

Burning Legacy

Hardin County Conservation sent out five of its staff to perform a controlled burn at the Legacy Wildlife Area's prairie. They spent much of Monday morning working the southwest corner of the reserve.



PHOTOS BY SHAWN DIGITY/TIMES CITIZEN

Hardin County Conservation scorches Legacy Wildlife Area with prescribed burn

BY SHAWN DIGITY | sdigity@iafalls.com

Five members of Hardin County Conservation took to the Legacy Wildlife Area (between Iowa Falls and Ackley) on Monday, April 10.

Hunter Kruse (Natural Resource Technician), Cooper Ingles (Interpretive Park Technician), Chris Barber (Interpretive Park Manager), Kit Paper (Natural Resource Manager), and Wes Wiese (Conservation Director), performed a prescribed burn in the southwest quadrant of the wildlife reserve.

Over the hours-long process, Hardin County Conservation started with building a first flank fire on the area's northern fringe and drove it south and a second flank on the eastern side and worked it west. At that point, once the borders had been set, the team worked on a head-fire on the southern line (which ran alongside Highway D15) to work with the wind as it went north.

Prescribed burns (aka controlled fires) offer numerous benefits to the local ecosystem and community. They can help prevent regular wildfires from occurring and spreading, but they can also be done to help facilitate the reintroduction of certain species within the ecology or free up resources for plant life being suffocated by overgrowth. ■



MARISSA VANWINGEN/TIMES CITIZEN

Invasive species have been taking over Pine Lake State Park after the 2009 hailstorm stripped trees, letting the under-story vegetation grow. The Friends of Pine Lake were seeking money for a crew to remove invasive vines and trees.

Sups deny Pine Lake request

Suggest contacting other avenues to fund the state park

BY ELAINE LORING
eloring@iafalls.com

Marilyn Neuerburg of the Friends of Pine Lake addressed the Hardin County Board of Supervisors at their April 3 meeting to request \$6,720 to hire a six-person crew from the Conservation Corps of Iowa and Minnesota to help remove invasive vines and trees. The crew would be at the park for one week.

"I think we all know that in terms of economic development, tourism, and quality of life for current and prospective residents, Pine Lake State Park is the gem of Hardin County, Neuerburg said. "Tourism is so important for us... and where we need to start emphasizing our area."

Out of 63 State Parks in Iowa, Neuerburg said Pine Lake was the sixth most visited State Park in Iowa. "For us to be sixth, that's really says that people really appreciate and come to Pine Lake." She said the Pine Lake cabins had a 95 percent occupancy on the weekends, 80 percent overall, with visitors from all over the state.

After the 2009 hailstorm, Neuerburg said the trees were stripped bare and the under-story

vegetation ran wild, with invasive species taking over in many areas. She said it would take resources that go beyond the normal park staff and volunteer efforts.

Work from this crew would improve the health, appearance and usability of the park, she said, noting that the total cost of the project would actually be closer to \$8,000 to hire the crew, and asked if COVID relief money was available to help.

Supervisor Chair Lance Granzow asked if the state had been contacted about this, and Neuerburg said that the Pine Lake park manager could reach out to see if the state could help in some way, maybe offering a cabin or two to help the crew.

"I know this is a great cause. The problem I have is that it's a state park, and we spend a lot of money on the conservation side on the county parks, as well," Granzow said, asking if Neuerburg had to reached out to the county conservation board, suggesting she contact Wes Wiese.

"Would you be willing to give any amount?" Neuerburg asked.

"I don't know if I want to," Granzow replied, stating she needed to talk to Wiese first.

Supervisor Renee McClellan agreed with Granzow saying she'd "hate to start putting county money into state parks. I'd much rather see other resources used."

The next week, during the April 10 meeting, Neuerburg returned and reported that she had checked with Wiese and he said he had a tight budget and didn't have any extra helpers. "That was a dead end," she said.

Neuerburg also said she contacted Tam Elerding with the Hardin County Community Endowment Foundation. "They're done for the year. We'd have to come back again next year by February."

Eldora City Administrator Aaron Budweg was also contacted by Neuerburg, and she said he might have some "suggestions" for her. "Pretty much, as members, we're going to have to each take some of that and move forward," she said, noting that she would also contact Sen. Annette Sweeney and Rep. Josh Meggers because Pine Lake is a state park. "They should be aware of what we're doing, and they should be aware of the need, and think about helping us out," she said.

Granzow said if he heard of more suggestions, he'd reach out to Neuerburg.

In other business during the April 3 meeting:

- Jennifer Randall of the Hardin County Child Abuse Prevention Coalition proclaimed April 2023 as Child Abuse Prevention Month. The Supervisors approved the proclamation. ■

Sups OK max levy at public hearing

Total increase for general fund is \$624,000

BY ELAINE LORING
eloring@iafalls.com

During Monday's (April 10) Hardin County Board of Supervisors meeting, the supervisors held a public hearing on the Proposed Max Levy for FY 2023/2024.

Although there were no public comments during the hearing, Supervisor Chair Lance Granzow said he had a received one written request. "They want to know what the average person... how much this increase would be. That's a tough answer."

Granzow said his department deals with rural services, general services, as well as residential, agricultural, and commercial. "Everything has a factor that puts into everything," he said. "So, I don't want to give a definite answer."

"You also add in, if you're a city resident, what the cities are going to levy and what the school districts are going to levy," Supervisor BJ Hoffman added. "Some residents are going to contest their valuations, so things could fluctuate up and down, for sure."

Granzow said the total increase for the general fund was \$624,000, noting it was a decrease in general basic, but an increase in general supplemental. Part of the supplemental increases included mon-

ey moved into secondary roads which allows them more funding for county roads.

"It spreads across the greater population of taxpayers, as well," Hoffman said.

Emergency Management Coordinator Thomas Craighton was asked to review his budget increase of \$100,000 with the supervisors. He noted it was partially for his salary, and for an assistant in the office. "We were also approved to go to the National Conference again out in California, so we always have to budget, and then get reimbursed," Craighton said.

He said he was keeping the department's truck but is putting money aside for a new truck. Also, \$40,000 of that is for mitigation. "The mitigation plan for the county is a five-year project, and every five years it has to be done. We ran into some issues with that and didn't get people signed on to that. It ended up being \$46,000."

Repairs also saw an increase, and Craighton added money into his emergency fund for emergency equipment.

In total, the county's General Services increase is 8.84 percent, which is a 37 percent increase over last year; and a 9.23 percent increase, which is 5986 percent levy rate increase for Rural Services due to inflation.

Hearing no other public comments, the supervisors approved the Max Levy for 2023/2024. They set 9:02 a.m. Monday, April 24 for their budget hearing. ■