



ELKHART COUNTY  
PARKS

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



# A YEAR IN REVIEW

Just as a butterfly experiences metamorphosis, so do we. Who would have thought our world would transform so much in just one year. Everything we took for granted, our family, our health, and our livelihood was impacted by the pandemic.

Many positive things happened in 2020 as well. Some people slowed the fast-pace of their lives, took deep breathes, and went outdoors. Parks across the nation, including the Elkhart County Parks, experienced an increase in visitation. The president, governors, mayors, and doctors all encouraged people to spend time outdoors for their physical and mental health. People re-connected with nature and used our parks & trails for their well-being and to cope with the unknown.

In our 2019-2023 Elkhart County Parks Five Year Master Plan, the number one answer as to why people don't use their local parks was 'not enough time.' Many found that time in 2020, and we hope they continue to carve out space in the future for even more visits!

*Ronda DeCaire*

Director

## MISSION

Inspiring connections with culture & nature.

## PARK BOARD

Larry Andrews  
Jeff Burbrink  
Karin Frey  
John P. Hardy

Karen Mackowiak  
Klaus Mueller  
William Wilson

## 2020 COUNTY COUNCIL

Randall Yohn  
Douglas Graham  
David Hess  
John Letherman

Darryl Riegsecker  
Thomas Stump  
Tina Wenger

## 2020 COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Frank Lucchese  
Suzanne Weirick

Mike Yoder

## PARKS & PLACES

Bonneyville Mill County Park  
Ox Bow County Park  
River Preserve County Park  
Cobus Creek County Park  
Boot Lake Nature Preserve  
Elkhart County Historical Museum  
DeFries Gardens  
Treasure Island  
Pumpkinvine Nature Trail  
MapleHeart Trail  
Six Span Boat Launch



**Elkhart County Parks**  
211 W. Lincoln Ave.  
Goshen, IN 46526  
574-535-6458  
[elkhartcountyparks.org](http://elkhartcountyparks.org)

# 2020 BY THE NUMBERS

The Landscape  
Acres of Land: 1500+  
Miles of Trail: 51



## The People

Park Visitors: 385,000

Museum Visitors: 2,340

Mill Visitors: 7,258

Personnel: 26 full-time  
16 part-time



**Website Users:**  
[elkhartcountyparks.org](http://elkhartcountyparks.org)

**2019: 39,217**

**2020: 49,281**

## Social Media Followers:

ElkhartCountyParks

**FACEBOOK: 7.4K**

**INSTAGRAM: 1.7K**

## 2020 Operating Budget

	Budget	Spent
<i>General (1219)</i>		
Personnel	\$ 1,641,362.00	\$ 1,558,448.57
Services	\$ 96,850.00	\$ 77,533.18
Supplies	\$ 181,650.00	\$ 179,678.09
Equipment	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 100,000.00
	<b>\$ 2,019,862.00</b>	<b>\$ 1,915,659.84</b>
<i>Operating (1179)</i>		
Services	\$ 60,600.00	\$ 38,714.47
Supplies	\$ 127,800.00	\$ 49,221.61
Equipment	\$ 23,100.00	\$ 15,062.50
	<b>\$ 211,500.00</b>	<b>\$ 102,998.58</b>
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>\$ 2,231,362.00</b>	<b>\$ 2,018,658.42</b>

# 2020 IMPACT & BENEFITS



## 52+% Decrease in Non-operating Revenue

- No field trips, limited public programs, and many shelter cancellations



## 16.5% Decrease in Non-reverting Capital

- No Ox Bow gate fees collected mid-March to May



## 50% Decrease in Program, Field Trip, and Museum Attendance

- Limited field trips, public programs, and Museum closed for 4.5 months



## Staff Stress

- Staff became even more essential with increased cleaning and maintenance and record number of visitors.
- Learning new technology skills via virtual programming.



## 20-30% Increase in General Visitation to All County Parks & Trails

- Overflowing parking lots
- Weekend visitation on weekdays
- People taking 'Staycations'



## Public Health Benefits of the Outdoors

- Physical health
- Mental health
- Socialization



## A Returning Audience

- So far 2021 Gatehouse sales at Ox Bow are 14% higher than 2019
- Most park managers continue to notice more visitors than a pre-pandemic year



## Record Flour Sales at Mill

- Staff offered drive-thru flour sales
- Pandemic led to more people cooking at home, Bonneyville Mill had record grain sales of \$14,906

# 49+%

decrease in program, event, and field trip attendance compared to the past decade

## BY THE DECADE

Program, event, and field trip attendance varies from year to year depending upon a variety of factors, including the economy and what is offered to the community.

The pandemic greatly impacted the Elkhart County Park offerings and audience compared to the past decade. That did not stop staff from continuing to educate the public in a variety of ways using technology and the great outdoors.

## Program Numbers

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>School Programs</b>	12977	13675	11674	13256	13664	12786	12453	12799	14094	10589	3205
<b>Walk-In Attendance</b>	13743	14275	13469	13561	14191	12136	10043	10821	8563	9568	8123
<b>Public Programs</b>	3615	1944	1752	1933	1756	1843	1330	1907	3554	2915	2310
<b>Special Events</b>	6979	8731	8587	6135	5668	6070	4380	6836	3850	4663	614
<b>Outreach and Other</b>	2143	3628	1674	1980	1691	2056	1498	1524	1457	1586	360
<b>Total</b>	<b>39457</b>	<b>42253</b>	<b>37156</b>	<b>36865</b>	<b>36970</b>	<b>34891</b>	<b>29704</b>	<b>33887</b>	<b>31518</b>	<b>29321</b>	<b>14612</b>

# BRANCHING OUT

We reached our audience in different ways in 2020.

When indoor facilities such as theaters, gyms, and other forms of recreation were limited, parks became one of the safer places to visit. Operation staff pivoted to accommodate an increased general attendance of approximately 20-30% in all Elkhart County Parks. Some weekdays in the spring were as busy as a weekend in the summer.

Program and field trip attendance, on the other hand, had dramatic decreases throughout the County Parks and at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. Later in the season, limited outdoor programs were offered to ensure we were social distancing and keeping our community safe.

To continue our commitment to educating the community about historical and natural resources, interpretive staff excelled in learning new skills. With the use of technology we produced educational videos, utilized social media, and live virtual classroom visits to enable our mission to continue.



**Virtual Field Trips:**  
172 children and adults connected virtually with staff during the fall semester of the 20/21 School Year

**Facebook LIVE:**  
Three Facebook LIVE events gave participants in-depth tours of the Museum's new exhibits

## Elkhart County Parks YouTube Channel 2020 Facts

3,906 Total Views  
184.8 Watch Hours  
21,479 Impressions

### TOP THREE VIDEOS:

- Elkhart County History: The County Home
  - Beaver Adventure
  - Mill "Buckwheat Flour"



### PHOTOS:

TOP: Naturalist staff Andy Langdon and Phelicia Jozwiak film YouTube education video.

BOTTOM: Patrick McGuire, curator of education, visits with a classroom virtually at the Historical Museum.

# 2020 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## **Boot Lake Nature Preserve won a Great Lakes Park Training Institute Award**

The preserve has undergone a major transformation. Restroom, new kiosks, accessible trail, and new wetland overlook provide amenities deserving of this recognition.



## **Perkins Windmill restored at Bonneyville Mill County Park**

Wood restoration was completed by a local company and windmill painted by staff to replicate original colors used by Perkins.

## **Windows repaired at DeFries Gardens Homestead in the River Preserve**

First steps in prepping facility for small rentals some day. A future great spot for programs, weddings, baby showers, and corporate meetings (and revenue!)



## **Crossroads exhibits completed at the Elkhart County Historical Museum**

Museum staff completed the third and final phase of its new Crossroads of Elkhart County exhibits.

## **Roofs replaced on two shelters**

Two leaking roofs were replaced on popular shelters within the park system at Ox Bow and Cobus Creek County Parks.



## **A series of retro travel-style shirts debuted**

The sale of the fundraising shirts has netted around \$2,000 so far for the Friends of the Elkhart County Parks.

# MORE ACCOMPLISHMENTS



The world changed with the snap of a finger in 2020. Staff went from planning projects and programs to closing down restrooms, towers, museum, gatehouse, playgrounds, water fountains and services within the park department to help protect our community. This created one of the largest challenges of our industry ever, yet we still accomplished great things!

## Parks and People

- The Elkhart County Parks logo and mission statement were modernized
- Two benches and bike racks installed on the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail
- Bonneyville Mill staff transformed former gift shop into a test kitchen
- Invasive species removed at Ox Bow, Cobus Creek, River Preserve, & Boot Lake
- Two staff completed NAI Certified Interpretive Guide training
- Elkhart County Historical Museum hosted a national traveling Smithsonian exhibit *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* in early 2020
- New equipment replaced an outdated pickup truck, Bobcat Toolcat, tractor, two trailers, and a small van
- Bonneyville Mill flour placed 3rd in the "Cool Things Made in Elkhart County" contest
- Upgrades to security systems continued at Ox Bow and Cobus Creek County Parks
- Lending library constructed by volunteer and installed at Boot Lake Nature Preserve
- Volunteer appreciation banquet hosted in February



## Partnerships

- 2020 Indiana Master Naturalist class hosted in partnership with Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District
- Boot Lake Nature Preserve featured in Indiana Audubon Society's new *Indiana Birding Trail Guide*
- Michiana Master Gardeners installed and cared for Quilt Garden entitled 'Practical Orchard' at the Elkhart County Historical Museum
- Several staff attended Champion Placemaker Workshop presented by Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau
- A *Move More* campaign incorporated trail signs at Ox Bow County Park in partnership with Goshen Health
- Elkhart County Historical Museum continued to partner with The Goshen News to present "*A Sense of Place*" podcasts



## Major Gifts and Grants

- Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board awarded a \$36,000 LARE grant to review low head dams in the River Preserve County Park
- A major unrestricted gift was received from the estate of Catherine Metzger, a former gate attendant who loved the outdoors and animals
- Park Board received a \$64,000 grant from Community Foundation of Elkhart County to replace a future wetland education boardwalk at Ox Bow County Park



The community noticed the extra work staff put into keeping parks open during the pandemic. Their kind words made each of us feel essential. A huge thank you to our staff for all of their extra efforts during the challenges of 2020.

# NOTES OF APPRECIATION

"I have never been here before. It is great. When my gym re-opens, I will alternate the two for exercise!"

**-Cobus Creek County Park runner shared with staff**

"The County Parks have been a great place to spend time this year. Thanks to you and your staff for keeping them open and cleans and as usable as possible."

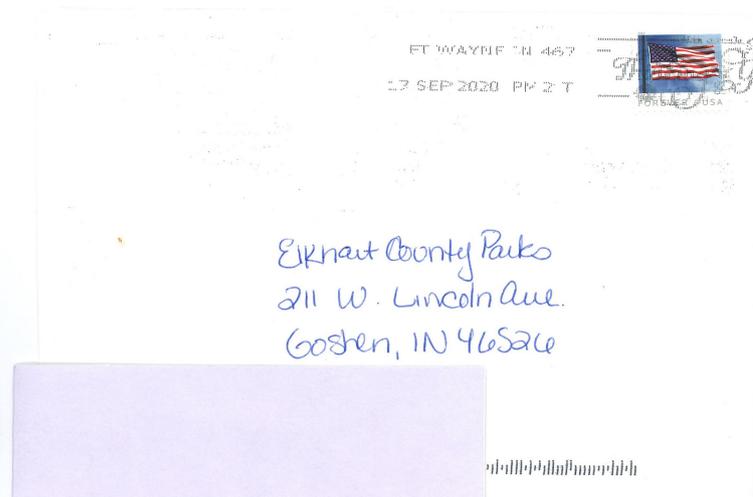
**-e-mail from Ox Bow County Park visitor**

"I highly respect what you and your team have done to give us such a wonderful park system in Elkhart County. I've lived in six states...and not a county in which my husband and I have lived comes close to having as fine a park system as that which we have here in Elkhart County—thanks to you and those who have been working with you!"

**-e-mail from an Indiana Master Naturalist**

"Thanks for keeping the parks open and safe for us all. Good work!"

**-Bonneyville Mill user on social media**



*It was such a lovely thing to do,  
so nice in every way—  
Your thoughtfulness  
means so much more  
than words can ever say.*

*Thank you all for keeping  
the parks open + everything  
in great shape this year!  
Getting out in nature is so  
important right now for mental  
+ physical health. You guys  
are awesome!*



# 7,258

number of Mill visitors in 2020 wore masks, hand sanitizer, social-distanced and safely toured building in small or family units