

Central Iowa SIERRAN



Spring/Summer 2011

Central Iowa Group Newsletter

A Successful Metro Community Garden Story

By Phoebe Bubendorfer

It's late September, and it's time to prepare our small community garden for the winter. But first, we'll harvest the potatoes, squash and sweet potatoes.

Our garden is young. Two years ago, after a house was torn down for freeway expansion, the lot was left as a narrow, vacant strip of land. A couple in the neighborhood began talking with friends and neighbors about starting a community garden. Consumers had become more interested in fresh, locally grown produce, so the timing was perfect. Many of us had no real gardening experience, although we had a lot of enthusiasm, and were willing to learn as we worked. The idea caught on quickly.

The land was leased with no charge, with the agreement that no permanent structure would be erected, and that it would be mowed and kept reasonably tidy. So, in the spring of 2009, ten 4x20-foot beds were laid out, with a few added later as more people joined. Larger beds were planted with corn, sweet potatoes, potatoes, strawberries and asparagus to be shared. Fruit trees, blueberries, a small herb garden, and a couple of grape vines were also planted. Small evergreen trees were added to buffer the noise from the adjacent freeway, and flowers were planted from seed.

An interesting feature is our "Three Sisters Garden", which is an old Native American custom in which corn is planted in a grid pattern of small mounds. Squash is planted between the corn and pole beans are planted at the base of each corn plant. The idea is that the prickly squash vines discourage predators, the corn stalks shade the squash, and the bean vines use the corn stalks for support and provide nitrogen for the soil. The concept worked great, even though we did lose some plants.

Our little Eden now has a fine garden shed complete with its own rain barrel, a composter, and a beautiful, handmade trellis. A lovely, painted sign marks the entrance to the garden. A neighbor with

a riding mower cuts the grass, and another member uses his truck to pick up free, composted manure. Almost everything is either donated or borrowed.

Although we have no ready source of water, a neighbor offers us the use of her outdoor water supply and her generosity is repaid with extra produce. However, most of the watering this year was done by nature or by hauling buckets.

Besides giving us wonderful, fresh produce, the garden has given us much pleasure. We've held potlucks and brunches in the garden itself and we're now planning our next potluck using our fall produce.

Our hope is that in the future, we'll be able to grow enough to contribute to some of the food-assistance programs in Des Moines. In the meantime,



ABOVE: Ian and Diane show off a load of sweet potatoes. And this is about a third of the plot. More to come.

LEFT: Deb and Greg's son, Ian, supervise the harvest.



we feel we have converted what could have become a neighborhood eyesore into a piece of land that we can be proud of, and which supplies us with fresh, locally grown produce to share with friends and neighbors.

Another Stab at the River Grab! R2G2 is coming, again.

www.riverstewards.org

by Phyllis Goodman

The Des Moines River is being scheduled for another R2G2 clean up this August. Hundreds of volunteers have swept the river in the past from Saylorsville Dam to Yellow Banks County Park, picking up several tons of tires, bottles, and abandoned appliances. You just never know what our enthusiastic volunteers will grab and remove to an appropriate disposal. I'm sure anyone who has done a river clean up will become an honorable life-long trash picker for those not yet aware of the damage a carelessly tossed can does.

Last year, this huge event had to be cancelled due to flooding. With this in mind, please follow the latest updates on our website. The date may be subject to change.

Most volunteers will be in canoes. However, many non-boaters will walk the shoreline as well. Come for as long as you want. And come to the party afterwards! It's always a fun day in just about any weather (except for safety issues like floods). It is fun for families, groups of friends, community

minded local businesses, and just someone looking for a good way to spend the day.

The website www.riverstewards.org, is the easiest way to track the event. It currently is holding last year's information, which will be pretty similar to this year's information. The date and party location will change. We hope to get this website fully current around June, but you can get some early bird looks here at the past event.

Currently, the 2011 R2G2 date is scheduled for August 20 with the party to be held at Doane Park in Pleasant Hill. As our weather has been quite interesting in the past few years, we may have to change this. Therefore, it would be helpful to pre-register on the site when it is up for this year. Or just check in on your own at any of our host sites the day of the clean up. It is hoped most volunteers will be able to pre-register, as this helps to plan for supplies and food.

See page 3 to specifically help Central Iowa Sierra Club's host site.

In This Issue:

Metro Community Garden Page 1
Stab at the River Grab

Calendar of Outings Page 2

Your Money Works Page 3
Help Restore Beaver Creek
Frog and Toad Survey
Access Sierran Electronically
Elections Results
Volunteers Wanted for Yellow Banks
Host Site

Greenways Vision Page 4
Tipton Prairie: Jewel of Iowa's Past

CENTRAL IOWA SIERRA CLUB SPRING/SUMMER 2011 CALENDAR

PLEASE CALL THE OUTING LEADER IF YOU PLAN TO GO ON ANY OUTINGS. This helps the outing leader plan and alerts you to possible changes. Everyone, including non-members, is welcome to attend programs and outings. Children are also welcome to attend with their parents or caretakers unless otherwise indicated by the outing leader. In order to participate in an outing, you (or your parent or guardian if under 18) will need to sign a liability waiver. To read a copy of the waiver, please call 415-977-5630. Carpooling on outings is encouraged but is strictly a private arrangement among participants, and participants assume all risks associated with such travel. All telephone numbers in this listing are area code 515 unless otherwise indicated.

APRIL EVENTS

INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL

Volunteer at Yellow Banks County Park for invasive species removal beginning in April every Thursday night at 6 p.m. Meet at the maintenance shed just inside the park and wear heavy work shoes or boots, sturdy gloves, long sleeves and long pants. Difficulty level: Moderate. Contact Penny at 262-1224 to sign up or to check on weather conditions.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2: 4:30 P.M.

Prairie Chicken Watching at Kellerton Grasslands

The colorful mating dance and booming calls of prairie chickens were once common throughout Iowa prairies in the springtime, but now they are isolated to a few areas in Southwest Iowa. Experience this rare phenomenon at sunset with an outing to the Kellerton Grasslands Bird Conservation Area. Meet at 4:30 p.m. in the southeast corner of the Super Target parking lot, I-35 & Mills Civic Pkwy., in West Des Moines, to carpool approximately 90 minutes to the viewing area. We will be able to watch for prairie chickens for about 90 minutes before sunset, then perhaps stop at a local restaurant afterward for dinner before returning. Binoculars, spotting scopes, and/or cameras with telephoto lenses suggested. Wear clothing appropriate to being outside 90 minutes as it begins to cool down at dusk. Difficulty level: Easy (minimal walking). Contact Doug at dra427@mchsi.com or 515-277-1263 by March 31 to sign up.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20: PROGRAM, 7 PM

Umbrella for the Prairie:

Prairie Chickens in Southern Iowa

In the late 19th century the Greater Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido cupido*) was a popular and common game bird on Iowa's landscape. The 1950's saw the demise of this charismatic bird in the state with the last nesting attempt recorded in 1952. Roughly 30 years later efforts began to bring this iconic symbol of prairie grassland back and while success has been questionable many positive and unexpected things have arisen from this bird's return to Iowa. And the story continues with plans for a future effort to bring the boom back to southern Iowa's prairies. The program will be presented by Stephanie Shepherd, who is a wildlife biologist with Iowa DNR's wildlife diversity program and has been with them for a little over 5 years. She received her Master's degree from Iowa State University in Animal Ecology and has a primary interest in conservation biology and restoration ecology particularly of grasslands. Central Iowa Sierra public programs are held at Northwest Community Center, 51st Street and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at 223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net for more information about the program.

Tuesday Weekly Hikes Begin

Sierra Club Tuesday Evening Hikes resume on April 26. Hikes are held at a different location each week around the Greater Des Moines Area, begin at 6:30 p.m., and end around 8 p.m. This is a great way to get to know hiking areas you may have never visited, or to revisit old favorite trails. For all hikes, please contact the hike leader to sign up each week so you can get directions and be notified if there is any change in plans. You may request to be placed on an email list to be notified of each week's hike and any changes by contacting Jane at jrclark@radiks.net. Difficulty level is usually easy to moderate. Hiking boots or sturdy walking shoes are recommended, as are light weight long pants, mosquito repellent and water. Bring rain gear whenever the weather suggests a chance of rain.

TUESDAY, APRIL 26: HIKE, 6:30 PM

Yellow Banks County Park

Meet at 6:30 p.m. inside the park at the maintenance shed by the ranger's house for a hike at Yellow Banks County Park, which is located in the southeastern part of Polk County. This park has a rich archeological history and wildflowers should be blooming. Difficulty level: Moderate. Contact Penny at 262-1224 for directions or for more information.

MAY EVENTS

TUESDAY, MAY 3: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Margo Frankel Woods State Park

Celebrate Iowa Wildflower Week

Margo Frankel Woods is a good place to find wildflowers after a long winter. Follow NE 2nd Street (Hwy 415) about 2 miles north of I-80/35. Margo Frankel Woods is located on the east side of the road, just south of NW 66th Avenue. We will meet at 6:30 in the parking lot. Contact Ginger at soelbergv@dwx.com or 253.0232. Difficulty: moderate, hilly terrain.

TUESDAY, MAY 10: 6:30 P.M.

BIRDING AND WILDFLOWER WALK

Walnut Woods State Park—For a bird hike/nature walk, meet in the picnic area at the circle drive found inside the east entrance to the park. Bring binoculars and wear appropriate footwear! Contact Jane at jrclark@radiks.net or 223-5047 for more information. Difficulty: easy.

TUESDAY, MAY 17: HIKE, 6:30 PM

Brown's Woods Preserve—meet in the Brown's Woods parking area at 6:30 p.m. to hike the long loop. To reach the park, take 63rd Street in West Des Moines till you reach Brown's Woods Drive, turn west and go about a half-mile, turn right into the parking lot. Difficulty level: moderate, hilly terrain. Contact George at 745-7563 for information.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20: Public Program

Program TBA: The Central Iowa Sierra Group's public program to be announced will begin at 7 p.m. at Northwest Community Center near 50th and Franklin Avenue in Des Moines. Contact Jane at 223-5047 or jrclark@radiks.net for more information.

TUESDAY, MAY 24: HIKE 6:30 P.M.

Walnut Creek Trail—Meet at the Q-Trip gas station at the corner of the intersection at SW 63d Street and Railroad Avenue for an evening walk of 1 ½ to 2 hours through bottomland forest. Difficulty level: moderate. Contact George at 745-7563 for information.

TUESDAY, MAY 31: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Maffitt Reservoir—Meet at the west entrance to Maffitt Lake for a hike through the park and around the lake. As always, boots, water and bug repellent are recommended. Difficulty level: moderate. Contact George at 745-7563 for information and/or directions.

JUNE EVENTS

TUESDAY, JUNE 7: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Raccoon River Park—Meet in the parking lot at the Lodge at Raccoon River Park in West Des Moines to walk around Blue Heron Lake. Please contact George for more information. Difficulty level: easy. Contact George at 745-7563 for information.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8

The Executive Committee of the Central Iowa Group of the Sierra Club will meet from 6-9 p.m. All members are welcome for the quarterly planning meeting. Contact Jane for location at jrclark@radiks.net or 515-223-5047.

TUESDAY, JUNE 14: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Summerset State Park—Meet at Summerset State Park south of Des Moines at 6:30 p.m. To get to the park, travel five miles south of Des Moines on Highway 69—there is a posted sign pointing east. Meet at the public restroom just inside the park gates. This hike will take approximately 60 minutes on a level trail. Difficulty level: easy to moderate. Contact Jackie at 577-0375 with questions.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16

NO PROGRAMS DURING THE SUMMER—

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER

TUESDAY, JUNE 21: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Jester County Park

We will take advantage of several of the hiking trails that Jester County Park in northwest Polk County has to offer. Meet at the parking lot just inside the park entrance at 6:30 p.m. Contact Ginger at soelbergv@dwx.com or call 253-0232. Difficulty: moderate.

SATURDAY, JUNE 25: BICYCLE RIDE, 8:30 A.M.

Join us for a bike ride on part of the High Trestle Trail Saturday morning, June 25th. We will meet at the Dahl's parking lot on NW 86th St. in Johnston at 8:30 A.M. Contact Ginger at 253.0232 soelbergv@dwx.com or Carol at 278-4057 davy2@wildmail.com to RSVP. Our ride will include traveling over the newly-opened High Trestle Bridge. The High Trestle Trail is a 25-mile trail that will connect 4 counties and 5 communities in Central Iowa. The trail includes a magnificent 13-story, 1/2-mile bridge over the Des Moines River Valley. Difficulty: easy to moderate. Helmets are required and bring water and/or snacks. (You can check out the High Trestle Trail ahead of our ride at the trail's Grand Opening on April 30th.)

TUESDAY, JUNE 28: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Waterworks Park—Meet at the popular wooden footbridge which is located less than a mile inside the park from the entrance. From there we can cross the bridge and the Raccoon River and hike along trails, perhaps going to a point where we can spot the Terrace Hill Mansion from afar--and possible wildlife along the way! Contact George at 745-7563 with questions. Difficulty level: easy.

JULY EVENTS

TUESDAY, JULY 5: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Polk City Five Bridges—Meet at the Casey's on the south side of Polk City just east of the Mile Long Bridge. We will travel to the entrance of Big Creek State Park where there is a parking lot. From there we will get on the recreation trail, where there are 5 wooden bridges running along Big Creek Lake and Saylorville Lake. The trail is paved and mostly wooded and the hike will take about 90 minutes. Contact Jackie at 577-0375 to let her know you're coming. Difficulty level: easy to moderate.

SATURDAY, JULY 9: BICYCLE RIDE, 9 A.M.

To meet at 9 a.m. for this bicycle ride on the Great Western Trail, take the Hwy 5 bypass to the SW Connector exit. Turn south on the SW Connector and go 0.5 miles to Maffitt Lake Drive. Go west (right) and travel 0.4 miles to S. Orilla Road. Go south on S. Orilla Road 0.7 miles...and there's the trail head. You may park either in Bambino's parking lot or across the street. We'll plan for a 24-mile round trip ride to Martensdale and back. The adventurous among us may want to go all the way to Bevington! Email Sandy at sandra_964@hotmail.com or call at 288-1811 for information. Helmets are required and bring water and/or snacks.

TUESDAY, JULY 12: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Raccoon River Park—Meet in the parking lot at the Lodge at Raccoon River Park in West Des Moines to walk around Blue Heron Lake. This hike will be a little over 3 miles and will take about an hour. There is a bird blind where we might stop briefly. Please contact Jackie at 577-0375 for more information. Difficulty level: easy.

TUESDAY, JULY 19: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Sycamore Trail—Meet at the Sycamore Landing on the parking lot south of NW 66th Street on the east side of the Des Moines River. We'll hike about 90 minutes. Difficulty level: easy. Contact George at 745-7563 for questions and directions.

TUESDAY, JULY 26: HIKE, 6:30 P.M.

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge—The Tuesday, July 27 hike will be at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge near Prairie City. Meet in the parking lot of the refuge's Prairie Learning Center at 6:30 p.m. Hike the Tallgrass Trail to catch glimpses of butterflies and songbirds among the summer prairie blooms. Afterward, take an optional drive through the bison range to perhaps get an up-close look at these large prairie inhabitants. Difficulty level: Easy to Moderate. Contact Doug at dra427@mchsi.com or 277-1263 to sign up and get directions.

AUGUST EVENTS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2: 7:00 P.M.

TRESTLE TO TRESTLE HIKE

Meet at the parking lot near Lenc Landscaping, 5400 Lower Beaver Road in Des Moines to walk this wooded trail along the Des Moines River. This trail links Des Moines to Johnston and is a key connector in the regional trail system. Contact Ginger and RSVP at soelbergv@dwx.com or 253-0232. Difficulty level: easy.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 9: 6:30 P.M.

(NEAR) FULL MOON PRAIRIE HIKE

Sand Hill Prairie, Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

Meet at 7:00 P.M. in the Sand Hill Prairie parking lot on 118th Ave. off Hwy. 65/330 in northeast Polk County. After hiking on prairie paths enjoying the variety of grasses and forbs, we will linger to watch the moon rise over the prairie. Difficulty level: easy to moderate. Please RSVP to Jo at 276-6359 or johudson@q.com for directions or to carpool.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 16: 6:30 P.M.

YELLOW BANKS PARK HIKE

Meet inside the main entrance to the park in the lot across from the ranger's workshop. From there we'll carpool to either an upland trailhead or down to the river boat launch for an evening hike. It's a wonderful park with viewpoints and opportunities for binoculars and cameras. Boots are strongly recommended. Difficult level: Moderate. Contact George at 745-7563 for questions and directions.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23: 6:30 P.M.

RED FEATHER PRAIRIE HIKE,

Meet at the Saylorville Lake Visitor Center. We will then shuttle to the NW 90th place trailhead and hike back south to the visitor center. View late summer prairie in bloom and a butterfly garden. Contact Doug at dra427@mchsi.com or 277-1263 or Carolyn at 779-1680 to sign up and get more information. Bring water and wear sturdy walking shoes. Difficulty level: Moderate.

ALSO OF INTEREST

Loess Hills Prairie Seminar: *Prairie!*

June 3-5, 2011

The Loess Hills Prairie Seminar is sponsored annually by Northwest Area Education Agency for educators, students, park and conservation persons, community leaders, and citizens. It's held in the Loess Hills Wildlife Area northeast of Onawa, Iowa. Connie Mutel of IHR-Hydroscience & Engineering is the featured speaker at the Loess Hills Prairie Seminar on Friday evening, June 3rd. Her talk is titled, "Climate Change Impacts on Iowa: The Closing Loop." Contact Ginger at 253-0232 or soelbergv@dwx.com to discuss carpooling.

The program, registration document, poster, and other information for the 2011 LHPS are now available at the NWAEA website: http://www.nwaea.k12.ia.us/en/upcoming_events/loess_hills_prairie_seminar/.

Your Money Works for Mother Nature

By Sandy Simmons

As contributing members of Central Iowa Sierra Club, you may wonder where your contributions end up. Do the funds help to promote conservation projects? Do they go to environmental education efforts? Yes!

We want to give you a brief description of the projects your generous support helps to promote. The funds from our silent auction and fundraising hikes are valued in promoting the interests of the Central Iowa Sierra Club.

The Sierra Club contributed \$50 to Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to help fund their Water under Siege film festival. WILPF works to promote social justice, peace

and water conservation efforts (to name but a few).

We provided \$150.00 to help with the Hickory Ridge restoration project at Lake Red Rock. The site was an abandoned timeshare that is being restored to its green and beautiful state, without the appliance and construction debris formerly there. We also allocated \$150.00 to River Run Garbage Grab (R2G2), which has focused on the Des Moines River for several years, but in the future will include the Raccoon River, too.

The Central Iowa Sierra Club added \$165.00 to Moulton School for Camperships which helps

inner-city children camp and gain appreciation for our natural world.

Your funds also helped to print the updated Greater Des Moines Regional Trails Map, which you're probably using right now! This updated guide folds easily to fit in your pocket or pack and will take you all over town via your bike or two feet. Maps are available at monthly meetings.

Lastly, your contributions help to print the Central Iowa Sierran newsletter, which keeps you informed of concerns, presentations and lobbying efforts of interest to Sierra Club members.

We hope this information lets you know the value of your continued support of Central Iowa Sierra Club. If you keep contributing, so can our group. Thank you!

Readers Can Access Sierran Electronically

The Iowa Sierran and the Central Iowa Sierran are both available on-line. As paper costs and mailing become increasingly expensive, we rely on the web more and more. Right now, the entire Sierran is mailed via US postal service to our members.

But if you are like me, you may want to access the meeting dates, activities, and some articles while away from home, or if your one copy has been thrown out due to overzealous house cleaning, you'll need a replacement. We know not all our members do use computers, so we hope to keep the "snail mail" option around as long as possible.

Your electronic copy is posted on the web by Central Iowa volunteer webmaster Mary Ann Hynes.

You can access the Central Iowa Sierran at:
iowa.sierraclub.org/ciag

Central Iowa Group Election Results

The election for the Executive Committee resulted in one new member, Sandy Simmons. Continuing to serve by re-election are Donna Balzer, Phyllis Goodman, and Carol Grimm. All four will serve 2-year terms.

The Central Iowa Executive Committee re-elected the four officers that served in the past term.

Thank you for voting.

Volunteers Wanted for Yellow Banks Host Site

The date for the 9th or 10th (well, you may remember that #9 was flooded out) annual Des Moines River cleanup, known as the River Run Garbage Grab (R2G2), is August 20. Information regarding this service day is on page one of this Iowa Sierran. Your Central Iowa group invites you to join us at our own host site, Yellow Banks County Park boat ramp.

Hosting is a great way to participate in R2G2. We welcome the paddlers onto the shore, help them unload their "treasures", and make sure they are offered cold water. Yellow Banks one of the loveliest spots to spend the day, or a few hours.

It is great fun welcoming the paddlers and being part of the logistics team. All hosts are invited to join the 6:00 p.m. celebration at Doane Park with a free BBQ dinner and music.

The R2G2 website is for registering the workers cleaning up the river or shoreline, not this host site. To volunteer for a shift at our Sierra Club host site, please contact Phyllis at 274-4319 goodmanph@mchsi.com. The R2G2 website mentioned on page 1 is for registering workers cleaning up the river or shoreline, not this host site. To volunteer for a shift at our Sierra Club host site, please contact Phyllis at 274-4319 or goodmanph@mchsi.com.

Help Restore the Beaver Creek Natural Resource Area

The Johnston Parks and Recreation Department and the Johnston Tree Board are inviting volunteers to continue to help battle the spread of the invasive plant honeysuckle in the Beaver Creek Natural Resource Area. We will also work on trail cleanup in the area.

Volunteers will meet at Crown Point Community Center, 6300 Pioneer Parkway at 8:30 am on

Saturday, April 16. Work time will be 9:00 am to 11:00 am with refreshments provided. Wear gloves and dress for the weather. Bring loppers and/or pruning saw if you have them. Some tools will be available. For details contact Ginger at soelbergv@dwx.com

Frog and Toad Survey Workshops

Amphibians face many environmental stresses, and are currently in global decline. Since 1991 the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program has coordinated a statewide yearly survey of frogs and toads. Over the years hundreds of volunteers have helped with this survey, and by attending a Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program (VWMP) frog and toad training workshop you can learn how to help with this important work. Routes are set up across Iowa, and trained volunteers are needed to "adopt" and survey these routes.

Participants in a Frog and Toad Call Survey workshop will learn to identify Iowa's frogs and toads by sight and sound, and how to collect and report this data to the Wildlife Diversity Program and to the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP). This volunteer-collected data will be used not only by Iowa but at regional and national levels too.

Registration is required, plus a \$10 registration fee that covers training materials and a frog and toad call CD. Forms are available at

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/diversity/vwmp.html>.

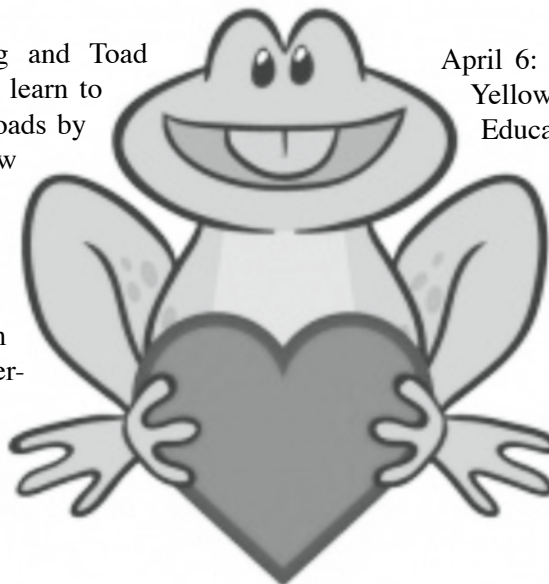
For more information, contact Stephanie Shepherd, (515) 432-2823, ext. 102, or stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov.

Workshop Dates

April 6: Crawford County Conservation, Yellow Smoke Park Environmental Education Center, 2237 Yellow Smoke Road, Denison, 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.

April 7: Warren County Conservation, Annett Nature Center, 15565 – 118th Avenue, Indianola, 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.

April 13: Wapello County Conservation, Pioneer Ridge Nature Center, 1339 Hwy. 63, Bloomfield, 5:30 - 9:00 p.m.



At the November monthly meeting, Sierra members heard Clayton Daughenbaugh of the Southern Utah Wilderness Association (SUWA) give a thought provoking presentation. He spoke about the increasing threats to Utah's Red Rock Wilderness areas. Mineral exploitation is one destroyer of precious "protected" wilderness. Understand more about this disturbing trend at SUWA's website: www.suwa.org.

Photo by Clayton Daughenbaugh

Greenways Vision: The Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers Greenways Plan

By Robin Fortney

At first glance, a map of Iowa shows a land divided, with highways and county boundaries laid out in tidy straight lines and rectangles. For many, those lines create the important structures on which we organize our lives and our travels. However, if we were to remove those political boundaries and modern roads, what would we see? Now Iowa shows itself to be a fertile land with rolling topography, intersected by numerous rivers flowing across the landscape. The Des Moines River, Iowa's largest interior waterway, flows through central Iowa and through the state's largest city where it embraces the waters of the Raccoon River. For thousands of years, prehistoric and modern communities have traveled and settled this land between two rivers.

Just as roads connect communities and natural spaces, rivers and their adjacent greenways also connect these places. A greenway is a corridor of protected space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. The Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers Greenways Plan is a multi-jurisdictional public planning process begun in 2009 to define a common vision for the greenway system. The plan acknowledges the many economic, environmental, and social benefits of this natural resource. It is also a means to link these separate spaces and consider them as a whole.

The Greenways Plan helps us envision our greenways system as a single asset, like an emerald necklace. Check out an area map. Along the Des Moines River, city, county and federal agencies have established the Saylorville Reservoir and floodway, Cottonwood and Bob Shetler Recreation Areas, Sycamore Access, Prospect Park, Birdland Park and Access, Hawthorne Park and Harriet Street Access,



Photo by Todd Robertson.

Canoers enjoy Iowa's smaller waterways like Beaver Creek.

Yellow Banks County Park and Red Rock Reservoir floodway. Along the Raccoon River, you'll find Walnut Woods State Park, Raccoon River Park, Browns Woods, Water Works Park, Grays Lake Park and Riverside Park. Within these places, we have designated the Des Moines River Water Trail, Raccoon River Water Trail, Neal Smith Trail, Sycamore Trail and Ding Darling Greenway. This emerald necklace is priceless, yet available for public benefit and use.

Perhaps you have explored this emerald necklace while biking, paddling, skating, fishing or bird watching. You have definitely enjoyed one of the benefits of these rivers as we depend on them for

our water supply. In the near future, you will have an opportunity to participate in public input sessions as part of the greenways planning process. Meanwhile, you can learn more about the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers Greenways Plan at:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Central-Iowa-Greenways/110202982381172>.

Suggest it to your friends. Better yet, get outside and explore each bead in the emerald necklace.

Tipton Prairie: A Jewel of Iowa's Past

By Ray Harden, Dallas County Conservation Board

The leaders of the group called this a Blazing Star Prairie Walk, but there were more flowers than just blazing star in bloom. I saw Culver's root, compass plant, yellow coneflowers, lead plant, goldenrod, and many other species.

I was walking with members of the Raccoon River Watershed Association and several prairie experts at Tipton Prairie in Greene County, located on Road E-57 west of Rippey near Adkins Bridge. This three-acre plot of land had been grazed and used for hay, but the soil has never been tilled. It was owned by the Tipton Family from the 1930's until 2003. At that time it was acquired by the Greene County Conservation Board, which had already managed it for several years and burned the grass each spring. Dan Powers, the director of the Greene County Conservation Department, said that the spring burning is necessary to keep out invasive plants, especially trees that would eventually take over the land. Shrubs such as sumac and dogwood are not killed by the burning and must be removed manually by volunteers.

The wildflower experts on the hike were amazed by the number of blooming flowers and other prairie plants that we observed. Several said that this three-acre remnant of native prairie may have more species than the well-known Doolittle Prairie State Preserve in Story County.

It was hard for me to visualize that this small piece of ground is what sixty percent of Iowa looked like 150 years ago. For the 8,000 years since the last ice age, these grasses and forbs made up the tallgrass prairie that was the dominant form of veg-

etation in our state.

"Prairie" is a French word meaning grassy orchard or park with scattered trees, and the early French explorers used the term "prairie" to describe Iowa. Because there were not many trees, the explorers did not think that the soil in Iowa was very good; they believed that land which could not grow trees was not suitable for growing crops. But they were mistaken. The prairie grasses with their massive root system, along with rainfall and other environmental factors, produced the world's richest soil. In only a few decades after European settlement the prairie was gone, a victim of the plow, sacrificed to produce food for a growing nation. Now only one tenth of one percent of the native prairie remains in Iowa. Also, one-half of the best topsoil formed by prairie plants has been lost to erosion. But now good conservation measures, such as planting native grasses in waterways, terraces and buffer strips, are being practiced by farmers to save Iowa's topsoil.

The Tallgrass Prairie is an endangered American biome. Many prairie plants are on the endangered species list. When one plant becomes extinct it can take with it several species of dependent insects and affect other plants. I am pleased that the small Tipton Prairie survived the plow and that it will be used as a study plot and a seed reservoir for restoration of other prairies.



CENTRAL IOWA SIERRAN

Managing Editors: Phyllis Goodman

Layout Editor: Position is open.

Please contact Jane Clark for more information.

The Central Iowa Sierran is published three times a year. We invite submissions of letters, articles, photographs and illustrations. Deadlines are March 5 for the Spring/Summer issue; July 5 for the Autumn issue; and November 5 for the Winter issue.

Preference will be given to articles relating to the Central Iowa Group. The editors reserve the right to edit for clarity, space and for libel reasons. All submissions must have name, address, and phone number.

Submissions may be sent to Phyllis Goodman. Call 274-4319 for submission address. Electronic submission of articles is preferred: goodmanph@mchsi.com

Central Iowa Group Directory

(See directory in Chapter newsletter for state and national information)

Chair	Jane Clark, 223-5047
Vice Chair	Phyllis Goodman, 274-4319
Treasurer	Ginger Soelberg, 253-0232
Secretary	Karen Tigges, 274-0545
Membership Chair	Phyllis Goodman, 274-4319
Conservation Chair	Jo Hudson, 276-6359
Fundraising Chair	Ginger Soelberg, 253-0232
ExCom Members	Donna Balzer, 285-7787
	Carol Grimm, 278-4057
	Sandra Simmons, 288-1811
Managing Editor	Phyllis Goodman, 274-4319
Layout Editor	Position is Open.