



Benton County Conservation

Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

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Fall Peace at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area

The Team



Board Members	Term End
Dan Hill	12/31/24
Samantha Hunter	12/31/28
Mike LaGrange, Chair	12/31/25
Randy Scheel	12/31/27
Tracy Seeman, Liaison	12/31/25
Becky Van Wey	12/31/26

Full-Time Conservation Department Staff

Staff	Position	Start Date	Years
Aaron Askelson	Naturalist	5/1/2013	11
Cecilia Dirks	Conservation Technician	5/4/2021	3
Camryn Grubic	Park Ranger - South Unit	3/21/2022	2.25
Benjamin Ed Hach	Park Ranger - North Unit	1/11/2021	3.5
Layla Hagen	Park Ranger - East Unit	10/19/2020	3.75
Ethan Hennings	Roadside Tech II - IRM	5/6/2024	.25
Faith Hunt	Naturalist	7/5/2021	3
Brock Leaders	Roadside Tech - IRM	5/20/2024	.25
Zach Parmater	Conservation Technician/Ranger	7/9/2010	14
Larry Reiter	Part-Time Conservation Technician	7/1/2023	1.5
Eric Schares	Roadside Manager/Weed Commissioner	4/1/2024	.25
Shelby Williams	Director	7/9/2018	6

Seasonal Staff

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bryce Borseth | Gabby McDonald |
| Abby Brecht | Pat Jorgensen |
| Duane & Rose Chandler | Daniel Lynch |
| Riley Curtis | Michael & Susan Osborn |
| Brant Dickenson | Lewis Paine |
| Tanner DeBrower | Christian Ramos |
| Charlotte Binder & Ken Duwa | Sara Rommann |
| Login Grabin | Brad Routier |
| Mike Hagen | Clara & Ron Schanbacher |
| Cara Harrill | Josie Yario |



Summer Seasonals

Benton County Conservation Board

Benton County Conservation improves the quality of life for all by providing recreational and educational opportunities that foster stewardship of our natural resources.



Board and Staff Enjoying a Tour of Conservation Properties

Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa

350.1 Purposes. The purposes of this chapter are to create a county conservation board and to authorize counties to acquire, develop, maintain, and make available to the inhabitants of the county, public museums, parks, parkways, playgrounds, recreational centers, timbers, wildlife and other conservation areas, and to promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people, to encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural resources, and to cultivate good citizenship by providing adequate programs of public recreation.

The Benton County Conservation Board's (BCCB) duty is to serve the residents of Benton County. The BCCB consists of five county residents appointed by the Board of Supervisors.

History

In 1955, the Iowa State Legislature passed a law for the creation of county conservation boards. In 1956, public vote of Benton County residents authorized the creation of the BCCB. The BCCB was one of sixteen counties in Iowa to make a conservation board that year and has been working on preserving Iowa's natural heritage since that day. The BCCB built the first man-made lake by a county conservation department in the state of Iowa, Hannen Lake. Our 25 plus properties make up over 1,600 acres, offer several opportunities from hiking and bike trails, boat ramps, fishing, hunting, disc golf, equestrian trails, campground facilities, and more.

Benton County Conservation Foundation

Dedicated volunteer group

We are lucky to have so many wonderful volunteers that help with various events and projects, advocate for us, and serve on our Benton County Conservation Foundation Board.



Foundation Members Serving Beverages at Firefly Fest

The Benton County Conservation Foundation is a 501(c)3.

The general purpose of this organization is to promote preservation and enhancement of our natural resources through education and conservation, as provided for in Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa, in the following manner:

- Promote the conservation of natural resources through a variety of educational programs.
- Conserve and protect unique natural areas.
- Develop and maintain suitable programs of public recreation.
- Serve the citizens of Benton County by assisting and interacting with other public service agencies.

The foundation shall fulfill its purpose by undertaking the following roles:

- Serving as an organizational base for volunteers for conservation programs.
- Helping raise funds for designated projects and educational projects of the Benton County Conservation Board (BCCB).
- Advising the BCCB as to the needs of the community regarding programming.
- Supporting and furthering the functions of the BCCB by serving as a vehicle for community involvement.



Public Enjoying Hannen Chili Cook-Off

Public Presence and Outreach

Staff continues to increase social media output. Google analytics show thousands of clicks for Benton County Conservation every year. In fiscal year 2024, Facebook had 3,900 followers with an outreach of 509,800 individual outreach for this fiscal year.

The department attends and represents at local events such as town parades, National Night Out, county health events, Party in the Park, Jake's Day, etc. The department also publishes quarterly newsletters. Each Patrol Unit and the Nature Center host at least one county wide public event per year.

Benton County Conservation hosts a property tour every year for the Benton County Board of Supervisors, Benton County Conservation Board, and Benton County Conservation Staff.

Snapshot of Partnering Organizations:

- Benton County Departments
- County Conservation Departments of Buchanan, Clinton, Iowa, and Johnson Counties
- County Conservation Peace Officers Association
- Garden Society
- Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts
- Iowa Association of Naturalists
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Izaak Walton League
- Local Care Facilities, Cities, Colleges, and Libraries
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Pheasants Forever
- Trees Forever
- Vinton Parks and Recreation
- Vinton Unlimited
- Whitetails Unlimited

Events

- Doggone Tired Trail Run
- Donuts and Donors
- Fall Family Fest
- Family Reunions
- Farmers Market Garrison
- Firefly Fest
- Freezin' for a Reason
- Garrison Fun Days
- Hannen Chili Cook-Off
- Hannen Lake Dinner Banquet
- Hannen Shop Grand Opening
- High School Career Fair
- Hunter Education Classes
- Jakes Day
- Kirkwood Job Fair
- Kiwanis
- National Night Out
- STEAM day at Kirkwood
- T-shirt fundraisers
- TrailBlazers - Benton City
- Women in Conservation talk



FISCAL YEAR 2024
DATES JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024
06/10

Randy Scheel Promoting Wildcat Addition

Environmental Education

Programs offered for schools

- Preschool: Trees, Insects, Explore Our World, Furs
- Kindergarten: Spiders, Nocturnal Animals, Powder Tracks, Furs, Explore Our World
- First Grade: Turkeys, "Hibernate, Migrate, or Stay," Owls, End of Winter, Graham Cracker Geology
- Second Grade: North Star, Soil Bags, Bats, Butterflies, Build a Plant
- Third Grade: Prairie Journaling, Prairie Seed Collecting, Incredible Journey/Water Cycle, Crayfish, Bucket of Bones, Skins and Skulls
- Fourth Grade: Prairie Seed Collecting, Pass the Energy/Energy Cycles, Solar System in Your Pocket
- Fifth Grade: Shelter Building, Fire Starting, Bird Migration, Seed Collection, Prairie Hike
- Miscellaneous Ages: Bison Tub (2nd grade & up), Native American Games (2nd grade & up), Skins/Skulls (3rd grade & up), Snowshoeing (4th grade & up), Atlatls (4th grade & up)
- Field Trips (All Ages): Hikes (including plant/wildlife ID, animal tracking, bird-watching, etc.), Scavenger Hunts, Nature Crafts, Outdoor Games, Pond/Creek Study, Insect Netting, Prairie or Forest Exploration, Fishing (4th grade & up), Canoeing (4th grade & up), Snowshoeing (4th grade & up), Archery (4th & up), Escape Room



Students Experiencing a Field Trip at Rodgers Park

Public Program Snapshot

- Archery Camp
- Building Better Birders Workshops
- Corner Basket Weaving
- Creek Stomp
- Firefly Magic
- Grapevine Wreath Making
- Libraries: Turtles, Find Your Voice: Frog Band, Cicadas
- Project AWARE - Make your own charcoal art, Prairie Games
- Recurring Series Throughout the Year: Artistry with Aaron - Flora, Fauna, and Females - Monarch Tagging - Toddler Time - Nature Kids
- REM Adult Group
- Sandhill Crane and Prairie Chicken Bus Tour to North Platte, NE
- Snowshoeing
- Upcycle: Gift Bags, Tags, & Bows
- Wood Burning Coasters and Ornaments
- Youth Camps: Adventure - Dragonfly - Critter - Hannen Lake Overnight - River Raiders Canoe Trip - Boundary Waters Canoe Area Trip

8200+
individual
contacts made

Schools served:

- Alternative High School
- Atkins Elementary
- Belle Plaine Grade School
- Belle Plaine High School
- Belle Plaine Middle School
- Belle Plaine Preschool
- Benton Community/Norway
- Braille School
- Center Point-Urbana
- Creative Kids
- Good Earth Nature School
- Happy Time Daycare
- Keystone Elementary
- La Porte Dysart- Preschool
- Penn Elementary
- Shellsburg Elementary
- Tilford Elementary
- Tiny Vikes Preschool
- Union Middle School
- Vinton Early Learning Center



FISCAL YEAR 2024

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07/14

Projects

Snapshot of Projects Completed by the Department:

- Approved Law Enforcement Coordinator position for FY '25
- Approved Conservation Technician Positions for FY '25
- Approved Office Coordinator Position for FY '25
- Benton-City trail establishment
- Bison Display for Nature Center
- Cleared Wyman shoreline
- Completed county forest reserve approvals
- Completed Hannen Lake Park maintenance shop



Staff Finishing Concrete Pad for New Kiosk



Upgraded Flag Pole at Hannen Lake Park

- Completed multiple grant applications
- Converted large hillside areas at Hannen to prairie
- Coordinated with Land Management Resources for clearing the Paha
- County Handbook input
- Created driving tour for WMA meeting
- Designed OCNT historical signage
- Donation of the new Vinton Trailhead for OCNT
- Downloadable maps on website
- FEMA 2020 Derecho follow-up
- Hannen flag pole upgrade
- Hannen Lake Restoration planning

- Horseshoe pits at Hannen
- Ike's presentation - Wildcat Addition
- Improved Hannen Lake Park west/old shop
- Improved public access to Minne-Estema Park
- Installed additional potable water access at Hannen Lake Park
- Installed Albert Wetland walk through gate
- Installed Edna Shain Fen sign
- Installed new kiosks and signage
- Installed new parking lots
- Law Enforcement resources updated
- Northern gas line project cooperation



Improved Access to Minne-Estema Park

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Projects Continued



The Den at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area

- Partnered with other county departments to accomplish burns, plantings, and various other projects
- Pine clearing at Hannen Lake Park
- Planted Wildcat Addition crop field to natives with cover crop
- Prepared The Den for renting
- Property Easements
- Property legal issues
- REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) assembly planning and hosting
- REAP CEP (Conservation Education Program) grant application on behalf of Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN)

- Remodeled Rodgers old shop
- Removed building at Winegar and Tobin Wildlife Area
- Resided garage at Hannen boat ramp
- Resided sandbag shed at Wild Rose Cabin
- Rodgers Park and Nature Center well work with public water sourcing
- Rodgers pull-through sites developed and upgraded
- Routine Frog and Toad Surveys for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- Split firewood from secondary roads
- Tree Canopy Grant work for Atkins Roundhouse 2020 Derecho Project
- Updated Hannen Lake Park west shop public restroom using Water Recreation Access Cost-Share (WRAC)



Edna Shain Fen Sign



Hannen Lake Park West Shop Restroom

- Updated park surveillance
- Water Trails project approved, process started with IDNR
- Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area Addition - REAP Grant application, fundraising, and inventories
- Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area shower house, dump station, and host site design with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Wildcat Disc Golf parking lot establishment
- Wildcat well house installation
- Worked on clarifying county property deeds

Iowa Roadside Management (IRM)



Benton County Conservation stepped up to have the IRM department under our umbrella

- Hired 3 employees by the end of May
- 381.5 miles of roadsides sprayed (in less than three months)
- Seeded 11 acres of Right of Way with native seed mix
- Obtained necessary certifications

Native Plants in the Right of Way



- Sprayed all 13 maintainer sheds, 33 bridge railings, 5 sheriff towers, secondary roads shop, weed office, and sheriff's office with nonselective and pre-emergent herbicide
- Assisted UNI's Tallgrass Prairie Center with a prescribed burn
- Two weed complaints with one resulting in a destruction performed by Weed Commissioner
- Created Facebook and Instagram pages for IRM
- Purchased new 325G John Deere skid loader
- Purchased 200 gallon skid sprayer unit with pump and hose reel
- Joined ICCABE Winterfest planning committee
- Developed new logo for IRM

Fresh Hydroseeding

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Continuing Education and Professional Development



BCCB Rangers hosted the Spring CCPOA Conference

Trainings/Committees/Meetings attended by the staff:

- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding meetings and application
- Association for Integrated Roadside Managers (AFIRM) representation
- Benton County Conservation Foundation meetings
- Board of Supervisors meetings
- County Conservation Peace Officers (CCPOA) spring and fall Conferences
- County harassment training
- County insurance meeting
- CPR/AED/First Aid
- Developed and hosted Building Better Birders Workshops
- Director's Association meetings and leadership training
- District 6 meetings
- East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) Regional Trails group alternate
- Employee and Director reviews
- Hunter Education updates/workshops
- International Society of Arboriculture Certification
- Iowa Association of Naturalist Professional Development certifications and conferences
- Iowa Pesticide Applicator new licenses and continuing instruction
- Iowa Public Information Board training
- Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC)/County Conservation Director's Association (CCDA) Conference
- Local community outreach events including job fairs, county health events, etc.
- MOU meetings
- National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)
- National Association of Interpretation (NAI) conference
- Obtained necessary CDL and fire certifications
- Presented at NAI about Natural Charcoal Art and Wilderness Trips
- Project AWARE planning and programming
- Safety Committee and Security Committee
- Staff communication, burnout, and team development training
- Stop the Bleed training
- Substance Abuse training
- Watershed Tours with Army Corps of Engineers and Iowa Watershed Approach
- Wilderness First Aid
- Winterfest conference and District 6 Winterfest Committee Representative



Economic Benefit and Quality of Life

In 2012, a study titled Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation Activities in Iowa was conducted to show the value of our outdoor areas. In this study, usage in county parks was valued at \$25.37 per person, average spending. This implies that our 32,721 registered camping individuals alone brought an economic benefit of \$830,131.77 to the county (even more given the year this study was conducted).

** This is not including camping revenue fees or any day use benefits. For day use (which would be valued at \$25.37 per person per day in 2012), we know that we have several thousand of day-use individuals including disc golfers, hikers, bikers, walkers, anglers, hunters, boaters, and equestrian riders. This brings in additional hundreds of thousands of dollars.



View of Rodgers Park from the South

"Economic Impacts of Natural Resources and Outdoor Amenities in Iowa: Participating in outdoor recreation typically involves expenditures such as travel, food, supplies, and specialized equipment (e.g., bikes, fishing tackle, hunting equipment, licenses, and special clothing). Identifying and measuring these expenses is one way to estimate the value people place on a particular recreational activity. Natural resources have value even when no expenditures are made while participating."

"Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation Activities in Iowa." Iowa State University

Conservation Matters

78.81% of Benton County residents identified mental health as a priority. Outdoor recreation has shown to reduce anxiety and depression. Conservation offers that safe space.

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) states local travel brings \$392 million to Iowa every year.

A survey by the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IDEA), "access to natural landscapes and outdoor activities" was identified as a top priority by those considering Iowa as a place to live or have a business.



Conservation Revenue

\$119,237.65

CAMPGROUND REVENUE

\$16/night for electric sites, \$10/night for primitive sites.

We offer 155 electric sites and 26 primitive sites.

In FY24, conservation brought in over \$890,000 in total revenue

\$13,506.64

CABIN REVENUE: \$12,050.82

SHELTER REVENUE: \$1,455.82

Wild Rose Cabin (Winegar Tobin Area) \$90/night
Cedar Cabin (Hannen Lake Park) \$70/night
Eight rentable shelters on mycountyparks.com

\$1,748.73

MISC. REVENUE

Various revenue received from other sources such as REAP, insurance reimbursements and FEMA funds.

\$603,110

DONATIONS

The Foundation received over \$600,000 in contributions from generous community members, organizations, and businesses. The majority of this funding this fiscal year has been earmarked for the Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area Addition.



Randy Scheel (BCCB), David Coulter (BCCF), Dr. Alice Timmerman (Donor), Becky VanWey (BCCB), Mike Myers (Donor), Shelby Williams (BCC), Dale Henry (BCCF), Cecilia Dirks (BCC), Mike LaGrange (BCCB), Samantha Hunter (BCCF)

\$156,000

RECEIVED GRANTS

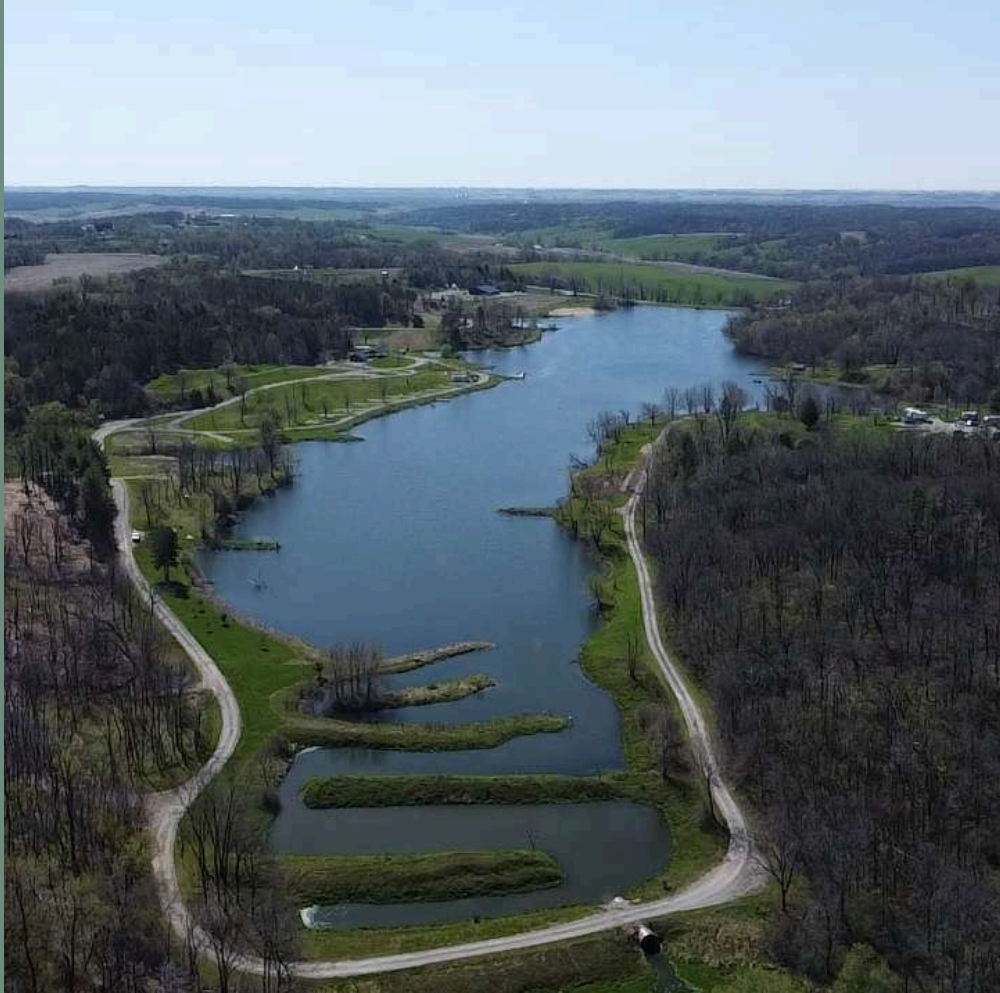
Funding Sources: Benton and surrounding county Pheasants Forever Chapters, National Wild Turkey Federation (local and state), Ornithologist Union, Native Plant Society, ARPA Tribal Consistency Fund. Additional grants are in process and applied for, anticipating more in FY25.



Contact us for further inquiries

<https://www.bentoncountya.gov/conservation/>
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FY 2024
JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024



View of Hannen Lake Park from the north



Naturalist, Ranger, and Director
at National Night Out

