

Spring 2024

Conservation Matters

Park Use Reminders

Important Dates:

Solar Eclipse:
April 8th

Earth Day
April 22nd

Full Moons:
April 23rd
May 23rd

Tiny Nature
Adventures:
April 3rd
May 1st

Natives vs
Invasives:
April 14th

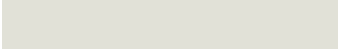
Snakes:
May 25th

As the warm Spring weather brings green foliage, flowers, and new sights to Mills County parks we would like to remind all our visitor's proper park etiquette to ensure people and the wildlife can all enjoy these outdoor spaces. Litter removal is an easy one to remember, you will see signs at many of the parks that state "Carry In/Carry Out". Trash cans are not provided at the Mills County parks so it is important to take any litter that you might have when you leave. Four picnic shelters are available at various park locations that are often used for gatherings and shelter reservations can be made by contacting the office at Pony Creek Nature Center. During outdoor celebrations we ask that parties refrain from using confetti, tying balloons to park structures, and releasing balloons in park spaces.

A variety of hiking trails are found at the parks. Paved trails at Glenwood Archaeological State Preserve and sections of the Wabash Trace are great places to visit during wet conditions to prevent damage to more natural trails. Dirt trails at West Oak Forest and Pony Creek Park in the Loess Hills are vulnerable to erosion so please avoid when conditions are too damp. Many of the parks have mowed dual purpose paths that serve as burn breaks for prescribed fires and nice hiking trails for year-round use.

- ✓ Motorized vehicles are not allowed off parking areas.
- ✓ Fireworks are prohibited in parks, NO EXCEPTIONS
- ✓ Pets must always remain on leash. This helps to ensure the safety of your pet, resident wildlife, and other park visitors.
- ✓ It is illegal to remove, injure, or destroy any natural or man-made structures including trees, flowers, or wildlife.

Foraging is allowed on park property; mushrooms, fruits, and nuts can be harvested for personal use (not for use to sell). Moral mushrooms, wild raspberries, strawberries, and wild plums are a few of the popular wild edibles that grow on park properties. Never consume any wild forage that you are not 100% certain of the identification.



Summer Day Camps

Nature Detectives- Ages 6-9 years old

June 4th, 5th, 6th (9:00 am-noon)
June 18th, 19th, 20th (9:00 am-noon)

This day camp will be a 3-day session focused on learning how to explore, document, and seek knowledge about the natural world that surrounds us. A few highlights include fishing, hiking, crafts, and data collection. Please only sign up for one session, they will be the same to allow small groups.

Nature Connect- Ages 10-13 years old

June 11th, 12th, 13th (9:00 am-noon)
June 25th, 26th, 27th (9:00 am-noon)

It is time to step away from electronics and connect with Nature. Fishing, hiking, nature studies, canoeing, crafts and more. Please only sign up for one session, they will be the same to allow small groups.

Tiny Nature Adventures (Summer edition)- Ages 2-5 years old

June 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th
10:00-11:00 am

Nature themed activities for the little ones! Dress to be outdoors and a guardian must stay with child. Program will last 45-60 minutes each time depending on topic and group involvement. Siblings are welcome to come along, pre-registration is required for planning purposes.

**To register a child for a camp please contact Dessa at 712-527-9685
or send an email to dmontgomery@millscountyiowa.gov**

Park Highlight

If Mother Nature rewards us with a wet Spring the Nishnabotna Water Trail in Mills County should catch up to normal water levels and provide users with water recreation opportunities. This fun stretch of the West Nishnabotna River can be accessed at Washburn Landing and an easy exit site is found at Fisher Wildlife Area. Channel straightening in the early 1900s affected about 90% of the lower 100 miles of the river. During these 6 miles you will witness firsthand the manmade influence on the river as well as the natural determination to flow where it should. Floating and paddling the river is a great opportunity to view local wildlife such as dozens of bird species, white tail deer, beaver, muskrat, racoons, fish, turtles, and snakes. The bridge on Highway 34 and Lambert Ave are covered in cliff swallow nests and it's an amazing sight as this species nest in colonies of up to 1000 nests in one location.

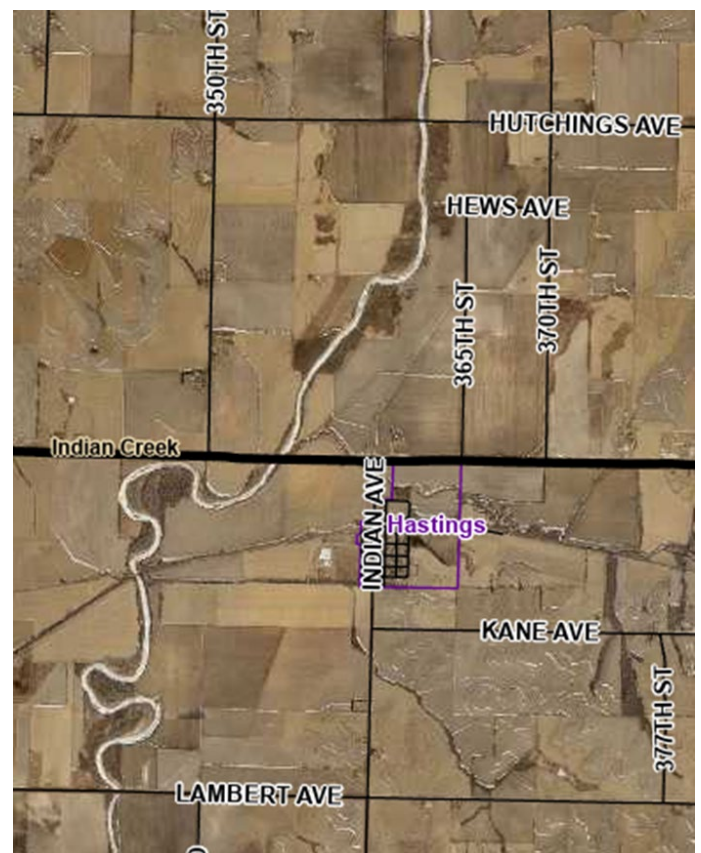
Now, let's get you started on your local float trip. Washburn Landing is located on the east side of the Nishnabotna River. Travelling on highway 34 you will turn north on 370th St (M16) which is a paved road one mile east of Hastings. Travel 2 miles and you will find the intersection of Hutchings Road. Turn west and follow the gravel road to the dead end which is the parking area. Both access points have been designed to allow personal float crafts (canoes, kayaks, rafts) to be carried safely to the river while restricting access to larger boats. From this beginning point you will have the opportunity to travel 6.5 river miles down to Fisher Wildlife Area. This park is located 2 miles east of Malvern on Lambert Ave. There are no facilities at either access area.

Be responsible and respectful!

- Know how you are getting back to your vehicle once your trip is finished. There are no public accesses between the designated water trail accesses, and few bridges and roads near the river.
- There are also no lights along the river, so be aware of sunset times and bring flashlights if you plan to paddle after dark.
- Do not camp or hang out on sandbars or streambanks without landowner permission, as these are almost entirely privately owned.
- Do not dig for fossils or artifacts. Again, most of the land is privately owned, and digging also contributes to soil erosion.

Have FUN and BE SAFE!

Always wear a PFD (Life Jacket)



Mills County Neighbor

Night crawlers are kind of earthworm that most people are familiar with and are often unaware that they are not native, they were imported in the 1700s from Europe. Morning walks and outdoor work will often lead you to encounter these odd creatures. Night crawlers come to the surface to feed and mate. Each worm has both male and female organs and when two find each other they join with a band of mucus that allows the swapping of sperm. Eventually each will lay eggs that create a new night crawler generation. Nightcrawlers found in our area do not pose a threat to our native worms, unlike other invasive nightcrawlers found in areas of the country. They serve as a consistent link in the food chain, great for aerating the soil and an easy source of bait for fishing.

Earth worms are easily moved around the world through landscaping products and bait facilities- this mobility has proven to be an issue with more aggressive species. The Asian Jumping Worm was recently found in Iowa. They are faster, live in colonies and eat more which leads to significant changes in the soil structure in an infested area — and potentially all that grows there.

Upcoming Events:

Tiny Nature Adventures

April 3rd and May 1st

The first Wednesday of each month from 10:00-11:00 am at Pony Creek Park Nature Center (extra dates scheduled during the summer). Nature themed activities for children ages 2-5 years old, siblings are welcome to tag along. Adult must stay with child and pre-registration is required. We will be outdoors when weather allows so dress accordingly.

Natives VS Invasives- April 14th @ 2:00 pm

A presentation at Pony Creek Nature Center will address the challenges of invasives in our woodlands, native and invasive species identification, and management practices. Weather permitting, a hike will follow to look for woodland wildflowers and invasive Garlic Mustard removal.

Snakes of Mills County- May 25th @ 1:00 pm

Come learn about SNAKES! What they eat? Where they live? Join us at Pony Creek Nature Center to learn snake identification and the status of snakes in Iowa and the United States. Live snakes will be used for this program. Pre-registration is required for planning purposes.

Pre-registration for programs is quick and easy to do. All we need is a name and the number of participants that will be attending. You can call the Pony Creek Nature Center at 712-527-9685 or email dmontgomery@millscountyconservation.gov

