

FY2023: July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

Annual Report

BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION



Benton County Conservation
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Benton County Conservation Board

Mission Statement

Benton County Conservation strives to improve the quality of life for our citizens by providing recreational and educational opportunities that foster stewardship of our natural resources.

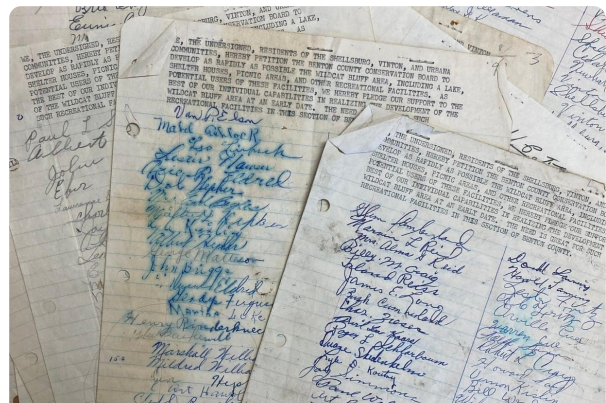
Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa

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.



Tree planting in 1959 at Hannen Lake Park



Petition from 1963 to create Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area

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.

The Team

Board Members	Term End
Randy Scheel	12.21.27
Denni Randall	12.31.23
Dan Hill, Chair	12.31.24
Mike LaGrange	12.31.25
Tracy Seeman, Supervisor Liason	12.31.25
Becky Van Wey	12.31.26

Seasonal Staff

Duane & Rose Chandler	Sydney Hawkins
Riley Curtis	Cindy Heitshusen
Tanner DeBrower	Mike & Vicky Houser
Charlotte Binder & Ken Duwa	Pat Jorgensen
Lauren Giddings	Daniel Lynch
Login Grabin	Michael & Susan Osborn
Rick Haefner	Lewis Paine
Mike Hagen	Sara Rommann
Hunter Hampshire	Brad Routier
Cara Harril	Charles & Trish Tucker



Most of the BCC staff at the summer 2023 outing

Staff	Position	Start Date	Years
Aaron Askelson	Naturalist	5/1/2013	10
Cecilia Dirks	Conservation Technician	5/4/2021	2
Camryn Grubic	Park Ranger – South Unit	3/21/2022	1.25
Benjamin Ed Hach	Park Ranger – North Unit	1/11/2021	2.5
Layla Hagen	Park Ranger – East Unit	10/19/2020	2.75
Faith Hunt	Naturalist	7/5/2021	2
Zach Parmater	Conservation Technician/Ranger	7/9/2010	13
Larry Reiter	Part-Time Conservation Technician	7/1/2023	1
Shelby Williams	Director	7/9/2018	5

Volunteers

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.

Environmental Education

Programs offered for schools:

- Preschool: Trees, Insects, Explore the Outdoors, 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, Build-a-Tree
- Second Grade: North Star, Soil Bags, Bats, Butterflies
- Third Grade: Prairie Journaling, Prairie Seed Collecting, Frogs, 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, Seed Olympics
- Fifth Grade: Shelter Building, Bird Migration, Seed Collection
- 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), Geocaching (4th grade & up), Archery (4th & up)

6,700+ contacts

The two Benton County Naturalists each made over 6,700 individual contacts with the public.

Public Programs Snapshot:

- Basket Making
- Cedar Valley Nature Trail Family Bike Ride
- Creek Stomp
- Eco-Extravaganza
- Fireflies
- Grapevine Wreath Making
- Monarch Tagging
- Reoccurring Series Throughout the Year: Artistry with Aaron - Flora, Fauna, and Females - Monarch Tagging - National Trails Event - Toddler Time - Nature Kid
- Sandhill Crane and Prairie Chicken Bus Tour to North Platte, NE
- Snowshoeing
- Wood Burning Coasters and Ornaments
- Youth Camps: Adventure - Dragonfly - Critter - Hannen Lake Overnight - River Raiders Canoe Trip - Boundary Waters Canoe Area Trip

Environmental Education and Outreach

Schools served:

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

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
- Whitetails Unlimited

Public Presence

Staff continues to increase social media output. Google analytics show thousands of clicks for Benton County Conservation every year. Facebook had 3,198 followers with an average of 12,000 outreach numbers in a week for this fiscal year.

The department attends and represents at local events such 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.

Projects

Among regular maintenance/upkeep (mowing, plowing, shoveling, litter pick up, education animal care, water samples, cutting firewood), land management (burning, woody vegetation removal, cut and treat, timber stand improvement, storm clean up), wildlife management (wildlife rescues, dispatching deer), event preparation and performance, law enforcement duties, and public interaction, the staff manages to accomplish various larger scale projects throughout the county.

Snapshot of Projects Completed by the Department:

- Completed county forest reserves
- Completed last of native prairie seedings, installed parking lots and hosted grand opening at the Edna Shain Fen and Wetland
- Continued invasive species removal
- Continued prairie planting and maintenance
- Developed trail at Polk Township
- Eliminated dated pit toilet at Rodgers cul-da-sac
- Hoefle-Dulin Shoreline Stabilization Project, grading, parking lot, and re-planting
- Installed “Dakota’s Circle” bench area at Hannen Lake Park through fundraising
- Installed Benton County Creek Signs through grants
- Installed Bike Fixit station, bike rack, benches, water stations and hosted grand opening at the OCNT Garrison Trailhead
- Installed new kiosks and signage
- Installed Old Creamery Nature Trail (OCNT) intersection signs
- Law Enforcement resources updated
- Nature Center basement facelift
- Open parks for the season
- Partnered with other county departments to accomplish burns, plantings, and various other projects
- Planned and started on the new Hannen Lake Park Maintenance Shop
- Received Monarch Waystation Certification
- Restructured gates and fencing for yearlong access in some parks
- Routine Frog and Toad Surveys for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR)
- Scout Project work including turtle docks for the parks, bluebird boxes, outdoor turtle enclosure
- Spillway repairs completed at Rodgers Park
- Started on multiple grants
- Started on Rodgers Park and Nature Center Well work with public water sourcing
- Started on South Rodgers Shop revamp
- Started the process for the donation of the new Vinton Trailhead for OCNT
- Updated park surveillance
- Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area Addition work through 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 Bluff Recreation Area shop office and lean-to addition
- Winterize parks
- Work on structure of Hannen Lake Park west/old shop
- Worked on clarifying county property deeds

Continuing Education and Professional Development

Trainings/Committees/Meetings attended by the staff:

- Academy Graduation of South Unit Ranger
- American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding meetings and application
- Attended local community outreach events including job fairs, county health events, etc.
- 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 Programs
- District 6 Meetings
- Employee and Director Reviews
- Human Trafficking Training
- Iowa Association of Naturalist Professional Development Certifications and Conferences
- Iowa Association of Naturalists Wilderness Training
- Iowa Pesticide Applicators
- Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC)/County Conservation Director's Association (CCDA) Conference
- IPERS Training
- MOU meetings
- National Archery in the Schools Program
- National Association of Counties Leadership Academy
- Project AWARE Planning
- Staff communication, burnout, and team development trainings
- Staff Radio Training
- Started on International Society of Arboriculture Certification
- Stop the Bleed Training
- Substance Use Training
- Watershed Tours with Army Corps of Engineers and Iowa Watershed Approach
- Wilderness First Aid
- Winterfest Conference and District 6 Winterfest Committee Representative



Staff at the Rodgers Park Ice Fishing Tournament February 2023



Economic Benefit

\$25.37 per person per day

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 28,862 registered camping individuals brought an economic benefit of \$732,228.94 to the county. 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 over thousands 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.

\$732,000+
economic benefit brought to Benton County FY23



"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. Beyond what consumers actually spend to engage in recreation pursuits, there is a surplus value of what they would actually be willing to pay for that recreation opportunity. This surplus is an important part of the valuation of the outdoor recreation experience and is critical in assessing the value of the nearby recreation facilities that residents are able to use without incurring significant user fees."

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

Conservation Revenue

\$9,724.79

CABIN REVENUE: \$8,616.54

SHELTER REVENUE: \$1,108.25

Wild Rose Cabin (Winegar Tobin Area) \$90/night

Cedar Cabin (Hannen Lake Park) \$70/night

Eight rentable shelters on mycountyparks.com

\$30,468.03

MISC. REVENUE

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

\$218,144

RECEIVED GRANTS/DONATION

Funding Sources: Benton County Community Foundation Grant, Fish Habitat Grant, Land Donation

The staff have been working on grants this fiscal year to be awarded next fiscal year.

Benton County Conservation Foundation received various contributions supporting the work the conservation department is doing.

\$20,600

CONTRIBUTIONS

The Foundation received over \$20,000 in contributions from generous community members and organizations.

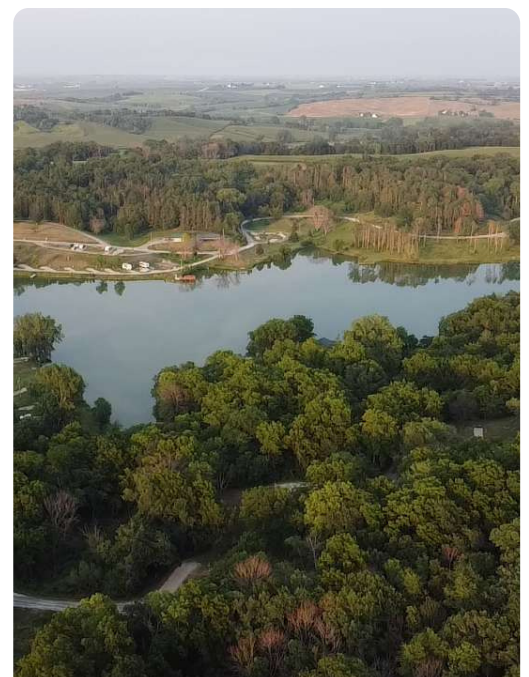
In FY23,
conservation
brought in over
\$400,000 in
total revenue

\$125,381.36

CAMPGROUND REVENUE

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

We offer 167 electric sites and 28 primitive sites.



Hannen Lake Park
Summer 2023