

Vol. 2 Issue 1 • Winter 2024-2025

The Rattlesnake Buzz

Allamakee County Conservation Board Newsletter



Do you know this animal?
Check out page 7 for details!

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Information

The Importance of Timber Stand Improvement: ACCB's Sustainable Approach to Forest Management

by Ross Geerdes, Director

As we navigate the complexities of modern forestry, the practice of Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) stands out as a crucial component for maintaining healthy, productive forests. TSI refers to the selective management of tree species within a stand to enhance forest health, biodiversity, and economic returns. This practice not only benefits the ecosystem but also supports local economies and fosters sustainable forest management.

Check out our website [Allamakee County Conservation](#) and stay up to date on our [Facebook Page](#) for all of the upcoming events!



Continued....

Why Timber Stand Improvement Matters

1.Enhanced Forest Health

TSI helps to reduce competition among trees, allowing the most vigorous and resilient species to thrive. By removing underperforming or invasive species, we can improve overall forest health, reduce disease transmission, and enhance the forest's resilience to pests and climate change.

2.Biodiversity Promotion

Healthy forests are diverse forests. TSI encourages a mix of tree species and age classes, which is essential for supporting wildlife habitats. Diverse stands are more resilient and can better withstand environmental stressors, leading to a more balanced ecosystem.

3.Increased Economic Value

Improving timber stands can significantly increase their market value. By focusing on quality over quantity, landowners can enhance the growth of desirable species, leading to higher quality timber production. This not only benefits landowners economically but also supports local lumber industries.

4.Recreational and Aesthetic Benefits

Healthy, well-maintained forests provide opportunities for recreation and enjoyment. Improved stands can create more appealing landscapes for hiking, birdwatching, and other outdoor activities, fostering a deeper connection between communities and their natural surroundings.

Best Practices for Timber Stand Improvement

To maximize the benefits of TSI, landowners and managers should consider the following practices:

- **Conduct Regular Assessments:** Regularly evaluate the health and composition of timber stands to identify areas in need of improvement.
- **Prioritize Native Species:** Focus on promoting native tree species that are well-suited to the local environment and support local wildlife.
- **Implement Selective Thinning:** Thinning involves removing select trees to reduce competition and promote growth in remaining trees.
- **Monitor and Manage Invasive Species:** Regularly assess for invasive species that can threaten the health of the stand and take action to control them.
- **Engage with Professionals:** Collaborate with forestry professionals for guidance on best practices tailored to specific forest conditions.



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Where has the ACCB benefited from Timber Stand Improvement?

In 2022, Iowa DNR Foresters approached the ACCB about a possible TSI project at the Waterville Pines Natural Area. The Waterville Pines sits on a steep rocky, ridge just outside of Waterville. From aerial photos and site visits the foresters recommended a plan for TSI including mechanical and chemical control of invasive species and native species that were inhibiting the growth of white pine trees. The white pine trees at Waterville Pines were not just any pine trees, they were dated back at least 125 years and were strains of the native white pines that would have been present in Allamakee County at the time of statehood and before. After the completion of the TSI plan in the summer of 2023 the foresters conducted follow up site visits to determine the impact of the plan and if any additional work was needed. By 2024, the foresters could see the results of the work. Underneath the towering native white pines 2-3" sprouts could be seen! The beginning of the next generation of Iowa native strain white pines!

In 2024, the ACCB and the DNR foresters began to look at further projects that could be done. Waterville Farm 55 was the next logical location. Down the road a mere four miles from the first TSI project the foresters hypothesized that they would find much of the same species present as they had at Waterville Pines. After each site visit to the Waterville Farm foresters were more impressed with the size and age of the white pines and the oak trees that they found. But they were also alarmed at the size of the Maple trees present. Something that they had not encountered at the Waterville Pines area. The large maple trees were shading out any growth from other native species. The foresters worked with ACCB staff and local timber buyers to come up with a three step plan including the selective harvest of mature trees, chemical control of invasive species, and planting of desired species like oak trees. Work at Waterville Farm is scheduled to begin in the winter of 2025 and may take up to two years to complete.





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With the selective harvest of mature trees at Waterville Farm 55 the ACCB will be conducting a timber sale. The revenue from the timber sale will help to perform TSI at other county parks, with the County Home Pond being the next area that will be considered. The County Home Park is diverse in its own right, and the staff have goals of returning the area to the way that it may have looked when Patrick Keenan settled and began to build a log cabin on the property in 1848.

Conclusion

Timber Stand Improvement is more than just a management technique; it's a commitment to fostering healthy, diverse forests that can thrive for generations to come. By prioritizing TSI, we can ensure that our forests continue to provide ecological, economic, and social benefits in an increasingly challenging world. As stewards of the land, we have the power to make a lasting impact—one stand at a time.

Let's embrace Timber Stand Improvement as a vital practice in our sustainable forestry efforts and work together to preserve the beauty and integrity of our forests for future generations.

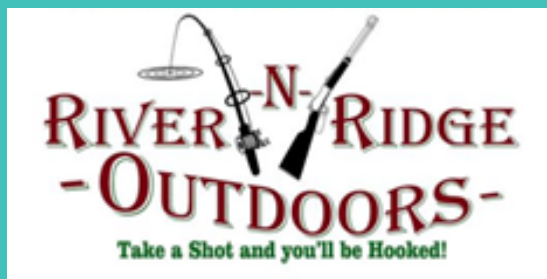
“..the practice of Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) stands out as a crucial component for maintaining healthy, productive forests.”

Ross Geerdes, Director



A Special Thanks to...

River N Ridge Outdoors for donating food for our education animals & aquarium.



Upcoming Events

Follow us on [Facebook](#) for more information and to stay up to date on all of our upcoming events.

January

Conservation Board Meeting

Tuesday, 7th @ 1 PM - Driftless Area Education & Visitors Center



New Albin Public Library

Thursday, 9th @ 3:30 PM -
176 Elm St. NE., New Albin, IA



Full Moon Hike

Sunday, 12th @ 6:30 PM - Near Rural Waste Dropoff on Power Plant Drive

Join a nighttime hike to explore the stars and full moon like they have never been seen before. The event requires preregistration for those wishing to use snowshoes provided by the ACCB and is open to all ages. However, anyone under 16 years of age must be accompanied by an adult. In the case of inclement weather or poor snow conditions the Full Moon Snowshoe may be postponed or cancelled and will be announced via the ACCB's Facebook page.

Appropriate sized snowshoes and trekking poles will be provided to individuals who do not have their own equipment with preregistration. Participants should dress for the weather with appropriate layers including outerwear, winter hats, gloves, and waterproof boots. A headlamp or small flashlight is also recommended, but not required. [To register or to receive more information on this event or any event you can call the ACCB at \(563\) 538-0403.](#)



Robey Library Storytime

Tuesday, 14th @ 10:30 AM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave.
NW., Waukon, IA



Conservation Café

Wednesday, 15th @ 9:30 AM - Driftless Area Education & Visitor Center

A new series started at the Driftless Area to enjoy some social time with a hot beverage and treats with a conservation focused program following. The program will be free of charge, but advanced registration is encouraged. Assistant Naturalist Becca will start the conservation program around 9:45 with the topic being "What is the Driftless?" As this is probably the most asked question from visitors in the education center we wanted to shed some light on the topic and share just how extraordinary the place we call home is. To register or to receive more information on this event or any event you can call the ACCB at (563) 538-0401.



Afternoon with the Driftless

Tuesday, 28th @ 3:30 PM - Robey Library - 701 1st Ave. NW., Waukon, IA

February

Conservation Board Meeting

Tuesday, 4th @ 1 PM - Driftless Area Education & Visitors Center



Full Moon Hike

Wednesday, 12th @ 6:30 PM - Yellow River State Forest Fire Tower



New Albin Public Library

Thursday, 13th @ 3:30 PM -
176 Elm St. NE., New Albin, IA



Robey Library Storytime

Tuesday, 14th @ 10:30 AM -
Robey Library - 701 1st Ave.
NW., Waukon, IA

Afternoon with the Driftless

Tuesday, 25th @ 3:30 PM - Robey Library - 701 1st Ave. NW., Waukon, IA



On Birding

by Erin Cubbon, Naturalist

Birding has never been my “thing”. For the longest time I just could not find it in myself to get excited for the spring migration of warblers and other neotropical migrants, and the bald eagle cam at the fish hatchery in Decorah left me nonplussed. For much of my career at the Allamakee County Conservation Board and during my time as an interpretive ranger with the National Park Service before that, I almost dreaded the detailed questions from avid birders. “Where is my best shot of seeing a cerulean warbler”? “Can you help me to identify this nondescript little brown bird”? “What kind of hawk is that”? These kinds of questions were an invitation to a cold sweat, embarrassment, and a request to “hang tight while I find one of my coworkers who really knows their birds”.

It’s not that I disdained the hobby, or the people who practiced it. On the contrary, I think I was intimidated and knew that this was a gap in my knowledge. I was embarrassed to admit to what I saw as a serious shortcoming for someone who considered themselves a student of the natural world. Birding to me felt like a foreign language that I just couldn’t quite grasp, maybe a romance language where you can catch a couple of the words but the overall meaning is elusive. I was much more comfortable in the world of plants and wildflowers, herps and history than I was with those feathered denizens of the skies.





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Then a few years ago, something finally clicked for me. Apparently, I had spent long enough listening to experts and consulting my Sibley that somehow without even really trying, I had become a “birder” myself. I had noticed that I started recognizing birds without even really thinking about it. It started with the more common ones of course, (your bird feeder birds, various woodpeckers etc). Later, I started noticing kestrels everywhere on my commute into work every day, and found myself slowing my car down in an attempt to identify the hawks lazily circling the sky. Pretty soon I was driving around with a pair of binoculars in the passenger seat (just in case).

It was as if a whole new world had opened up for me, and if I just took the time to slow down and look, there were new (to me) species everywhere. Where once it would have bored me to tears, I now found myself taking detours home from work so that I could stop and watch the migrating waterfowl on the Mississippi River. Finding an American Wigeon or a Wood Duck among a flock of Mallards felt like a real life *Where's Waldo* book in motion and with sound. This change in my routine naturally led to me being home late from work on more than one occasion. This was so cool! What had I been thinking all these years? Clearly, I had been missing out.



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I am apparently not alone in my newfound love of birding. There's data to suggest that birding as a hobby has increased among Americans in recent years, with a recent US Fish and Wildlife Survey finding that more than 35% of the nation's population over the age of 16 has engaged in some kind of activity relating to observing birds or intentionally improving their local habitat in 2022 (Living Bird magazine, Winter 2024). Some suggest that people started turning to birding in part as something to do during that first difficult year of the pandemic, when gathering together in indoor spaces was ill advised and people were searching for things to do outdoors. Others wonder if it is a reaction to and a rebellion against our modern lives in which we spend so much staring at screens.

Whatever the reason for its recent surge in popularity, I can't help but think that anything that gets us outside and more connected to the natural world and the plants and animals that live there is a good thing for us as humans. Birding is such a wonderful way to do just that, and I for one am proud and delighted to finally count myself among the growing ranks of the birders. Join us!

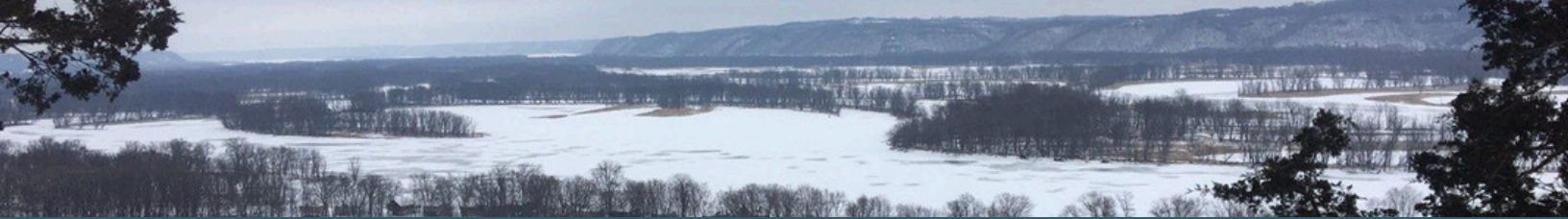


Fietzfotos



“More than 35% of the nation's population over the age of 16 has engaged in some kind of activity relating to observing birds or intentionally improving their local habitat in 2022.”

Living Bird Magazine, Winter 2024



Introducing Me!

by Becca Hefflefinger - Assistant Naturalist/Office Manager

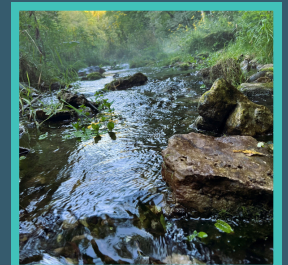
Hello! My name is Becca Hefflefinger and I am the new Assistant Naturalist/Office Manager here at Allamakee County Conservation! I am so excited to be a part of this amazing community. I graduated from Upper Iowa University in May of 2024 with my Bachelors of Science in Conservation Management. I have been married to my wonderful husband Joshua for just over a year now and together we have tropical fish and a corn snake! I grew up in Grinnell, Iowa and moved north for schooling. I was exposed to interpretation with nature when I visited many county, state, and national parks in 2020 when everything shut down.

One thing to know about me is that I love photography especially landscape pictures. In my free time I typically have my camera on me ready to go especially if I am spending time outdoors hiking or just exploring! I love capturing sunrises and sunsets as well as anything that captures my eye.



Lately I have been spending my time practicing and developing my skills with my camera when it comes to wildlife, birds to be more specific. I find it fascinating just how many different bird species there are in Iowa and just how different each one is especially through a camera lens! It's not just about taking pictures—it's about learning to anticipate their movements, understanding their natural habitats, and gaining a deeper appreciation for each species. Whether it's a rare sighting or a common visitor, every encounter adds to my growing connection with nature and sharpens my photographic skills. As the seasons change, so do the birds that grace the skies of Iowa, each season bringing a new challenge and excitement to my work.

I look forward to getting to interact with Allamakee County individuals and cannot wait to see what programs I get to experience next!



Least Weasel

Mustela nivalis

Description

The least weasel is a mouse-sized animal with a long-slender weasel shaped body with short legs. Their head is small and flattened and is only slightly wider than its long neck. The tail is very short and is around one fifth as long as the head and body.

In summer, the adults are brown on top and white on the bottom of their throat and belly. The tail is brown but lacks the prominent black tip of the long-tailed weasel. In winter, the coloration can vary from completely brown to almost completely white.

Habitat & Ecology

Least weasels tolerate lots of different habitats some of which include forest, farmland, grassy fields, riparian woodland, and prairies. They make their homes in dens located in crevices of tree roots, hollow logs, or abandoned burrows. They can enter holes that are less than an inch in diameter. The least weasel will usually hunt during the day for small mammals and prefers rodents. However, they will also eat birds' eggs, lizards, frogs, salamanders, fish, worms, and carrion.

Lifestyle

Except for the breeding season, the least weasels are solitary creatures. This means for most of their lives they either live alone or in pairs. They are also territorial animals that depend on a gender-based dominance hierarchies. The older males are the most dominant over the juvenile males and the females. They mark their territories by scent marks and when the weasel is startled it will also release a bad-smelling fluid to deter the antagonist.

Least weasels also perform a "war dance". This consists of a series of twists and leaps, noises that sound similar to barks, arched backs, stiff limbs, and the standing of caudal and dorsal hairs. It does not matter the age of the weasel as they can all perform this dance; however, it is more common in the younger ones, especially between siblings.

Least weasels have many mating partners and breed from March to June. A litter consists of 4-6 kits and the young are weaned at 4 weeks old and by 8 weeks they are able to hunt in "gangs". Once they reach 9-12 weeks old they are completely independent.



Anna Golubeva, 2022



Scholarship Information

Allamakee County Conservation Foundation Scholarship Guidelines



The Allamakee County Conservation Foundation Scholarship Fund is offering a \$500 scholarship to Allamakee County students who plan to further their education in the degrees of environmental education, cultural interpretation, historical interpretation, outdoor recreation, or biological sciences. One \$500 scholarship will be offered to a senior from each of the area High Schools in Allamakee County; Postville, Allamakee Community, and Eastern Allamakee.

- Applicant must be a graduate or scheduled to graduate from an Allamakee County school district.
- Applicant must be pursuing a degree in natural resources or related field.
- Scholarship payments will be made directly to the college or university, upon receipt of an e-mail letter to the Allamakee County Conservation Foundation confirming the recipient’s enrollment.
- Applications must be received by April 1st, 2024.
- Announcement of the recipient will be made by May 6, 2024. The award winner is encouraged to attend the June Allamakee County Conservation Board meeting. Meetings are held the 1st Tuesday of each month at the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center; 1944 Columbus Road, Lansing Iowa.



Seasonal Opportunity!

Allamakee County Conservation Board

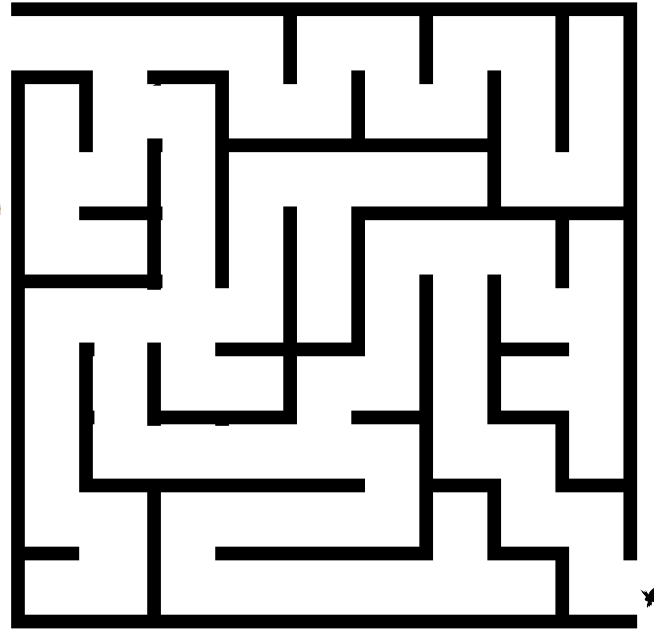
Looking for a fun opportunity to work this summer? Come work with us! As a seasonal employee of the ACCB you can look forward to being a part of the management of over 25 parks and natural areas in Allamakee County and the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center. Fulltime staff will work to get you experience in an area of natural resources that you are interested in. In the past seasonal employees have helped electro-shock fish, participated in prairie burns, helped with environmental education programs and so much more. Our length of employment is flexible and we will give you 40 hours a week Monday-Friday. **Keep checking our Facebook page and website for when the postings go live!**



Kids Corner

Least Weasel Fun Facts!

- The weasel has a stronger bite than a lion, tiger, hyena, or even a bear. For being so small, the weasel has a powerful bite!
- Everyday, weasels eat more than 50% of their body weight in food.
- Under ultraviolet light, the white coat glows a bright lavender.
- Least weasels are the world's smallest carnivore.
- Their favorite food is rodents that especially look like mice.



ACCB STAFF

Main Line: 563-538-0400

Director

Ross Geerdes

563-538-0402

accb.director@gmail.com

Naturalist

Erin Cubbon

563-538-0403

accb.naturalist@gmail.com

Assistant Naturalist & Office Manager

Becca Hefflefinger

563-538-0401

accb.offmanager@gmail.com

Operations Supervisor

Brody VanderKolk

563-538-0403

accb.asstdirector@gmail.com

Allamakee County Conservation

Allamakee County Website

Hours -

Mon-Fri: 8AM - 4:30PM

Sat: Noon - 4PM

Sun: CLOSED until March

Location -

1944 Columbus Rd.,
Lansing, IA 52151



Board Members

- Jeanie Carrol
- Marilyn Clark
- Jessie Delaney
- Dennis Koenig
- Steve Weymiller



Mission

It is the Conservation Board's responsibility to acquire, develop, maintain and make available, to the inhabitants of the county, public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreational centers, environmental educational opportunities, county forests, wildlife and other conservation areas; and to promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people; and to encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural resources; and to cultivate good citizenship by providing adequate programs of public recreation.



ACCF Board Members

- Dennis Blocker
- Jeanie Carrol
- Jessie Delaney
- Dave Duncklee
- Ross Geerdes
- Jens Kallevang
- Jim Kerndt
- Gary Krapfl
- Jane Regan

Mission

It is the Allamakee County Conservation Foundation's (ACCF) mission to enhance the quality of life for the citizens and visitors of Allamakee County by providing quality outdoor recreation facilities, environmental education, and by promoting the long-term protection of Allamakee County's natural resources and heritage.