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LET'S GO OUTSIDE



Hoosier kids can enjoy nature at 30-acre park

By **Anna Rochelle**
Special to the Hoosier Times

Every Hoosier kid, from kindergarten through 12th grade, can now claim their very own piece of nature since the Children of Indiana Nature Park opened earlier this summer as part of Indiana's Bicentennial Celebration.

The 30-acre park, located in Centerville near Richmond, is a gift of nature to the state's younger generation. The park has been mapped and divided into sections for each of the state's 92 counties, with more than a million unique geographic coordinates determined — one for each of the state's 1.1 million K-12 children.

When children claim their very own spot in the park, they'll be issued a "Nature IN-Deed," a ceremonial deed to their personal coordinate they can visit in person or virtually online.

The park, one of 14 Indiana Bicentennial Signature Projects, is a partnership between the Nature Conservancy, Cope Environmental Center, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and the Indiana Department of Education.

Melissa Moran, who serves as the community outreach coordinator for the Nature Conservancy, says this ongoing project that's just getting started is a way to help children get more connected to nature and hopefully inspire them to conserve and protect the environment. A map of the park reveals planned walking trails, as well as some curious boundary lines marking county sections.

"The trails were designed to touch as many of the county areas as possible," Moran said, "and

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Children of Indiana Nature Park

The 30-acre park near Centerville is part of Indiana's Bicentennial Celebration. The park has been mapped and divided into sections for each of the state's 92 counties, with more than a million unique geographic coordinates determined — one for each of the state's 1.1 million K-12 children.

Hoosier children claim their very own spot in the park. To obtain a "Nature IN-Deed," contact a member of the Bicentennial Nature Center Network, visit the Children of Indiana Nature Park or visit ilovemyland.org online.



For more information about the Children of Indiana Nature Park, go to www.ilovemyland.org.

KIDS

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the county areas were squished and stretched to accommodate the number of coordinates needed for the number of children estimated in each county. The county areas will have permanent markers, so visitors to the park can tell which county area they are in."

Moran said the park officially opened on June 18 with a formal celebration attended by dignitaries and about 100 children who received the first deeds to be issued.

Since the opening, about 1,100 deeds have been issued, and Moran expects many more will be issued over the coming months. But the reality is that not all of the state's children will sign up to claim their deed or even be aware of this opportunity. Organizers are hoping for at least 20 percent participation during the first year.

Moran said the park will continue to issue deeds "until we run out of coordinates," and whenever that happens, the park may expand. Organizers already have their eye on adjacent property to add more space in the future and more coordinates to the park.

The Nature-IN Deeds should give kids a sense of pride and ownership of the park, but this project also has other goals in mind.

"This is a way to spark an interest in reconnecting with nature," Moran said. "It's an invitation, a tool, to help children become more involved with the environment."

"You want kids to get outside more but you wonder, 'How do I start?'"

"This project and the website



A sign marks the Children of Indiana Nature Park in Centerville.

offer a lot of ideas to keep the juices flowing."

The Children of Indiana Nature Park's website, at ilovemyland.org, offers a way to claim a deed online; information about the park, how it came to be and how to schedule a group or individual visit; a virtual map of the park where owners of deeds can enter their coordinates to find their land; a wealth of information and resources for classrooms, libraries, families and youth groups to learn about nature; and an outdoor fun area that is sure to pique the interest

of budding naturalists.

The outdoor fun area of the website currently features contests for young photographers plus tips and ideas for kids who want to get outside and take nature photos.

Moran says these fun activities will be changing often to offer youth new ideas and resources to get them actively involved in nature. "This project and the website is a chance to start a conversation about the environment," she said.

The project is currently stepping up its outreach to schools,

libraries and community groups and organizations. Outreach to the education community includes a newsletter sent to superintendents, principals and anybody else who subscribes.

Outreach has also started through the Bicentennial Nature Center Network, a network of 20 nature centers around Indiana that are using the Nature IN-Deeds as an invitation to children and families to learn more about nature in their local communities. Every Hoosier child should be within an hour's drive from a participating nature center but Moran hopes more parks and community centers join the network over time.

Monroe County Parks and Recreation Department is part of the network and its naturalist, Cathy Meyer, said Nature IN-Deeds have already been issued to some children in the Monroe County area.

"We share the mission of getting kids outside," Meyer said, "and deeds were issued to children attending the day camp at Karst Park Nature Preserve this summer."

In addition to the Children's Park website, Meyer suggested educators interested in doing more with nature and the environment might want to link up with the group Environmental Education Association of Indiana online at eeai.org.

Meyer said children suffer from "nature deficit disorder," a catch phrase that came from a book published a few years ago that documented the decreasing exposure of children in our society to nature, "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv.

Louv is the co-founder of the Children and Nature Network. Meyer says the network's website, childrenandnature.org, is another excellent source for

ideas to get kids interested in nature. "We need to do things to encourage kids to get outside," she said.

Earlier this year, Mary McConnell, state director of the Nature Conservancy in Indiana, said studies show that kids need nature. "Children who spend time in nature outdoors are more creative, healthier, more confident and better problem solvers," McConnell said. "The Children of Indiana Nature Park can serve as a springboard, inviting kids to reconnect to nature."

In addition to the Nature Conservancy, its outreach coordinator gave thanks to three other organizations that have made the children's park possible. "The Cope Environmental Center serves as the owner of the park, and they act as hosts at the site," Moran said, explaining they are happy to welcome groups of children as well as individuals for personal visits and tours.

"The DNR was instrumental in helping to identify and procure an appropriate piece of property and funding through the Bicentennial Nature Trust," Moran said. "And the Indiana Department of Education has played a great part helping with the communication with schools and providing educational resources and environmental curriculum that is aligned to Indiana standards."

To learn more about the Nature Conservancy, visit www.nature.org.

To obtain a "Nature IN-Deed," contact a member of the Bicentennial Nature Center Network, visit the Children of Indiana Nature Park or visit ilovemyland.org online.

BIRDING

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often explore other areas of the United States, sometimes even here in Indiana.

In doing so, they learn where others of their species forage before joining large roosts in Florida prior to migration. Swallow-tailed kites are an early migrant, leaving for more

southern climes in September. They gather in roosts, sometimes numbering in the hundreds, to learn from each other and to take advantage of finding large gatherings of insects prior to migration.

They spend the winter in Central and South America, joining year-round resident birds there. The Avian Research and Conservation Institute has used satellite te-

lemetry since 1986 to study the ecology of swallow-tailed kites. This summer, one bird tagged on June 8 in Florida first traveled north to North Carolina before heading south. In the 56 days since he left his nesting area, he traveled 2,600 miles before reaching Nicaragua in July. Some travel 10,000 miles.

Years ago, when Jeff and I were in Costa Rica, we saw several swallow-tailed kites gliding over an open area with a small pond. Their gracefulness was mesmerizing. These birds eat, drink and bathe on the wing, swooping low over the water and skimming the surface.

Their diet consists of flying insects (dragonflies and grasshoppers are distinct favorites), small lizards and snakes, tree frogs and nestling birds. Being "social raptors," they forage in groups. It's an interesting thought that the swallow-

tailed kites in Florida gather just when certain dragonflies are migrating.

During our recent trip, we spent several days at Melbourne Beach, where we saw thousands of dragonflies passing by our motel room. Jeff calculated that we were seeing about 27,000 dragonflies per hour flying south along the Atlantic shore.

Back home in Indiana, I find that there have been at least two swallow-tailed kites soaring our skies. On Aug. 14, two were spotted by Jeremy Ross and Evan Speck in Pike and Warrick counties. Another one was spotted in Owen County by Ryan Sanderson as he was on his way home from Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area.

These birds are way out of their normal territory, which includes all of Florida, southeast Georgia, a few spots along

the coast in South Carolina, and various spots along the gulf coast west of Florida.

Historically, their range extended up the Mississippi River drainage to Wisconsin and Minnesota. Nesting had been recorded in 21 states, but between the late 1800s and 1940s their numbers declined. Changes in habitat due to deforestation, drainage of swamps and shooting reduce their numbers. They have rebounded somewhat, but there are only about 2,100 pairs of birds in just seven states.

Much more research is needed to help protect these glorious birds. They are a wonder to watch and well worth searching the southern skies.

Sandy Belth is an assistant naturalist with Monroe County Parks and Recreation Department.

Solunar table

Date	Day	a.m. minor	a.m. major	p.m. minor	p.m. major
8/28	Sunday	2:20	8:30	2:40	8:55
8/29	Monday	3:10	9:20	3:30	9:45
8/30	Tuesday	4:00	10:05	4:15	10:30
8/31	Wednesday	4:45	10:50	5:00	11:15
9/1	Thursday	5:30	11:35	5:45	0
9/2	Friday	6:15	12:00	6:35	12:25
9/3	Saturday	7:05	12:50	7:30	1:15
9/4	Sunday	7:45	1:35	8:15	2:00

It is ILLEGAL to buy, sell, or plant purple loosestrife in Indiana.



Purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*
Purple loosestrife grows 3-7 feet tall and puts up several spikes of purple flowers in June-July. It spreads aggressively by seed and by rhizome. Even "sterile" cultivars can still produce viable seed. Purple loosestrife has invaded wetlands in northern Indiana, forming pure stands that choke out native vegetation. It has also been found in parts of central and southern Indiana.



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