

# Conservation Matters

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mills County Conservation Board

Winter 2010 / 2011

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## An Introduction

The staff of Mills County Conservation has grown to include Zach Kohlhoff as our Conservation Specialist.

Here's what Zach had to say about himself and what he does with the MCCB:

"First off, I grew up in the country by Corning on a small farm. We raised numerous animals over the years, including bison. I am an avid outdoorsman who enjoys hunting and fishing as well as other outdoor activities. After graduating from Corning High School, I attended Peru State College where I majored in Wildlife Ecology with a Biology minor.

My passion for the outdoors has grown over the years by being able to live and work in the country. Aside from working on the family farm, I have spent the last four years working for the Adair County Conservation Board as a Conservation Aide, which gave me the ability to gain valuable hands-on experience of what it takes to conserve, protect, and restore parks, lakes, and wildlife areas.

There really isn't a typical day for a person working in the conservation field. Every day there is a different task to complete. One day you're restoring native prairies, another you're controlling invasive species and maintaining areas to benefit wildlife. I am also here to aid the general public with their questions pertaining to Mills County and Iowa's natural resources.

The Mills County Conservation Board ensures that others have an opportunity to enjoy what nature has to offer by offering public recreation areas and taking pride in conservation and preservation efforts to ensure natural resources and public recreation areas for future generations."

Welcome to Mills County Conservation, Zach!

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## Camp Neyati

For those who are not aware, Camp Neyati, the 280 acre Girl Scout camp north of Glenwood, is for sale. The Mills County Conservation Board and a group of concerned citizens are interested in purchasing the property to ensure its future as an educational and recreational resource.

This site has been a great benefit as an educational facility for the youth of the region. If public ownership can be attained through Mills County, the purchase will protect the fragile Loess Hills landscape and ecosystems present on the site, as well as allow citizens opportunities in education and outdoor recreation. Public ownership of the site will also allow for the creation of a science center on the site,

which would benefit the region. The site is irreplaceable as an educational resource and it would be a great public recreation area.

This is an important project for Mills County and the entire southwest Iowa & eastern Nebraska region. In the past 10 years, Glenwood Schools have sent over 2,500 students to Camp Neyati for their Outdoor Science Camp. Within 25 miles of the site there are more than 20 schools and the population is over 600,000.

Since its inception, Camp Neyati has been privately owned and therefore the general public was not able to utilize the site. If owned by Mills County Conservation, the site would continue to be used by schools to achieve the environmental education requirements in their curriculum, Youth groups and adult organizations would still be able to use the site for leadership programs and recreational pursuits. The general public would benefit the most by having access to another recreational and educational resource. The public's ability to participate in educational programs and activities will promote environmental awareness, environmental compassion, and people will understand how their behavior effects natural resources. By providing these valuable and memorable learning experiences, area youth are more likely to appreciate and support conservation efforts in their adult lives, leading to a better quality of life.

We must be able to present examples of public support to benefactors as we apply for grants and seek money to fund this project. There are many ways to show your support for this project:

**A)** Send a signed letter of support to Mills County Conservation.

**B)** Contact a staff member at Mills County Conservation or Sherry Ford at ISU/Mills County Extension to discuss how you would like to show your support for the project.

**C)** If you would like to financially contribute to this project, please contact the Mills County Conservation Board before taking any further action.

We have already received letters of support from area agencies that have participated in past educational programs at Camp Neyati. Many of these agencies would like to continue to assist with programs held at Camp Neyati if Mills County Conservation were able to acquire the property.

Many would benefit from public ownership of this site including school staff and students, prairie enthusiasts, hikers, primitive campers, photographers, bird watchers, kayakers, canoe enthusiasts and nature lovers in general.

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Without the acquisition of Camp Neyati, the resource is lost and there is not another site in the area that could provide the extensive natural resources available through this property.

## Meet Your WILD Mills County Neighbors!

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This issue's "neighbor" is one found in the depths of Iowa's lakes and rivers. This animal is the largest member of its family, has a mucus layer over its scales, is a great swimmer and has whitish eyes. It's the walleye!

A walleye's color varies, but it is most often described as having a dark olive green dorsal and side surface color which fades to a lighter yellow or white ventral (belly) surface. The sides will appear to have an irregular pattern of dark spots, and the tip of the lower lobe of the caudal fin (tail) will be white. Most anglers recognize the milky white eyes, which are crucial for their feeding in low light conditions found in deep water. They also have large teeth, so anglers handle them carefully.

Walleye are a naturally occurring and naturally reproducing Iowa fish, but they are also raised in large numbers at several DNR fish hatcheries. Iowa fish hatcheries produce nearly 125 million walleye fry every year. These hatchery raised fish will be stocked into rivers, lakes and impoundments all across Iowa. Shortly after the ice melts and water temperatures reach 45 to 50 degrees F, walleye will move to shallow areas (1-5 feet deep) to spawn. Spawning areas are usually small streams or shallow parts of a lake or river where there is a rocky substrate and a flow of water. Males usually arrive to the spawning area first, and when females arrive, males will follow her around, releasing milt (fish sperm) as the female releases her roe (fish eggs). Around 95 percent of the eggs will be fertilized as they sink to the shelter of the rocks below. As eggs develop, the moving water keeps them free of contaminants and keeps them oxygenated. That is the only protection they receive, because after spawning, the adults return to deep water. Spawning activity takes place over a period of about 3 weeks.

Egg production varies, based on the body size and physical condition of the female. The average range is between 23,000 to 50,000 eggs per pound of fish weight. Only 5 to 20 percent of those eggs will hatch. After hatching, the fry are about a half inch long. At this stage, they gain most of their energy from absorbing their yolk sac. Once the yolk sac is absorbed, they begin feeding on tiny plankton. As they grow, they seek larger prey. Within the first year, a walleye will measure just over five inches long. They typically reach 23 inches in length by the time they are ten years old. Females grow faster and get bigger than male walleye.

Not long ago the walleye's genus and species name was **Stizostedion vitreum**. Many Ichthyologists (fish scientists) and taxonomists (name-scientists) suggested the North American walleye, sauger and saugeye, should be in same genus as the European Zander, due to their similarities. Further genetic research showed these species are so closely related that, in 2003, it was proposed that the walleye, sauger and saugeye be added to the genus *Sander*.

When genetic research shows how closely related some species are, taxonomists will often change an organisms taxonomical name. Today it happens more than you may think, due to technology. Taxonomists will usually use the oldest recorded organism's family and genus names as a base for the other similar species. In this case, since the European Zander was catalogued much earlier than our North American walleye, sauger and saugeye, these North American species would be added to the genus *Sander*. So, the walleye's genus and species name is now **Sander vitreus**.

The walleye is the largest member of the perch family, Percidae, reaching up to twenty pounds in weight. The Iowa record walleye came out of the Des Moines River weighing 14 pounds 8 ounces almost 25 years ago. Anglers love this fish for many reasons. When caught on a fishing hook, a walleye will give you a good fight. The fight, their size and their taste has helped it to become one of the most important game fish in North America. So important in fact, that there are numerous places with large statues of walleye. "Wally the Walleye" can be found near the city park in Garrison, North Dakota, which is near Lake Sakakawea, an impoundment of the Missouri River. Garrison also boasts that it is "the walleye capital of the world", and every summer they host the Governor's Walleye Cup, a walleye fishing tournament. Every year there are many walleye fishing tournaments hosted in places like this all across the United States.

Anglers in Iowa can catch walleye year round. The rules and regulations set by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources regarding walleye seasons, length limits, daily bag and possession limits can vary based on where you're fishing in the state. **YOU** are responsible for knowing the regulations, so be sure to review the 2011 Iowa Fishing Rules & Regulations booklet, or view them online at the Iowa DNR website: [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)



(image from Iowa DNR webpage)

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## MILE HILL LAKE

Mills County Conservation has been working to improve the fishing at Mile Hill Lake. One of the methods to improve a fishery is to improve habitat. We have placed several groups of old Christmas trees and pallet structures on the ice at Mile Hill Lake. These are placed in key areas based on depth and those areas in need of fish habitat. When the ice melts, these weighted structures will sink and provide habitat for fish. The general premise is that more structure means better habitat which yields better fishing. So, for those of you who ice fish during the winter & fish from a boat in the warmer months, it may be to your advantage to take a GPS unit with you and mark where these structures are placed on the ice, for future reference.

Last summer and fall we received many questions regarding the fishing at Mile Hill Lake. Several anglers asked how often Mile Hill Lake is stocked with bluegill, bass and crappie. These three fish are generally not restocked in a lake. These fish naturally reproduce and we would only restock them if their numbers get extremely low. Just because you don't catch them does not mean they are not in there. It means you learned why they call it "fishing" and not "catching". The only fish that we restock in Mile Hill Lake is the channel catfish.

As a public resource along a major road, many people visit and use Mile Hill Lake as a means of entertainment or as a stop along a journey. This single 37 acre property allows users an opportunity to kayak, canoe, boat, fish, hunt, hike, explore, photograph and to just enjoy nature. If you use the site, it can provide you with many fond memories.

With Mile Hill Lake being a public resource, it means that everyone gets to use it. With that in mind, we have to remember that there are a few out there who choose to abuse these resources. The degree of this abuse varies and can be severe, but the one that hurts the most is the casual abuse. Littering. Whether it is done in winter, spring, summer or fall, we see it. We find the cans, bottles, boxes, worm boxes, oil jugs, broken fishing tackle, cigarette packs, plastic bags, wrappers, and garbage. They do not belong in a park. A package may say it is biodegradable, but it does not mean it should be discarded in a public area.

We all must work together to improve these natural areas, and the easiest way to make a difference is to make the conscious decision to take out what we bring in. It is imperative that we leave these areas better than we found them. Not for us, but for future generations.

Thank you.

**KEEP IOWA BEAUTIFUL**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### FEBRUARY PROGRAMS

2/11/2011 7PM

#### Owl Prowl I @ Pony Creek Park

Learn some of the common owls of Iowa and some of their more common calls and then go for a walk. Please bring a flashlight, and dress accordingly. Pre-registration is requested.

2/19/2011 10 AM

#### Habitat Construction Day @ Pony Creek Park

Come and learn how to build nesting structures for some of Iowa's most colorful waterfowl - Wood Ducks! Pre-registration is required. There will be a \$10 materials fee due the day of program, ONLY if you wish to keep a wood duck house. Most will be installed on various MCCB properties for use by wood ducks.

### MARCH PROGRAMS

3/26/11 10 AM

#### IOWA'S INVADERS @ Pony Creek Park

Join me as we touch base on many of Iowa's current plant, animal and insect invaders. Learn why these species' are a cause for concern for Iowa, how they're transferred, hazards they pose, and possible treatments. We will also be hiking trails here at Pony Creek Park as we search for a fairly common wood and grassland invader. Please dress accordingly.

**To pre-register for these events or to ask questions, please call James at (712) 527-9685. Thank you.**

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**Mills County Conservation is currently seeking the following for Environmental Education programs:**

- ( 1 ) Badger skull
- ( 1 ) Woodchuck skull & hide
- ( 1 ) Mink skull
- ( 1 ) Coyote pelt

**If you have any of these items to donate, it would be greatly appreciated.  
Please contact us at: (712) 527-9685. Thank you.**

The Mills County Conservation Board is able to accept, in the name of Mills County, any gifts, bequests, contributions and appropriations of money or other personal property for conservation purposes. Your tax-deductible donations, and our grant writing, promote the growth and betterment of our facilities for the enjoyment of the citizens of Mills County and its many visitors.

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*Remember to use and take care of your County Parks. They belong to You!*