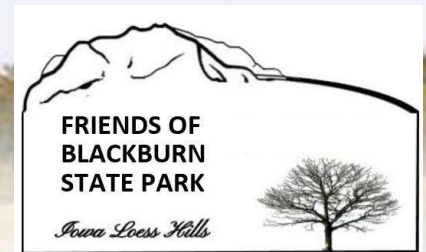


# The Friends' Flyer

An Update from the Friends of Blackburn State Park



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Issue 003  
July 1, 2022

This is the latest edition of the *Friends' Flyer*, a newsletter update from the Friends of Blackburn State Park (BSP). The Friends is an Iowa nonprofit 501c3 tax-exempt corporation that includes a board of directors and over 50 members like you who are dedicated to promoting and supporting the park and surrounding wildlife management areas. The park, which is maintained by personnel from Waubonsie State Park, is Iowa's newest state park, located in the Loess Hills at 1291 Cemetery Road northeast of Thurman, Iowa, a few miles north of the town's cemetery. The Blackburn Wildlife Management Area next to the park, is managed by Department Natural Resources personnel at the Nishnabotna Wildlife Unit. Altogether, the park, the WMA and other WMAs there offer nearly 1000 acres of publicly accessible DNR grounds at that location. See [Blackburn State Park - GOLDEN HILLS RC&D \(goldenhillsrcd.org\)](http://goldenhillsrcd.org)

If you want to know more about the Friends of Blackburn State Park, contact vice presidents Ken Forney (712.313.0315, [reforney@hotmail.com](mailto:reforney@hotmail.com)) or Mike Younts (402.209.7292, [myounts@fmtabor.org](mailto:myounts@fmtabor.org)). Being a Friend of the Park is a also a good way to stay informed of unique opportunities and activities being offered there.

Tax-exempt donations to the Friends group to support initiatives like those mentioned below can be made by going to the Donations page of the website [Blackburn State Park - GOLDEN HILLS RC&D \(goldenhillsrcd.org\)](http://goldenhillsrcd.org).

Here's the latest park news:

## 1. Park Attendance

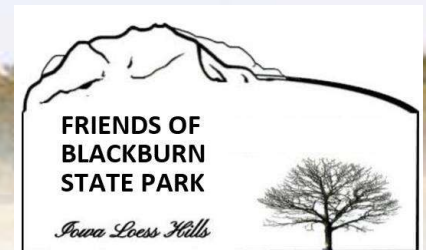
Car-count data shows that more than 5,000 people are visiting Blackburn State Park and adjacent wildlife management areas from spring through fall. Well over 20 people per day are coming there in March and April, to enjoy turkey hunting in the wildlife areas or to shake off cabin fever around the campfire or on the hiking trails of the state park. Thanks goes to the park and WMA staff for making the site so engaging to the public.

## 2. Volunteer Weekend, Projects

The Iowa State Parks have set Saturday, September 25, as its annual statewide Volunteer Day. The Friends group is working with DNR to host volunteer work at Blackburn State Park on the morning of Saturday, September 25, (8 am- noon) and the afternoon of Sunday, September 26, (1-5 pm) during which Friends and other members of the public may volunteer to help with projects at the site. A hot-dog roast will be held Sunday evening to celebrate the accomplishments. If you are interested in coming out to the fresh air of the park to participate one or both of those days, please contact park manager Matt Moles at 712.310.3460, [matt.moles@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:matt.moles@dnr.iowa.gov); or Friends representatives Ken Forney at 712.592.3917, [reforney@hotmail.com](mailto:reforney@hotmail.com); Bill Blackburn at 847.530.4014, [WRB@WBlackburnConsulting.com](mailto:WRB@WBlackburnConsulting.com); or Mike Younts at 402.209.7292, [myounts@fmtabor.org](mailto:myounts@fmtabor.org), to **let us know the day(s) you will be able to help**. Those

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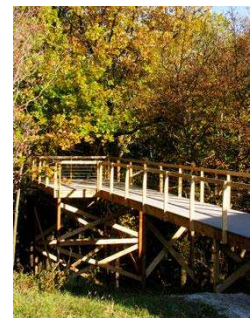
who would also like to join a few of us doing some of this work later that week should contact one of the above Friends representatives to let us know.

## Possible projects:

- Clear brush from around gazebo observation deck in preparation for re-build (see explanation below)
- Assist in disassembly of observation deck for re-build
- Re-stain gazebo base and touch-up paint metal column plates
- Re-stain two wooden outdoor picnic tables
- Paint bars of fence to storage box and stain posts
- Clean stains off gazebo floor with special powder
- Pull invasive plants (DNR will provide "weed wrenches")

### **3. Observation Deck Repair & Upgrade**

The Friends received approval from the Gilchrist Foundation for the first phase of its grant application for upgrading the popular handicapped-accessible observation walkway and deck adjacent to the park's gazebo-pavilion. A professional engineer was retained to design the upgrade to meet Iowa code and DNR safety criteria. The changes include heavier support columns and joists, and new decking and railings. The new grant application presents two options. One is for full funding, which would result in construction in October-November this year. The second is for partial funding with the remaining financing coming this winter and next spring through Fremont County Coommunity Foundation grants or other sources. Construction under the second option would begin in April or May of next year. Volunteers will be recruited to help clear brush from around the construction site, disassemble the existing structure, and paint new metal-railing fencework. See the above note on volunteering if you would like to help.



### **4. Access Road Repair**

Three aspects of improving the Cemetery Road access to the parkland are being considered:

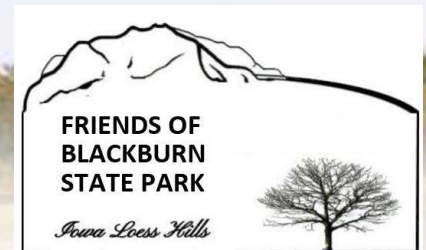
#### **(1) Repair of Large Washouts.**



Discussions between DNR management and the Fremont County Engineer have been fruitful. The county has commissioned engineering firm HGM to design repairs for the two 50-foot ravines cutting into the road bed of Cemetery Road, the only access road now leading to the park. Temporary concrete barriers have been placed around the washouts and some earthwork has been done nearby to help reduce the risk of further washout. After the design is completed over the next few months, a cost estimate will be prepared and included in a budget proposal. Because the County Engineering Department is focused on two large FEMA road-

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repair projects this year, the remedial work will begin next year, assuming the road doesn't collapse this year, posing an emergency situation.

## (2) Re-gravel.

Increased traffic to the parklands and past flooding has caused the gravel to become very thin on portions of the 1 ¼-mile Class B portion of Cemetery Road. It has declined to the point that some regular park visitors have told us they will no longer come up that road after significant rain. The County Engineering Department has a policy requiring sources outside the department to fund half of any gravel work on Class B roads. The County says additional gravel could be applied there for \$11,000. The Friends group is working to gather the 50% match amount of \$5500. Although the Department of Natural Resources, along with other property owners, originally contributed funds when that Class B roadway was originally graveled, the agency has declined to do so now. On the other hand, the Friends board has committed \$500 to the cause and William Blackburn Consulting has offered another \$3000. The remaining \$2000 is being sought from other landowners and other sources. We are optimistic that sufficient funding will be gathered by the end of this month. The County has promised to replace whatever gravel it may disturb from the ravine repair work next year.

## (3) Class A Upgrade.

The donation of Blackburn State Park and Wildlife Management Area was made to the DNR with the understanding that the agency would work with the county to eventually find a sustainable long-term solution to the problematic Cemetery Road access to the parklands. The most likely solution is to upgrade the Class B portion of the road to Class A standards, like the rest of the road, which would then mean the county would accept full gravel, maintenance and repair responsibility for it year round. Even better would be to upgrade the 1 ¼ Class B portion and then to oil the full 2 miles of Cemetery Road from the cemetery to the parkland entrance. This would provide a nicer road connecting the parklands with the paved National Loess Hills Scenic Byway (Plum Creek Road) nearby. But this work won't be cheap. The upgrade alone is likely to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Friends have requested an estimate for this upgrade from the County Engineering Department so that funding for it may be explored. Becca Castle Laughlin, grants expert at Golden Hills RC&D, told the Friends group that the Department of Transportation's RAISE grant program ( [RAISE Discretionary Grants | US Department of Transportation](#) ) offered a real (and rare) possibility for funding this work. She noted that additional federal infrastructure moneys would be coming, too, which may also apply. Golden Hills will undertake the task of seeking this funding if given the go-ahead from the county and DNR. DNR has communicated that to the County Engineers. The Friends will be monitoring their progress.