



BENTON COUNTY
CONSERVATION

Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report

July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025

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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.

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 people 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.

BOARD MEMBERS

Dan Hill Term Ends 2029

Samantha Hunter Term Ends 2028

Mike LaGrange Term Ends 2025

Randy Scheel Term Ends 2027

Becky Van Wey, Chair, Term Ends 2026

Tracy Seeman, Board of Supervisors Liaison,
Term Ends 2025



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Trash Cleanup at Minnie-Estema
State Park

The Team

NATURALISTS

Aaron Askelson – Served 12 years

Faith Hunt – Served 4 years

CONSERVATION TECHNICIANS

Logan Grabin – Served 1 year

Cara Harrill – Served 1 year

Ethan Hennings – Served 1 year

Zach Parmater – Swing Ranger – Served 15 years

PARK RANGERS

Cam Grubic – Law Enforcement Coordinator – Served 3.25 years

Ed Hach – Served 3.5 years

Layla Lynch – Served 4.5 years

Will Souer – Served .25 years

IRM

Eric Schares – Served 1.25 years

Sam Jacobs – Served .25 years

Drew Weisskopf-DeSmet – Served .25 years

ADMIN

Shelby Williams – Served 7 years

Cecilia Dirks – Served 4 years

SEASONALS

Bryce Borseth

Abby Brecht

Aubrey Cady

Duane & Rose Candler

Ann Conklin

Tanner DeBrower

Noah Franklin

Jessica Good

Mike Hagen

Gabby McDonald

Michael & Susan Osborn

Brad Routier

Clara & Ron Schanbacher

Kurt Slouha

Jakob Whiting

Josie Yario



Naturalists



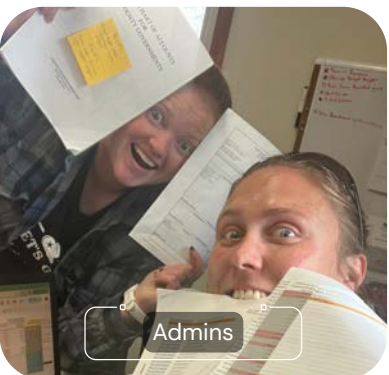
Conservation Techs



Park Rangers



IRM



Admins



Seasonals and Staff before paddling
the Cedar River

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BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Benton County Conservation Foundation (BCCF) 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



OVER \$155,000 BROUGHT IN THROUGH THE FOUNDATION

The BCCF brought in over \$155,000 through fundraising and grants, all directly supporting the Benton County Conservation Department and everything it does!

BENTON COUNTY CONSERVATION FOUNDATION MEMBERS

Dale Henry, Chair
David Coulter, Treasurer
Kelly Kelly, Secretary

Members At Large :
Charlotte Binder, Brad Harvan, Jerry Kenney, Marsha Schrog, Dan Schrog, Paul Stults



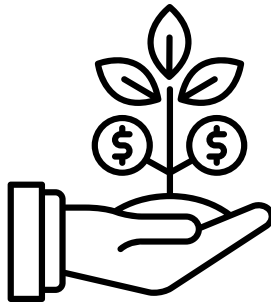
Economic Benefit & Quality of Life

**FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED IN COUNTY CONSERVATION,
THE ECONOMY RECEIVES \$10 IN RETURN**

Investing in conservation is one of the smartest financial decisions we can make.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

County Conservation provides one of the best returns on investment anywhere in public service.



CONSERVATION IS ESSENTIAL

Protecting and providing resources such as wetlands, prairies, and timbers is valued at thousands per acre and provides habitat to wildlife but so much more to individuals.



MORE THAN MONEY

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.



"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

*Stats retrieved from:

- "The Economic Impact of Recreation in Iowa" by Scioto Analysis, 2025
- "Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation Activities in Iowa." by Iowa State University, 2012
- Benton County Community Health Needs Assessment

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Trash Cleanup at Hannen Lake Park
by Pack 46 Scouts



Painting Enclosed Shelter at Rodgers
Park by Frontier Coop



Volunteers helping at
Firefly Festival



Park Cleanup at Wildcat Bluff
Recreation Area with Frontier Co-op



Trash Cleanup at Old Creamery
Nature Trail with the Garrison Library

Volunteers

- Florence Go Getters 4H club painted the bird blind at Hannen Lake Park
- Frontier Co-op mulched trees and cleaned up the flowerbeds at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area
- Frontier Co-op painted the Enclosed Shelter at Rodgers Park
- Garrison Library picked up trash along the Old Creamery Nature Trail
- Nick Fischer equestrian trails maintenance
- Pack 46 Scouts picked up trash at Hannen Lake Park
- Hannen Lake Park Chili Cook-Off – Music by Scott, Annette, & George, Benton County Conservation Foundation
- Firefly Festival – Troutleaf Native Plants, Vinton Guild of Fine Arts, Benton County Historical Society, Tanager Place, Benton County Conservation Foundation



Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area Grand Opening Event

Events

- Celebrate Iowa Outdoors Day at Iowa Capitol
- Celebrate Trails Day
- Don Bosco career fair
- Fall Family Fest
- Firefly Fest
- Hannen Chili Cookoff
- Hosted District 6 meeting
- Hosted Hunters Ed
- Hosted IAN preconference at Wildcat Bluff
- Interviews with press for Atkins Roundhouse Area
- Jake's Day with the Blue Creek Springtime Monarchs and Red Cedar Chapter of the Izaak Walton League
- National Night Out
- Old Creamery Nature Trail (OCNT) Garrison Trailhead Historical Signage Grand Opening
- Participated in Vinton's Lighted Holiday Parade
- Planning for cohosting Iowa County Conservation System 2026
- REAP meetings
- Sauerkraut Days Parade
- Tree Canopy Public Meeting
- Wildcat Grand Opening



Hannen Chili Cook Off



Rodgers Fall Family Fest



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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

- Ag Safety Day
- Aquaponics
- Basket Class
- Boundary Waters Canoe Trip
- Breakfast Nature Club at Nahant Marsh – Fireflies
- Central Lutheran 5 & 6th 2 day at Camp Io-Dis-E-Ca
- Creative kids : Prairie Investigations
- Creek Stomp at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area
- Discover the Upper Midwest: Wolves & Bears Bus Trip to Ely, MN
- DNR Mussel Blitz
- Edna Shain Fen Presentation at Virginia Gay Nursing Home
- Feeding Frenzy at Nature Center
- Frog and Toad Surveys
- Full Moon Painting class at Nature Center
- Hannen Lake Bird Program
- Homeschool : Insects of Land, Air, & Water, Herpetology
- Hosted an Extern through the Iowa STEM Teacher Externships Program
- Hunter Ed Izaak Walton 2 day course
- Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) Preconference : Running a World Class Disc Golf Course and Land Acquisition at Wildcat
- IAN Wilderness Committee
- Iowa County Field Day at Lake Iowa Park Canoeing and Kayaking
- Kirkwood STEAM job fair
- Library Programs – Cicadas, Wolves & Bears bus trip presentation, Monarchs
- Lions Club presentations
- Monarch Tagging
- National Night Out at Vinton Riverside Park
- OCNT, Garrison Trailhead Historical Signage Grand Opening – Pioneer Games and Butterfly Catching
- Orienteering and Archery at Rodgers
- Patterns in Nature
- Produced quarterly newsletter
- River Raiders three day trip on upper Iowa
- September 2024 Bus Trip to North Woods – partnered with Buchanan County Conservation
- Served on safety committee for county
- Staff Paddle Cedar River
- Toddler time: colors in nature
- Translated frequently asked questions to Spanish
- Upcycle Gift Bags, Tags, & Bows at Nature Center
- Vinton Early Learning Center – Insects, Turtles,
- Vinton Parks & Rec at Nature Center
- Wild love presentation at Virginia Gay Nursing Home
- Wildcat Adventure Camp
- Wildlife Hike at Irvine Prairie
- Wind Chimes
- Women, Land & Legacy at Irvine Prairie
- Wood Burning class Coasters and Ornaments



Monarch Tagging
@ Irvine Prairie



Wolves & Bears
Bus Trip



Firefly Fest



School Programs
@ Nature Center



IAN Preconference
@ Wildcat Disc Golf Course

Programs offered for schools:

Preschool: Trees, Insects, Explore the Outdoors, Furs, Turtles

Kindergarten: Spiders, Nocturnal Animals, Powder Tracks, Furs, Explore Our World, trees leaf rubbing, Prairie walk

First Grade: Turkeys, "Hibernate, Migrate, or Stay," Owls, End of Winter, Graham Cracker Geology, Bison

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, Prairie Exploration,

Fourth Grade: Prairie Seed Collecting, Pass the Energy/Energy Cycles, Solar System in Your Pocket

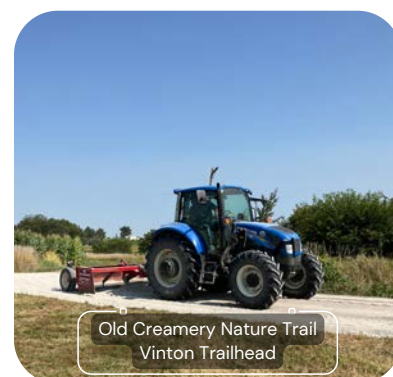
Fifth Grade: Shelter Building, Bird Migration, Seed Collection, Prairie Hike, Fire building, Astronomy

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) Escape Room

PROJECTS

- Acquired permits for Milroy Access Shoreline stabilization project
- Added updated and downloadable maps to the county website
- Animal Ambassador Sponsorship Program created
- Animal Room remodel in the Nature Center
- Assisted with multiple fires throughout the county
- Campsite leveling at Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area
- Cedar Valley Habitat Partnership
- Cleared trees from Old Creamery Nature Trail
- Coordinated with disc golf volunteers for tournaments
- Coordinated with RARE and other wildlife rehabilitators for various rescues
- Created kiosk signs and maps
- Found and repaired Edna Shain wetland tile issue
- Frog and Toad Survey completed throughout the summer
- Hosted a seasonal resume workshop
- Installed bollards at Wildcat Bluff, Rodgers Park, and Nature Center
- Installed campground kiosks
- Installed new water sources at Wildcat Bluff
- Landscaped around Hannen flagpole
- Live animal care
- Nature Center playscape work
- New driveway at Pangborn Wildlife Area
- New flooring at Rodgers and Hannen shower houses and Wild Rose Cabin
- New plumbing in Rodgers and Hannen shower houses
- OCNT Garrison Trailhead Historical Signage installed
- Old Creamery Nature Trail Vinton Trailhead developed
- Participated in mycountyparks.com new site testing
- Planned and installed septic at Wildcat Bluff
- Repainted shower houses
- Repaired electric pedestals
- Representative on Regional Transportation Advisory Committee committee
- Rodgers shower house lightning strike repair
- Updated mycountyparks.com website photos
- Upgraded ADA approach to Nature Center
- Wildcat parking lots planned and installed
- Wildcat Shower house engineered and installed
- Worked with Rural Access Hub to provide resources to people utilizing parks
- Worked with the Assessor's Office to check forestry reserve applications



IOWA ROADSIDE MANAGEMENT (IRM)

Applied for and received Living Roadway Trust Fund (LRTF) grant

Attended Forklift training

Attended state Roadside Conference

Cleared trees and brush at all intersections

Got action mapper up and running in the trucks

Handled four weed complaints

Hosted IRM Committee meeting

Right of way (ROW) spraying

Updated county Iowa Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) plan

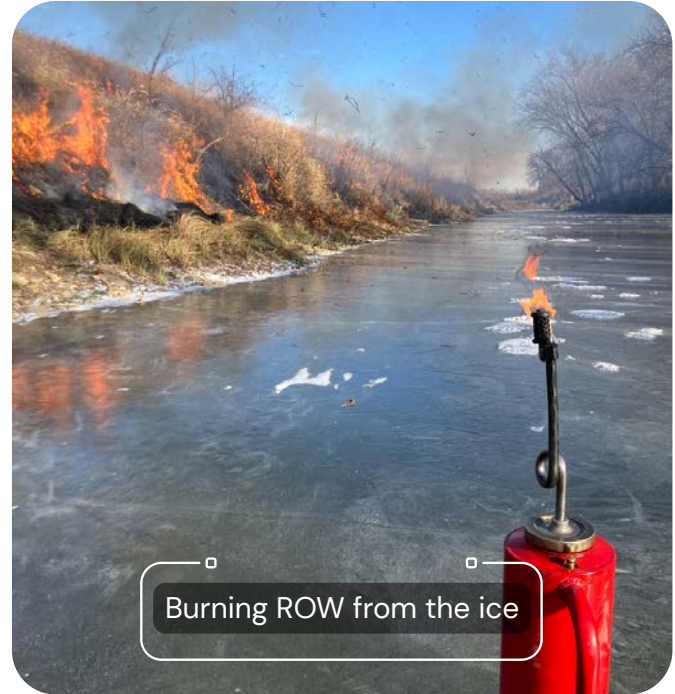
Winterfest Planning Committee

Worked with Secondary Roads Department on clearing brush out of ROW all winter

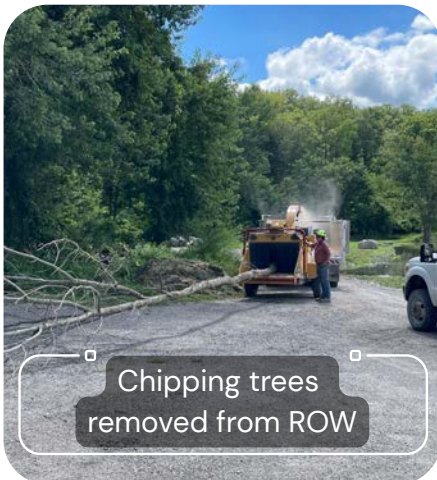
Acres seeded - 12
Acres of prescribed burns - 127
Miles of right of way sprayed - 2558



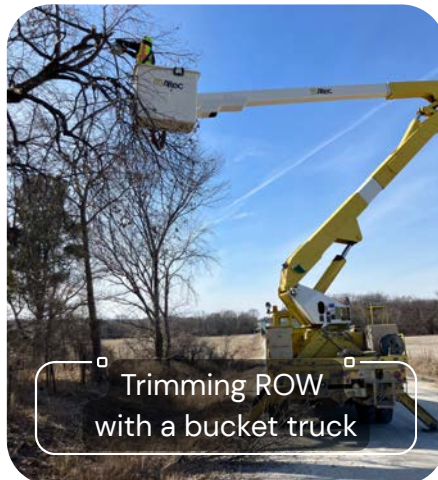
ROW in bloom



Burning ROW from the ice



Chipping trees removed from ROW



Trimming ROW with a bucket truck



Prescribed burn on ROW

CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Annual County Meeting
- Attended presentation about Lulu Berry (Benton County Original Naturalist)
- CDL training and testing
- Communication training
- County Conservation Director's Association (CCDA)
- County Conservation Peace Officers Association (CCPOA) State Committee
- First Aid/CPR training
- Handbook Committee Meetings
- Human Trafficking training
- IAN Conferences
- Iowa Association of Counties (ISAC)
- Iowa County Conservation System (ICCS) Conference
- Iowa's Water and Land Legacy (IWILL) education on the importance of funding Iowa's Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund
- Jig Tying training
- Land and Water Conservation Fund State grant scoring
- Naturalist swaps
- New Employee School
- Pesticide Application Continuing Instruction Courses
- Rural Access Hub training
- S130/S190 fire refresher
- SJR -6 Subcommittee meeting at capitol building
- Wilderness First Aid refresher
- Winterfest



Hosting District 6 meeting



Staff presenting at District 6 meeting



County Conservation Peace Officers Association (CCPOA)

Conservation Revenue

Campground Revenue
\$133,215.76
15%

\$20/night for electric sites at Hannen Lake Park, Rodgers Park, and Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area

\$16/night for electric sites at Benton City-Fry Recreation Area, Hoefle-Dulin Recreation Area, and Minne Estema State Park

\$10/night for primitive sites.

We offer 155 electric sites and 26 primitive sites.



Cabin Revenue
\$10,515.45
1%

Wild Rose Cabin (Winegar and Tobin Wildlife Area) \$110/night
Cedar Cabin (Hannen Lake Park) \$90/night
The Den (Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area) \$250/night

Shelter Revenue
\$1,983.69
.22%

Eight rentable shelters on mycountyparks.com



Misc. Revenue
\$28,717.89
3%

Various revenue received from other sources such as REAP allocation, and firewood sales.

Total Revenue
\$886,867.34

Grants
\$712,434.55
80%

- Community Development Block Grant Program
- Habitat Stamp Grant
- Max & Helen Guernsey Charitable Foundation
- Paint Iowa Beautiful
- Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Grant
- National Wild Turkey Federation Superfund Grant
- Vinton Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Grant program



Properties Managed

Property Name	Location	Acres
Albert Wetland and Wildlife Area	1544-2 330th St, Brandon, IA 52210	20
Animal Shelter Facility	5999 25th Ave Trail Vinton, IA 52349	1
Ann's Paha	1955 64th St, Garrison, IA 52229	40
Atkins Round House Area	7051 Ben/Ln Rd, Atkins	83
Benton City-Fry Recreation Area	5899 29th Ave, Vinton, IA 52349	25
Big Grove Township Wildlife Area	67th St & 21st Ave, Van Horne	1
Cherveny Wildlife Area	19th Ave, Van Horne	7
County Care Facility Wildlife Area	25th Ave Dr, Vinton	27
Eden Township Wildlife Area	65th St & 23rd Ave, Vinton, IA 52349	1
Edna Shain Fen and Wildlife Area	2053 54th St, Mount Auburn, IA	158
Hannen Lake Park	1949 Ben/IA Rd, Blairstown, IA	218
Hoefle-Dulin Recreation Area	5901 27th Ave, Vinton, IA 52349	46
Milroy Access	2510 58th St, Vinton, IA 52349	2
Minne Estema State Park	5261 24th Ave, Vinton IA 52349	76
Mount Auburn Boat Ramp	5033 Benton/Buchanan Rd, Brandon	25
Old Creamery Nature Trail	Vinton - Garrison - Dysart	152
Pangborn Wildlife Area	6656 30th Ave Dr, Shellsburg	15
Polk Township Wildlife Area	2819 51st St, Vinton, IA 52349	12
Rodgers Park	2113 57th St, Vinton, IA 52349	207
Rodgers Park Nature Center	5718 20th Ave Dr, Vinton, IA 52349	4
Selken Wildlife Area	Hwy 218, Vinton	2.5
Tuttle Wildlife Area	1 mi S of Norway on 29th	2
Vinton Boat Ramp	5865 24th Ave Dr., Vinton, IA 52349	2
Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area	3139 57th St Trail, Center Point, IA 52213	312
Winegar and Tobin Wildlife Area	2318 Ben/Buch Rd, Brandon, IA	445
Wyman Memorial Park	5702 22nd Ave, Mount Auburn, IA	5

We thank you for your continued support!



CONTACT

Benton County Conservation
5718 20th Ave Drive
Vinton, IA 52349

<https://www.bentoncountyiagov/conservation/info@bentoncountyparks.com>
319-472-4942



Northern Lights over
Rodgers Park
Photo by Doug Cook

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