

“Looking OUT THE BACK DOOR...”

The Sac County Conservation Board's

Winter 2006

Volume 16 | Issue 9

Quarterly Newsletter



The Wild Winter Winds

Now that the first snow has flown and the wild winds of winter are knocking at our doors our thoughts turn towards staying warm. Many times it takes having the furnace break down in the middle of winter or feeling despair when the gas bill finds it's way to your mail box before we think about our home's efficiency. The great thing about making our homes more efficient is that it helps to reduce cost and discomfort all year long not to mention that you are doing your part to reduce consumption. During the winter the easiest way to save a little money is to tape plastic wrap and caulk around windows and to caulk around outlets and light fixtures. Weather stripping and caulking around doors will also help. So how do you know where the air leaks are? The best way to find the air leaks is to use an incense stick or candle. When the flame or incense smoke moves you've found a leak. You can save as much as 10%

off of your heating and cooling bills. Closing heating vents in unused rooms. Use passive heating by keeping your south facing window's draperies and shades open during the day and closed at night. By maintaining your heating system and changing the furnace filter monthly. A dirty filter and or ducts will make your furnace work harder and use more energy. Lubricating fan motor bearings to limit energy lost to friction. A programmable thermostat can reduce your costs by lowering the temperature while you are away or sleeping, for every degree of heat you reduce you save about 4 % energy that would otherwise be lost. You can also compare your home heating costs to similar houses in your area by doing a home energy audit by visiting: www.midamericanenergy.com.homeaudit Otherwise there are many programs to help homeowners to become more efficient. The first and easiest for home own-

ers who gets their power from MidAmerican and who's house was built before Dec 31, 1994 you can call 1-800-545-0762 to receive a free home energy audit. An Energy specialist will provide you with a report of your home's efficiency and will provide you with many free energy efficient programs. New heating and cooling units can be expensive but so can the cost of an old inefficient unit. Right now there are rebates for buying new efficient heating and cooling units. MidAmerican customers can receive rebates on furnaces that are 92% efficient or better. Air conditioners also receive a rebate for an air cooled EER of 9.2 or more or water cooled EER of 11.5 or more. Heat pumps, boilers, water heaters and programmable thermostats also have rebates. Continued on page 5.

Directors Notes.....	Page 2
Upcoming events.....	Page 3
Kids Korner.....	Page 4
Eyes to the Skies.....	Page 5
Biofuels Boom!.....	Page 6





With only a month left of 2006 it is a chance to reflect on the year's past and the upcoming year. Now that Christmas is looming near the Sac County Conservation Board would like to remind you that we have gift certificates for



camping, cabin and shelter house rentals as well as Sauk Rail Trail passes available for that outdoor person on your list. We also still have the Outdoor Adventure Guides available which list county conservation board areas in all 99 counties. These make great stocking stuffers!

Reflecting back, this past year has been very busy for the Sac County Conservation Board. Our environmental education program has been extremely busy and continues to be a top priority with the Sac County Conservation Board. This is a credit to Rene who is always thriving to deliver quality environmental education programs to Churches, school groups, scouts and adult groups or to anyone who will listen. Park usage was again very good with our \$30,000 in revenue collection since January 1st. With camping, shelter and cabin reservations making up the bulk of this, the credit goes to the dedicated staff of the Sac County Conservation Board. From Sandi and Rene in the office, to Roger at Grant Park to our Summer Conservation Aides. They all take pride to ensure all park visitors have a memorable outdoor experience. The Sac County Conservation Board was created to provide quality of life activities, outdoor recreation and education for all of the residents of Sac County. Should you ever have a question or comment regarding any issue with your Sac County Conservation Board, please feel free to contact me at Hage Park at 662-4530. From all of us here at the Sac County Conservation Board, we hope you have a safe and happy holiday season!

Looking into the fact files! Red Breasted Nuthatch

(*Sitta Canadensis*)



- Normally a winter visitor the nuthatch has recently nested in Sac and Carroll County.
- When nest building these nuthatches use their beaks to move sticky conifer resin globules at the entrance of the nest. This gooey surface may help to keep predators or competing birds out.
- The nuthatch avoids this sticky substance by diving right into the nest and avoiding the edges
- They are very aggressive and competitive when it comes to defending the nest.
- They eat insects, spiders and conifer seeds
- 5-6 creamy white eggs with reddish brown spots.
- Call is a nasal bleating sound like a toy horn. It is a series of short "annk" "annk" sounds.
- Populations are increasing in natural range to the

Thank You

Clausen's Bait Shop for their generous donations of worms, minnows and more for our Box turtle and Bullhead and sphinx moth.

Lake View Historical Museum for their donations of time and space for our September program!

Barb Bloom for her donation of an Audubon bird!

To our wonderful Halloween Night Hike volunteers!

Mardell for her donations of crayons and singing loon.

Jerry Volkert for birdhouse jigs!

Mark frierer for his donation of a mounted picture of Red Breasted Grosbeaks.





Upcoming Programs

December 7th –DNR Watershed Improvement Meeting

Your input is needed on water quality improvements on the Raccoon River, please meet at the Sac City Community Center at 6:30 pm and let your two cents be heard.

December 27-28th Winter Camp

December 27 from 1-3PM -PreK, K, and 1st grades

December 28th from 1-3 PM -2nd thru 4th grades

This is a free camp where children will learn about winter topics by participating in games, activities and crafts. A snack will be provided to the children. Camp will be held at the Hage Park Office Building. There is a minimum and maximum number campers so, please sign up by December



December 30th – Christmas Bird Count

Do you like to watch the birds? Winter is the best time to do this and even better it is also the annual Christmas Bird Count where volunteer citizen scientist like you set out to find the variety and amount of birds in our area. You can do it from your home at your feeders or get out and visit some of our wild areas. For more information or to volunteer to help out please call Rene Stroud at 662-4530 or Rita Efta at 712-668-2873.



December 30th– Winter Family Fun Day

Bring the family to Hage Park for an afternoon of fun from 1-3 pm. Parents get the chance to participate in games and activities including snowshoeing or cross country skiing, snowman building, winter scavenger hunts, hikes, crafts and snacks with hot cocoa. This is an all ages program but parents are expected to stay and have fun with their children. Please make reservations by calling 662-4530 also please give us your shoe size and dress appropriately.



January 6th Saturday 12-1:30pm -Cross Country Skiing/ Snow Shoeing Workshop

Have you ever wanted to hit the trails during the winter? The woodlands are so peaceful and serene during this time of year. The soft white snow gleams and shines as the sun's rays radiate off of it. Not to mention the wildlife tracks, scrapes and scat that are so evident this time of year. We will meet at the parking lot off of D54 and M68. Please reserve a spot- we will also need to know your shoe size at that time.



January 26th, Friday 8-9pm -Owl Calling Hike

From Mid January through February our common owls (Barred, Great Horned and Screech owls) are starting to become quite active as they are establishing territory, finding a good nesting site and calling for a mate. We will learn to distinguish the difference in the owls looks, calls and nesting behaviors. Then we will take a hike into the woodlands trying to hear who's out and about. Please call 662-4530 in order to reserve your place on the hike. Meet at the Hage Park office and come prepared for the weather.



February 10th– Nighttime photography-Star trails, Meteors and Northern Lights

Join Don Poggensee at the Hage Park Office at 7:00PM and learn how to take beautiful photos of the night sky, he will explain what you need to do for both a film and digital camera. This will be the perfect night to get some great photo's of Saturn as it will be very close on this night. Please make your reservations by calling 662-4530.



For more information on any upcoming programs, please call the SCCB office at (712) 662-4530.





Continued from page 1.

This year there will be tax credits for furnaces with a 95% efficiency and a new air conditioner with a SEER of 15 or more, and EER of 12.5 . There are more values for split system or packaged equipment. As for insulation Mid-American will rebate insulation with a proper R-value. If you get the MidAmerican home energy audit they will give you 50% of the cost of installing the recommended insulation, up to \$500. You will also receive some other fun freebies like a water heater blanket, water reducing shower heads and up to 5 energy efficient light bulbs. Energy loss through your windows can account for 10-25% of your heating bill. Because of this windows are a very important investment, and not all windows are created equally. When you are replacing your windows look for windows with a NFRC label and with a Low E of .4 or lower or a solar heat gain coefficient, and a U-value of .35. These also happen to be the same requirements for the MidAmerican rebates and IRS tax credits. During the “Winter Winds and Your Wallet” program Bill McAnally suggested looking into vinyl windows because they are extremely efficient. All of these improvements take money up front but in the long run you will save money by fixing a leaky inefficient house. For some these up front costs may seem too prohibitive. However with a little research you will find that there are many programs to make these improvements happen. Many of the programs are on an income level basis. The Region XII Council of Governments have grant and grant/ low interest loans for these efficiency improvements To qualify your family will need to fall into these income brackets. In increments from one person with a \$30,050 yearly income up to a family with eight members and a yearly income of \$56,650 for more information contact Jean Blum at 712-792-9914. The Iowa Rural Development 504 Home Improvements have low interest loans (1% or so) over 20 years and loan/grant money for improvements as the ones stated above including other improvements such as plumbing and electrical, wheelchair ramps and more. To qualify for these programs your income should fall around \$18,750 for one person up to \$53,200 for a family of seven. For more information please contact Vicki Larson at 712-732-1851. There are even energy efficient mortgages to help you put energy efficient products into new or older residences, for more information contact the US Department of House and Rural Development by calling 202-708-1112. Now that you know the specifications for improvements and know about the credits and assistance why not fix up your home now rather than waiting for a heating emergency. Always be sure to check with your gas and electric provider for information on programs and rebates.

Eyes To The Skies!

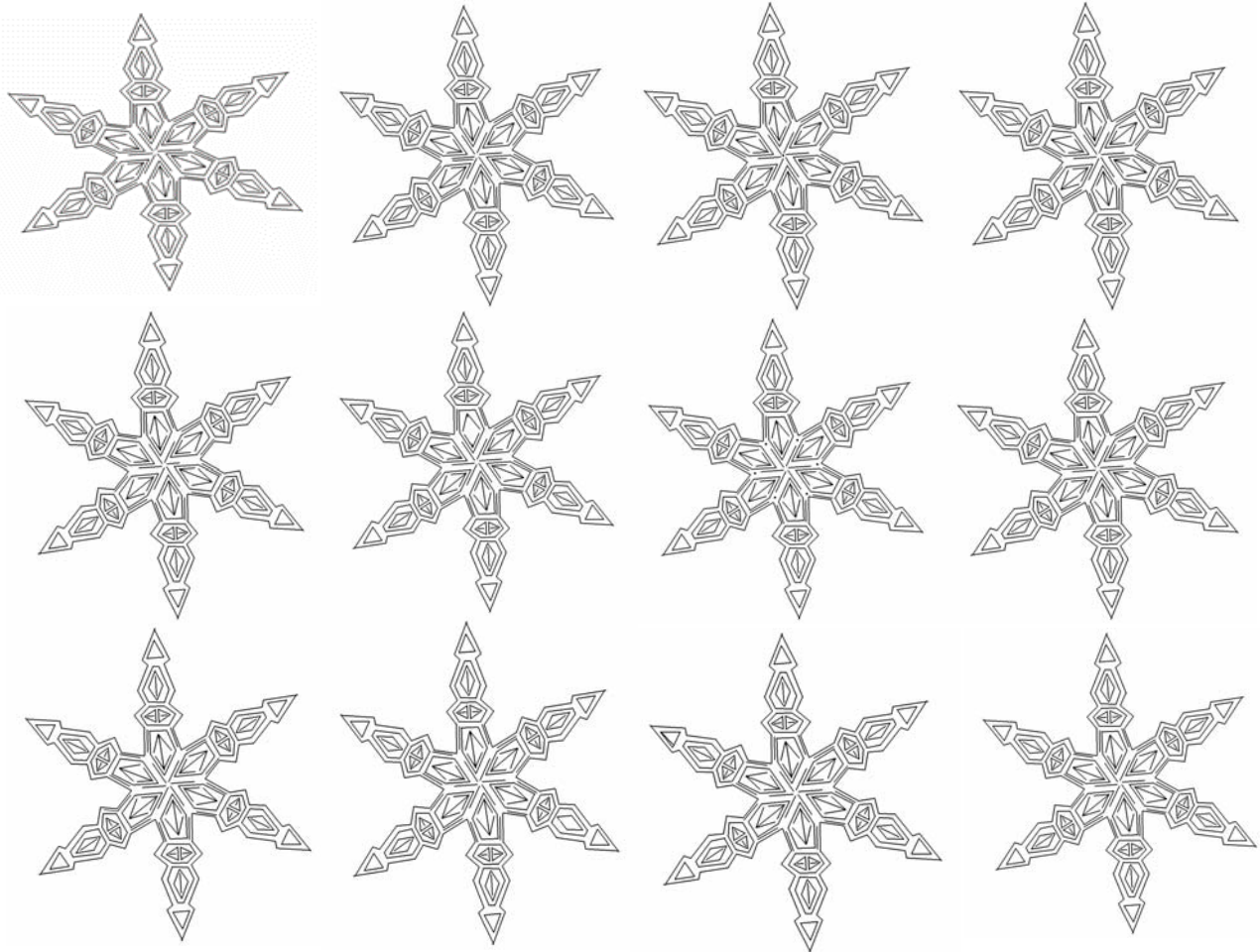
- December 10-11th– A once in 50 year meeting of three planets that you can see with unaided eyes. Facing east, 45 minutes before sunrise look for Jupiter, Pluto, and Mercury will be the brightest. They will be so close that they would only take up the space of 2 full moons. Also look for the red planet Mars which will be very close at this time.
- December 14th—Considered to be the best meteor shower by many the Geminids Meteor Shower will take place out of the constellation of Gemini. You will want to look to the east after midnight. This shower is capable of producing 60 multicolored meteors per hour at it's peak. The average is one a minute. This meteor shower will be visible from December 6th-19th.
- December 20th- Winter Solstice, this is the shortest day of the year and the sun is lowest in the sky. This is also the first day of winter.
- December through February is the best time of the year for star gazing. Because it is colder the air condenses and there is less atmosphere between you and space. Check out Orion's belt and look for the sword there is a galaxy there you can see with binoculars .
- Also be sure to find andromeda, the andromeda galaxy is near Andromeda's chained hands.
- January 1st– Sirius will rise hour by hour until it reaches the meridian. So the brightest star in the sky will reach the highest point above the horizon at midnight.
- February 10th– Saturn is in opposition, which means that it is it will be closest to us during this night and you will have a great opportunity to see and maybe take pictures of it and it's many moons. Check our page 3 for our program!



Kid's Korner!

Winter is wild! The winds come in whirling and whipping sometimes bringing snow! Did you know that there are 4 types of snow flakes? Some are flat others look like tubes and some look like needles. Below are some experiments and a find the difference game.

- A fun experiment to do during the winter is to catch and examine a snowflake. To do this you must take some black construction paper and put it in the freezer. Leave it in there until it snows, take it out and you will be able to catch snowflakes and look more closely at them, it is even better when you have a magnifying glass.
- After the thermometer dips below 32 degrees F, find your bottle of bubbles and take them outside. As you blow the bubbles you will begin to see them freeze and as the freeze they will get heavy and fall.
- Use a jell-o mold or a pie tin, fill it with water and add natural items like berries, branches and pine cones then hang them near a window and watch the sun gleam through.



Find and circle the missing and added parts to the snowflakes!





BIOFUELS BOOM!

The big biofuels boom is happening right now in Iowa. I am so proud that Iowa is trying to be part of the solution to pollution. By replacing fossil fuels with biofuels the global warming emissions would reduce by the equivalent of taking 70 million cars off of the road. Not to mention the decreases in air pollutants such as sulfur oxides, nitrous oxides, ground level ozone and more. This combined with the fact that according to the US Department of Energy tripling US use of biomass energy would put about \$20 billion dollars of revenue back in the hands of farmers and rural communities. With all that being said, biofuels are not perfect. If we are going to make this massive transition from fossil fuels to biofuels we need to make sure that we do it right with our eyes wide open to all of the issues both positive and negative. The net energy value of converting corn to ethanol is still under great debate as to whether the net energy is a gain or a loss. Currently, producing corn takes a lot of fossil fuels to run machinery and for the ingredients in ammonia fertilizer. Environmental impacts of using water soluble fertilizer result in Iowa's waterways with levels of nitrogen and phosphorous 2 to 10 times greater than levels dictated by the DNR. However hope is not lost because of things like low-input corn production and minimum tillage practices and lower chemical usage. These practices including strategic wetlands and buffers will also help our water ways and topsoil by reducing the amount of soil going into our creeks. Although technology in creating ethanol is always changing existing grain ethanol production facilities are contributing to local water pollution and consumption by taking in large quantities of clean water which can have local devastating effects and is not a long term sustainable practice, then releasing sediment and nutrient concentrated water. In fact they have the highest permitted releases of total dissolved solids and chloride levels in the state. Iowa must come into compliance with the federal Clean Water Act and this issue will need to be addressed. The biggest issue is that many biorefineries are using "clean" coal and natural gas to power their bio-fuel production. Don't let the "clean" fool you, it is still being dependent on fossil fuels and there are still serious health and environmental damage from burning these products. Some plants are being issued warnings by the EPA to reduce air pollution emissions or shut down. This would be such a shame, I feel that the people who invested in these plants are being given a disservice. Some other cool thoughts about biofuels is that you don't have to only use corn or soybeans. Switch grass and other perennial crops including fast growing trees are becoming possibilities. These perennials have deep roots that help to sequester carbon, possibly creating a closed carbon system, where the carbon burned to create the fuel is equal to the amount of carbon sequestered by the plants. Not to mention these plants would have lower inputs and tillage. One study from the Union of Concerned Scientists estimated that an average sized corn field converted to switch grass could save 66 truck loads of soil from erosion each year. Not only would there be less chemical applied to the fields but these deep rooted plants could absorb

chemicals before they hit our water, and continue to build topsoil instead of stripping it. Perennial crops have the potential to create more habitat, including a longer harvesting time which would enable farmers to avoid breeding and nesting times. Biofuels could be great for Iowa we just need to make sure we do it right, with our eyes wide open!



Sac County Conservation Board

Board Members

Mark Adams—Lake View—Chairman
 Kenny Bentsen—Sac City—Vice Chairman
 Barb Bloom—Odebolt—Secretary
 Jay Irwin—Early—Member
 Dean Stock—Lake View—Member

Staff

Chris Bass—Executive Director
 Sandi Huster—Secretary
 Rene Stroud—Naturalist

Meetings

Regular board meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM at the Hagge Park office. These meetings are open to the public.

Hagge Park Office Phone: (712) 662-4530
 Email: saccocon@longlines.com

The Sac County Conservation Board in the provisions of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age, or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Sac County Conservation Board Office or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington D.C. 20240