

SPRING 2026

LITTLE SIOUX WANDERINGS



A NEWSLETTER FROM THE O'BRIEN COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LITTLE SIOUX VALLEY CONSERVATION
ASSOCIATION

APRIL 2026

CHARTING THE FUTURE: OUR VISION FOR O'BRIEN COUNTY CONSERVATION

By Mark Wilson, Director, O'Brien County Conservation Board

As we step into a new summer and beginning of camping season, I'm proud to share with you the foundation and focus of the O'Brien County Conservation Board's 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. It lays out not only a roadmap for where we're headed, but more importantly, why we do this work and who we're doing it for.

At the heart of our plan is our mission statement, which reflects both our responsibility and our passion:

"To provide a connection to O'Brien County's historical, cultural, and natural resources through environmental education and outdoor recreation; and to preserve and protect our lakes, parks, and natural areas to be accessible for all generations."

This mission grounds every decision we make—whether it's restoring a native prairie, building a new trail, or upgrading facilities to better serve our visitors. It reminds us that our parks and natural spaces are more than land and water—they are living classrooms, places of memory, sources of well-being, and homes for wildlife. They belong to the people of today and tomorrow.



**MOVING
FORWARD
ONE STEP
AT A TIME**

Supporting this mission are our vision statements, which represent the five core pillars of our long-term success:

- **Environmental Education:** Empower our community with lifelong learning opportunities about the value of conservation and environmental practices, fostering a deep connection to O'Brien County's natural and cultural heritage.
- **Recreation and Accessibility:** Develop and maintain innovative, universally accessible outdoor recreational facilities and experiences that inspire people of all ages to connect with nature.
- **Conservation for the Future:** Lead in the conservation and restoration of O'Brien County's ecosystems, ensuring a legacy of natural beauty and biodiversity for future generations.
- **Community Engagement:** Strengthen community partnerships to promote stewardship, volunteerism, and shared responsibility for our natural and cultural resources.
- **Sustainability and Innovation:** Utilize sustainable practices and cutting-edge strategies in managing parks, lakes, and natural areas, setting a benchmark for conservation excellence in the region.

This strategic plan is more than a document; it's our promise to serve you with vision and accountability. Over the next few years, we'll use this plan as a guide to make thoughtful investments, strengthen our workforce, enhance our parks, and deepen our connection to the land and community we love.

We invite you to join us on this journey—as visitors, volunteers, partners, and advocates. The future of O'Brien County's conservation legacy depends on all of us.

Mark Wilson



STRATEGIC PLAN IN ACTION: PROGRESS ALREADY UNDERWAY

By Mark Wilson, Director, O'Brien County Conservation Board

We are a full year into our 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, and we're proud to report that several key initiatives are already well underway. These early accomplishments reflect the dedication of our staff and board, and the strong partnerships we continue to build throughout O'Brien County.

At Mill Creek Park, we've successfully completed Phase 1 of the sewer project, a critical infrastructure improvement that will support future campground and day-use area development. Additionally, we've improved internet connectivity within the park, an essential upgrade for communication, visitor services, and future digital amenities. You'll also notice changes to the beach area, parking lots, and additional patio space at the concession stand and lodge.

Some of the most exciting progress is happening at the Prairie Heritage Center, where the transformation into a premier environmental education destination is taking shape. Offering fresh, interactive learning opportunities that reflect our mission of connecting people to O'Brien County's natural and cultural heritage. Read on for details about the completion of the main floor rotunda renovation project!

Updates to the lower level displays and activity room have been completed. These changes will modernize and unify the entire nature center, creating a seamless educational experience across both levels of the building. A new reading room and library, dedicated to retired conservation board member Kathy Luedke, is finished. In addition, there is a new mural in the stairwell, as well as next to the aquariums, which visually connect the themes of land, water, and wildlife, and serve as a striking symbol of our conservation mission.

Continued on next page 4



STRATEGIC PLAN IN ACTION: PROGRESS ALREADY UNDERWAY

Meanwhile, our team has initiated natural areas management plans for several wildlife areas and parks, including Mill Creek Park and Dog Creek Park. These efforts may look messy, but as the restoration efforts continue over the coming years, these areas will become increasingly diverse and functioning ecosystems.

We're excited by the momentum and look forward to sharing even more milestones in the months ahead. Thank you for supporting conservation in O'Brien County!

O'BRIEN COUNTY PARKS:

Plan Your Stay Early: Campsite Reservations Now Open Up to One Year in Advance

All campgrounds managed by the O'Brien County Conservation Board now offer campsite reservations up to one year in advance. This includes Mill Creek Park, Dog Creek Park, Tjossem Park, and Douma Park, giving visitors more flexibility to choose the dates and locations that fit their plans.

Whether you're looking ahead to a summer weekend, a family getaway, or a relaxing trip outdoors, reserving your campsite early helps ensure you get the spot you want. With a variety of scenic parks to choose from, each offering its own unique outdoor experience, there's something for everyone to enjoy throughout the season.

Booking is simple and convenient. Just visit



www.mycountyparks.com to view available campsites and make your reservation. The online system allows you to browse options, check availability, and secure your stay in just a few clicks.

Don't wait until your preferred dates fill up. Start planning now and take advantage of the ability to reserve your campsite up to a year in advance. O'Brien County's parks are ready to welcome you.



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMING: ADULT

SELF Program

We are thrilled to announce the Senior Environmental Learning & Fellowship (SELF) program is continuing throughout 2026, featuring an exciting topic each month. This year's schedule invites you to explore the fascinating world of local fauna, both past and present.

Designed especially for retirees who cherish learning and community, SELF offers enriching, hour-long meetings filled with engaging presentations and lively discussions over coffee and delicious baked goods. Our gatherings take place at the Sheldon Public Library on the 4th Thursday each month.

A huge thank you to everyone who has participated so far! If you're looking for a fun and educational way to connect with others, we warmly invite you to join us and be part of this wonderful journey. Don't miss out on the fun—become a part of SELF today!

Program Dates:

- April 23 Earth Day Every Day
- May 28 Humans
- June 25 Bobcats
- July 23 Turtles
- August 27 Flies and Mosquitoes
- September 24 Life on the Prairie
- October 22 Crows, Magpies, and Jays
- November 19 Our Solar System
- December 17 The Three Bears: Black Bears, Grizzlies, and Polar Bears

Senior

Environmental

Learning &

Fellowship



YOUTH EDUCATION:

By Kylie Holdorf, Naturalist, O'Brien County Conservation Board

Over the past few months, there have been many exciting opportunities for young people in O'Brien County. Here are some highlights:

Kylie visited some area schools this winter to help bring nature into the classroom. Elementary students compared different animal furs and tracks to learn more about winter adaptations. At the middle school level, students drew creatures with crazy features to investigate heritability and genetics. In March, HMS students even got a visit from our animal ambassadors, Timmy, Tina, and Rophis to find out what makes a reptile a reptile!

Back at the Prairie Heritage Center, participants in the Home School Nature Program dissected owl pellets in their pursuit to discover all of the gross things that nature has to offer. On a cold weather hike, we found feathers, holes in the ground, and other signs that animals were waking up from winter hibernation.

Students at the Sheldon Library's afterschool program made watercolor paintings of germs after examining the tiny creatures with a microscope. At the Paullina Library's afterschool program, students learned about the importance of constellations for astronomy, navigation, and storytelling.

Field trip season is up next. We can't wait for students to explore the Prairie Heritage Center's new exhibits or join us for a day of fishing at Mill Creek!

Continued on next page 7



Then, it's 7 weeks of summer camps all about wilderness survival! Each week, campers will learn about a different set of survival skills. From first aid basics to Dutch oven cooking, there's something new for everyone to learn!

Sign up for summer camp begins May, 1, 2026

Visit mycountyparks.com on the events page to see the dates for the Wilderness Survival camp series.

Ages 5-11 years old and no cost to attend.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORATION:

Summer of the Little Sioux-Paddle Event

- Date: May 23, 2026
- Time: 9:00 AM

www.inkpadutacanoetrail.org

Linn Grove Campground to Wanata Access

All attendees must register online before attending the event!

Watercraft will not be provided—bring your own.

Experience 5 miles of the Little Sioux River as it winds its way along the stretch of the water trail between Linn Grove and Wanata.

Summer of the Little Sioux-Paddle Event

- Date: May 24, 2026
- Time: 9:00 AM

Wanata Access to Prairie Heritage Center

All attendees must register online before attending the event! Watercraft will not be provided—bring your own.

Experience 5 miles of the Little Sioux River as it winds its way along the stretch of the water trail between Wanata and the Prairie Heritage Center.

Hunter Education Field Day Training

- Date: August 29, 2026
- Time: 9:00 AM-1:00 PM

Youth who have completed the online training for Hunter Safety must register to complete the field day training. www.gooutdoorsiowa.com

Field day is hosted at Crosbie Wildlife & Youth Nature Center, 4270 Roosevelt Ave, Paullina.



PRAIRIE HERITAGE CENTER

Bison Burger Picnic and Lawn Concert

- Date: August 11, 2026
- Time: 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Join us for a delightful evening featuring a Bison burger, chips, baked beans, watermelon, and water, all while enjoying live music by Larry Heschke. Don't forget to bring a lawn chair! You can also take a scenic ride to the Waterman Cemetery or enjoy a horse-drawn cart tour of the prairie. Funds raised go towards the Little Sioux Valley Conservation Association.

Retracing the Dragoon Trail in Iowa

- Date: July 15, 2026
- Time: 6:30 PM

Join historian Kevin Mason for an immersive journey along the 1835 First U.S. Dragoon Expedition route in Iowa. Dr. Mason uncovers how the state's prairies and wetlands evolved into the farms, towns, and highways we know today.

Main Floor Exhibit Renovation

The renovation of the main floor is now in its final stages. Over the past four years, this project has transformed the upstairs exhibit space into an inviting, interactive learning center for both youth and adults. While the information remains unchanged, the revamped exhibit area offers greater depth and inspires exploration.

Dedication of the space will be done during the Bison Burger Picnic, August 11, 2026.

Volunteers

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers that keep the Prairie Heritage Center open on the weekends. If you would like to volunteer with O'Brien County Conservation please email: occb@obriencounty.iowa.gov

Support

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who have donated, volunteered, or contributed in any way to the ongoing mission of O'Brien County Conservation.

