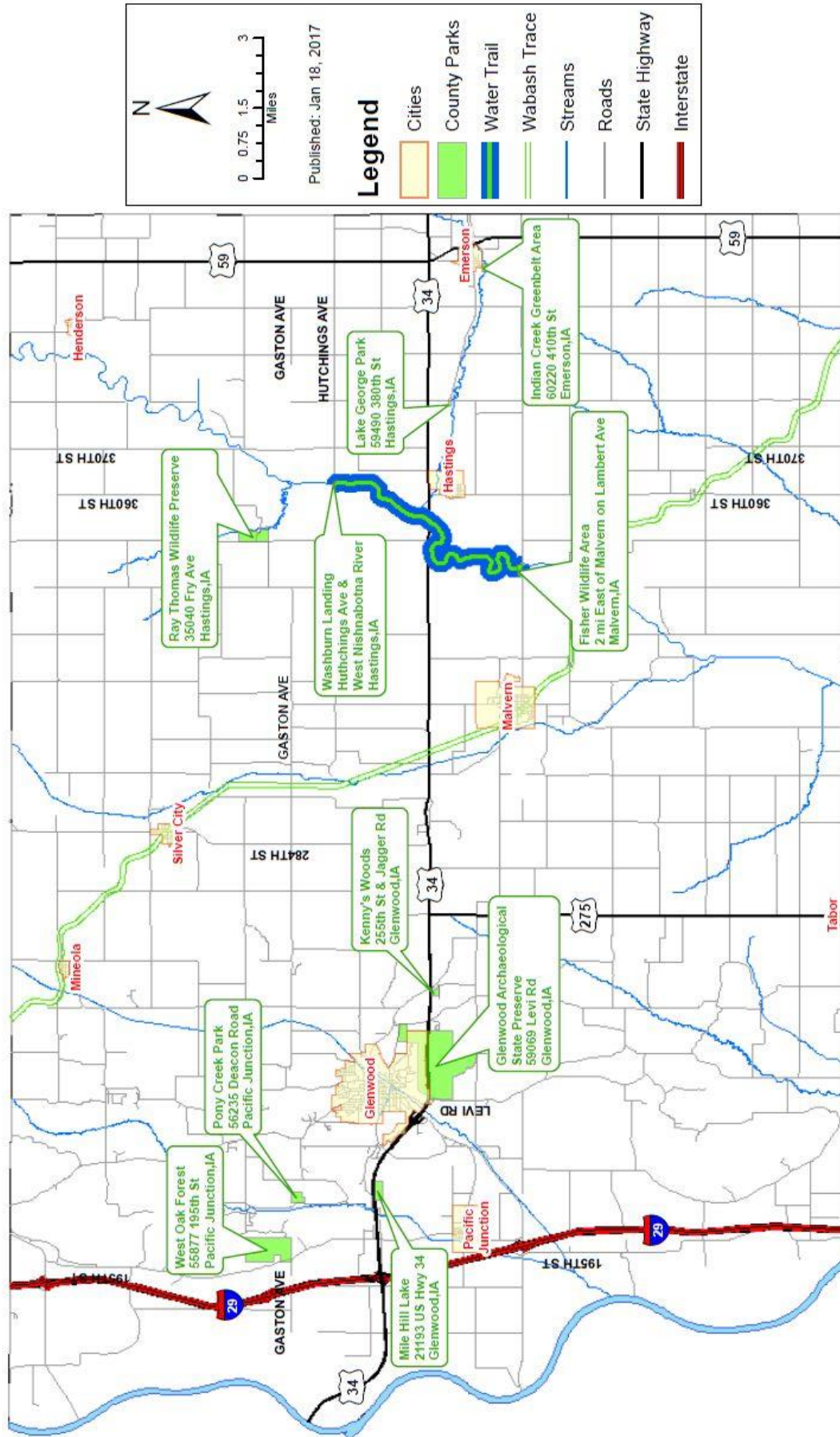
Tree chewed at Mile Hill Lake



Muskrat eating at Pony Creek Park



Muskrat mounds in a wetland



Spring in YOUR Mills County Parks is a beautiful time, get outside and enjoy nature!

Upcoming Public Programs

Easter Egg Scavenger Hunt

April 13th @ 1:00

Easter Eggs will be placed in locations throughout Pony Creek Park. Clues will help you hunt down each location, as you explore the park and gather eggs. Sturdy shoes for hiking are recommended. Weather permitting! Please call 712-527-9685 to get registered for this program.

Earth Day at Pony Creek Nature Center

April 22nd @ 5:00-7:00 pm

Join us at Pony Creek Nature Center for a variety of Earth Day activities. Information on recycling, composting, and other daily habits that you can form to help our beautiful planet. Crafts and volunteer opportunities will also be available. This event is come and go as you please. Stop by and celebrate Earth Day! Pack your supper and have a picnic in the park.

Sunset/ Full Moon Hike in the Loess Hills

May 18th @ 8:00 pm

Hike to the top ridges of West Oak Forest and watch the sunset along the Missouri River. The Mills County Conservation Naturalist will share some information about the Loess Hills. A blanket to sit on and sturdy shoes are recommended. Feel free to bring a flash light for the hike back down. Call (712) 527-9685 to pre-register or for more information.

Summer Day Camps will be held at Pony Creek Nature Center!

- Nature Detectives will be every Tuesday in June from 9:00 am-noon for ages 6-9.
- Nature Connect will be every Thursday in June from 9:00 am-noon for ages 10-13.
 - Tiny Adventures will be every Wednesday in June from 10:00-11:00 for ages 3-5.

More details will be available in the Summer Newsletter!

Pre-registration contact information:

Phone: 712-527-9685

Email: millsccbia@hotmail.com

Pre-registering helps us plan accordingly for programs.

Tiny Nature Adventures-

The first Wednesday of each month, 10:00-11:00 am. Nature themed activities for children 3-5 years old. Adult must stay with child and pre-registration is REQUIRED, call 712-527-9685.

We will be outdoors when weather allows so dress accordingly! Pony Creek Nature Center, 56235 Deacon Road.

April 3rd and May 1st

Pony Creek Nature Center

56235 Deacon Road
Pacific Junction, IA

712-527-9685

Hours: Monday thru Friday
9:00am to 3:00 pm



screen-
free
week



Conservation Matters

April 29 - May 5, 2019

Mills County Conservation is challenging people of all ages to participate in this eye-opening experience. This nationwide event is dedicated to turning off televisions, smartphones, tablets, and gaming consoles for seven days and turning on the world around you. Screen-free week is a chance for children and adults to read, play, think, create, be more physically active and to spend more time with friends and family. On average, preschool children spend over four hours a day consuming screen media, while older children spend over seven hours a day. Excessive screen time is linked to a number of problems for children, including childhood obesity, poor school performance, and problems with attention spans.

It's helpful if everyone in your family makes the commitment to try and make Screen- Free Week work for all of you. If adults are fully committed, children feel everyone is sharing the experience and taking it seriously. The overall goal is to spend these seven days with zero exposure to a screen during your free time. This challenge does not interfere with your job or homework, continue to use technology as needed every day. The focus is what you are doing to entertain yourself when not at work or school.

Ready to get started? This week is meant to be a fun and eye-opening time. Mills County Conservation is here to help you plan some exciting, outdoor opportunities to fill your free time. Check out the list of upcoming events, with a special section for Screen- Free Week!

Step 1: Decide what "screen free" means for your family so that everyone is clear about the commitment ahead. Fill out the Pledge Card and display them as a reminder for everyone throughout the week.

Step 2: Make plans together for the week. Start planning early so you won't need to rely on social media or internet searches to plan outings or activities to keep you busy.

Step 3: Enjoy your week! Play board games, read books, visit friends and family, have a picnic, make crafts, go hiking, reclaim the family meal time for talking and sharing stories. The sky is the limit on how you chose to spend your free time now that the distraction of a screen is out of the picture.

Step 4: After you have completed the Screen- Free Week take time to talk about how you feel, what all of you have accomplished and what aspects of the week you would like to keep going. Keep the fun going by making one day a week screen free or maybe weekends screen free. Hopefully this experience will reduce the dependence on screens year-round.

If you would like more information about Screen- Free week feel free to contact MCCB at 712-527-9685, send an email to

millsccbia@hotmail.com or attend the Earth Day Event at Pony Creek Nature Center on April 22nd.

Mills County Conservation Board:

Contact information

Mills County
Conservation
Pony Creek Park
56235 Deacon Rd
Pacific Junction, IA
51561

PHONE:
(712) 527-9685

E-MAIL:
millsccbia@hotmail.com

Website:
www.millscoia.us/index.php/depts/conservation

MCC Staff:

Jerad Getter, Director
Dessa Montgomery, Naturalist
Zach Kohlhoff, Specialist
Jesse Ayers, Technician

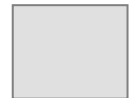
MCC Board Members:

George Marshall, Malvern
Lana White, Hastings
Kreg Kinzle, Glenwood
Ted Golka, Glenwood
Debra Swirmiky, Glenwood



The Mills County Conservation Board is committed to providing the citizens of Mills County with quality outdoor recreation areas and opportunities for environmental education experiences. Please take advantage of these services and visit the nearly 1,800 acres of public land available!

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MILLS COUNTY CONSERVATION
56235 DEACON RD
PACIFIC JUNCTION, IA 51561



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