

THE CONSERVATOR

December, 2016



THE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FROM POTTAWATTAMIE COUNTY CONSERVATION



[Visit Our Website](#)



Attention:

All trails at Hitchcock Nature Center will be closed to public access December 3rd through 7th.

The Loess Hills Lodge, observation deck & tower, playground, & campground will all be open during this time but there will be no trail usage allowed.

Thank you for understanding.

Big Plans on the Horizon for Public Programming in Pottawattamie County



Our popular Hitch Hike series of guided hikes

Our Environmental Education staff shows no sign of slowing down despite the winter chill. Big plans are in motion and we are evaluating a whole host of new programming opportunities for the new year. Some of our new ideas include:

- Backpacking classes for individuals of all experience levels with Canfield's Sporting Goods;
- Outdoor photography classes for individuals of all experience levels with Rockbrook Camera;
- Intro to Land Stewardship classes for individuals of all experience levels with our Natural Areas Management staff;
- Summer Speaker Series at Hitchcock Nature Center featuring regional leaders in the field of conservation;
- Free Summer Concert Series at Narrows River Park featuring local artists from the Omaha/Council Bluffs area.

We are also looking for your input! Be a part of our new programming initiative by filling out a quick survey. [Click here to fill out and submit the survey.](#) Everyone who submits a completed survey will be entered into a drawing for a free cabin rental at Arrowhead Park or Hitchcock Nature Center.

Thank you & be watch for more information on these exciting new programs soon!

Winter Brings Changes to the Loess Hills Lodge at Hitchcock Nature Center

Winter weather marks the return of winter hours for the Loess Hills Lodge at Hitchcock Nature Center. Each season we reduce operations at the lodge as traffic to the park decreases. Park hours remain unchanged, the gates are open from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. every day, but the hours of operation at the Loess Hills Lodge exhibit gallery adjust accordingly.

Winter Hours, December 5th, 2016 through February 28th, 2017

Friday & Saturday - 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Sunday - 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Additionally, December brings the holiday season. The park will remain open throughout the holidays but the Loess Hills Lodge will be closed or have altered hours several times during the month.

The Loess Hills Lodge Exhibit Gallery will be closed the following dates:

Saturday, December 24th, 2016

Sunday, December 25th, 2016
Sunday, January 1st, 2017

We will also be open from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 31st, 2016.

News From Natural Areas Management

From Kody Wohlers, Conservation Technician

November was a busy month for our staff despite the lack of cooperation by the weather. Fall burn season has been mildly productive with staff burning at both Arrowhead Park & Hitchcock Nature Center. The burning may continue into December at both parks as conditions allow.



Members of the G.O.A.T.z. repairing trail damage.

November also saw some dirt work at Hitchcock Nature Center. An old retaining wall near the barn was removed to increase parking at Hitchcock Nature Center and the dirt that was removed was used to repair damage to trails throughout the park due to erosion & traffic. Members of the G.O.A.T.z. were on hand to assist with the dirt work in advance of the Hitchcock Experience Race, which will be run on the trails in early December.

The Hitchcock Experience at Hitchcock Nature Center



Staff at Hitchcock Nature Center are thrilled to be a part of the second annual Hitchcock Experience trail run. This ultra trail run features a 13.1, 50, & 100 mile race through the Loess Hills at Hitchcock Nature Center & will be December 10th & 11th. This one of a kind run is deceptively difficult, challenging even the most experienced trail runners. We sat down with Scott Giddings, founding member of the Greater Omaha Area Trail Runners, or G.O.A.T.z., the organization behind this exciting event. For more details on this unique event [check out their website here!](#)

How long have you been involved with the G.O.A.T.z. & what inspired you to take up trail running?

I took up trail running some 15 years ago, after trying to be a "fast" distance runner. After enduring a few nagging injuries, I found a couple of trail races in Kansas and Illinois in order to get off pavement. I didn't exactly know what I was getting into, but what I found was that, in addition to

being incredibly challenging, trails were rewarding in ways I never experienced while road running. I was able to challenge myself while spending time in nature with people who genuinely cared about each other's successes, even while being competitive in their own races. I loved the camaraderie of the people, from the runners to the volunteers. I founded the Greater Omaha Area Trail Runners or G.O.A.T.z in 2012 along with my good friend Tim McGargill. We had a goal of bringing Omaha its first ultramarathon, the G.O.A.T.z 50k at Lake Cunningham. Our primary objective with the race was to try creating the same atmosphere we'd discovered at races outside of Nebraska. We didn't know how we would do that, but it's what we wanted. The inaugural race took place in October of 2012 and we will celebrate our 5th anniversary this October. Since that first race, the G.O.A.T.z have added several additional races, each with a unique flare, and each geared to provide a challenge to a variety of abilities while in keeping with what we feel is the true spirit of running and competition, all while giving back to the parks and communities we run in.

What is the best part of being involved with G.O.A.T.z. & the Hitchcock Experience?

Some of the best parts of being involved with the G.O.A.T.z are the intangible benefits that come from being around people of like mind, who not only choose to challenge themselves in ways most people see as insane, but are also kind hearted people who want to be a part of something greater than themselves. We discovered with our first races in 2012 just how desperate people were to be around others like themselves who may not be the fastest, most talented, or leanest, but who had the desire to run just the same. Runners who not only want to define their own limits and set their own goals regardless of their ability. We call everyone who runs, or maybe even walks our races an athlete. Many who started with a 5k or 5 mile race now find themselves attempting, and successfully I might add, crazy distances like 50 or 100 miles, a la The Hitchcock Experience.

How did the Hitchcock Experience begin?

The Hitchcock Experience began out of a desire to give people a challenge in the Omaha area that's a little different and difficult than those we've provided with other races. Hitchcock Nature Center provides the perfect venue for that challenge. It is far and away, the most rugged natural area near Western Nebraska and Eastern Iowa, and whether or not it's 13.1 miles, 50 miles, or 100 miles, it offers people who are trying to find their limits the opportunity to find or expand them.

[Check out the rest of the interview here!](#)

Winter in the Loess Hills with New Tree School & Hitchcock Nature Center Winter Citizen Science Workshops & Saunters

"We must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day. We must make root, send out some little fibre at least, even every winter day." ~ Henry David Thoreau, Journal, December 29th, 1856.

Join us a Hitchcock Nature Center throughout the winter for a series of workshops & saunters designed to help you explore the rich biodiversity of Iowa's Loess Hills. Workshop topics include Nature Writing in the Loess Hills, Bryophytes & Other Primitive Plants, Winter Birds, & more

[For a full schedule and details, click here.](#)



Winter saunter at Hitchcock Nature Center, photo by Robert Smith.

Upcoming Programs

KinderNature: Tricky Tracks

10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Saturday, December 17th, 2016

Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek

Head out to discover the clues that animals leave behind as they travel the forest floor and try your hand at making your own tracks at this fun filled program.

[Read More ...](#)

Nature on Tap

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 17th, 2016

Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek

Register your team of up to 5 participants to try your hand at nature trivia. Bring your thinking caps because there will be prizes from over 6 Iowa & Nebraska breweries up for grabs! This is a 21 & over only event & pre-registration is required. [Read More ...](#)

Winter Extravaganza

2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, December 18th, 2016

Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek

Join us for some family fun in the great outdoors as we celebrate all things winter! Stop by the park from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 18th for winter crafts, activities & exploration in Iowa's winter wonderland. Pre-registration is required for this event. [Read More ...](#)

January Guided Snowshoe Hike

1:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 14th, 2017

Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek

Join Pottawattamie County Conservation staff on a snowshoeing adventure through the beautiful Loess Hills on Saturday, January 14th, 2017 at 1:00 p.m. This workshop is designed for participants 12 years of age and older & pre-registration is required. [Read More ...](#)

KinderNature: Snow Science

10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Saturday, January 14th, 2017

Hitchcock Nature Center, Honey Creek

Did you know that there are many kinds of snow and that snowflakes come in all sorts of shapes & sizes? Become a snow scientist as we investigate this natural wonder. [Read More ...](#)

Kate Simmons, Community Relations Coordinator
Pottawattamie County Conservation
katherine.simmons@pcccounty-ia.gov

STAY CONNECTED:



Hitchcock Nature Center



Arrowhead Park



Botna Bend Park



Narrows River Park

Follow us on **twitter**

FOLLOW US ON *Pinterest*



View on Instagram

Visit our blog