

Your seasonal dose of Vitamin N: Enjoy winter at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, just northeast of the Des Moines metro area, stretches over 7,200 acres along 10 miles of the Skunk River in Polk and Jasper counties. This diverse public area offers many opportunities to explore and play in a wild landscape near the city.

Visitors to the Bottoms will find riverine woodlands, stream and wetland habitats, sedge meadows and sandy upland hill prairies and overlooks. Recreational facilities include electric and non-electric campsites, a lodge (called the Longhouse) to rent, picnic areas, seasonal canoe rental, a trap shooting range and more.

The area is also popular with anglers, and a great place to see many kinds of wildlife. Winter species to watch for include weasels, mink and deer, or even the federally endangered Plains pocket mouse. When the weather warms up, keep an eye out for rare turtles and sandhill cranes once again nesting in the area. With its varied wet and dry landscapes, this area is also richly endowed with native plant species.



Diane Michaud Lowry

More than four miles of hiking trails wind through the bottoms, including several miles groomed for cross-country skiing. The 20-mile Chichaqua Valley bike trail also runs through the south side of the Bottoms, from Bondurant to Baxter.*

The Bottoms is jointly owned by the Polk and Jasper county conservation boards and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. INHF helped create the Greenbelt with 15 additions since 1993, including a brand new 312-acre addition. Along with its wildlife and recreation benefits, keeping this land natural improves local water quality and reduces future flood impacts and costs.

The Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt is located about nine miles east of Ankeny, at 8700 NE 126 Ave., Maxwell, Iowa. For more information and links to maps, visit www.inhf.org/winter-2012-magazine.cfm

*Note: a section of the Chichaqua bike trail is currently closed due to flood damage.

Each season during the coming year, INHF plans to highlight a public area we have helped protect. We will feature Iowa's varied landscapes around the state where you can go to recreate, restore your spirit and senses, and soak up some beneficial Vitamin N, courtesy of Nature.