



THE Heron



By Darin Voss,
Natural Resource
Technician
& Phil Visser,
Executive Director

Controlled Burns

While driving across the Clinton County countryside during early spring, some may notice a large amount of light-colored smoke plumes scattered across the horizon. At first, you might be wondering if there have been multiple lightning strikes or maybe there are new factories just opening up, but these are often controlled burns.

You may be wondering why we do these burns. After all, aren't we trying to protect these areas? By doing a controlled burn, we are helping the area by

eliminating dead material and setting back woody encroachment and invasive species. Many native grasses and plants can utilize the nutrients from the burn to help them grow. The timing of these burns is also important. We try not to do burns too late in the spring, because of nesting ground birds. However, there are times when in order to meet objectives of a certain area we may do a later burn. This may take place in the latter part of April or early May. These later burns are more effective for controlling cool season grasses such as Brome and Kentucky bluegrass as well as unwanted woody vegetation and invasive species that have already greened up. It is possible to harm a few ground nests at this point, but it is still early enough that most birds will renest.

When burn season comes along, there are a few things that we must be prepared for.

Training: Our staff is well trained in wildland fire safety and on how to conduct controlled burns. Each member of

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Controlled Burn (cont. from front page)

the conservation board staff attends trainings and refresher courses every couple of years to make sure they are prepared and up to date on best practices.

Planning: This is an important step, we make sure that we have a solid burn plan, as well as a contingency plan for what we will do if there is an emergency. Our natural resource team takes time in late winter and early spring to prepare written burn plans for each area we will be operating in. These plans are reviewed and referenced before each burn with all the team members participating. We also take time to prepare each site, which typically includes mowing and tilling firebreaks around the designated burn site. This step helps ensure that the fire will stay contained in the designated burn area.

Equipment: We make sure that all our equipment is ready and working properly. This includes portable water tanks, pumps, UTVs, radios, drip torches and hand tools. We do know that you cannot plan for every equipment failure, but we do our best to be prepared for when something does go right. We also require appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to be used during each burn. This includes basics, like leather gloves, appropriate footwear and safety glasses. Other special clothing we wear includes Nomex outer wear, which is a fire resistant material, over natural fiber clothing like cotton. Lastly, we make sure that all of our water tanks are fully operational and ready to go. It is better to have too much than not

enough. We also have a transfer tank that we can pump directly from a creek or pond in case we run out of water!

Before and during a burn, we constantly monitor the weather. Important weather parameters include wind speed and direction. Use the wind as your friend, don't fight it. Ideal wind conditions will include a light to moderate wind out of a sustained direction. This allows you to control the direction the fire is going to move. Relative humidity, or RH, is also an important factor. Generally, with a higher RH, the vegetation will be less volatile, and you will have a slower, easier to control fire. There can be times when you need a lower RH to meet your objectives, but too low can lead to extreme volatility and will make it hard to control. This can lead to spot fires outside of your burn unit. Wind direction also affects how and where smoke will move. For example, when we are doing a controlled burn at the Wheatland Wildlife Area, just south of Wheatland, we need a west-northwest wind. A south wind puts smoke on Hwy 30 and into town itself, which may lead to many unhappy residents or a dense smoke that could create a travel hazard on the highway. There is also a hog confinement directly to the south which we have to be mindful of. This unit is by far our most difficult area to burn in terms of smoke management.

While a burn is going on, we will constantly monitor the fire. We always make sure to have an adequate number of people available. We will pull people from other parks and assignments to help if needed. We are armed with backpack blowers, rakes, water tanks and sprayers, to keep the fire where we want it to be. Once completed, we will extinguish anything left smoldering that could escape our burn area and check the edges for anything still smoking. We do all we can to keep our fire in the prescribed area but realize that things can happen, and we try to prepare for the moments where things could go wrong so that we can take measures to mitigate a bad outcome.



BY KARRI RUTENBECK, WEST DISTRICT PARK SUPERVISOR

MOUSE TRAPS AND MAKEOVERS: *A Bunkhouse Tale*

Through my years overseeing public parks, I've learned a fair amount about the importance of transparency and documentation. One piece of advice I was given early in my career that has always stuck with me is, "Don't put anything in writing you wouldn't want to see on the front page of your local newspaper." This is an important reminder of the responsibility we have as government employees to be accountable and transparent in everything we do.

So, I'm here to do just that. Today, I want to openly share a rather embarrassing problem we've been having at the Eden Valley bunkhouse. The bunkhouse is a charming, rustic cabin located in the heart of one of our most popular parks. The cabin is often booked by Boy Scout troops, backpackers and outdoor enthusiasts looking for a more rugged camping experience. However, with its quaint charm comes a few challenges. Built in the 1960s, the bunkhouse has undergone some renovations over the years, but certain features remain that aren't necessarily ideal for modern guests, such as the lack of running water, the uphill quarter-mile hike to reach the location and, most notably, the ongoing mouse issue.

The mouse problem at the bunkhouse had been a long-standing joke among park staff. Bob Schafer's talk of running "trap-lines" and the number of mice it would take to make a fashionable "mouse-skin fur coat" weren't the most glamorous of morning coffee topics. Still, it was clear that this was more than just a nuisance or a joke, it was a serious issue that needed to be addressed.

Last winter, we took some initial steps to address the problem. We replaced two damaged doors to improve the cabin's seal. Additionally, we applied spray foam along the foundation, hoping to seal any entry points the mice might be using. We even found great success with modern electric mouse traps, but the results still weren't enough to resolve the issue.

The final straw came this last summer when we received a note left behind by a guest. The mes-



sage, scrawled on a paper plate, was hard to ignore. It read: "Hi, you really need to work on the mouse situation. We found 1 trap and got FIVE mice inside in 2 days. Could hardly sleep from the mice. *Provide more mouse traps. *Stop them from getting in. *Clean top of black cabinet—it's gnarly!"

This message was a turning point. It was a wake-up call that the situation wasn't just an inconvenience for us, it was affecting our guests' experience.

At the next department head meeting, we brought up the issue in full. I proposed that we start with the sleeping arrangements, as the old plastic and down-filled mats were clearly being used as bedding by the mice. I suggested we replace the old mats with bunked cot-style beds, which would make it more difficult for the mice to establish beds of their own. I was given the green light to purchase three cots, which would provide six sleeping spots for the loft area. The old mats were discarded, and we moved forward with our plan.

Next, we turned our attention to the walls and steps, which were dirty and visibly marked in areas with mouse tracks. We spent nearly a month sanding, staining and sealing the walls, making them much easier to clean. We followed this by staining the trim a darker color and applying a wipe-on poly finish to ensure the wood would withstand future cleaning efforts.

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BY: HANNAH EDFORS, NATURALIST & KELSEY PISEL, ZERO WASTE RESERVE OWNER



SHOPPING LOCALLY: zero waste reserve

In August of 2023, I ventured down to the Freight House Farmers Market in Davenport, on a Saturday morning with a friend. It was a beautiful day, and I always love seeing the different booths that local people have worked hard to set up and work out of. I always love the locally grown produce, fresh cut flowers and the home-made products and I was intrigued when I came across a booth called "Zero Waste Reserve". I was immediately impressed by the products that were set out. She had large glass jugs full of household items like shampoo, conditioner, lotions, dish detergent, etc., as well as smaller products like shower steamers, bamboo toothbrushes and reusable shower loofas. Who knew that you could bring your containers and refill them at a local farmers market?! I had no idea that we had anything like this in our area! After speaking with the owner for a few minutes, my friend and I moved on, but the name of the store really stuck with me, and a few months later I ventured into her store. I was immediately taken back as soon as I walked in. She had an array of all natural products from natural beauty products to dryer balls, baby products to beeswax wrap and many more items. Since then, I have visited the store several times, each time trying a new product. There are several items I still intend to buy as I have been transitioning many household items into more natural, healthy products for me and my family. Switching to healthier home products can be stressful as you may not know where to go to find the products and it can be costly, but doing a little at a time makes the transition much easier and more fun as you can visit every so often and pick a new item to try!

Here is Kelsey Pisel, owner of Zero Waste Reserve, telling more of her story: "My awareness of waste and recycling has been a lifelong journey. I've always been mindful of what ends up in the trash versus the recycling bin, striving to minimize waste whenever possible. I was the person at birthday parties who would collect all the plastic water bottles, ensuring they made it into a recycling bin, especially when one wasn't provided. The sheer volume of global trash has always been a source of concern for me.

I started the business out of our home, converting part of our living room into a makeshift "shop." Starting my business from home felt like the most sustainable approach at the time. I was uncertain how the Quad Cities would receive a zero-waste shop, and with limited

exposure to others sharing my sustainability interests, I wasn't ready to risk opening a brick-and-mortar location until I had a better gauge of public interest. We began by shipping orders, making local deliveries, and opening to the public on Sundays.

Business gradually grew. A feature in Bettendorf Living magazine, distributed in the Sunday Times, increased our visibility. We also connected with a local environmental group, which was a rewarding experience. Additionally, I had the opportunity to appear on Paula Sands Live and Living Local, two local television programs. Expanding into markets, starting with Made Market and then the Freight House Farmers Market in Davenport, Iowa, further contributed to our growth.

Eventually, another local business, seeking to relocate to the TBK Bank Sports Complex area or the "Bettplex", proposed sharing a storefront. We agreed, recognizing the sustainability of sharing financial and operational responsibilities. We moved into the shared space in June 2023 and continued to share the space until October 2024. We now have the space to ourselves and are experiencing steady growth.

At Zero Waste Reserve, we advocate for progress over perfection. While achieving complete zero waste is nearly impossible, it serves as a guiding principle. We aspire to offer bulk food options in the future. Currently, we provide a wide range of personal and household products, striving to offer sustainable swaps for everyday items. From plastic-free toilet bombs, bulk laundry and dish soap to reusable sponges and trash bags, and coconut cleaning brushes, we cover household needs. For personal care, we offer bulk toothpaste tablets, bamboo toothbrushes, refillable dry shampoo, bulk body washes, shampoos, and conditioners, etc. Our products are non-toxic, which are better for you and better for the planet, thanks to natural ingredients and waste reduction.

We continue to participate in the outdoor Freight House Farmers Market every Saturday from May to October. We are committed to increasing our visibility and inspiring more people to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Our shop, located at 5015 Competition Dr, Bettendorf, IA 52722, is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 AM to 6 PM, and Sunday from 12 PM to 5 PM. We are closed on Mondays."

Zero Waste Reserve is active on Facebook and Instagram where she is always showcasing new items hitting her shelves. They also have a website, www.zerowastereserve.com, where you can shop online from the comfort of your home! I would highly encourage anyone to check out her store. Just when you think you've made another change that will have a healthy impact on the environment, she shares a new product that you will just have to have!



Bunkhouse Tale cont

The timing worked out perfectly, as TSR Coating was already contracted to redo the floor in the Nature Center. Thanks to the efforts of our conservation board member, Jeff Beckwith, we were able to schedule the same contractors to redo the floor in the Bunkhouse. While the contractors had a bit of a challenge getting their equipment back to the remote location, the new concrete floor coating brightened up the space significantly and made the cabin feel much cleaner.

To further address the issue, we purchased two new mouse-proof cabinets to store kitchen essentials, like the hot plate, coffee pot and toaster. These cabinets were designed to keep mice out and ensure that the interior remained hygienic for guests. We also added a new LED lighting and a thermoplastic-coated table, which is easier to clean and more resilient against pests.

Finally, we implemented additional mouse-proofing measures, including re-sealing gaps with foam and steel wool. While we can't guarantee that the mice won't try to return, we are hopeful that these new improvements will keep them at bay.

We also hope to reach out to the guests who left the note on the paper plate to invite them back to the Eden Valley Bunkhouse. It's our way of saying, "We heard you, and we've made changes!" We are committed to continually improving our parks and the experiences of those who visit them, and this project is a perfect example of how a bad review can lead to positive change. We look forward to welcoming you to our parks and to the Eden Valley bunkhouse, where we hope the only critters you'll encounter, are the ones outside in nature.



CALENDAR OF Events

Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center Summer Hours:

For current hours, please call 563-259-1876 or check our Facebook page.

Eden Valley Nature Center Summer Hours:

Every Saturday, Memorial Day - Labor Day, 10 AM-2 PM

Note on Blue Heron Eco Cruises:

Sign-up for each cruise will begin one week before each trip. Check the forecast, gather your friends and sign up! 563-259-1876. Note: The Blue Heron does not go out if winds are 20+ MPH, lightning is (or is forecasted) within 10 miles or the river stage is 17+ feet (Camanche River Gauge).

May Events

31st ~ Youth Hunter Education Challenge (YHEC) ~ 8 AM-7 PM ~ Rock Creek

This statewide event is held for children 11-18 years old who compete in eight elements: shotgun, rifle, muzzleloader, archery, wildlife ID, orienteering, safety trail and knowledge base test. This is a full day of fun competing as a team or individual! Practices are going on right now, contact Jill Schmidt at 563-847-7202 for more information or visit www.mycountyparks.com.

31st ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Season Opener ~ 10 AM-2 PM

Come visit the newly remodeled nature center! We have animals to see and new displays too! The center will be open every Saturday through Labor Day, 10 AM-2 PM.

June Events

5th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

Every Thursday evening, there will be naturalist-guided Mississippi River cruises aboard the Blue Heron pontoon. Call 563-259-1876 to reserve a free spot one week in advance.

6th - 8th ~ Free Fishing Weekend for Iowa Residents

7th ~ Mushroom Foray with Prairie States Mushroom Club ~ 9 AM-Noon ~ Eden Valley Refuge

Join us at the beautiful Eden Valley Refuge to find late spring/early summer mushrooms, from Chanterelles to the Wrinkled Peach mushroom! Experienced mushroom hunters from the Prairie States Mushroom Club will be available for identification help. This event is open to all and free to attend. We will be meeting outside of the nature center.

12th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

13th ~ Eden Valley Camp Day ~ 9:30 AM-2:30 PM ~ Eden Valley

These are like our day camps at Rock Creek, but this is where a guardian is present. We will hike, play in the water, roast some hot dogs and s'mores, make crafts, and do nature games and activities. Register at mycountyparks.com for \$10/child.

13th ~ Summer Storytime ~ 10:30 AM ~ Rock Creek

Join a Naturalist and listen to a nature related story! We will have crafts, animal artifacts and live animals! Check our Facebook the week of to see what topic we will be covering.



14th ~ Fishing Has No Boundaries Youth Event ~ 9:30 AM-12 PM ~ Lake Malone

Fishing Has No Boundaries, Eastern Iowa Chapter and Clinton County Conservation are partnering up once again for our youth with disabilities fishing event! If you know of a child living with a disability, please consider signing them up for a morning of fun and fishing at Lake Malone. The cost for this event is \$15/child and registration is required. We need volunteers and fishing buddy volunteers! If you would like to be a part of this amazing event, please contact Jill Schmidt at 563-847-7202 or via email at efhnb@gmail.com.



17th ~ Herping Experience! ~ 5 PM ~ Ringneck Marsh Wildlife Area

Join a Naturalist to learn about reptiles and amphibians. Explore what makes a good habitat and look for wild herps firsthand! This event will include a hike so please dress accordingly and bring water, bug spray, and be ready for a GREAT TIME! Registration is limited. Please call or text Emma at 563-357-0759 with questions or to reserve a spot. Meet at the parking lot off 150th Ave, Lost Nation, IA.

19th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

26th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek



July Events

Enabled Hunting sign-up starts. Call 563-847-7202 to reserve your upcoming season in our accessible blind.

**2nd ~ Build Your Own Fishing Rod ~ 5 PM
~ Rock Creek**

Custom Rod Builder, Ryan Waltz, will be on hand to help you complete your very own custom spinning rod for only \$75, register at mycountyparks.com. The kits have a 6.5 foot, 8-15lb. white spinning rod with a Shimano FX2000 reel included! This is a great option for largemouth bass and small mouth bass, along with deep water walleye and inshore applications. You can also choose a decal as well to make your rod, even more unique! If you are not able to arrive by 5 PM, please text 563-212-0955 when you sign up to let us know when you are able to arrive. This project will take around 3 hours depending on skill level, but rods must stay overnight, to be picked up at a future time for the epoxy to harden on the spinners.

3rd ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

10th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

**10th ~ Full Moon Owling Cruise ~ 8:30 PM
~ Rock Creek**

Barred owls are one of the most vocal owls native to Iowa. Take a cruise on the Blue Heron under a full moon while we attempt to communicate with these nighttime creatures. Registration is required by calling the Eco Center one week prior to the cruise.



**11th ~ Summer Storytime ~ 10:30 AM ~
Eden Valley Nature Center**

Join a Naturalist and listen to a nature related story! We will have crafts, animal artifacts and live animals! Check our Facebook the week of to see what topic we will be covering.



**14th ~ Herping Experience! ~ 5 PM ~
Ringneck Marsh Wildlife Area**

Join a Naturalist to learn about reptiles and amphibians. Explore what makes a good habitat and look for wild herps firsthand! This event will include a hike so please dress accordingly and bring water, bug spray, and be ready for a GREAT TIME! Registration is limited. Please call or text Emma at 563-357-0759 with questions or to reserve a spot. Meet at the parking lot off 150th Ave, Lost Nation, IA.

**15th ~ Creating an Angler ~ 6:30 PM ~
Malone Park**

Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Bring your child to the shoreline and teach them how to fish. Experience and licenses are not required unless you plan on fishing yourself. We will teach you how to encourage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public. Call Jill Schmidt at 563-349-8680 with any questions.

**17th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~
Rock Creek**

19th ~ Crossroads Triathlon ~ 8 AM ~ Killdeer Recreation Area

Register at parks.cityofdewittiowa.org

24th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

25th ~ Eden Valley Camp Day ~ 9:30 AM-2:30 PM ~ Eden Valley

These are like our day camps at Rock Creek, but this is where a guardian is present. We will hike, play in the water, roast some hot dogs and s'mores, make crafts, and do nature games and activities. Register at mycountyparks.com for \$10/child.



25th - 27th ~ Christmas in July ~ Eden Valley, Walnut Grove, Sherman Park

Decorate your campsites in the Christmas-fashion!

28th - 30th ~ Preschool Summer Camp ~ 9:30 AM-Noon ~ Rock Creek

This is for children ages 3-5 and a guardian. We will do crafts, nature games and activities with the last day being the boat day, just like the older kids' camps! It will be \$25 per child. The camp is limited to 24 people total due to boat capacity. Register at www.mycountyparks.com.



29th ~ Creating an Angler ~ 6:30 PM ~ Malone Park

Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Bring your child to the shoreline and teach them how to fish. Experience and licenses are not required unless you plan on fishing yourself. We will teach you how to encourage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public. Call Jill Schmidt at 563-349-8680 with any questions.

31st ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~ Rock Creek

August Events

2nd ~ EnviroKids ~ Rock Creek

A fun filled day at the Eco Center for children 3rd-5th grades. Contact Judie Petersen at 563-357-6932 for registration information.



6th ~ Insect Hotels ~ 5 PM ~ Rock Creek

Join a Naturalist to learn about the best ways we can help our declining insect populations and build your very own insect hotel! The cost is \$10/hotel. If you only want to build 1 hotel, just register one person. Registration is limited by the number of hotels and is required at mycountyparks.org.

For more information or questions, call or text Emma at 563-357-0759.

**7th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~
Rock Creek**

**8th ~ Summer Storytime ~ 10:30 AM ~
Rock Creek**

Join a Naturalist and listen to a nature related story! We will have crafts, animal artifacts and live animals! Check our Facebook the week of to see what topic we will be covering.

**9th ~ Fishing Has No Boundaries ~
8 AM-2 PM ~ Rock Creek**

Clinton County Conservation will be hosting the 11th annual Fishing Has No Boundaries event. This event will provide fishing opportunities for people with disabilities on and along the Mississippi River. We need boat captain volunteers and fishing buddy volunteers! If you would like to be a part of this amazing event, please contact Jill Schmidt at 563-847-7202.

**12th ~ Creating an Angler ~ 6:30 PM ~
Malone Park**

Providing new experiences in nature for children helps build an appreciation for the outdoors at a young age that they may carry on throughout their life. We have worms, poles and tackle...let's just catch the fish! Bring your child to the shoreline and teach them how to fish. Experience and licenses are not required unless you plan on fishing yourself. We will teach you how to encourage your angler even if you're not an angler yourself. This is a free event and open to the public. Call Jill Schmidt at 563-349-8680 with any questions.



**14th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~
Rock Creek**



**15th - 17th ~ Lower Wapsi River Clean-Up
Project ~ Location Undetermined**

This is a family-oriented community service project sponsored by the Clinton County Conservation Board and Eagle Point Nature Society. Email riversflowild@gmail.com for more information.



**18th - 20th ~ Family Camp ~ 18th at 2 PM
to 10 AM on 20th ~ Eden Valley**

Bring your own gear or borrow some of ours. We have tents, sleeping bags and camp stoves, roasting forks and other miscellaneous things if you need them. You will have to provide all your own food and drinks, but Naturalist Jessica will provide the activities throughout our time together. We will go on hikes, caving, owl calling, star finding, creek stomping, outdoor movies, campfires and more! Register on mycountyparks.com for \$10/person.

**21st ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~
Rock Creek**

**26th ~ Mussel Beach Cruise ~ 4 PM ~
Rock Creek**

Learn about the common mussels found on the beaches around us! The Blue Heron will take participants out on the Mighty Mississippi to discover mussels for themselves! Please dress accordingly to be wet, sandy and wading in the water. Please call 563-259-1876 to reserve your free spots at any time.



**26th ~ Friends of Rock Creek Meeting ~
6 PM ~ Rock Creek**

Join this amazing volunteer group to make a difference at Rock Creek! Email hedfors@clintoncounty-ia.gov for more information.

**28th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 7 PM ~
Rock Creek**

**30th ~ Eden Valley Nature Center Season
Finale ~ 10 AM-2 PM**



**31st ~ Annual Rock Creek Catfish Classic ~
7 AM-12 PM ~ Rock Creek**

The Clinton County Conservation Foundation is hosting this tournament to raise funds for our nature centers. Costs are \$50/boat and \$10 for the Biggest Fish Jackpot. Registration can be done on www.cccf.org or the day of the event.

September Events

**4th ~ Sunset Eco Cruise ~ 6 PM ~ Rock
Creek**

**24th ~ WILDNESS Watercolors ~ 6 PM ~
Rock Creek**

Artist Gabi Torres is back to help guide us on making our very own custom gift card using inks from natural materials! Register on mycountyparks.com.

Clinton County Conservation

P.O. Box 68
2308 255th Street
Grand Mound, Iowa 52751
Phone: 563-847-7202
Email: conservation@clintoncounty-ia.gov
Web: www.mycountyparks.com

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MAILING LIST

Clinton County residents may receive this newsletter at home, free.
Others are charged \$5 annually. "The Heron" is on our website or emailed, free of charge.

BOARD MEETINGS

The Clinton County Conservation Board meetings are open to the public and visitors are welcome. The Board regularly meets the third Tuesday the month, at 6 PM, in the Conservation Office, located 1 mile south of Grand Mound at 2308 255th St. Please note, date and location may be changed.

Clinton County Conservation Board in the provision of services and facilities to the public does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subject to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clinton C.C.B. or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

