

Spring 2025

Conservation Connection

Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

The People's Approval

Brad Friedhof - Executive Director

This past November, the residents of Johnson County overwhelmingly approved a \$30 million Conservation Bond, passing it with nearly 78% support. This resounding endorsement reflects the community's appreciation for the projects completed with the 2008 Conservation Bond and signals strong interest in continuing similar initiatives and land acquisitions in the future.

Approximately \$3 million from the 2008 Conservation Bond remains but has already been earmarked for the Clear Creek Trail Extension to F.W. Kent Park. This much-anticipated project is set to begin construction this spring.

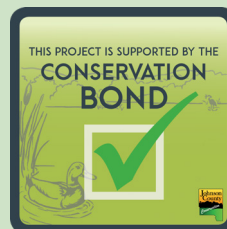
The success of the 2008 Conservation Bond created tremendous momentum and new opportunities for the Conservation Board. The 2024 Conservation Bond follows suit with an ambitious list of potential projects and land acquisitions. While specific land acquisitions cannot yet be named, discussions with several landowners in the Iowa and Cedar River corridors continue to move forward. The Conservation Board remains committed to securing properties with unique and rare ecological communities, ensuring these irreplaceable natural gems are preserved for generations to come.

Trail development continues to be a top priority. Planned projects include linking Iowa City and West Branch, connecting West Branch and Solon, and establishing a trail between Tiffin and Oxford, with an eventual extension to the Amana Colonies.

Water quality initiatives will also be a key focus. Upcoming projects include completing the shower house at Kent Park, replacing latrines at Kent Park and other Johnson County Conservation Board properties, and exploring potential wetland and oxbow restoration efforts.

Additionally, all acquisitions and projects will aim to leverage public and private funding to maximize the impact of the \$30 million bond, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Thank you to the voters of Johnson County for your continued support and trust. The Johnson County Conservation Board and staff remain dedicated to protecting and enhancing our natural resources while providing meaningful opportunities for everyone to connect with the land. We look forward to seeing you on the trails and exploring conservation properties soon!



Above: Pechman Creek Delta was purchased in 2016 using funds from the 2008 conservation Bond.

THE PEOPLE OF JCC

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Jon Green Chair
V Fixmer-Oraiz Vice Chair
Lisa Green- Douglass
Mandi Remington
Rod Sullivan

CONSERVATION BOARD

Bill Waldie President
Carolyn Buckingham Vice President
Bonnie Winslow-Garvin Secretary
Connie Mutel
Zac Hall

CONSERVATION STAFF

Director
Brad Freidhof
Office Manager
Dory Kjosa
Office Assistant
Ally Skidmore
Naturalists
Kristen Morrow
Frances Owen
Michelle Wiegand
Rangers
Charlie Bray
Aaron Ohlsen
Natural Resource Manager
Dave Wehde
Natural Resource Mgmt. Specialists
Jeremy Rieck
Michael Alexander
Blake Harris
Kevin Halemeyer
Natural Resource Mgmt. Technicians
Natalie Stowe
Tim Kurt
Sabrina Peyton
Operations Superintendent

Assistant Operations Superintendent
Dave Gustafson
Utility Person
Brad Herrig
Mechanic
Josh DeWild
Maintenance Specialist
Paul Bouska
Field Workers
Terry Kinney
Ben Woltz
Seth Somerville
Alicia Claus-Bartels
Trails Field Worker
Ed Kringle

A Brief from Brad

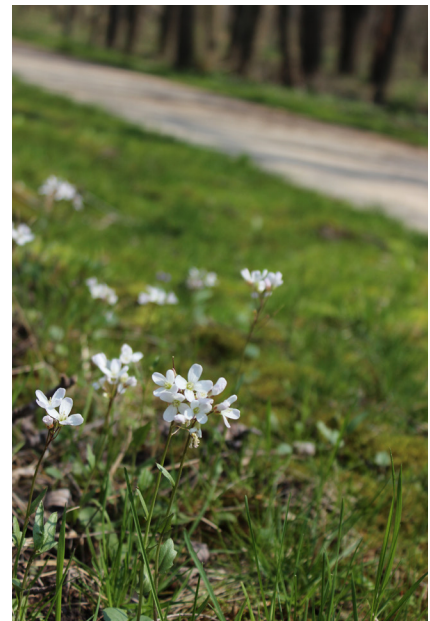


With spring right around the corner, let's take a look at some upcoming projects for the Johnson County Conservation Department.

Phase 1 of the **Kent Park Shower House** is scheduled for completion this spring. Landscaping, directional road painting, and temporary registration structures will be installed so the campground can open around May 1. Consultants are finalizing the shower house design, and updates on construction timelines will be shared as they become available. Thank you for your patience—no one anticipated these delays.

The **Clear Creek Trail Extension to F.W. Kent Park** has been in development for several years, and we're excited to announce that Phase 1 was bid through the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT) this past December. The Conservation Board approved the bid from Peterson Contractors Incorporated (PCI), who previously worked on the Mehaffey Bridge Trail and sections of the Hoover Trail.

PCI will construct the trail from north of the railroad crossing on Half Moon Avenue to Highway 6, continuing west along the highway's right-of-way, stopping just past the second driveway of Oak Hill Cemetery. They will also build an underpass beneath Highway 6 near F.W. Kent Park. This will require a temporary asphalt roadway to maintain traffic flow while half of the underpass is built. Once completed, traffic will shift to the new section while the other half is constructed. Phase 2 is expected to go to bid during or shortly after Phase 1 construction.



Above: Spring wildflowers bloom next to the completed section of the Clear Creek Trail.

The **Cangleska Wakan Celebration Barn Kitchen and Restroom Remodel** is in the public bid process. This project involves remodeling restrooms and the kitchen to provide year-round

climate control, eliminating the need for seasonal winterization and expanding opportunities for public use and education. The kitchen will be updated with energy-efficient appliances, and the prep area expanded for caterers.

These projects will enhance Johnson County Conservation properties and improve facilities for public use. We appreciate your support as we continue expanding outdoor recreation and conservation opportunities for our community.

JCC Staff Updates

Zac Hall - Board Member

I was born and raised in Burlington, Iowa, where my love for nature first took root. As a kid, I explored my grandparents' farm along the Skunk River, the Mississippi bluffs, Flint Creek, and the woodlands in between. I was also fortunate to have family in Colorado, which gave me an early connection to the mountains.

As I got older, my outdoor interests expanded to fishing, kayaking, hiking, camping, and learning about trees. Some of my best college memories are paddle trips with friends on the Upper Iowa, Volga, and Jack's Fork Rivers—25 years later, we're still paddling. In college, I co-owned a tree service company with my lifelong friend Alex while earning my A.A. from Kirkwood. I met my wife, Korey, there—she was a rock girl; I was a tree guy. Credit to her for my understanding of geology. Always interested in native cultures, I later earned my B.A. in Anthropology from UI.



Above: Zac and his family pose for a photo in the Cascades.

After college, Korey and I spent nearly a decade in Colorado—she in environmental engineering, me in urban forestry. We returned to Iowa City to start a family and for me to begin graduate work at the UI in Urban and Regional Planning. In 2014, I became Superintendent of Parks for Iowa City, and in 2015, I earned my M.S. in Land Use and Environmental Planning. I started adjunct teaching at Kirkwood in 2018 and was thrilled to join the Parks and Natural Resources Program full-time in 2020. Teaching has afforded us the opportunity to explore more.

Our kids, Rowan, Andy, and Jamie, have inherited our love for the natural world, and we enjoy traveling to parks and wild places across the country. My goal serving on the County Conservation Board is to help protect and preserve the parks and wild places here at home for us and future generations because as Thomas Macbride wrote 130 years ago in his call for county parks, "... there is nothing so good as direct contact with nature, the contemplation of her processes, the enjoyment of her peaceful splendor".

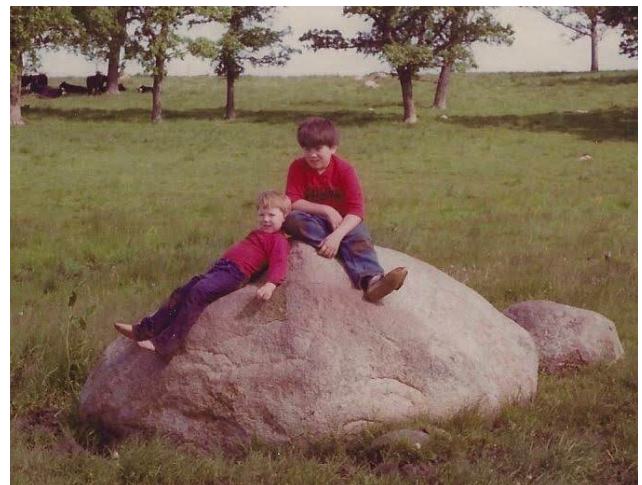
JCC Staff Updates

Brad Freidhof - Executive Director

I am humbled and honored to announce that I have been selected by the Johnson County Conservation Board to serve as the new Johnson County Conservation Director. I am proud to say that I have been a part of this department for 22 years, serving as a Naturalist for twelve years (2002-2014) and as a Conservation Program Manager for another ten years (2014-2024). The knowledge and experience I have gained in those years will provide me with a unique perspective when working with the Conservation Board, staff, and the public. I will be the first Conservation Director for Johnson County to have held a previous position within the department before becoming the Director. Understanding the agency's history, organizational structure, and operations provides me with a behind-the-scenes perspective and will allow me to make adjustments that could have significant positive impacts for the county, staff, and the public.

I have witnessed strategic growth within the Conservation Department during my tenure. In 2002, I joined a staff of 11, all operating out of F.W. Kent Park. Today, the staff has grown to 29, and the Conservation Department operates out of four centers—F.W. Kent Park, Sutliff, Pechman Creek, and Cangleska Wakan—to better serve all Johnson County residents. I have also had the opportunity to witness the passage of two Conservation Bonds during my career. The level of support and commitment to conservation in Johnson County is exhilarating! Serving as the Director of the Johnson County Conservation Board is an opportunity few have had, and I am honored to be the fourth person to fill that role.

The title of Conservation Director is new, but my enthusiasm for conservation is not. My career has been dedicated to natural resource protection and restoration and to connecting people with the land. Growing up on a small farm in northeast Iowa, I was fortunate to develop a deep connection with the land—digging for earthworms in the rich soil, playing in the waters of the creek that bisected our farm, and climbing on the massive glacial erratic stones that rested in our pasture. I assumed all children shared similar experiences with the land. As I grew older, I realized not everyone had the same opportunities and memories I was afforded. It became my passion to help protect the landscape that taught me so much, connect others to that landscape, and, in the process, instill the same nurturing relationship with the land that was instilled in me.



Above: My brother Jeff and I resting atop one of the large glacial erratic stones that rested in our pasture. My parents could see us from the farmstead just a few hundred yards north as we played in the creek and pasture.

I look forward to working with the Conservation Board, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors, and staff to fulfill the Conservation Board Vision:

A county where all citizens have access to a healthy landscape, environmental education, and recreation opportunities; where the natural resources of the county are enhanced and protected; where conservation areas are restored and maintained at the highest standard and are safe; and where this vision is accomplished through partnerships with the public and private sectors.

A Legacy of Conservation: A Conversation with Dave Wehde



After nearly four decades with Johnson County Conservation, Natural Resource Manager Dave Wehde is retiring. In this interview, Dave reflects on his journey, the evolution of conservation practices, and the legacy he leaves behind.

What first inspired you to pursue a career in conservation?

I grew up next to Lake Macbride State Park, so I spent almost every summer day outside. When I was a kid, I worked at the boat docks and actually either rode my bike or took my little motorboat to work. I'd go down to my dock, get in my boat, and drive down the lake to the dock. I camped a lot as a kid too, especially around the reservoir.

But professionally, I got into conservation through a big interest in raptorial birds. My brother and I got involved in the state winter raptor survey during my freshman year of college. I had several townships to survey, including Monroe Township in Johnson County, which I did for many years. That got me started with identifying wildlife, which led to learning about habitat, then forestry, then wildflowers, and then I got into prairie. It was like a chain reaction.

Where did you go to school?

I went to Kirkwood for two years and then to Upper Iowa for two years, where I double-majored in conservation management and biology.

Were you working here part-time while you were in school?

Yeah, I actually camped all summer. We had walk-in campsites back then, no shower house. Rod [the conservation director] charged me two dollars a night to stay there. I'd work all week, then drive up to Fayette to my apartment to shower and clean up.

What was your first full-time role with Johnson County Conservation?

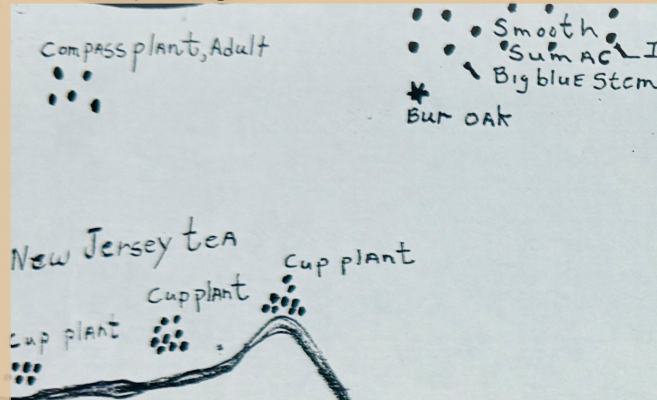
When I started, I was a Field Worker I. At first, my main job was tree care. It wasn't uncommon for us to plant 20,000 to 30,000 trees every spring. We were on our hands and knees with an auger or we were on the tree planter. I spent hours on the tree planter. After we planted, I had an older guy that ran a mower to keep all the tree rows mowed, and another crew that went behind him to push mow around the trees. Then we sprayed Round Up around them so they didn't get weedy. Kent Park was actually known as one of the biggest oak restoration projects in the state.

I think of you as the prairie guy, but you actually started with forestry?

I really was involved with forestry a lot earlier. When I started full-time in 1987, the only prairie Johnson County managed was Solon Prairie. When I was a little boy that area was actually a former gun club. There were buildings and a trap house, and that was the outside of town. I used to walk out there as a boy and ice skate. Back then there was standing water every year.

All the ditches and a lot of the fields there were wetlands back in those days. Later, it became a prairie because of Aaron Basten. They donated it, and that was the first prairie that Johnson County Conservation managed. I wasn't there for the first [prescribed] burn, but I was in on the second.

Highlighted below: One of Dave's hand-drawn maps from a fall planting in 1988.



The interest in prairie restoration really took off after Peter Kollasch and Lon Drake gave a report to the conservation board identifying some prairie remnants in Kent Park. The director [Rod] at the time knew I had some interest in prairie, so he appointed me to manage them. My first prairie management plans were really primitive and I had to present my plans to the board every year.

At that time I only had certain areas in the park that were designated prairie and I had to stay within them. We got quite a bit of public support. For a long time, we couldn't use herbicide, so we had volunteers continually cutting brush and pulling weeds. Paula [the naturalist at the time] helped me a lot with volunteers.

What are some of the biggest changes in conservation practices that you've seen?

Back in the old days, we'd plant just one or two species of trees at a site. I really pushed a lot as time went on to diversify our plantings to better simulate a natural forest. We also planted a lot of non-native plants—conifers, shrubs like Autumn Olive and Honeysuckle. We can see now that was a huge mistake.

What do you identify as the biggest challenges that you've faced during your career?

The non-native invasive species. It was pretty heartbreaking. Planting prairies and having them invade, then going in to kill the very things that we just planted. It's like chemotherapy every summer and that's pretty discouraging. Seeing invasive species take over and push everything out faster than we could spray or mow or even deal with it. I've had to spray and the crews had to spray a lot of chemical that we don't like. But if we don't, we'll lose everything.

I also dealt with a lot of resistance to any change whatsoever. A lot of people would have rather seen native prairies planted into scotch pine, and that happened a lot everywhere [in Iowa]. We just have these little prairie relic areas that were spared the plow. It was the smokey-the-bear thing too. Everyone had a fear of fire, but no one wanted to look back to understand how fire was a creator, a conditioner, and a maintainer of natural systems. Fire could do a lot of damage at the wrong time, and fire could do a lot of good, too. It's just how you choose to use it.

What do you see for the future of conservation?

Well, with the invasive species and land development, to be very real, it does not look good. A lot of the diversity is being lost. Kent Park is a beautiful example of what can go right, but we put a lot of work into it. Outside [public lands] everything is getting pushed to the maximum of how much wildlife it can support. Wetlands are drained, laws that protect wetlands are being weakened. We put everything into row crops with no crop rotation, so there isn't any type of diversity out there. I used to see gray fox all the time, now I don't see them at all. Blanding's turtles are declining, box turtles are declining. We used to have blue racers and huge bullsnakes out here all the time. It's very rare to see that now. Then you see things like bobcats. There were very few bobcats around

back in the day, but all these bobcats came from Oklahoma, through Missouri, and repopulated our state, and I never would have guessed that. That's pretty cool. We've been able to preserve some of that in Kent Park and the prairie has brought back species like Lark's sparrows and grasshopper sparrows. I'm not gonna give up hope, but it's very important that areas are left and preserved and managed so all forms of life have a place to live. And if we don't protect these refuges, there won't be any place. Just houses and buildings and fields and roads and dumps.

I think what resonates for me from everything that you're saying is, we don't stand a chance to replicate exactly what was here before European colonization and the types of development that followed that. But there's still value in doing our best to create the opportunity for these species and that diversity to survive.

Well, we're doing the best we can. I know if we hadn't done anything, it'd be totally lost. What folks could do in their own yard, is just have a little spot. You don't have to go to the extreme where everybody's yard is unmowed and it's all into prairie. But if everyone just had at least a designated area for some habitat, that would help replace some of what development is destroying every year. It would help improve our water quality. Sometimes you need to take small steps to make big steps. There are so many places throughout the countryside, the bottom lands, highly erodible top lands, farm ground, there's places where there could be permanent plantings left forever. I'm not saying we should take every field out of production, that's not realistic, but there are places that make sense for that.

What has been the most rewarding part of your career?

The beauty. I don't even know if I can explain what it's like. Let's say I'm out at North Valley View on a June day, and there is a box turtle crawling on the trail, and the pale purple cone

flowers are blooming, and I'm listening to an indigo bunting sing, and the bugs and butterflies and the smell. You feel like you are time tripping. And every moment, it made me feel like I was the first one to see it. I created my own little wilderness. I created it for everyone.

What advice would you give to young conservationists?

Never let anyone tell you that you can't make a difference. When I started, people said we'd never restore prairies here. Now look at what we've done. If you believe in something and work hard, you can create real change.

You're about to retire. What's next for you?

I'm heading out to the Red Desert in Wyoming for quite some time, and the Sandhills. I'll be camping and I'll be traveling. I need to see a few things that I haven't seen yet. I don't think the work is ever going to be over one way or another. But now I can be an old man in some board meeting, doing as much monkey wrenching as I can. I will continue to fight. Because the worst thing you can do is be silent when you see wrong.

Dave Wehde's passion and dedication have left a lasting mark on Johnson County's landscapes. As he steps into retirement, the land he helped protect and restore will continue to thrive, serving as a testament to the power of conservation.



Above: Dave leads a group during a Forestry for Wildlife public event in 1992.

The Monarch Effect:

How Protecting One Butterfly Protects Many

Frances Owen- Naturalist

Monarch butterflies have long captured the imagination of nature lovers, scientists, and conservationists alike. However, despite their iconic status, monarch population numbers have declined dramatically over the past few decades. As these butterflies face mounting threats to their survival, the urgency to protect them has never been greater. Yet, there is hope—through collective action, we can still preserve the monarch's future.

The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) is native to continental North and South America, but it has spread across islands in the Pacific Ocean after being introduced to the Hawaiian islands (likely by humans) in the mid 1800's.

A male monarch butterfly rests on a hand briefly during its fall migration.



There are two distinct populations of monarchs in North America, divided by the Rocky Mountains. It is the population east of the Rocky Mountains that are renowned for their extraordinary migratory behavior. Every fall, these butterflies travel from breeding grounds in Canada and the U.S. to their wintering habitats in Mexico, covering distances of up to 3,000 miles. But in recent years, their numbers have dwindled significantly. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), monarch populations east of the Rocky Mountains have declined by over 80% since the mid-1990s.

As the monarch butterfly's population continues to fall, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken steps to address the growing crisis. In December 2024, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service proposed listing the monarch butterfly as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. This proposal includes designating 4,395 acres of critical habitat in California's overwintering sites. Designating the monarch as a threatened or endangered species would provide it with legal protection and access to funding for conservation efforts. However, it also underscores the seriousness of the situation. Without significant intervention, the monarch's future in North America could be in jeopardy.

Conserving monarch butterflies is not just about protecting a single species—it's about safeguarding entire ecosystems. Monarch habitats, including prairies, meadows, and wetlands, are home to a vast array of plant and animal species. By restoring these

critical environments to support monarchs, we also help protect pollinators, birds, and other wildlife that depend on these ecosystems. For example, milkweed, the monarch's primary food source, provides nourishment for other insects, while the wildflowers that bloom alongside milkweed support a wide range of pollinators like bees and butterflies. Moreover, the same conservation efforts that protect monarchs also benefit bird species that rely on these habitats for shelter and food. In this way, monarch conservation becomes a powerful tool for broader biodiversity preservation, ensuring the health of ecosystems that sustain many forms of life. By protecting one species, we're not just preserving a butterfly's migration—we're fostering resilience in the entire web of life.

Monarch butterflies face multiple threats, including habitat loss due to the destruction of milkweed from agricultural expansion and herbicide use, as well as pesticide exposure that harms both the butterflies and other pollinators. Climate change disrupts their migratory patterns and affects their breeding and wintering sites, while illegal logging in Mexico threatens their critical overwintering habitats. These combined challenges have contributed to the sharp decline in their population, making their survival more precarious than ever.

While the challenges are significant, there is still hope for the monarch butterfly. Conservation efforts are underway, with both grassroots initiatives and large-scale actions making a tangible impact on the species' recovery. Many of these efforts focus on restoring habitats, reducing pesticide use, and educating the public on the importance of protecting monarchs. Here is how you can help!

1. Planting Milkweed

One of the most effective ways to support monarchs is by planting milkweed in gardens,

parks, and along roadsides. Monarchs rely on these plants to lay their eggs, and larvae feed on them exclusively. Milkweed plants are available through various conservation organizations, and individuals can help restore monarch habitats in their own backyards.



Above: Sometimes called rose or swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), the flashy pink blooms of this plant make it a great option for landscaping.

2. Supporting Habitat Restoration

Locally, Johnson County Conservation cares for 2,740 acres of public land within Johnson County, and this number will continue to grow with the support of our citizens. Much of this land contains high quality restored or remnant prairie, prime breeding habitat for the monarch butterfly. Other organizations such as Monarch Joint Venture and the Xerces Society are leading efforts to restore monarch habitats across North America. These initiatives focus on planting native wildflowers and milkweed, as well as working with farmers and landowners to create pollinator-friendly landscapes. By restoring these critical habitats, these groups are helping to provide safe breeding and migration corridors for monarchs.

3. Advocating for Policy Change

On a larger scale, advocates are pushing for policy changes to protect the monarch butterfly.

This includes supporting legislation that limits the use of harmful pesticides, promotes habitat conservation, and safeguards monarch overwintering sites in Mexico. The inclusion of the monarch on the Endangered Species Act candidate list has also brought much-needed attention to the issue, galvanizing further action from lawmakers and conservationists alike.

4. Community Engagement and Education

Public awareness and education are essential to mobilizing broader conservation efforts. Local communities, schools, and nature centers are teaching people about the importance of monarchs and how they can make a difference. Johnson County Conservation works with volunteers to monitor monarch habitat during the summer as part of the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program (IMMP). We also host numerous monarch tagging events during the fall migration as part of Project Monarch Watch, run by scientists at the University of Kansas.



A volunteer finds a monarch egg (above) on common milkweed during an IMMP monitoring event.

While the plight of the monarch butterfly is a cause for concern, where there is life, there is still hope. Through collaborative efforts to protect habitats, reduce pesticide use, and support conservation initiatives, we can help restore monarch populations. Every action, no matter how small, contributes to a greater effort to secure a future not only for these iconic butterflies, but for the dynamic ecosystems monarchs and many other organisms depend on – including us.

Join the IMMP!

The Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program (IMMP) is a nationwide effort to track and support monarch butterfly populations by gathering essential data on their habitats, breeding success, and overall health. Through community-driven science, volunteers help monitor milkweed presence, nectar resources, and monarch life stages, contributing valuable information that aids conservation efforts. This data not only informs scientists and land managers but also helps shape strategies to protect these iconic butterflies and their vital ecosystems.

We're looking for passionate volunteers to join our monitoring team at Cedar River Crossing! Whether you're a seasoned naturalist or just love being outdoors, this is a fantastic opportunity to make a real impact. By spending just a few hours in the field, you'll help collect critical data that supports monarch conservation on a local and national scale. Plus, it's a great way to connect with nature, learn more about pollinators, and be part of a community working toward positive change. Come be a part of something meaningful—join us in safeguarding the future of monarchs!

You can sign up to help at any of our upcoming IMMP site visits by following the QR code below to our event registration page. We visit the site 3-4 times monthly on Wednesday mornings. More details are listed within each event.

*Sign up to
volunteer here!*



This volunteer work can be physically demanding. All volunteers should be able to confidently walk through uneven, muddy terrain and tall vegetation. We will encounter biting insects and poison ivy.

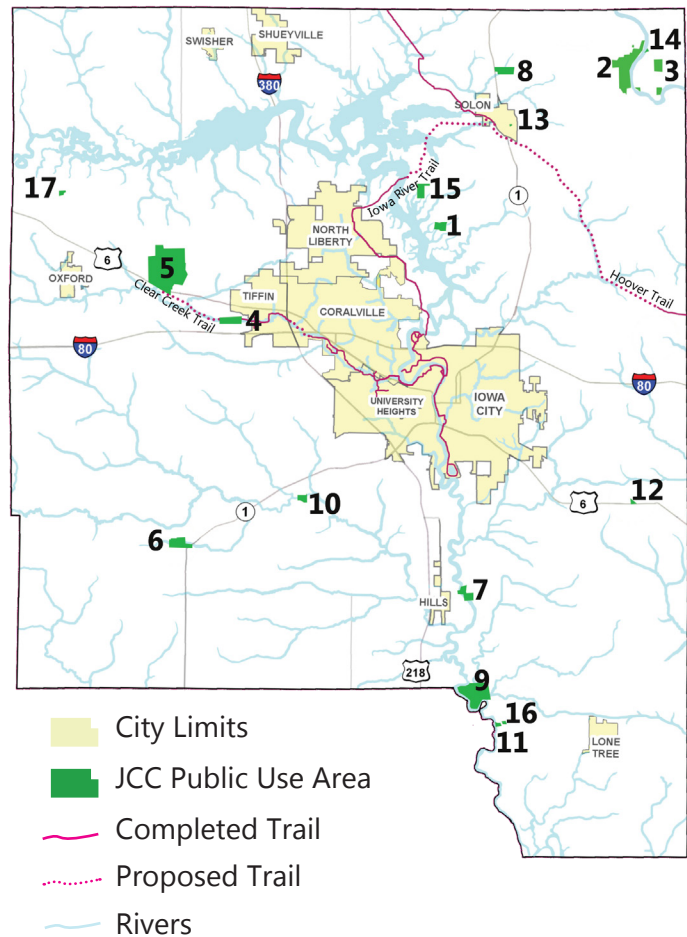
WILDERNESS TREK SCHOLARSHIPS

Every year, JCC leads life-changing wilderness trips to expose youth to backpacking, Designated Wilderness Areas, and conservation careers and stewardship. We aim to include a broad diversity of participants and offer as many scholarships as we can to those with financial need. If you are in a position to donate, we would love your help to grow the scholarship fund through the Friends of Johnson County Conservation! You can donate any amount by scanning the QR code to the right. Email kmorrow@johnsoncountyiowa.gov for more information if you'd prefer to donate by check.



JCCB Public Use Areas

1. Cangleska Wakan	132 acres
2. Cedar River Crossing	610 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

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. Sign up by scanning 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**.



Program/Event 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 assistance.

March

Sunrise Equinox Saunter

Monday, March 20, 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. The walk will be over uneven terrain. Leashed dogs are welcome.

Explorers: Reptiles

Thursday, March 20 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Kids are invited to learn about Iowa's native reptiles and meet a live snake and turtle. The Explorers series is designed for kids K-6 with an accompanying adult.

April

Explorers: Spring Foraging

Thursday, April 3 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come learn about some fun and easy-to-identify plants you can forage as a family! The Explorers series is designed for kids K-6 with an accompanying adult.

CEC Open House - Frogs

Saturday, April 12, 12:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

This month, learn about frogs with self-guided hands-on activities and crafts. Nets and guides will be available for free check-out to explore for tadpoles at the nearby wetlands.

Nature Buds: Birding 101

Wednesday, April 9, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Nature Buds is a free program designed for kids ages three to five with an accompanying adult. The program includes themed storytime, group activity, a follow-up craft or STEM activity, and often, outdoor exploration.

Spring Foraging

Saturday, April 12, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Cedar River Crossing

Take a walk to learn about some of the foods that can be found in spring!

Hope Hikes: A Grief Walk w/Spring Ephemerals

Thursday, April 17, 6:00 - 7:30 pm
Cangleska Wakan

Being in nature and in community with others has restorative effects on our mental health and wellbeing. If you are experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one or any other form of grief, join us for this restorative walk in the woods. This 2-mile hike will explore an oak-hickory forest to enjoy spring ephemerals.

Iowa Bumble Bee Atlas Volunteer Training

Saturday, April 19, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 10, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Virtual training through Zoom

The Iowa Bumble Bee Atlas is a community science project focused on tracking and conserving Iowa's native bumble bees. This training will help citizen science volunteers to learn more about native bumble bees, and what you can do to help them. Visit www.BumbleBeeAtlas.org to learn more.

City Nature Challenge: Intro to iNaturalist & Mini-Biolblitz

Friday, April 25, 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Jump into the global community science project City Nature Challenge (runs April 25-28)! Participants will learn how to use iNaturalist to document natural discoveries and participate in a mini bioblitz with a short hike.

Spring Ephemeral Hike

Saturday, April 26, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Frytown Conservation Area

Join a naturalist on a hike to learn about some of the first wildflowers of spring. This hike is 2 miles on a hilly trail that transitions between grass and dirt.

May

Volunteer Garlic Mustard Pull

Thursday, May 1, 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Two Horse Farm

Help us restore our woodlands! Garlic mustard is an aggressive invasive plant that crowds out native species. Help us remove it and make space for wildflowers and wildlife to thrive.

Spring Ephemeral Hike

Saturday, May 3, 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Two Horse Farm

Join a naturalist on a hike to learn about some of the first wildflowers of spring. This hike is 2 miles on a hilly trail that transitions between grass and dirt.

Native Plant Sale

Sunday, May 4, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Support wildlife and reduce your ecological footprint by adding native plants to your landscape! In May, we will host Troutleaf Native Plants based out of Johnson County, IA.

Native Plant Speaker Series & Plant Sale

Sunday, May 4, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

The Native Plant Series is back! Learn to incorporate native plants at home to support wildlife and provide other ecological benefits. Each event showcases two regional native plant experts and hosts a native plant sale.

Explorers: Bird Migration

Thursday, May 8 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Iowa sits in the middle of the Mississippi Flyway— North America's largest bird migration flight path! Kids will learn about the amazing feat of bird migration and try their hand at "becoming a bird" migration stations along the CEC trail. The Explorers series is designed for kids K-6 with an accompanying adult.

Papermaking with Garlic Mustard

Saturday, May 10, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Two Horse Farm

Help us pull garlic mustard, then learn how to make paper from it! Participants will learn a little about garlic mustard and why we work to remove it. We will spend part of the program pulling these invasive plants from the landscape, then transition into making paper!

Nature Buds: Senses Hike

Wednesday, May 7, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Nature Buds is a free program designed for kids ages three to five with an accompanying adult. This month's program will feature a hike with stops to explore different senses.

CEC Open House - Reptiles

Saturday, May 10, 12:00 - 3:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Learn about reptiles with self-guided hands-on activities and crafts inside the CEC. The Discovery Room will also be open to explore.

Mother's Day Hike

Sunday, May 11, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
Phebe Timber

Join us to celebrate mothers everywhere. Learn about the cultural and natural history of Phebe Timber and hike through a forest with spring wildflowers in bloom. The hike will be one mile or less on a flat dirt trail. There will be an optional watercolor activity at the end of the hike for anyone interested.

Spring Migration Public Bird Banding

Saturday, May 17, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Join federally permitted bird banders to learn about bird research and conservation and see birds up close! Come and go as you please.

Explorers: Wetland Exploration

Thursday, May 22, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Search for wetland critters of all kinds in this hands-on pond-side program. We'll use nets to catch, observe, and learn about wetland insects, amphibians, and crustaceans. The Explorers series is designed for kids K-6 with an accompanying adult.

Explorers: Froggin' Fun

Thursday, May 29, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Catch frogs and tadpoles with us! We'll learn about native frogs and toads and how to identify them by sound and sight, then spend time with nets at the pond. The Explorers series is designed for kids K-6 with an adult.

Nature Bop Fun Ride

Saturday, May 31 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Clear Creek Trail

This bike ride is open to persons of all ages. Nature interpretation and challenge activity stations will be set up along the bike trail, where participants will learn about the natural environment and wildlife of our area. Participants must register but can arrive anytime between 10 and 11 am to participate.

W.T.F. Bikepacking Adventure

May 31 - June 1

JCC is teaming up with the Iowa City Bike Library to host this weekend of pedaling, camping, and kayaking. Registration required and limited; to register, visit:

<https://www.icbikelibrary.org/bikepacking>

June

Native Plant Speaker Series & Plant Sale

Sunday, June 1, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Learn to incorporate native plants at home to support wildlife and provide other ecological benefits. Each event showcases two regional native plant experts and hosts a native plant sale. Troutleaf Native Plants will be the plant vendor.

Integrated Monarch Monitoring (IMMP)

Wednesdays, June 4, 11, and 18, 7:30 a.m.

We're looking for volunteers to join our monarch monitoring team to help collect critical data that supports monarch conservation on a local and national scale. More information available through our event link on page 12.

Naturalist Hike

Saturday, June 14, 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.
Cedar River Crossing

Join a naturalist for a guided 3-mile hike at Cedar River Crossing. The trail is both grass and dirt surfaced. The majority of the hike is over level terrain, with a couple short hills.

Raptor Meet-n-Greet

Saturday, June 21, 10:30-11:15 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come meet and learn about two different birds of prey with Raptology. This program is an informal "meet-n-greet" style and no registration is required.

CEC Summer Open Hours
Saturdays, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
June 7 - mid-August

Come explore the Discovery Room, visit the education animals, and check out the bird blind!

The second Saturday of each month will feature additional hands-on activities exploring a nature theme.

Teen Adventure Camp

JUNE 17 - 20, 2025
\$100 CAMP FEE
SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE
FOR 6TH-8TH GRADERS

.....
HIKING, KAYAKING, ARCHERY,
FORAGING, FISHING AND MORE!
.....

SPOTS WILL GO FAST! REGISTER
THROUGH THE EVENT LINK.





Johnson County Conservation
2048 HWY 6 NW
Oxford, IA 52332

Click or scan the QR
code to subscribe to
our newsletter



PRINTED ON
RECYCLED PAPER



Prairie trillium and Mayapple flourish in the restored oak forests of Frytown Conservation Area . See and learn about these and more spring blooms during one of our Spring Ephemeral Hikes. Find more information and the link to register on page 13.