

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Name of paper

Hardin County

Where published

Donna Jakes

Date of issue

Apr. 29, 1969

Sent by

Cymc

S. C. D.

Hardin

Stationed at

Eldon

CLASSIFICATION:

Weekly column ☐Story (SCS) ☒

IRA NICHOLS REFUGE — Elk Run sweeps under a limestone formation briefly at this point in the Ira Nichols Wildflower and Bird Refuge.

Inroads In Ira Nichols Refuge Include Tree Thefts, Cycle Use

Society is making inroads on the Ira Nichols Wildflower and Bird Refuge.

Not all the inroads are wanted. Homer Calkins, county park officer, said Monday six oak trees have been dug up and removed, apparently to be replanted in someone's back yard. The trees were taken from the major part of the refuge which is fenced and locked.

Also, motorcyclists have been climbing the hiking and picnic area on the south side of the refuge. This area is open to the public all the time. Besides being against state law, cycling in the park spoils the grounds for hikers and picnickers, Calkins noted.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

The tree thefts and vandalism come at a time when the county is making progress in the refuge to develop it as a giant outdoor classroom. The 16-acre tract extends north along Elk Run Creek. It is north of River Road and west of Union Cemetery. The creek opens into the Iowa River.

The park's creator, Ira Nichols, never intended the refuge as a public park in the conventional sense. He fenced the major

part of it and let nature continue to take its course, adding many wild flowers. He lived to see the wild tract draw thousands of birds.

Nichols kept the fence gates locked. The city received the land after his death and passed it on to the County Conservation Board, which also has kept the enclosure locked.

Until recently, a hole in the fence enabled unauthorized visitors access. The hole has been repaired.

FEDERAL BIOLOGIST

Sylvan Runkel, a federal field biologist from the Soil Conservation Service, visited the refuge two days last week with Calkins. Runkel helped classify plants and confirmed Nichols' intent to limit access to the land.

"He said there are things in there that are priceless," said Calkins. "Unknowing visitors could trample them into the ground and not even know it," he continued.

Calkins stressed that the refuge is for the public — the segment that cares. Access can be gained by seeing him or fellow officer Irwin Burns of Iowa Falls or W. H. Schmidt or Dean May at Ellsworth College. Guided tours can be arranged. As the county's plans progress, trails will be developed and plants labeled. "That's what it's for," said Calkins. There's evidence many of the recent visitors could just as well have used a dirt road out in the county for their purposes.

Iowa Falls scouts will help establish new trails in the refuge at Runkel's guidance.

UNUSUAL VARIETIES

Runkel and Calkins found four varieties of dogwood which they wonder whether are native or introduced by Nichols. Other unusual specimens include a Wahoo bush, a high bush cranberry.

Runkel told Calkins he's never seen a larger bed of dogtooth violets than they found in the refuge. It takes seven years for the violets to grow and bloom.

The refuge is ideal for nature studies at local schools and Ellsworth. Calkins said the University of Northern Iowa and other major schools also are interested in it and several other areas in Hardin county.

Biologist Suggests Mini-Prairie Fire For Area In Park

A mini-prairie fire, unlikely as it sounds, is just what a federal field biologist recommends for a bit of Hardin county park land.

The biologist, Sylvan Runkel, was in Hardin county last week to check several park areas, including the Nichols refuge at Iowa Falls (see related story this page). Runkel advised county park officer Homer Calkins that burning the bit of prairie ground at Bigelow park "is just what's needed."

The Des Moines Sunday Register carried a similar story about a prairie at Manson. Prairies are late developers, it seems, and periodic prairie fires helped clear the sod of woody plants while hastening new growth.

Calkins said Bigelow Park, three miles northwest of Alden, has an area on the north side which has some native grasses. The park has eight acres, six of them undeveloped and the other two for picnicking. It was obtained in 1958, one of the first pieces of land acquired by the Hardin County Conservation Board.

The Iowa River runs through the park and the south side is timbered. It has fireplaces, a well and picnic tables.