



ELKHART COUNTY
PARKS

ANNUAL REPORT 2021





PARKS & PLACES

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

Elkhart County Parks

211 W. Lincoln Ave.
Goshen, IN 46526

574-535-6458

elkhartcountyparks.org

MISSION

Inspiring connections with culture & nature.

PARK BOARD

Larry Andrews
Jeff Burbrink
Karin Frey
John P. Hardy

Karen Mackowiak
Klaus Mueller
William Wilson

2021 COUNTY COUNCIL

Randall Yohn
Douglas Graham
David Hess
Adam Bujalski

Darryl Riegsecker
Thomas Stump
Tina Wenger

2021 COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Frank Lucchese
Suzanne Weirick

Brad Rogers

YEAR IN REVIEW

In early 2021 we presented information about the impact of the pandemic on the county parks at the Elkhart County Leadership Summit. Although the community was still in the midst of feeling those challenges, I was happy to report that the Elkhart County Parks continued to have record breaking crowds in certain parks and trails and a heavy return of visitorship as many became reconnected with the outdoors. Even on the national level, our community felt the impact of more people spending time outdoors with the success of RV sales.

As our community grew healthier throughout the year, we were able to reopen indoor spaces such as restrooms and the Elkhart County Historical Museum. Interpretive staff slowly began adding programs, field trips and events while continuing to offer virtual options.

It has been a challenging two years, but one thing certain is people have connected to the great outdoors for improved physical and mental health. We feel your needs and our team will continue to be inspired to do our best to connect you to culture and nature in Elkhart County for a healthy mind, body, and spirit!



Director

2021 BY THE NUMBERS

Popular Places

Ox Bow County Park:
244,400 people

Pumpkinvine Nature Trail
(County portion):
17,488 walkers
49,829 riders

Bonneyville Mill Visitors: 8,445

Grain:
9,150
pounds
ground at
Bonneyville Mill

Shelters Rented

2019: 406
2020: 179
2021: 439

Family gatherings are back!

Interpretive participants:

20,720

field trips, programs, special
events, museum and mill visitors

Website Users:

elkhartcountyparks.org

2019: 39,217
2020: 49,281
2021: 51,768

Social Media Followers:

ElkhartCountyParks
FACEBOOK: 8.8K
INSTAGRAM: 1.9K

2021 Budget

	Budget	Spent
General (1219)		
Personnel	\$ 1,824,411.00	\$ 1,657,712.00
Services	\$ 97,050.00	\$ 93,067.06
Supplies	\$ 207,950.00	\$ 200,710.60
Equipment	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 40,000.00
	\$ 2,169,411.00	\$ 1,991,489.66
Operating (1179)		
Services	\$ 46,100.00	\$ 23,705.81
Supplies	\$ 58,900.00	\$ 21,451.74
Equipment	\$ 13,000.00	\$ 4,116.96
	\$ 118,000.00	\$ 49,274.51
TOTALS:	\$ 2,287,411.00	\$ 2,040,764.17

PRETTY PLACES



How does the operations team keep the 1,500 acres and 51 trail miles beautiful?

- mowing
- vandal damage
- painting
- planting natives
- gardening
- repairs
- erosion control
- storm damage cleanup
- invasive species removal
- snow removal
- trail maintenance
- litter pickup
- building maintenance
- planning
- ranger patrols
- vehicle maintenance
- equipment repairs
- and more

plus lots of sweat equity and hard work!



31 years

special thank you to Gary Plank who retired in 2021 after 31 years of service to Elkhart County Parks

Phyllis and Gordon Hostetler assisted with the collection at the Museum on a weekly basis.

They contributed over 2,000 hours of volunteer time before retiring. Their hard work, dedication, and smiles will be missed.



VOLUNTEER SUPERSTARS

- Lynn Bradley constructed a lending library in memory of Catherine Metzger as well as another at the Historical Museum. To hear more about Lynn's story visit here: <https://grottonetwork.com/make-an-impact/volunteer/park-volunteer-created-magic-with-fairy-door/>
- Carlos Negron Vega constructed a third barred owl nesting box. He was rewarded by a nesting pair in the park this year!
- Phyllis & Gordon Hostetler 'retired' after a combined total 26 years and 2,000 hours of volunteering at the Elkhart County Historical Museum.
- Rick Williamson is a regular Boot Lake Nature Preserve Volunteer who dedicates his time on almost a daily basis. Staff say 'they couldn't do it without him!'
- Tom Watson loves his volunteer role so much that he doesn't track his hours. He gives back to nature by monitoring blue bird boxes and maintaining the rain gardens at Ox Bow County Park.

Special thank you to ALL of our volunteers and volunteer organization partners!



211
Volunteers

1160+
Hours of service

\$34,742*
Value of Volunteer Time

*As reported by the Independent Sector
+not all hours are tracked

PLANTING A SEED

Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund

In 2019, staff and visitors were devastated by the loss of gate attendant Catherine Metzger. She was a quiet and friendly person who loved animals and nature, and always greeted visitors with a smile. Cathy had been a teacher for many years in the Elkhart Community Schools. She later became an Indiana Master Naturalist and loved exploring the region with outdoor loving friends.

Cathy was full of ideas and eager to help assist with Nature Nuts or Book Club and always wondered how we could 'do things better' in the parks with repairs and programs. She often surprised fellow staff with little thank you notes.

She left not only good memories, but left the Elkhart County Parks a major surprise. In 2020, we accepted an unrestricted gift from Cathy's estate and the Park Board made the decision to create the Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund in 2021 with the almost \$200,000 donation which was matched with \$50,000 by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County.

This spirit of planning for the future to assist with programs and projects fell in line with Cathy's vision. Cathy's gift will be perpetual to the Elkhart County



Parks and is one last seed she was able to plant to connect people to nature. We will forever be grateful to her and those who help grow the Legacy Fund in the future.

All donations to the Legacy Fund will be matched 25% by the Foundation. Please contact the Administration Office at 574.535.6458 to find out how to donate.

Partnerships

- The Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District continues to be a partner as we assist with the Indiana Master Naturalist program.
- The Midwest Museum of American Art featured an exhibit entitled "A Walk in the Woods" that displayed landscape paintings from their collection. We partnered with them to provide several programs and they encouraged participants to enjoy forests in local parks.
- The Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau continues to be an important partner by sponsoring the Quilt Garden at the Elkhart County Historical Museum and Quilt Mural at Bonneyville Mill. In addition we appreciate the Michiana Master Gardeners great care they give to planting and maintaining the quilt garden.
- Many staff worked with WNIT to highlight the documentary "Then, Now, and Always...the St. Joe River Story." The Elkhart County Historical Museum featured a virtual on-line series of photos entitled "Work and Play along the St. Joe" while naturalist staff helped create an activity guide for families and St. Joe River Bioblitz that identified 427 different specimens of flora and fauna in the river ecosystem. Staff also continued to be featured on WNIT's "Outdoor Elements."

Major Gifts and Grants

Well Foundation
IDNR LARE Grant
Catherine Metzger Estate
Friends of the Pumpkinvine
Friends of the Elkhart County Parks
Larry Kiefer
Mary and Rick Davis
Ron Geyer
Jennifer Armstead
Specialized Staffing
D. Krachenfels
Wade Mayberry
Tom Suplee
Samuel Hooley/Sarah Buell

Robert E. Miller Memorial Project:

Christine Adams
Babsco Supply
Renata & Bruce Russell
Jan Farron
Tamara and Kevin Jehnzen
Carol Romo
Curt & Becky Warren
Paul and Virginia Schultz
Kendra and Jeffrey Glick
Terry and Sandra Calencia

Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund:

Larry Ford
Ms. Gloria Salavarria
Mr. & Mrs. Dan Seltenright
- in memory of Leo Seltenright
Mr. & Mrs. Steve Lynn
- in memory of Paul & Sharol Raber
Mr. & Mrs. Doug Graham
- in memory of Jonathan Graham

- Staff and volunteers participated in the "Summer Bat Roost Monitoring Project" sponsored by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. We also continued to partner with the IDNR to help care for Lieber Nature Preserve in Bristol.

- Museum curators and volunteers continue to process and catalog collections for the Elkhart County Historical Society and uploaded materials into the Indiana Memory database so that researchers have access to more than 8,000 historic images online.

- Staff partnered with Goshen Health and Goshen Community Schools for their Summer Lunch Bunch program to provide health related programs while area children ate lunches at select locations.

- The Community Foundation of Elkhart County and Vibrant Communities hosted a series of Pathways and Trails stakeholder meetings. They have hired a private firm to work with communities and trail non-profits to create a network called 'Connect in Elkhart County' and to develop a future trail master plan. connectinelkhartcounty.com

- For more than three decades, we continued to host an education booth at the Elkhart County 4H Fair and this year we expanded the native garden around the building.

PEOPLE & PROGRAMS

The department began the year with the continuation of virtual and outdoor programs in limited numbers. As 2021 passed and immunity of the community was built, we were able to open our doors to more programs and even brought back a few special events. In addition, the Elkhart County Historical Museum started working with Beacon Health, City of Elkhart, and area libraries to collect pandemic stories for future generations.

2021 Virtual Connections:

- Sense of Place Podcasts
- Virtual Photo Contest
- Nature A to Z
- Virtual Stories of Elkhart County
- Museum Collections Tournament
- EC History in 60 Seconds
- Deerfly Dash Virtual Run
- St. Patrick's Day Scavenger Hunt
- Five Women Artists Virtual Exhibit

We learned to do things differently and more efficiently during the pandemic. Staff will continue some of those trends such as attending some Zoom meetings for example as it has a positive impact on the environment with less

travel. We will continue to engage the community with podcasts and social media, but we are also delighted to return to face-to-face interactions with visitors, school children, and program participants. To explore upcoming programs visit elkhartcountyparks.org as we continue our commitment to educate the community about historical and natural resources,



Site Feasibility Study:
Conceptual Building Exterior by Ancon Construction

A Space to Learn about your Place:

A feasibility study was completed to explore the possibility of a future multi-use interpretive facility. Almost 50 staff, board members, and community leaders were interviewed to receive input on this possible future project to interpret the cultural, natural, and historical resources of Elkhart County.



Events & Exhibits Return

Increased immunity allowed planning of events and exhibits second half of year:

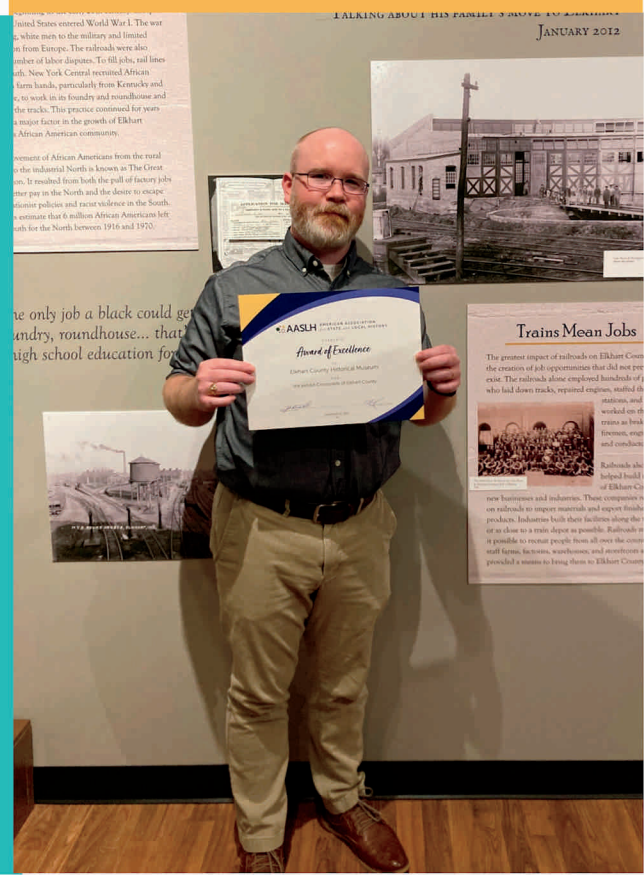
- Halloween Campfire & Hayrides
- Bonneyville Pancake Breakfast
- Holiday at the Mill

Elkhart County Historical Museum exhibits:

- **Emma Molloy: In Her Own Words**
- **Loss and Remembrance: Elkhart County at Pearl Harbor**

Crossroads Exhibit Wins Award for Historical Museum

The Elkhart County Historical Museum was one of 39 honored with an "Award of Excellence" certificate through the American Association for State and Local History. This national award recognized the partnerships and three phases of development of the permanent exhibit that tells the story of Elkhart County and the people who have lived here.



PRESERVATION OF SPACES

Land and Water Conservation Funds Released to Build Future Park

The progress of building Corson Riverwoods County Park was slowed by the pandemic, but the pace picked up in 2021. The planning and engineering of this future park north of Middlebury is for land donated by Mr. Tom Corson. With funds for development now released, look for a new park in the near future. Special thank you to Elkhart County Highway for their engineering expertise.



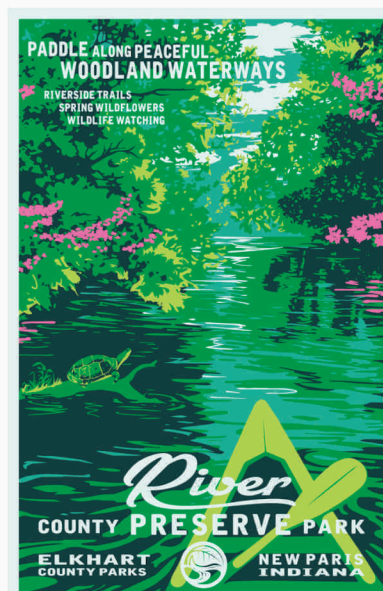
Feasibility Study of River Preserve Dams

The Elkhart County Parks used an IDNR LARE (Lake and River Enhancement) grant to study the impact of river restoration via possible removal and/or modification of the Baintertown and Benton Dams in the River Preserve County Park. The study included three public meetings and pros and cons of removal including recreation safety risks and opening the river up for fish and other aquatic animals such as mollusks.



Toe Drain Repair at Goshen Dam

Elkhart County Commissioners assisted the Park Board with the repair of the toe drain at the Goshen Dam. The toe drain is a pipe that collects seepage in the earthen dam and is important to maintain the safety and security of this high hazard dam.



River Preserve retro travel-style shirts debuted

The sale of the fundraising shirts on bonfire.com has netted around \$2,500 so far for the Friends of the Elkhart County Parks. This is the fourth park in the series of 'vintage art' completed.



Two Brochure Updates

The Boot Lake Nature Preserve & Elkhart County Historical Museum brochures were updated to showcase these area attractions. The Museum brochure is being distributed in area counties.

STAFF NOTES

A huge thank you to our talented staff who have worked hard through challenging times in recent years. Their commitment to public service is appreciated!

Andy Langdon, Interpretive Naturalist
Annie Aguirre, Marketing Coordinator
Bernard Cunningham, Deputy Director of Operations
Brian O'Connor, Park Services III
Courtney Franke, Mill Manager
Donny Aleo, Deputy Director of Interpretive Services
Gary Plank, Asset Supervisor
Jason Woody, Park Services I
John Monger, Park Services I
Julia Parke, Museum Manager
Krista Daniels, Interpretive Naturalist Manager
Krystin Hildebrandt, Park Services III
Lynn Matthews, Park Services III
Marlene Lantzer, Secretary
Michelle Nash, Curator of Collections
Miranda Pernell, Park Services II
Natasha Tucker, Park Services I
Nicholas Steele, Trail & Equipment Coordinator
Patrick McGuire, Curator of Education
Phelicia Jozwiak, Interpretive Naturalist
Robyn Buenger, Bookkeeper
Ronda DeCaire, Director
Sherry Bowen, Park Services III
Traci Stickler, Park Services II
Wilma Harder, Park Services I

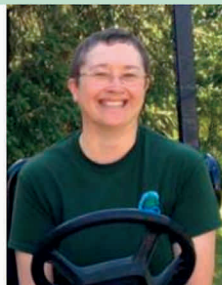
Part-time/Seasonals:

Alex Kaminsky, Park Services
Audrey Shreiner, Park Services
Bethany Goddard, Gate Attendant
Brandon Blackmer, Mill Interpreter
Carol Smith, Gate Attendant
Chloe Madison, Visitor Services
David Gall, Park Services I
Edgardo Rosa, Park Services
Eugene Duncan, Museum Maintenance
Gary Rorie, Park Services
James Maure, Park Services
James Young, Park Services
Joni Decker, Gate Attendant
Lamar Lawrence, Park Services
Laura Warner, Gate Attendant
Melanie Helmuth, Gardener
Melanie Yoder, Park Services
Paige Renshaw, Visitor Services
Pam McCowan, Gate Attendant
Patsy Pippenger, Gate Attendant
Priscilla Hile, Seasonal Mill Attendant
Ron Yoder, Park Services
Teresa Klein, Gardener



- Krista Daniels was honored with the 2021 Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District's "Educator of the Year!"

- Sherry Bowen earned her Certified Park and Recreation Professional certification from NPRA.



- Donny Aleo won a scholarship to attend and graduated from the Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Staff either shared their knowledge or gained new ideas at the following virtual or in-person trainings and conferences:

National Geographic Storytelling Course
National Geographic: Geo-Inquiry
Forest School Webinar
Hoosier Mushroom Society
American Association for State & Local History
St. Joe River Symposium
Indiana Park and Recreation Association
Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy
Great Lakes Park Training Institute
American Trails
Indiana Native Plant Society
Ohio Museum Association