

# The Nature of Things

THE BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 10 WINTER 2015/2016

## Let Your Heritage Not be Lost *By Karen M. Phelps*

*Behold the Work of the Old...  
Let your heritage not be lost,  
But bequeath it as a Memory,  
Treasure and Blessing...  
Gather the lost and the hidden  
and preserve it for thy Children.  
Christian Metz, 1846*

This is a quote I learned as a child growing up in the Amanas. The quote itself was spoken by one of the church leaders of the community. I gave little thought to it growing up, but only now as I am older and have children and grandchildren of my own, do I realize the importance of this poetic quote. I think of all the wonderful things I was taught by my parents and grandparents in my developmental years and yearn to pass on to my children.

My ability to knit came about because my Oma (grandmother) taught me how to make the traditional Amana mittens; a gift my grandchildren have yet to receive. I would spend many a summer day watching Oma knit, and now admire her patience as she calmly took the time to hold my clumsy fingers in hers and work the magic of those needles. Even though Oma has been gone for sometime, I can still feel her hands gently guiding my fingers as I knit items for my family and friends.

My sense of place in the outdoors came about because my family felt at ease there and instilled in my sister and me an appreciation for all things wild. And so perhaps this is why these are the very lessons I try to pass on to the many children I come in contact with through my job as a Naturalist.

In this fast-paced era of technology where cellphones, computers, Facebook®, and many other forms of instant communication take place, we seem to be becoming more disconnected rather than connected with our family and friends. Sure we know things, but do we *feel* things. Do we feel the touch of an elderly hand, gently caressing ours - years after that loved one is gone from our lives. Do we feel the wind on our faces as a gentle breeze beckons us onward through a busy day.

*Continued on page 9*



### Inside this Issue

**Calendar of Events**  
Insert

**Come a Long Ways, Baby**  
**60 Years in Conservation**  
page 2

**The Memorable Hunt**  
page 3

**Log Beds for Hannen**  
page 5

**Prairie Girl's Notebook**  
page 6

**Board Member Profile**  
page 7

**The Wildcats of Wildcat**  
page 8

**Yurts at Rodgers**  
page 10

Electronic versions are  
available at our website  
[www.bentoncountyiowa.org](http://www.bentoncountyiowa.org)  
Contact us at:  
319-472-4942 or  
[info@bentoncountyparks.com](mailto:info@bentoncountyparks.com)  
to be added  
to our mailing list.

*Celebrating 60 years  
of Conservation in 2016*



## We've Come a Long Ways, Baby *By Aaron Askelson, Naturalist*

As Woody Guthrie said "This Land is Your Land"

As you might have gathered from this newsletter, we are celebrating an anniversary this year. Sixty years of conservation in Benton County. We started by constructing the first man-made lake built by a County Conservation Board. Hannen Lake, located south of Blainstown, was built in 1958 and became part of Benton County Conservation's first public park. We have continued to grow over the years adding Rodgers Park near Vinton as well as 5 parks along the Cedar River and numerous public areas for hunting and simply enjoying the outdoors.

1956 was the year that sixteen counties decided having conservation boards to help manage public lands was important. This marks a very important event in Iowa history. You see, Iowa has very little public land when you look at it compared to the other 49 states. Public lands are important for many reasons but a few of them are; the preservation of our natural heritage, hunting, fishing, environmental education, protection of our watersheds, and recreation just to name a few. These public lands give non-landowners access to areas they would not be able to use or afford if they were held in private hands.

A lot has changed since 1956 when Benton County Conservation first began. Here are just a few of the highlights that occurred back then: • Carol Morris won the Miss Iowa pageant and then went on to win Miss USA. • Dick Clark took over Bob Horn's Bandstand and it became known as American Bandstand. I am sure he spun "Heartbreak Hotel" on his record player, which was one of the top hits from the fresh up and coming artist Elvis Presley. • In the field of science, the DNA molecule was photographed for the first time and the hovercraft was invented by Christopher Cockerell. • The world famous abstract painter Jackson Pollack died in a car crash. • Kids for the first time ever got to experience the joy of playing with Play-Doh, Yahtzee, and Ant Farms. • A First Class stamp cost only three cents. • Autherine Lucy was the first black student to attend the University of Alabama. • Many houses in America enjoyed watching "I Love Lucy and the Ed Sullivan Show" on their new television sets. • Norma Jean Mortensen legally changed her name to Marilyn Monroe. • "Under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. • And maybe my personal favorite, the first snooze alarm clock was marketed as "The Snooz Alarm".

Life is certainly a lot different than it was 60 years ago. People are living longer and life has maybe sped up some, but for many of us we are still lucky to have this great county park system across this magnificent state. Benton County Conservation has changed and grown over the years also, but our main focus of providing beautiful areas where people can relax and recreate in nature stays the same. This is true for all the counties in Iowa and if you don't believe me be sure to check out our statewide website for a link to all 99 county conservation departments in Iowa. [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com) is a wealth of information about all the events, activities, and parks that our statewide county conservation boards have to offer.

Over the next year we will be switching over to an online reservation system for all the cabins, yurts and shelters that are available to rent in our county. This will streamline the process and make it possible for people to reserve some of our facilities up to two years in advance. People will also be able to pay for these facilities using a credit card which should help our customers and our staff.

Just think, back in 1956 one of the first solar powered radios went on sale, and today the solar panels on the roof of the nature center supply our building with over a third of its electrical needs. Change keeps coming and exciting things are on the horizon. Here is to another 60 years in conservation.

## The Memorable Hunt *By Zach Parmater, Conservation Technician*

After a week of scouting and an unsuccessful Saturday morning hunt on the first day of the youth turkey season 2015, it was no surprise to me that my 6 year old son, Aiden, didn't want to go sit in the truck for an hour before dark and scout a bird to hunt in the morning. I had already told myself that I wasn't going to push him. If he didn't want to go scouting I wasn't going to make him. Reluctantly, I headed off without him. I was backing out of the drive when one of my brothers called to see if I was going scouting. When he learned that I was he was quick to say, "Stop and pick me up". You see, when spring turkey season is upon us, that's all we think about, and this was the first year that we were taking someone in the family during the youth season.

While scouting, my brother and I were recapping the hunt that morning and what had gone wrong. The days leading up today we had been scouting birds on a piece of private property that my family hunts. We thought we had the birds figured out, however, the night before opening morning, the birds roosted nearly half-a-mile from where they had been roosting. Fortunately we also had permission to hunt the property the birds had moved to. We were after a bird that had been strutting almost every morning all by himself. Another flock of birds with two Toms and more than a dozen hens decided they would invade our Tom's territory. Our fool proof plan to harvest our bird was thwarted opening morning by the chaos created by the other turkeys invading this location. The bird we were after was a subordinate Tom and thus why he had been by himself for many days leading up to the hunt. With the more dominant Toms in the area, he was nowhere to be found and wouldn't even gobble with the other Toms being so close. We quickly changed our tactics and turned our focus to the invading flock of birds behind us. It's hard enough for one hunter out in the middle of a pasture to get repositioned with a flock of turkeys within 80 yards, let alone 3 adults and one 6-year old boy. Somehow, in the bright cool spring morning, we managed to all get turned around with the little bit of cover a log pile provided. The camera that we had all intentions of filming my son's first hunt with had become an inconvenience, and that plan was abandoned. Our focus was on getting Aiden his first bird.

There was 20 minutes of calling, hoping the birds would come closer. To no avail; the birds ended up heading for their normal stomping grounds hundreds of yards away. We reluctantly watched as the birds crossed the gravel road to the west of us and become small black specs in the distance. Still no site of the bird that we were originally hunting. Someone made the executive decision to call the hunt. I don't remember who, but we were all excited with the show of strutting and gobbling we had witnessed, and yet were all frustrated that our plan had fallen through and our quarry had escaped our grasp.

As my brother and I sat in the truck reminiscing, a gobble snapped both of us back to reality. "Did you hear that?" I asked my brother. Our eyes, glued to binoculars, searched over the landscape for the bird that had gobbled. There he was, out in the middle of the section strutting all by himself. This bird was fired up. My brother and I sat in my truck for the next half-hour watching this bird gobble, strut, and then run a hundred yards or so before repeating the process. We watched this bird cover almost a half mile, acting like a crazed bird strutting, gobbling, and running south away from us. As the sun was setting and the temperatures were falling rapidly as they often do in the early spring in Iowa, I thought about rolling up the windows in the truck. Doing so would have prevented us from hearing this bird's thunderous gobbles and starting the trucks for the sake of heat would have also impaired our ability to hear. Our only option was to put up with the cold.

Still watching through our binoculars, all we had to do was see where he was going to fly up and roost for the night. Just as it was getting almost too dark to see, the Tom flew up to roost right on the edge of the timber. On the drive back to town, we created a masterful plan for the next morning's hunt. I dropped my brother off at his house, confirmed our meeting time in the morning, and hurried home to inform Aiden of the successful scouting venture.



**The Memorable Hunt** *Continued from page 3*

With our gear ready for the next morning, the alarm went off dark and very early. I laid there thinking about how I didn’t want to get up. Then I remembered the bird from the night before. I woke my son with excitement in my voice. “Let’s go get your first bird buddy”. Now I don’t know about you, but my son isn’t easy to wake for school. When it comes to hunting, Aiden is out of bed and ready in five minutes.

After a quick breakfast and my coffee, we loaded the truck and headed to pick up my brother. When we arrived at our hunting grounds, the morning air was cool and we only had a hundred yard walk to where we planned on setting up for the hunt. As we walked in the dark to our destination, it was only 30 minutes or so until legal shooting hours. I decided to take the chance of getting out late, rather than being too early and Aiden getting cold or bored sitting in the dark waiting for the bird to fly down from its roost. Seasoned hunters know what to expect and have an easier time waiting patiently for sunrise to begin the hunt. Seconds after his question came a gobble. It was not the bird we watched the night before. This was a Jake; a young male turkey easily distinguished by their weak and halfhearted pathetic attempt at gobbling. He sounded close to the location of where our bird roosted the night before. Another gobble, this time it was much louder and we knew our Tom was still there.

We finished our short walk, set up our chairs and decoys. Aiden was sitting between my legs on a low profile turkey hunting chair. After we were settled and ready to go, we sat and listened to more birds gobbling. The Tom we were after had been joined by a couple of Jakes that must have flown up to roost after dark the night before.

Aiden sat between my legs and I coached him on what to do while my brother called softly to get the Tom’s attention. It worked. A loud gobble told us the Tom knew we were there. Now all we had to do was wait for him to fly down and walk into our decoys. A few minutes before shooting hours, the bird flew down into the field to our left. He was on the ground and coming our way. We had a little knoll to our left and could not see him, but his gobbles, spitting and drumming, informed us he was closing the distance. I whispered to my son, “He’s coming from over here”, pointing in the direction of the bird’s gobbling. “You have to get your gun up and ready. He is going to pop up over the hill right there and walk towards our decoys. Take the safety off, keep your finger off the trigger until you’re ready to shoot, get on him and take the shot when you’re ready, just like we practiced.” Aiden nodded his head to let me know that he heard every word I said. Of course, I didn’t have the slightest idea what this bird was going to do, but I knew what I wanted him to do. Thankfully he did what I hoped and came over the hill and headed straight to our decoys, presenting Aiden with a perfect shot.

Now Aiden and I had been out on numerous occasions target practicing. He was shooting a Remington 870 20-gauge youth shotgun. He had proven to me with his practice rounds that he was accurate enough to ethically harvest a bird. The last thing I wanted was for him to make a poor shot and wound an animal. His shooting skills had improved a lot since the previous year, so he and I both felt comfortable with him going on his first turkey hunt.

After he had the shotgun to his shoulder, I made sure he had taken the safety off. I had him aim to the left about where I had last heard the bird 30 yards over the hill. Now at this point the anticipation was killing me. I was so excited and very much looking forward to what I hoped was to unfold in the next few minutes. I couldn’t help but wonder at that moment what was going through Aiden’s mind. Later I found out that he was thinking “man I hope I don’t miss”. Right on schedule the Tom’s brightly colored head appeared, he spotted the decoys and began his final approach. As his entire body came into view I could feel Aiden’s excitement, as he too started to shake. Our guess on where to aim was perfect. All Aiden had to do was wait until the bird walked in front of his gun and pull the trigger.

**New Furniture from Old Trees** *By Logan Hahn, Hannen Lake Park Ranger*

I have written at length about this in the past: the pine tree forest areas at Hannen Lake Park and how they are undergoing some drastic changes as the stands mature. Many trees in these areas are becoming blighted and unhealthy due to the ever increasing competition for light and resources these trees need. To help reduce the damage to these areas, many of the pine trees may need to be harvested to allow for the healthy development of some of the trees that may be saved.



Like any park system, healthy trees are of the utmost importance for both wildlife and the people who come to enjoy the natural aesthetic at Hannen. With the importance of the trees in mind, it is hard to justify removing them from the park. However, in the spirit of making lemonade from lemons, several of the pines taken down at Hannen are being used to build a new bunk bed for the cabin.

Building log furniture is a great way to make use of lumber that would otherwise have rotted on the forest floor (however, it’s important to leave some fallen woody debris as it makes great wildlife habitat). Although it is a time consuming process, building log furniture is a very enjoyable process.

Some of the steps in completing the project include tree selection. Ideally, all of the lumber required for the project can be cut from as few trees as possible. To make this happen, the right trees of the right diameter need to be cut so that they can be divided into different sections of diameter for the project.

Bark peeling is another time consuming aspect of the process. To peel the bark from the logs, a special tool called a “draw knife” is used to scrape the bark off, one strip at a time. Finally it is necessary to taper the ends of the logs into what is called a “tenon end”. This end fits into a corresponding

diameter hole drilled into another log. Tenon ends can be cut using either a tenon cutter or a cylinder mill. After all the logs are cut and tapered, the project can be assembled.

For added protection against wear and spills, a clear coat or stain can be used on the logs once they have been sanded. Though sanding is a very time consuming process, it provides a quality appearance to the final piece.

We are also excited to announce that starting in January of 2017, we will be taking reservations for our shelters, cabins and yurts online! Keep up-to-date with all the latest happenings by following us on Facebook or locating us at [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com).

*The bunkbed at right is an example of the type of log bed we have constructed for our Hannen Cabin. We hope to be designing more of these beds for future use in our other cabins as the need arises.*





## Prairie Harvest by Coralee Bodeker

Early this morning I spent a few minutes watching a handful of birds as they scavenged for food across my yard. A mixed flock of sparrows were feeding on the big bluestem planted in the front flower bed—about ten individual House and American Tree Sparrows. It was interesting to watch these birds as they vigorously stripped the tiny seeds off this native grass. Like daring, little acrobats, they clung to their spots on the lanky, nearly-six-foot-tall golden stalks. A few sudden gusts of wind blew, but deterred the acrobats none. These birds were not the only ones, however, I witnessed taking advantage of our ripe prairie plants. In the garden a flock of rowdy chickadees were gorging themselves on the dying prairie sunflowers that line the wire fence. The little black-capped birds were simultaneously chasing each other away from their chosen flower heads and turning summersaults in the air. The chickadees would then show off their nuthatch-like talents by hanging upside down in order to best access the delicious seeds.



... Across my yard there are birds feeding on the ripened seeds of native prairie plants, particularly the invasive House Sparrows, which got me thinking...

To many people in the Midwest, House Sparrows (and Eurasian Tree Sparrows to an extent) are not the most desirable of their tribe. Birds of these species are rather loud and obnoxious, terribly messy at the feeders, and are not exactly the prettiest birds on the block. And yet, House Sparrows are decidedly here to stay, leading me (after several years) to finally embrace the *good* aspects of their residence —yes, I feel these invasive species do possess at least one good trait.

House Sparrows obviously are not cute, timid American Tree Sparrows, nor are they bold, fuzzy Black-capped Chickadees, but they can do the same things for nature as our native bird species. Sparrows and other seed- and fruit-eaters

are, in a way, nature's "farmers"—they "harvest" seeds when they are ripe and often "plant" them somewhere else or spread the seeds around due to their unrefined feeder habits. It has struck me that these, well, let's face it, *unwanted* birds' messy habits could be put to better use by filling our feeders (and planting our yards) with the native seeds and plants Iowa has long been missing. Perhaps the House Sparrow could become a tool in our quest to revive Iowa's native tallgrass prairie species? It is estimated that around 40% of American households feed backyard birds (*The Nature Conservancy*)—is it time for a rethinking of what is placed in those feeders? My own observations seem to indicate a genuine liking of big bluestem seeds in particular by these European immigrants...

*Just some thoughts from a native Iowa Prairie Girl.  
Feeder season is upon us...*



'A Prairie Girl's Notebook' is inspired by 'A Naturalist's Notebook' penned by John Schmitt & found in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Living Bird* journal.

## Conservation Welcomes New Board Member

Serving the City of Cedar Rapids in the roles of City Arborist and Parks Superintendent since January of 2009, Daniel Gibbins and his family relocated to Benton County from Columbia, Missouri. Upon graduating in 1999 from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a B.S. in Forest Resource Management, Daniel worked for the University of Missouri in Horticulture and Agro-forestry research project management and then as City Horticulturist for the Columbia, Missouri Parks and Recreation Department. Daniel is also an ISA Certified Arborist, and member of the National Recreation and Parks Association, the Iowa Park and Recreation Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, and the Society of Municipal Arborists. In addition to a passion for natural resource management, Daniel enjoys public speaking and teaching, and has directed numerous student and volunteer groups in park maintenance, forestry management, aquatic shoreline restoration, horticulture, and offender rehabilitation for the Missouri Department of Corrections.



Daniel and his family love the Iowa outdoors, especially enjoying biking, swimming, hiking, hunting and exploring the woods and prairies offered by local county and state parks. Home education of 4 children allows for a focus on nature and conservation, while favorite family pastimes include actively managing a native woodland, tall grass prairie, fruit trees and conifer groves.

To Daniel, conservation and environmental health is not simply about preserving natural areas for their intrinsic value, but is also a fight for a way of life being lost in our new digital and electronic age. He sums his feelings up with the following thoughts: "A generation of kids are growing up disconnected with the outdoors who increasingly exist in an unhealthy, synthetic and fast-paced culture far from our natural world. Learning, exploring, working and playing simply in the outdoors to imprint life-long memories and skills with family and friends is becoming a lost value. These and other things we are losing in our culture must be won back for future generations, so they too may enjoy healthy and rich lives connected with the soil, plants, trees and wildlife that are truly amazing if we take the time to both enjoy and steward them. To this end, county conservation plays a vital role in promoting both inspiration and opportunities to enrich our lives and health through active living in nature."

We welcome Daniel and look forward to working with him on our future conservation efforts.

### AmazonSmile?

AmazonSmile is a website operated by Amazon that lets customers enjoy the same wide selection of products, low prices, and convenient shopping features as on Amazon.com. The difference is that when customers shop on AmazonSmile (<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/20-2006699>), the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the charitable organizations selected by customers, at no extra cost to you! So please support Benton County Conservation Foundation and use **smile.amazon.com** THANK YOU!



**The Wildcats of Wildcat Bluff** *by Jon Geiger, River Parks Ranger*

I am the Wildcat Bluff park ranger and have been residing at Wildcat Bluff County Park since January of 2009. I grew up in the area and worked in our conservation department since 1994. I have always heard that this area was known to have had Bobcats that once roamed the bluffs. Until recently I thought that this was either rumor or a story of the past.

Development of the park began to modernize early in the 90’s with the availability of campsites that provided electricity to campers. In addition a pavilion has been added, a disk golf course has been established, and a maintenance garage and ranger residence have been built. This park gets a large amount of users during the summer months. I often wondered how all of this would affect the wildlife in the area. I began to question if the development of this park was pushing wildlife out of the area. I questioned if the legendary cats of Wildcat could still exist in the area or if they had moved on to areas of more seclusion.

One summer day in 2014 I awoke around 5:30 am. I started into my normal routine of making a pot of coffee when I happened to look out our sliding glass window into our back yard. “Bobcat, bobcat”, I shouted in a quietly excited voice to my wife. It was dawn and through the low light conditions we could make out a bobcat walking roughly 15 yards from our back door. We scrambled around the house trying to find a camera while still keeping one eye on the animal. All we could find was the camera on our phone and took the best picture



*Bobcat in backyard of Ranger residence at Wildcat Bluff Park.  
Taken in 2015 by Mrs. Jon Geiger*

that we could. Unfortunately, the pictures we ended up with were fuzzy and reminded us of a Bigfoot photo. We could make out that something was there, but very unclear for identification purposes.

In the spring of the following year, we were amazed to look out our front picture window and see another bobcat about 50 yards in front of our house, walking in the cattle pasture. Both of us knew that it was too far away to get a decent photo with the camera we had so we just enjoyed watching it as it descended down the hill, crossed the road, and then disappeared out of sight. We saw another bobcat that fall. I again looked out our window facing our backyard when I had the opportunity to see another. This one was

in our backyard but was walking toward the front of the house. “Bobcat”, I yelled to my wife who happened to be sitting in our living room chair. She hopped up and proceeded to our back window to look. “No, the front window”, I exclaimed. So she looked at me puzzled and walked to the front window. “There is nothing there”, she said. I joined her at the window and told her to just give it a minute. After about a minute it appeared and continued to walk down our driveway and eventually out of sight.

There have been a few nights that we have heard these animals while we were outside. One of the times I was letting our beagle out. While I was holding her leash I heard what could only be described as a loud high pitched scream that seemed to echo through the bluffs. The kind of sound that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. Our dog froze in place, stared into the darkness and quickly proceeded to the door of the house while occasionally looking back to see what it was. Even though it was such an eerie sound, it was an awesome sound to hear. I let our dog back inside and continued to listen to the bobcat for another couple of minutes until I could no longer hear it.

**The Wildcats of Wildcat Bluff** *Continued from page 8*

The bobcat in the photo was about 15 yards away and hunting around our wood pile. My wife took this photo as well as a video in the short time before it disappeared. I have spoken with a few other people who have spotted them in the park and a neighbor who has seen one by their house also. It is amazing that these animals seem to have a decent population within the park and seem to be doing very well. I will continue to watch out the window every morning and evening to catch another glimpse of these animals and possibly get more pictures. I hope that this is a sign that the population of bobcats in Benton county is growing and that we and our children will have the opportunity to see these animals in their natural habitat.

**Heritage** *Continued from page 1*

It’s so easy to find answers on the Internet, but do those answers come with emotion and lessons learned by someone struggling to discover the treasure along the way. Heritage is something that is indeed to be treasured. It provides a grounding as to who we are and where we are going. It assures us a sense of place. Heritage is that which is inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and bestowed to future generations.

In Conservation, Iowa’s natural heritage provides a balance and a guideline for future members of our team. There have been a multitude of lessons taught over generations of conservationists. Many of these conservationists laid the groundwork for what is today known as Iowa’s County Conservation System. Iowa is unique in that it is the only state in the United States with a county conservation system.

The citizens of Benton County were among the first sixteen counties in the state of Iowa to vote in a conservation department with its own governing body. This momentous event took place in 1956. Now in 2016, as we celebrate 60 years in conservation, Benton County Conservation is still focusing on improving and preserving wildlife habitat, establishing and maintaining public parks for citizens to enjoy, and providing outdoor opportunities with heritage in mind.

Our natural heritage involves the prairies, wetlands and oak savannas that laid the groundwork for the rich-fertile soil Iowa is known for. In the Midwest alone, topsoil is rapidly disappearing, along with the heritage it represents. Iowa loses an average of five tons of soil per acre a year due to erosion.<sup>1</sup> Iowa and Kansas have lost more topsoil to erosion in a shorter time span than that of the hilly regions of Nepal.<sup>2</sup> Our heritage is being washed down the streams and blown across the landscape. We are depleting the supply of topsoil faster than it can be replaced. As we celebrate our 60th year in conservation, we are working with farmers and landowners, providing them with resources to improve the quality of their land and the watersheds.

Six years ago, in 2010, 63% of Iowa voters passed a constitutional amendment to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund (NRORTF). In 2015 a bill was successfully introduced to the senate. We encourage the citizens of Benton county and the state of Iowa to lobby representatives and the governor of Iowa to pass the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund.

Iowa’s Water & Land Legacy (IWILL) is a diverse group of organizations, agencies and individuals working together in coalition to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund. The Trust Fund will provide a much needed, permanent and constitutionally protected funding source for conserving and enhancing water quality and natural areas in Iowa, including agricultural soils, fish and wildlife habitat, parks and trails. To learn more about the NRORTF and pledge your support, visit <http://iowaswaterandlandlegacy.org>

We need to let not our heritage be lost, but bequeath it as a memory, treasure and blessing... If we gather the lost and the hidden, we can truly preserve what is wild and important for our children. We can provide for them a sense of place in an ever changing, fast-paced world of technology; but it must start with us.

1. Conservation Districts of Iowa  
2. Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations by David R. Montgomery 2007 (update 2012)



**Two New Yurts Await You at Rodgers Park** *By Scott Bahmann, Deputy Director*

Have you ever wanted to go camping in the great outdoors but you don't have a camper or a tent? Even if you did have these things, you could avoid all that hassle and come stay at the new Yurts at Rodgers Park.

New in 2016, Rodgers Park will be offering two-24 foot round yurts for rent. Not sure what a yurt is - according to Wikipedia a traditional Yurt (from the Turkics) or Ger (Mongolian) is a portable, round tent covered with skins or felt and used as a dwelling by nomads in the steppes of Central Asia. The structure comprises an angled assembly or latticework of pieces of wood or bamboo for walls, a door frame, ribs (poles, rafters), and a wheel (crown, compression ring) possibly steam-bent. The roof structure is often self-supporting, but large yurts may have interior posts supporting the crown. The top of the wall of self-supporting yurts is prevented from spreading by means of a tension band which opposes the force of the roof ribs. Modern yurts may be permanently built on a wooden platform; they may use modern materials such as steam-bent wooden framing or metal framing, canvas or tarpaulin, Plexiglas dome, wire rope, or radiant insulation.

In the fall of 2015 Benton County Conservation staff spent time clearing trees and grading the site to get ready for construction. Once the area was cleared, contractors installed a septic system, electrical lines, and a concrete slabs for the yurts to sit on.

As for construction, the yurt is supported by an accordion style wall stretched around the perimeter and then fastened to a concrete slab. This helps hold the yurt in place. Then with a temporary homemade scaffolding placed in the center of the yurt, 2 x 6 rafters and a compression ring were installed. Just in case you have a large amount of snow or wind, 2 x 4 wall studs were attached to the rafters for more reinforcement. To help protect from the elements, insulation, protected by a liner are placed on the outside shell of the yurt.

The real struggle came when we installed the canvas wall and roof. Three staff members worked for several hours to accomplish this task and by the second yurt we were pros. The last detail was to cover the large hole in the roof with a plastic dome. This dome can be raised or lowered to allow for ventilation. It also provides for natural light and beautiful viewing of the stars or full moon.

Since we want to provide the best overnight experience, we will be offering all kinds of amenities. Once you walk in the door, you will notice a room that has a warm home feel that is regulated by a heater or AC unit depending on the temperature you prefer. You can also kick off your shoes and enjoy a comfortable couch while watching TV. Meals won't be a problem with a full functioning kitchen. A sleeper sofa and a twin/queen bunkbed will provide ample room for naps and comfortable overnight lodging. To make this experience even better the yurts will also have a restroom and shower. A nice breakfast bar is a great palce to sit and play cards or just eat a meal.

The yurts can be reserved for the upcoming season by contacting the park ranger at (319) 560-9803. Starting in 2017, all cabin and shelter reservations will be done online at [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com)



**The Memorable Hunt** *Continued from page 4*

Approaching the decoys, the Tom was in full strut. As he strutted towards the decoys, my son started to slowly swing his gun along with the bird and I knew he was on him. It seemed like the turkey had been in view for 5 minutes, when in reality it had been less than 30 seconds. An aggressive cut from a diaphragm call from my brother was all we needed for the bird to come out of strut and stick his head up. Aiden pulled the trigger, the Tom crumpled. "Yeah Buddy, good shot!". We made sure the gun was empty and the safety was on, then we eagerly walked over to the bird. The smile on my son's face was priceless. At 6 years old he had just shot his first turkey 10 minutes after shooting hours began. We tagged the bird and picked up our gear. Aiden wanted to try and carry his trophy back to the truck. I was happy he wanted to, but seconds later, he gave into the weight of his 25-pound Tom.

When we reached the truck my adrenaline rush was still on high, and so was his. Smiling from ear to ear, he couldn't wait to show his mother and sister, then proceeded to show all of his grandparents. After an hour of bragging rights, it was time to clean the bird. Aiden was eager to learn how and even insisted that he do it. We worked together and after a short while we had also cleaned the Tom's beard, fan and spurs and were ready to preserve them.

Aiden and I rubbed the turkey meat down with spices and smoked it for supper. He was so proud to be feeding his family with the bird he'd gotten that morning. Needless to say I was one proud Father. My son practiced, he made a great shot, and he was proud of what he had done. All in all, it will be a day that I never forget and I hope he never does either. I must say, it was the best tasting bird I've ever eaten.



## ***Conservation Board Members***

Dan Gibbins: Urbana, Member  
Dan Hill: Vinton, Member  
Jean Ohlen: Blairstown, Member  
Denni Randall: Belle Plaine, Vice Chair  
Randy Scheel: Garrison, Chair

The Benton County Conservation Board meets the second Monday of every month at 5:30 at the Nature Center. Meetings are open to the public.

## ***Conservation Staff***

Scott Bahmann	Deputy Director/Ranger
Karen Phelps	Interpretive Naturalist
Aaron Askelson	Interpretive Naturalist
Jon Geiger	River Parks Ranger
Logan Hahn	Hannen Park Ranger
Zach Parmater	Conservation Tech

Email anyone on staff by using their first initial combined with their last name  
@bentoncountyparks.com  
eg: kphelps@bentoncountyparks.com

***Please follow us on Facebook at Benton County Conservation***  
***Visit us on the web at [www.bentoncountyiowa.org](http://www.bentoncountyiowa.org) or [www.mycountyparks.com](http://www.mycountyparks.com)***  
***Benton County Conservation, 5718 20th Ave., Dr., Vinton, IA 52349***  
***319-472-4942***

***Celebrating 60 Years of Conservation in 2016!***

Benton County Conservation Board  
Interpretive Nature Center  
5718 20th Avenue Drive  
Vinton, Iowa 52349

