

# Cedar Valley Visions

## Conservation News

### Park Updates

Article by Chip Brown and Photos by Jacob Wilbourne

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This season we continued the remodel of the Little Campground at Cedar Valley Park. Last fall we finished dirt work on the site to level out the back portion of the campground in order to accommodate campsite placement. This season we replaced old electric pedestals and ran waterlines to more spaced out sites. The original design of this campground had spaces more closely together than current camping units could reasonably accommodate. More often than not, modern camping units are much larger and wider than they were even twenty years ago, so larger and longer sites are needed to accommodate a growing user base.



As of right now, water is not connected to the campground, but laying the infrastructure now makes it easier for future park improvements. We are always trying to think of ways to make future maintenance and park improvements easier.

Additionally, we have improved facilities at Shelter Two at Cedar Valley Park by putting in a permanent pit toilet. This new toilet is handicap accessible with a designated pull-up spot, concrete sidewalk and zero-entry stalls. One stall is fully ADA compliant for those park users with mobility issues, while the other stall is standard.

Camping season is in full swing, and we love seeing our regular users as well as new park guests. We try to keep our park users in mind when we are making improvements so that we may accommodate your growing needs.



### Creature Feature~ Blanding's Turtle

Article Jacob Wilbourne, Park Technician



Blanding's turtles are distinctive due to their domed shell and yellow chin. Blanding's turtles are medium-sized semi-aquatic turtles that can live as long as 70 years in the wild. This turtle is omnivorous, feeding on a variety of insects, plants, crustaceans, and even fish and frogs.

These turtles reach maturity at around 20 years old. Blanding's turtles mate from April through early May, with nesting season beginning in early June. They require large areas of habitat that include shallow wetlands surrounded by areas of well-drained soil for nesting.

Their range centers around the Great Lakes region, with populations being found from Nebraska to New York and southern Ontario to Indiana. Due to its needs for larger areas of habitat, the primary threat to the species is habitat fragmentation. This species is considered threatened here in Iowa.

## Bridge Replacement on the Hoover Nature Trail

Article by Mike Dauber, Director and Photo by Jacob Wilbourne, Park Technician

Running through West Branch to the town of Oasis is a 3.7-mile section of the Herbert Hoover Nature Trail, its foundation the repurposed railroad bed of the Rock Island Railroad, which once ran through the area. The Rock Island Railroad went bankrupt in 1980, but the bed was repurposed thanks to the hard work of local citizens in 1990 as a segment of the much larger Herbert Hoover Nature Trail, part of the Rails-to-Trails program. This multiuse trail allows users to view the surrounding nature as well as artifacts of the trail's past life as a rail line.

Aging infrastructure has led to the need to replace the old timber bridge on the trail. After years of use, the bridge has started to show signs of its age. In 2023, Director Mike Dauber applied for and received a State Recreation Trails Grant to help cover costs of bridge replacement. This project began in early June of 2025 and is expected to be completed by the end of June. The new bridge will allow users to once again enjoy our section of the trail safely!



## Partnering for Better Health

Article by Jacob Wilbourne, Park Technician and Photos by Allie Taber LEAP Program Specialist, ISU Extension

A new partnership project with the Iowa State Extension office has been completed! This project is part of the Leveraging Activities and Partnerships (LEAP) program designed to help promote health and well-being through Iowa. Six Iowa counties have partnered with LEAP; these counties are Cedar, Clinton, Crawford, Franklin, Muscatine, and Pottawattamie. The main focus of the LEAP program is to increase access to healthy food and increase accessibility to safe physical activity.

In the late summer of 2024, Erin Blackwell of the ISU Extension Office reached out to us about the program and potential partnership. We soon began with a planning and brainstorming session on how best our two agencies can promote the goals of LEAP in our parks. For our location, we landed upon the Cedar County portion of the Hoover Nature Trail for the location due to its high overall user base and accessibility to the community. We landed upon creating a way for individuals to create and measure personal goals while on our trails. We decided that total distance traveled would be the best fit with the goals of the program, and the mile marker signs were decided upon as an easy way for people to measure their progress. Allie Taber took over the program in February of 2025 after Blackwell's departure. Both Erin and Allie contributed greatly to the success of this partnership.



During the design process, we tried to stay true to the history of the location as a former railroad. This led to the design of the signs and lettering being reminiscent of those that would have been used at the time of the rails operation. While using the trail, you can see some of the historical infrastructure still present, allowing trail users to step into the past while enjoying nature at the same time.

We would like to thank the staff at the Iowa State Extension Office in Cedar County for the opportunity to be part of this program. It is our joy to help serve the community in getting out and enjoying the outdoors.

# Kids Corner

## Cedar Valley Visions

### DIY Tiny Bug Viewer

Please have an adult help you with the following project

#### Materials

Scissors  
Graph Paper  
Clear Cling Wrap  
Tape  
Two Small Paper Cups  
A pencil  
A glue stick



Photo Credit: Natural History Museum of London

#### Instructions

1. Cut the bottom out of your first cup with the scissors. Cut a section of cling wrap to cover the opening and attach it firmly to the bottom of your cup with tape on the outside edges.
2. Trace the bottom of your second cup on a piece of graph paper. Cut this traced section out with your scissors and using the glue stick glue to the bottom of your second cup.
3. Find small insects to be examined and place them in the first cup and gently slide the second cup inside.
4. Watch your insects movements and enjoy!



### Summer Nature Scavenger Hunt

Go out and try to complete the whole list!

- A red-tailed hawk
- A leopard frog
- Prairie flowers
- A bumble bee
- A pelican
- A small insect

## Word Scramble

NGHFISI LEPO \_\_\_\_\_  
NGSWIMIM \_\_\_\_\_  
NPECALI \_\_\_\_\_  
DILW LOFWER \_\_\_\_\_  
INGSHFI \_\_\_\_\_  
EDR OXF \_\_\_\_\_  
XBO TRLTEU \_\_\_\_\_  
SUMERM \_\_\_\_\_

## Nature Word Search

R	I	V	E	R	H	B	C	A	B
Y	E	Q	T	L	I	C	A	J	U
B	O	A	K	A	Y	A	K	D	T
A	G	C	M	N	F	M	W	P	T
C	O	A	Q	T	U	P	M	L	E
V	H	N	S	J	W	I	L	N	R
S	T	O	R	M	L	N	Y	T	F
F	O	E	B	S	O	G	U	P	L
G	A	U	O	C	R	R	X	J	Y
M	U	S	S	E	L	P	E	S	A

River, Kayak, Canoe, Camping,  
Butterfly, Storm, Smore, Mussel

Answers: Fishing Pole, Swimming, Pelican, Wild Flower, Fishing, Red Fox, Box Turtle, Summer



### A Look Ahead

Summer is fast approaching and we have a number of programs we don't want you to miss out on! We understand that between vacations and school being out it can be hard to plan for some events so we wanted to give a quick highlight of a few of our upcoming summer camp programs. All summer camps registration cost is \$15 due before day of camp.



**Critter Camp, Bennett (Grades 2nd and 3rd), July 17th. Registration opens July 1st.**

Critter Camp is all about animals! Campers will get a chance to learn all about the animals around them.

**Little Explorer Camp, Bennett (Grades 2nd and 3rd), July 24th. Registration opens July 7th.**

We want to encourage your sense of exploration! Campers will get a chance to explore Bennett Park with us!

**Nature Explorer Camp, Cedar Valley (Grades 4th and 5th), July 31st. Registration opens July 14th.**

Campers will get to work on outdoor exploration skills in this fun camp!

**Survivor Camp, Bennett (Grades 6th and 7th), August 7th. Registration opens July 21st.**

Come learn survival skills with us! Campers will survive the day with us in this fun themed camp!

### Summer Camp Fun!



Programs may be canceled due to weather. Please follow us on Facebook for program cancellations and updates.

**Tuesday, July 1, Summer Reading Program**

Tipton Library, 10:30 am.  
Join Miss Sarah for Tipton Libraries summer reading program!

**Wednesday, July 2, Bennett Library Yard Games**

Bennett Library, 1:00 pm.  
Join us at Bennett Library for some outdoor fun!

**Thursday, July 3, Durant Library Story Time**

Durant Library 10:00 am.  
Story time with Miss Sarah !

**Sunday, July 6, Paddle Boarding at Lake MacBride**

3971 Cottage Reserve Road Extension, Solon, Iowa, 2:00 pm.  
No experience necessary, ages four and up welcome to attend. We will provide the boards, and lifejackets. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

**Tuesday, July 8, Surprise Program**

West Branch Library, 6:30 pm.  
Surprise program with Miss Sarah !

**Thursday, July 10, Full Moon Paddle**

Bennett Park, 9:30 pm.  
Ages eight and older welcome! We will provide the canoes, kayaks, lifejackets, and paddles. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

**Saturday, July 12, Paddle boarding at Lake MacBride**

3971 Cottage Reserve Road Extension, Solon, Iowa, 11:00 am.  
We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.



**Sunday, July 13, Paddle boarding at Lake MacBride**

3971 Cottage Reserve Road Extension, Solon, Iowa, 2:00 pm.  
We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.



**Monday, July 14, Durant Library Squirrel Stash and Save Game**

Durant Library, 2:00 pm.  
Join Miss Sarah for a nature themed good time!

**Tuesday, July 15, Summer Reading Program**

Tipton Library, 10:30 am.  
Join Miss Sarah for Tipton Libraries summer reading program!

**Sunday, July 20, Paddle Boarding at Lake MacBride**

3971 Cottage Reserve Road Extension, Solon, Iowa, 2:00 pm.  
We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

**Wednesday, July 23, When Insects Level Up!**

Durant Library, 2:00 pm.  
Come learn all about insects!

**Saturday, July 26, Fungal Foray**

Townsend Wildlife Area, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm.  
The Prairie States Mushroom club will be joining us for a fungal foray!

**Thursday, July 31, Cooking with Miss Sarah**

West Branch Library, 6:30 pm.  
Come see what tasty concoction we can whip up at the library.



**Friday, August 1, Health Fair**

Cedar County Courthouse, 9:00 am—1:00 pm.  
Join us on the courthouse lawn to learn all the ways you can be healthy outdoors.

**Monday, August 4, Durant Library Nature Crafts**

Durant Library, 2:00 pm.  
Join us to craft with some natural materials!

**Monday, August 11, Mechanicsville Library Reading**

Mechanicsville Library 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm.  
Readers 2nd through 6th grades should come join us for a fun reading program!

**Sunday, August 17, Paddle Boarding at Lake MacBride**

Lake MacBride (3971 Cottage Reserve Road Extension, Solon, IA), 2:00 pm.  
Come paddle boarding with Miss Sarah! No experience necessary, ages four and up welcome to attend. We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Everyone will need to wear a properly fitting lifejacket. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

**Friday, August 22, Cooking With Miss Sarah**

Durant Library, 3:30 pm.  
Come see what tasty concoction we can whip up at the library.

**Sunday, August 24, Pelican Festival**

Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area 2564 Amana Road NW, Swisher from 11:00 am - 4:00 pm.  
Come and learn all about pelican's at this amazing festival!

**Thursday, August 28, Story Time**

Durant Library 10:00 am.  
Join Miss Sarah for Story Time at Durant Library!

**Thursday, August 28, Mechanicsville Library Reading**

Mechanicsville Library 3:30 pm.  
Readers 2nd through 6th grade should come join us for a fun reading program!

**Saturday, August 30, Paddle Boarding At West Rochester Sand Pits**

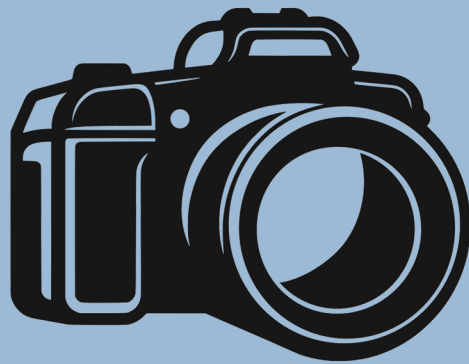
West Rochester Sand Pits, 11:00 am.  
Come paddle boarding with Miss Sarah! No experience necessary, ages four and up welcome to attend. We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Everyone will need to wear a properly fitting lifejacket. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

**Sunday, August 31, Paddle Boarding At West Rochester Sand Pits**

West Rochester Sand Pits, 2:00 pm.  
Come paddle boarding with Miss Sarah! No experience necessary, ages four and up welcome to attend. We will provide the paddle boards, paddles, and lifejackets. Everyone will need to wear a properly fitting lifejacket. Please bring your own water bottles and snacks.

## We Want to See Your Photos!

Have you taken photos out in our parks? Would you like to share them for everyone to see? If so we would love to feature them in our Newsletter! Please send photos to [Jwilbourne@cedarcounty.iowa.gov](mailto:Jwilbourne@cedarcounty.iowa.gov) with the subject "Newsletter Photo". Feel free to tell us a bit about your photo, be sure to include which park you're at, who the subjects and original photographer are and any other relevant details.



## It's Fair Season!

Don't forget to stop by and see us at the fair again this year! We'll be there every day of the fair from July 9th through the 13th. We'll have some cool stuff to learn about and things to hand out! We look forward to seeing you there!



## Wild Recipe: Mulberry Syrup

**Note:** While the recipe calls for black mulberry any mulberry species will do

### Equipment

- 1 Fine mesh strainer or cheesecloth
- 1 Large 4 quart non-reactive sauce pot
- 1 latex gloves optional, for squeezing juice from the berries

### Ingredients

- 5 lbs Ripe black mulberries
- 1 cup Organic sugar or granulated sugar
- 2 Teaspoons fresh lemon juice for canning, optional
- 1 Tiny pinch Kosher salt roughly ¼-1/8 tsp

### Method

1. Put the mulberries in a pot, cover and bring to a simmer over medium heat until hot and steaming, about 10 minutes. Mash the berries around with a potato masher or wooden spoon occasionally.
2. Once the berries are hot and mashed they'll have given up a lot of juice.
3. Pour the mulberries and their juice into a double thickness of cheesecloth over a strainer and allow to cool. Squeeze as much juice from the fruit as you can. If your fruit was clean you can save it to make jam.
4. Combine the juice with the sugar and salt, bring to a gentle simmer and cook for until reduced by 70% to 1.5 cups. This should take roughly 1.5 hours.
5. If you want to can the syrup, add the lemon juice now.
6. Pour the hot syrup into three four oz mason jars or another container. Screw on the lid and process in a water bath canner for 10 minutes. Remove the jars and cool, then label, date, and store in a pantry.
7. The syrup will last for years in the fridge or in the pantry and can also be frozen.

Photo and Recipe Credit: Alan Bergo | Forager Chef



## Cedar County Conservation Board Members

Jean Driscoll  
Dylan Haub  
Rick Rouse  
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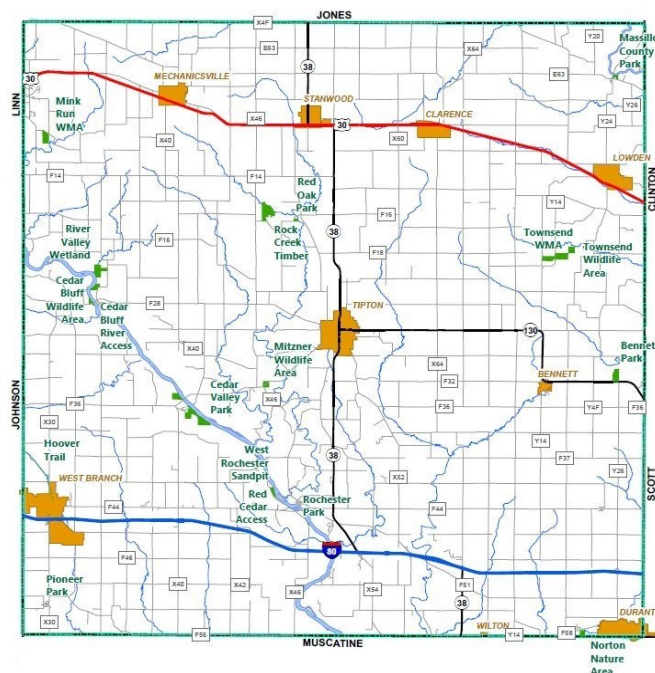
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## Cedar County Conservation Parks and Wildlife Areas



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