

SEASONS

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Protecting Our Natural Heritage:

The Case for a 2-Mile Setback from Conservation Areas

by Emily Herring, Director of Marshall County Conservation

Marshall County is at a crossroads. As the county considers new wind energy development, we face a critical decision: how do we balance the need for green energy with protecting our precious natural lands, wildlife, and recreational areas? The answer lies in thoughtful compromise and in supporting a 2-mile setback for wind turbines from conservation areas and the Iowa River.

Why Are Setbacks Important? A setback is a buffer zone between industrial development and sensitive lands. In this case, a 2-mile setback would ensure wind turbines are far enough from wildlife areas, parks, and the Iowa River to minimize their impact on the environment and the people who cherish these spaces.

Marshall County Conservation's Position: Marshall County Conservation supports renewable energy and recognizes its role in combating climate change. However, we have always advocated for a compromise that safeguards our limited remaining natural habitats. Our board has recommended a minimum 2-mile setback from conservation areas and the Iowa River as a reasonable solution.

Protecting Wildlife and Endangered Species: Our county's parks and the Iowa River Corridor are home to rare and endangered species, such as the Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, tri-colored bat, red-shouldered hawk, and bald eagle. Recent studies, including local acoustic monitoring, have documented all nine native bat species in our parks, many of which are especially vulnerable to wind turbines. These animals play a vital role in our ecosystem and agriculture, including providing natural pest control for our corn and soybean fields.

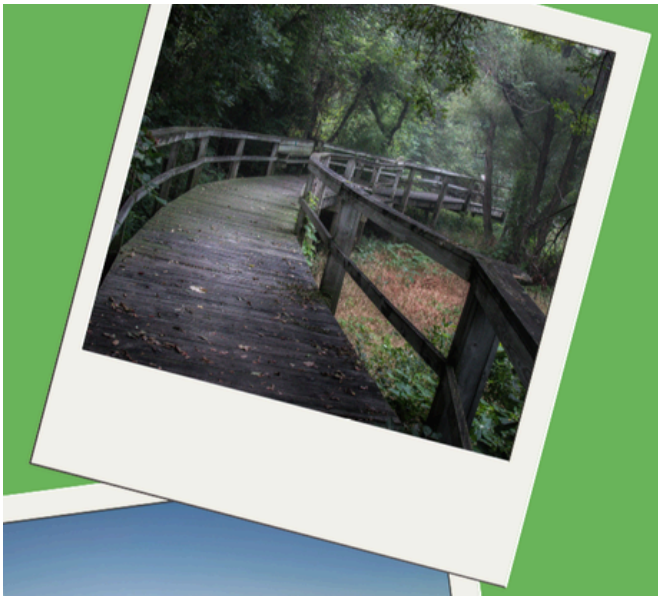
Studies by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Department of Energy: Studies show that wind turbines can cause direct wildlife mortality and disrupt habitats through noise and visual disturbance. The 2-mile setback is a scientifically sound, practical way to reduce these risks and preserve our county's rich biodiversity.

Protecting Our Parks, Campgrounds, and Local Economy: Our public lands and campgrounds are more than just green spaces; they're investments in community well-being and local tourism. Over $1.8 million has been invested in improvements at Green Castle Recreation Area alone. Turbine noise, blinking lights, and altered scenic views can degrade the natural experience visitors seek. In fact, a local survey found that 51% of park visitors would be less likely to return if turbines were built nearby, threatening both recreation opportunities and the local economy.

A Balanced, Common-Sense Solution: Conservation areas and recreational lands are irreplaceable assets. Once their character is lost, it is nearly impossible to restore. The 2-mile setback is a balanced approach that respects both property rights and the public's interest in healthy natural resources. It is based on scientific evidence, public input, and the lived experience of those who manage and enjoy these lands.

Educate and Get Involved: If you are interested in supporting the conservation cause, I would encourage you to check out the Marshall County Webpage. The Planning and Zoning Board is currently reviewing the ordinance, and it is receiving pushback. I would encourage you to watch past meetings on the Marshall County YouTube and sign up to receive agendas.

We urge our community members, leaders, and decision-makers to support the 2-mile setback. By doing so, we can embrace renewable energy while protecting the natural heritage that makes Marshall County special, for today and for generations to come.









Marshall County Conservation

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

DEADLINE JANUARY 31, 2027

A $25 GIFT CARD WILL BE AWARDED TO EACH CATEGORY'S WINNING PHOTO.

New this year, all entries will be submitted online!

Adult Categories (18 years & Over)

Outdoor Recreation
Scenic (Natural Resources)
Native Plants
Native Wildlife
Open Nature

Youth Categories (17 years & Under)

Open

For a complete set of rules and where to submit all entries:
www.marshallcountyia.gov/conservation/annual_photo_contest_form/

Scan QR code
to submit photos:

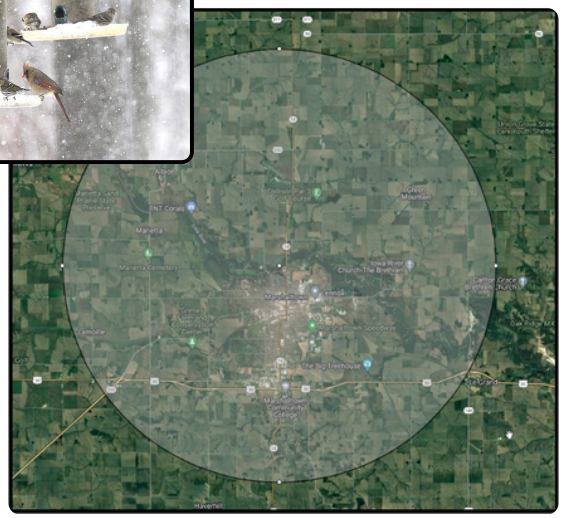
PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Christmas Bird Count

Thursday, December 17, All Day
Postponement Date: January 5, 2027
Throughout Marshall County Christmas Bird Area (See Below Image)
Registration Fee: FREE
Registration Deadline: December 11 by 4:00 p.m.

For over 125 years, the Audubon Society has held Christmas Bird Counts across the United States. These counts provide data used to understand bird populations. During the Christmas Bird Count, groups are assigned an area within a 15-mile radius and record as many different bird species as possible. The species and numbers are then compiled, sent to the Audubon Society, and documented. The count must take place around Christmas, and groups must pick a specific 24-hour period to record birds. We have selected December 17. We have multiple bird experts and have divided the quadrant into sections. There are several ways to participate in a birding day. 1. If you are an expert, you can help lead a group. 2. Even if you don't know birds, you can join an expert and learn about birds along the way. 3. If you have bird feeders at your home, you can watch and record the birds that come to your feeders. You do not have to dedicate 24 hours. You can give as much time as you want. If you are interested in joining us for the bird count on December 17, please contact Emma Dawson at 641-752-5490 or ebruck@marshallcountyia.gov by December 11 at 4:00 p.m. The map below shows the regions we will cover. This includes Marshalltown, Albion, Green Mountain, and Laurel.





Brown Bag Bunch: Trees and Climate Change

Tuesday, December 8 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: December 4 by 4:00 p.m.

Once upon a time, the Earth's climate changed at a glacial pace. Today, human activity is causing temperatures to rise faster than many trees can adapt. Join Melissa Burdick, Executive Director of the Brenton Arboretum, to learn how climate change is affecting tree populations around the world, what conservationists are doing to help, and how we can use trees to combat climate change in our own backyards!



Brown Bag Bunch: Marshall County Bats

Friday, January 29, from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: January 25 by 4:00 p.m.

Explore the fascinating world of bats with director Emily Herring. This Brown Bag will provide an overview of bat populations in our region, including a special focus on recent findings from acoustic studies conducted in Marshall County parks. Learn about the fascinating methods used to monitor bats, the challenges these important creatures face, and the vital roles they play in our local ecosystems. We'll also discuss common risks to bats and why their conservation is essential. Whether you're a nature enthusiast or just curious about these remarkable mammals, this program offers valuable insights into the world of bats and ongoing research efforts in our community.



TO REGISTER FOR EVENTS: CALL 641-752-5490, EMAIL MCCB@MARSHALLCOUNTYIA.GOV, OR TEXT ONLY 641-758-9777 BY THE DEADLINE OF THE EVENT

Nature Adventures for Homeschoolers

December

Animal Voices
Thursday, December 10 from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: December 8 by 4:00 p.m.

How do animals communicate without using words? In this Nature Adventures Homeschool Program, kids will explore the many ways animals use sounds, calls, and other signals to communicate. From bird songs and frog calls to warning sounds and animal "conversations," we'll discover what animals are saying and why their voices are important. Through hands-on activities, games, and plenty of listening, participants will test their animal communication skills.



January

Snow, Wind, & Everything In Between
Friday, January 15 from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: January 12 by 4:00 p.m.

Join us for a winter weather adventure as we explore snow, wind, and the changing weather around us! If conditions allow, we'll head outdoors for a snowshoeing adventure and experience winter weather firsthand. Through hands-on activities and exploration, we'll discover the science behind winter weather and the many ways it shapes the world around us. Dress for the weather and come ready to explore!

February

How Animals Survive Winter?
Thursday, February 25 from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: February 19 by 4:00 p.m.

How do animals survive winter when freezing temperatures, snow, and limited food make life difficult? Kids will discover the amazing adaptations animals use to survive the coldest months of the year. We'll explore how feathers, thick fur, body fat, and other physical adaptations help animals stay warm, as well as different ways animals overwinter, including hibernation, migration, and remaining active throughout the season. Through hands-on activities and exploration, we'll uncover the strategies that help animals survive and even thrive in the cold.

Full Moon Hike

Thursday, January 21 from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd St., Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: January 19 by 4:00 p.m.

Enjoy a moonlit hike through the winter woods! Dress warmly and, if conditions allow, we'll hit the trails on snowshoes. After the hike, warm up in the classroom with hot chocolate and cookies.



Winter Wonder: Snowshoeing After Dark

TBD - January or February from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free

Experience the winter landscape after the sun goes down! Strap on a pair of snowshoes and hit the trails under the night sky as we search for signs of wildlife hiding in the winter darkness. Along the way, participants may spot animal tracks, wintering birds, animal homes, and other clues that reveal how wildlife survives the cold winter months. With a little luck, we may even encounter some of the nocturnal wildlife that calls the park home!

This program will be offered in January or February when snow and trail conditions are just right. Because this is a weather-dependent program, interested participants can sign up to receive one to two days' notice once conditions are favorable and a date has been confirmed. Keep an eye out for an email or phone call with the confirmed date and program details.



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Painted & Stitched Art Workshop

Tuesday, February 9 from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
Tuesday, February 16 from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Ages: 16+
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
Registration Fee: $35
Registration Deadline: February 2 by 4:00 p.m.

Create a beautiful, nature-inspired piece of art in this two-part workshop! In the first class, participants will learn the basics of watercolor painting and create a scenic background featuring trees, sky, and other natural elements. We'll explore simple watercolor techniques while creating a one-of-a-kind design on fabric.

In the second class, we'll bring our paintings to life with embroidery! Participants will learn basic embroidery stitches and techniques, then use colorful thread to add texture, detail, and dimension to their watercolor artwork. By the end of the two-part class, you'll have a unique mixed media piece that combines the soft beauty of watercolor with the texture of hand embroidery.

No previous watercolor or embroidery experience is necessary. Participants must attend both classes, as the second class builds on the artwork created during the first class.



Snowshoes and Cross Country Ski Rental

Chase away the winter blues by getting outside! Marshall County Conservation rents snowshoes and cross-country skis for $5 a day per set. To rent snowshoes, you need at least 4 inches of snow. You must sign a liability waiver. The Marshall County Conservation Board offers many trails where snowshoes and cross-country skis are allowed, including: Grimes Farm, Green Castle, Timmons Grove, and Grammer Grove. During Marshall County Conservation Board-sponsored events, the equipment will be available for use at no charge.

Brown Bag Bunch: Following the Flight: New Technology for Monarch Research

Tuesday, February 16 at 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown
Registration Fee: Free
Registration Deadline: February 11 by 4:00 p.m.



BlūMorpho tags have changed the game in monarch migration research. For decades, scientists used sticker tags to track monarch migration, but they only provided a start and end point. Now, scientists can use the innovative BlūMorpho tags to track a monarch's flight path during its entire migratory journey!

Come learn about these new tags and how they're being used in Iowa to answer important monarch conservation questions. The Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium at Iowa State University will present this fascinating program and share how this new technology is helping researchers better understand monarch migration and conservation.

Herbal Soap from Scratch

Thursday, February 25 from 6:30 - 9:00 p.m.
Grimes Farm Conservation Center
Registration Fee: $35.00
Deadline: February 18 by 4:00 p.m.



Explore the art and science of making handcrafted soap from scratch with Ann Staudt of Siberian Soap Co.! Using the centuries-old cold-process soapmaking technique, students will combine plant-based oils and lye to create soaps that are mild, moisturizing, and eco-friendly. This workshop is very hands-on, with each participant making and taking home 1 pound (4-5 full-size bars) of their own custom batch of herbal handcrafted soap. Long sleeves, long pants, and closed-toe shoes are required of all participants. Please bring an old towel or blanket to insulate your finished soap. Open to age 16+; younger students must have advance permission from the instructor. Pre-registration and payment of 35.00 are required to secure limited spots by February 18 before 4:00 p.m.

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SEASONS

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MARSHALL COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2349 233rd Street, Marshalltown, IA 50158
(641) 752-5490
mccb@marshallcountyia.gov
www.marshallcountyconservation.com
Nature Center Hours
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

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