

Guthrie County Conservation Board

The Guthrie County Conservation Board offers a variety of recreational opportunities including camping, hunting, fishing, canoeing, biking, bird-watching, picnicking, and much more.

Guthrie County is rich in natural resources and diverse in recreational areas giving everyone an opportunity to enjoy the county. The Guthrie County Conservation Board welcomes and invites you to enjoy the conservation and recreation areas in Guthrie County.

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Nations Bridge Park



**Self-guided nature trail tour of
Nations Bridge Park**

Nations Bridge Park Nature Trail

The Nations Bridge Park Nature Trail was designed to allow park visitors an opportunity to learn about trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and other interesting features that occur at Nations Bridge Park. Trees, shrubs, and other unique features have been marked so you may learn something about each species as you pass it. The markers indicate a number and name of each plant or area which relates back to the brochure. You should be able to identify unmarked trees and shrubs in the timber once you become familiar with the leaf shape and structure of the trees. Wildflowers are also abundant throughout the forest floor.

When you begin to walk down the trail, try to pay close attention to what is going on around you. Life is everywhere; it may be a white-tailed deer, a tiny wildflower, a rotting log, wood ducks nesting in a tree cavity, or a host of different things. A walk through the timber can provide a quality educational experience and be a lot of fun.

Nothing in the timber except the trail has been altered since the Guthrie County Conservation Board acquired the land. All dead trees are left as they fall, along with the leaves and other living things. The forest would not be a forest if we were to change the life of its everyday growth and death cycles. We want to keep it as natural as possible so we ask that you take nothing and leave nothing in the woods.

INTERPRETIVE STATIONS

- 1. Nations Bridge Park**, with land totaling 81 acres, was acquired in January and May of 1970 with additional land added in June of 1974. The land was once owned by John Nations. The bridge crossing the South Raccoon River was a landmark that people used when giving directions. It was known as Nations Bridge.
- 2. Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*)**
Do not touch! The Stinging Nettles plant is covered with coarse, stinging hairs that, when touched, can cause a skin irritation. This plant has coarsely shaped leaves and tiny flowers that are on a slender, interrupted cluster in the leaf axils. Nettles prefer a damp, moist habitat.
- 3. Riparian woodland**
A wooded area of land adjacent to a body of water such as a river is known as a riparian woodland. Because riparian woodlands have a guaranteed water supply, their component trees are very different from trees in most other environmental situations. These trees are not limited by the hot, dry days of summer; rather they can afford to grow fast and profligately right through the longest days of the year.
- 4. Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*)**
The leaves of the Silver Maple are 6 to 7 inches across, deeply 5-lobed, and silver on the underside. This tree grows rapidly in moist soils and can reach a height of 60 to 80 feet. This tree also becomes hollow as it reaches maturity, creating excellent den sites and nesting cavities for wildlife such as raccoons, wood ducks, woodpeckers, and squirrels.

5. Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*)

The Black Walnut has 15 to 23 leaflets that are smooth on top and hairy on the bottom. The fruit of the tree is 2 inches in diameter and has a yellowish-green fleshy husk. The walnuts that are produced provide food for wildlife, especially fox squirrels. The lumber from this tree has high economic value and is used for furniture along with many other things.

6. Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)

The Cottonwood has leaves that are 3 to 6 inches long and 4 to 5 inches wide with rounded marginal teeth. The bark of mature trees is dark gray with deep furrows or ridges. The seed of the Cottonwood has a tuft of cottony hairs that allows the wind to carry it great distances. The Cottonwood grows straight and tall to get the life-giving sunlight that it needs to survive.

7. American Elm (*Ulmus Americana*)

The American Elm was once a common forest tree. Dutch Elm Disease (an introduced fungus that is spread by the bark beetle) has killed many American Elms, but a few continue to survive. This tree has leaves that are 4 to 6 inches long. On mature trees, the bark is dark gray and has flat-topped ridges separated by rough diamond-shaped areas.

8. Floodplains

A floodplain is an area of nearly flat land bordering a stream or river that is naturally subject to periodic flooding. The material carried by the stream—sediment such as gravel, sand, silt, and clay—is deposited on the floodplain thus influencing the plants that grow in this area.

9. South Raccoon River Water Trail

This water trail is two water trails in one. Paddlers can begin their journey at either Lenon Mill Park Access on the Middle Raccoon River or at Nation’s Bridge Park Access on the South Raccoon River, float to the confluence of the two rivers, and then continue on the South Raccoon River to Two Rivers Access near Van Meter. Lenon Mill Park Access to Two Rivers Access is approximately 36.5 miles and Nation’s Bridge Park Access to Two Rivers Access is approximately 34.2 miles.

10. River fishing opportunities

The South Raccoon River at Nations Bridge Park offers a place for fisherman to relax, throw in a line, and wait for a catch. The most likely fish to take the bait in this area of the river are catfish.

11. Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*)

This tree has large compound leaves and can reach a height of 100 feet when it is mature. It is susceptible to rust disease in the summer. The fruit of the buckeye tree has been a favorite of people for centuries. Some people believe that this tree was introduced to America from Europe by people carrying the seed across the ocean in their pockets.

12. Deer crossing

The white-tailed deer uses river bottom habitat wherever it is available. Deer crossings can be seen throughout this river bottom. Most deer trails connect a feeding area and a bedding area.

13. Basswood (*Tilia Americana*)

The Basswood (also known as American Linden) is identified by unevenly based heart-shaped leaves and in the winter by having large, reddish buds. It reaches a height of 60 feet and has very soft wood. This tree (located at bottom of hill) usually grows in clusters of four to five trees coming from a single base.

14. River bank sluff

Factors like wind and rain can cause the deterioration of the land at the edge of a river. Erosion of the land results, and may cause the banks to *sluff* into the river.

15. Hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*)

This tree can be easily identified by the bark which looks like a mass of warts that run in loose ridges. In the summer, the leaves are almost always perforated by plant-lice damage. Berries of the Hackberry are eaten by birds.

16. Red Oak (*Querus borealis*)

This is one of the most beautiful trees in the forest. The Red Oak grows tall and straight and is a member of the Black Oak family. The tips of the leaves come to a point (bristle) compared to that of the White Oak family which are rounded at the lobe. The leaves of the Red Oak can be deep red when they emerge in the spring and red to brown in the fall. Acorns produced by the Red Oak are eaten by deer, turkeys, squirrels, wood ducks, and other species of wildlife.

17. Black Cherry (*Pranus serotina*)

The easiest way to identify the Black Cherry is by the bark. The old trunk is almost black and made up of small broken pieces of the original young, smoother cherry bark. This tree grows 50 to 60 feet tall with a narrow, open crown. The fruit of the Black Cherry may attract

up to 70 different species of birds. The Black Cherry grows on rich, moist soils commonly mixed with hardwoods.

18. Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)

The Virginia Creeper is a high climbing vine that usually climbs on trees in the forest. During the fall, the leaves of this plant turn a bright red and stand out. Its main support for climbing on trees are the tendrils, which are coiling, thread-like organs that clasp to provide the vine's support. This plant should not be confused with Poison Ivy. Poison Ivy has three leaves and Virginia Creeper has five leaves.

19. Saplings and understory

In forestry and ecology, *understory* comprises plant life that grows beneath the forest canopy without penetrating it to any great extent. Only a small percentage of light penetrates the canopy so understory vegetation must generally be shade tolerant. Many saplings are visible as they struggle to find enough light under the canopy of older, taller trees.

20. Shagbark Hickory (*Carya ovata*)

This is one of the most dominant trees on the ridges of the nature trail at Nations Bridge Park. The bark of the young Shagbark Hickory is smooth and gray. As the tree matures, the bark becomes rough with large, partially detached strips making it easily recognizable. Large terminal buds are obvious during the winter and spring. The mast (nuts) of the Shagbark Hickory are edible if you can find them before the squirrels do.

21. Take in your surroundings

When walking the trail, take time to stop and use your different senses to fully take in all the outdoors has to offer. Sounds of song birds, frogs, and cicadas fill the air. Feel the different textures of bark on trees. See all the varied colors of the different seasons. The trail changes in all these ways at different times of the year.

22. Turkey roosting area

The obvious wild turkey signs include feathers, turkey scat, and scratchings that indicate feeding. If you find these items, check out the trees above you. If they are big, tall trees with an open limb structure with horizontal branches where turkeys can roost overnight, then you are likely standing in the middle of an active turkey roost.

23. Fallen decaying logs

Decomposition and decay play an essential role in the breakdown of organic matter—recycling it, and making it available again for new organisms to utilize. Even after a tree dies, it can still be of benefit in nature.

******* Rest Area *******

You have come along the river bottom part of the trail and then climbed up to the higher ridges. Do you notice the difference in the vegetation on the river bottom compared to the ridges? Bottom land species such as Black Willow, Silver Maple, Black Walnut, and Cottonwood are the dominant species. As you reach the ridges, Oaks and Hickories are the dominant species. Available moisture and sunlight are the two main factors that indicate where a specie will grow.

24. Ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*)

This is a common tree in the middle story of the forests and timbered areas of Iowa. The name Ironwood was given to the tree by the early pioneers. When they attempted to cut down this tree, the settlers often broke their primitive tools. Ironwood is the heaviest and hardest wood we have next to hickory. The bark grows in very thin strips while the leaves are smooth and resemble delicate elm leaves.

25. White Oak (*Quercus alba*)

In this area of the timber, there are much older oak trees. This site is high above the river where the soil is dry and is well suited for oaks. The White Oak grows 80 to 100 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet in diameter with a wide spreading crown. The leaves have 7 to 9 rounded lobes compared to the Red Oak which has pointed lobes. White Oak lumber is used to build furniture, floors, railroad ties, in ship building, and much more. The White Oak is the most common large woodland tree.

26. Mast production

Mast is any nut, seed or fruit produced by woody plants and eaten by wildlife. Mast is nutritious, containing more fat and protein than other plant foods. Hard seeds such as acorns from oak trees and beechnuts from beech trees are known as hard mast. For example, squirrels, mice, chipmunks, and deer consume acorns in great quantity.

27. Bitternut Hickory (*Carya cordiformis*)

During the winter and spring, the buds of the Bitternut Hickory are yellow. The bark is smooth and the leaves are 6 to 9 inches long with 7 to 11 leaflets. This specie is not as long lived as other hickories and its fruit is bitter, giving the tree its name.

28. Transition to river bottom

As you approach the river bottom area of the trail, you are once again entering a floodplain area. Note the change in plant species from those you saw during your walk through the heavily wooded parts of the trail.

29. Coral Berry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*)

The Coral Berry (also known as Buck Brush) is a native shrub throughout Iowa. The flowers of this plant are very small and considered inconspicuous. The red fruit forms clusters along the sides of the plant and are very noticeable throughout the fall and winter. The fruits provide food for wildlife and are abundant along the nature trail at Nations Bridge Park.

30. Bristly Greenbrier (*Smilax hispida*)

This woody vine is up to 10-20 feet long; it climbs over adjacent shrubs or the lower branches of trees using tendrils. The woody stems are mostly green and round; lower stems are heavily armed with stout straight spines and stiff bristles. The alternate leaves are up to 5 inches long and 4 inches across; they are oval to broadly ovate, smooth along the margins, and hairless.

Trail (an 8.9-mile multi-use recreational trail), and the Guthrie County Historical Village located in Panora.

Thank you for visiting the Interpretive Trail at Nations Bridge Park!

Please enjoy the nature trail and all that our park has to offer. During your visit to this area, you may also want to check out additional recreational opportunities such as the Middle/South Raccoon River Water Trail, the Raccoon River Valley