

Palo Alto Conservation News



Palo Alto County Conservation Board

Spring 2010



How To Help Wildlife

In a tough, long winter like we are having, the concern for the well-being of our wildlife is often discussed. The easy, but ineffective short term solutions include emergency feeding.

The key to abundant wildlife populations is quality habitat. This includes necessary habitat for nesting or bearing young, brood habitat for raising young and then habitat to provide food and shelter throughout the winter months.

Many people feel that as long as they pay their taxes, they are supporting wildlife. While this is partially true, most habitat projects are funded by special funds and grants. Almost all of the land purchased by the Conservation Board for wildlife habitat is funded by grants from the Wildlife Habitat Stamp Fund. This money is generated by a habitat stamp that hunters and trappers must purchase in addition to their hunting license. Much of the land purchased by the Iowa DNR is also purchased with special funds from the sale of Migratory Bird Stamps (Duck Stamps). The DNR wildlife section operates only on money from license sales and from federal money generated from the excise tax on guns and ammunitions (Pittman-Robertson funds). They get no general tax revenue. Organizations like Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and the Wild Turkey Federation provide funds to match grants for land acquisition, plant food plots, provide seed for nesting cover and trees for reforestation.

So, if you want to take that next step in helping wildlife out, I have some suggestions for you. Purchase a Wildlife Habitat Stamp, Migratory Bird Stamp, join Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited or the Wild Turkey Federation. You will be helping wildlife out year-round and if you are a bird watcher, hiker, or cross country skier you will help pay for the acquisition, maintenance and management of the areas you are using.



Lead-free Fishing Tackle

An effort is underway to get people to switch over from lead fishing tackle to non-lead tackle. Lead shot is now banned in many hunting areas, but lead continues to be used for fishing.

Studies have shown that lead, primarily from fishing tackle, accounts for about one quarter of all loon deaths in the country. Lead poisoning is also a significant cause of death for Bald Eagles. Sometimes eagles ingest lead shot when feeding on a duck or goose, or even a deer that has not been retrieved. They also ingest lead when feeding on fish that have swallowed lead fishing tackle. In fact, in 2005-2006, over half of the sick or injured eagles treated in Iowa were found to have lead poisoning.

Every time someone loses a lead jig or sinker in a lake, it sinks to the bottom. It may not seem like a big issue, but a bird may pick it up, thinking it is grit or food. Over time, lead can accumulate in an animal's body.

Lead is not good for people either. In fact, it is recommended that people (especially children) that handle fishing tackle routinely wash their hands.

This push to "get the lead out" is not new. England has had a ban on lead fishing tackle for over 20 years, and Canada has not allowed the use of lead tackle in its national parks for over ten years. Even in the United States, more and more states are imposing lead tackle bans in an effort to reduce unnecessary wildlife mortality.

There are many alternatives to lead tackle. Companies now make tackle from tin, tungsten, steel, bismuth or a combination of those materials. Research has shown that they all work just as well as lead, and in some cases, even better. Unfortunately, lead can remain in the environment for a long time, so the sooner we can make the change away from lead, the better.

When you go out to fish this spring and summer, make a pledge to be a more responsible angler. Do your part and don't use lead tackle.

The "Green Hour"

In 2007, the National Wildlife Federation launched GreenHour.org, an online resource providing parents, grandparents and care givers inspiration and tools to make the outdoors part of daily living.

Research shows that children are happier and healthier when outdoor time is in better balance with indoor time. I think that most adults realize that we also feel better if we can spend some time out in nature. We don't have to travel a long distance to do this. Your backyard, garden, or a park down the street can all provide a place that is safe and accessible, where you can learn and play.

Now the website has expanded and includes:

- Green Hour outdoor activities
- Nature Find- a tool to help you find nearby parks, trails and nature centers
- Frequently updated tips and articles to help you get outside every day
- Wildlife Watch
- Schoolyard Habitats
- Great American Backyard Campout & National Wildlife Week

No Child Left Inside federal legislation and other public policy efforts

Check these out soon, and get your Green Hour in each day.





Programs are sponsored by the Palo Alto County Conservation Board and SWCD. All programs are held at the Lost Island Nature Center unless noted otherwise. Please call 712-837-4866 for programs that require registration.

Upcoming Programs

April

24 **Earth Day Work Day** - 1 pm. Workday Activities. Watch for upcoming details.

May

8 & 9 **Wings & Wetlands Weekend**
11 am Trumpeter Swan release - site to be determined at a later date
1 - 4 pm Greenwings and Ringnecks Youth program
 ** Guest speaker, Chris Anderson, "Bushcraft Survival" Chris rolls out his survival pack and discusses what he takes along with him out into the 'woods'.
 ** Three sessions of activities- we will divide into three groups. Registration is required. Please call (712)837-4866 to register.

June 26

10 am - 2 pm **Canoe on the West Des Moines River**
 We will start at the Graettinger access and canoe/kayak to Emmetsburg. Call 712-837-4866 to register and reserve a canoe or bring your own.

Fishing Hot Spots

Conservation Board Area	Bass	Bluegill	Bullhead	Catfish	Crappie	Northern	Perch	Walleye
Lost Island Lake			x	x	x	x		x
Salton			x		x	x	x	
Sportsmans	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Mulroneys	x	x	x	x		x		
Riverview			x	x		x		x
Basswood			x	x		x		x
River Runner			x	x		x		x



Consider a "Living Snow Fence"

The winter of 2009-2010 has been of historic significance with record breaking snow events. Blowing and drifting snow has hampered travel throughout Palo Alto County and all of Northwest Iowa this winter. There are several areas along major highways where it has taken many hours of using heavy equipment just to clear a path so that traffic can pass through. This has been costly to the State of Iowa and the local DOT team who has worked many extra hours for our travel needs and safety.

In 2005, the local NRCS office promoted a CRP practice called the "Living Snow Fence". Using feedback from landowners and producers, they have made major changes to better cover concerns about planting and maintenance. They have joined forces with the DOT and local Pheasants Forever Chapter to make this practice easier to install and establish, with a possible cost of ZERO dollars to the landowner.

The Iowa DOT has volunteered to furnish all of the labor to plant the trees and grasses necessary for this practice. They will also maintain the area for a three year establishment period. This includes necessary mowing of grasses to control any weed issues and watering the trees as needed for establishment. This is a great partnership and the NRCS/SWCD office invites landowners to sit down and discuss rental rates and other bonuses available.

The local Pheasants Forever Chapter has graciously "sweetened" the pot by offering to provide the remaining 10% of the cost not provided by the CRP program. This is limited to \$400 for every half mile enrolled. Figures estimate that the producer/landowner cost for a half mile would be about \$375 for a Living Snow Fence established with minimum requirements, so the dollars provided by PF means that the total cost of establishment is zero dollars.

Benefits of this program include:

- * improved travel safety
- * reduced snow removal cost
- * reduced wind erosion
- * increased wildlife habitat
- * beautification of roadsides

If you own land along the west or north sides of Hwy 18 or Hwy 4, please consider enrollment in this program. It will provide economic benefits to you personally, and to the citizens of Palo Alto County and the State of Iowa.

Contact the NRCS/Soil Conservation Office in Emmetsburg at 712-852-3386 ext 3 for more information or to schedule a site visit.



Palo Alto Soil & Water
Conservation District



Take A Drive

Despite all the snow, it is time to start thinking about spring. And a sure sign that spring is here are the sounds and sights of the prairie chicken in Ringgold County Iowa.

The Kellerton Bird Conservation Area has the largest booming population in the state. And their "Booming Season" will start in mid-March and go through mid-May. About an hour before sunrise and again at about an hour before sunset are the most active hours. This is a rare opportunity to see and hear something that used to be commonplace in Iowa .



To celebrate the return of the prairie chicken to Iowa , the Iowa DNR hosts an annual viewing day for the public with interpretation from the local DNR management staff and wildlife diversity employees. This year's date is set for April 10, 2010. It starts at a half hour before sunrise (usually about 6 am) and goes until the prairie chickens decide to leave the booming grounds. The program will take place no matter what the weather is like. All sizes of groups are welcome to attend. They encourage you to get a group of birders together and come. Last year they had over 150 people attend the viewing day.

You may also contact the local DNR staff if you would like to schedule a group to visit on a day other than April 10th. If you decide to make an individual trip there will be some prairie chicken information available at the viewing platform.

Kellerton BCA is managed for grassland habitat and grassland wildlife species. If you do come to see the prairie chickens bring along your binoculars, spotting scope, and camera. Henslow's sparrows, Northern Harriers, Short-eared Owls and Upland Sandpipers are just a few of the other grassland species that are commonly seen at the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area.

The Iowa DNR and Iowa State University are also going to be tracking the economic impact the prairie chickens are making in Ringgold County . They are asking all prairie chicken visitors to fill out a short survey.

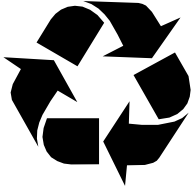
For more information feel free to contact:

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Bragging Tree Rights

Take your family on a hunt for the biggest tree.

Be sure to enter our "Bragging Tree" contest. We will be looking for the biggest TREE on Palo Alto County Conservation Board areas.

Rules:

Tree must be accessible, alive and on a County Conservation Board public area. Measure the tree trunk circumference, in inches, 4 feet 6 inches above the ground.

Complete and submit the entry form below to: Palo Alto County Conservation Board, 3259 355th Avenue, Ruthven, IA. 51358. All entries must be received by October 1, 2010. The winning tree will be verified by conservation staff. If there should be a tie, it will be broken by tree height.

Tree Species _____
Tree Circumference (measure 4 feet 6 inches from the ground) _____
Wildlife Area _____
Specific Location _____
Name and Address _____
Phone number _____

Palo Alto County Conservation Board

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