

PARKS



ELKHART COUNTY
PARKS

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MASTER
- PLAN -

PREPARED BY



LEHMAN & LEHMAN
Transforming Horizons

This report documentation was prepared under contract and in collaboration with the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Department by:

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*Prepared for:
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Introduction

Elkhart County Parks play a large role in a vibrant community. For more than 55 years the County Parks has ‘inspired connections with culture and nature.’ Planning documents such as the Five Year Master Plan have helped to lead and guide the way to creating the park system that exists today. These plans allow for community and staff input, and set the goals to create a map for the short-term as well as long-term future.

The Lehman & Lehman Planning Team was retained in May 2023 to update and prepare a master plan for Elkhart County Parks. This parks master plan was finalized and adopted by the Elkhart County Park Board on April 8, 2024. It will enable the Parks to continue balanced planning for the overall park system, meeting local recreation needs within available resources, and to help the Park and Recreation Board, community members and leaders to establish their current state of operations, their future desired state, and provide structure to help achieve their goals and to monitor their successes.

Planning Team

Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board

Klaus Mueller	President
Larry Andrews.....	Vice President
John Hardy.....	Secretary
Robert Kelly	Ex Officio
Karen Mackowiak	Member
Karin Frey.....	Member
William Wilson.....	Member

Elkhart County Parks Administration Team

Ronda DeCaire, CPRP	Director
Bernard Cunningham IV.....	Deputy Director of Park Operations
Donny Aleo	Deputy Director of Interpretive Services

Master Plan Consultant

Charles F. Lehman, ASLA, PLA, FRSA
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Mishawaka, Indiana



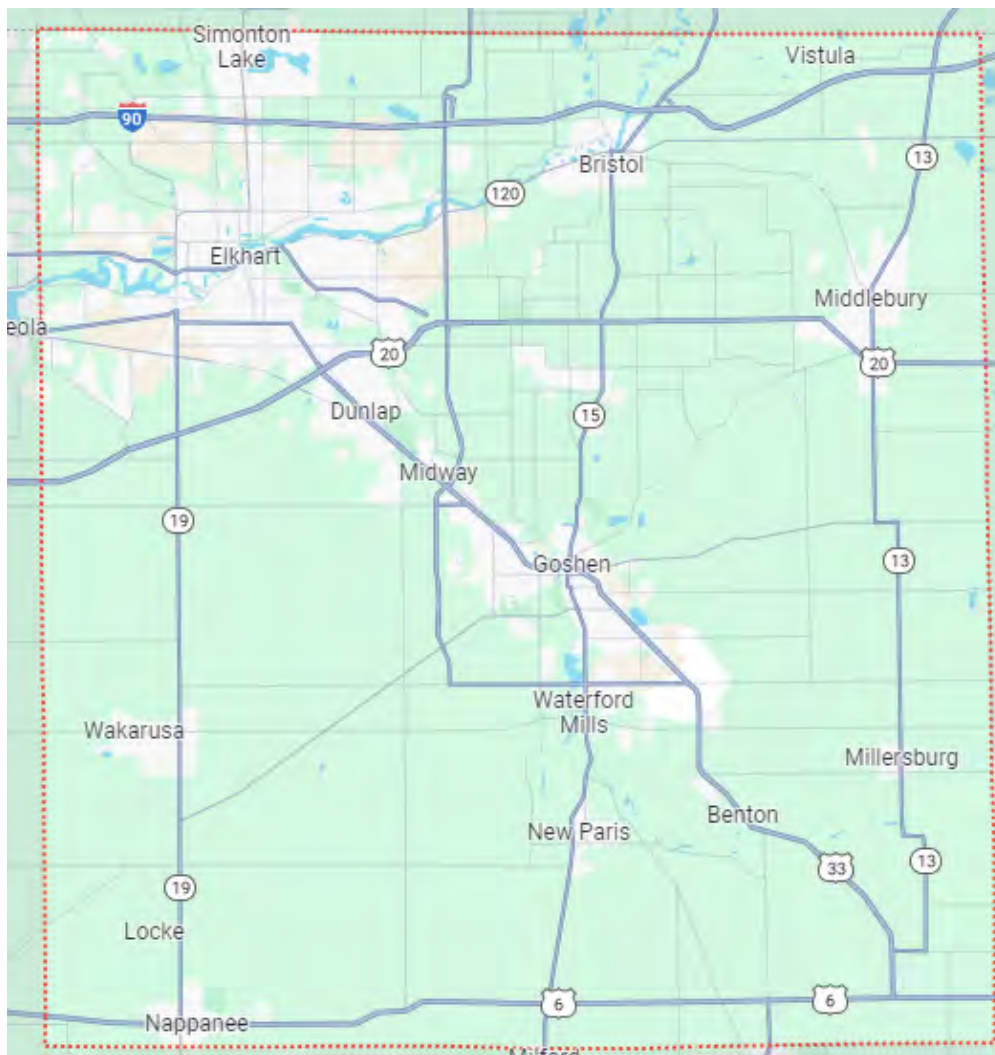
Planning Area

The planning area for this study is all of Elkhart County, Indiana, which is located in north central Indiana along the Indiana/Michigan state line. It is bordered by Cass and St. Joseph Counties, Michigan to the north, Kosciusko County to the south, Lagrange and Noble Counties to the east and St. Joseph County, IN and Marshall County to the west.

Elkhart County encompasses 468 square miles of land.

With its wide variety of park features and offerings, the Elkhart County Parks attracts visitors from not only Elkhart County, but the region. Tourists from around the world visit Bonneyville Mill and DeFries Gardens, while others travel from all over the Midwest to mountain bike or play disc golf. The Elkhart County Parks works closely with the Visitor Bureaus in the region to share information on all of our park and historical site amenities. As a result, the Elkhart County Parks helps to contribute not only to the quality of life of the citizens that live here, but to the economic boom tourism dollars bring to the greater community.

Planning Area Map



Master Plan Goals

Lehman & Lehman, Inc. feels that master planning is undertaken in order to achieve clearly defined strategies and objectives, and to provide recommendations for action on identified future needs tied to those objectives. We believe that the continual participation of the public in the planning process is essential. From a user's perspective, personal involvement in the identification of problems, needs, desires, and ultimately decisions, is much healthier than reacting to decisions already made by management.

The planning process needs to be continuous and must be sensitive to changes of conditions, needs, new information and opportunities. This document should not be considered the "final" plan, which can become irrelevant and stagnant. With annual reviews by the Elkhart County Park Board planning will remain a productive ongoing process facilitating future actions.

The Elkhart County Park Department staff and the Park Board have agreed on the following goals for the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan:

- Gather feedback and input from as diverse a group of Elkhart County residents as possible, and report it in an accurate manner.
- Use national recreation standards, combined with a careful needs analysis to create new priorities for parks and recreation in the County.
- Create a plan that is dynamic, and provides pertinent, useful information and guidance for the next five years in Elkhart County.
- Present the plan and gain its acceptance within Elkhart County community.
- Receive approval from IDNR for eligibility for application for Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant programs.
- Use the plan as a springboard to apply for all applicable grants
- Review the Action Plan on a semi-annual basis for the purpose of budgeting and planning.
- Strengthen and expand partnerships and collaborations within the community.
- Expand the effectiveness / role of the Friends of the Elkhart County Park Board members and other non-profit partners as a community engager.
- Collaborate with other County Departments in economic development projects and venues and measure the effectiveness as a return on investment.

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Park Agency Profile

Park Department

Office Location:
211 W. Lincoln Avenue
Goshen, IN 46526-3280

Phone: 574.535.6458
Fax: 574.535.6616
Email: parksinfo@elkhartcounty.com
Web: elkhartcountyparks.org

Park Department Administrative Staff

Ronda DeCaire, CPRP..... Director
Bernard Cunningham IV..... Deputy Director of Park Operations
Donny AleoDeputy Director of Interpretive Services

Park Department History

In 1966, the newly formed Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board began formulating and executing long-range plans for a park and recreation system. Elected to the original board were President L. Orville Miller, Vice-President Warren Shively, Secretary Cara Jean Baldwin, Dr. Larry Beachy, and Leo Seltentright. The Park Board began immediate work on plans for the future with multiple community projects.

The Park Board immediately began creating public spaces in 1967 to enhance the quality of life, preserve the County’s historical and natural resources, and provide educational and recreational opportunities for all. Since then, Elkhart County Parks has expanded its resources and outreach, with new properties, programs, and recreational features to meet the needs of the people in Elkhart County, while maintaining the goal of preservation.

The department now encompasses six major parks plus several small parcels, 37 miles of trails, and historical venues all of which attract an estimated 500,000 annual visitors each year. Since its inception, the park department provides the public with recreation, natural diversity, and cultural enrichment for all.

Park departments across the nation have taken on new roles in recent years, and Elkhart County Parks is no different. With a county-wide focus on Vibrant Communities they are excited to be a part of what makes Elkhart County a great place to live, learn, work, play, and be healthy. Parks add to the quality of life for residents and help attract new citizens and businesses, strengthening the economic vitality of the community. The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board remains dedicated to building a future that maintains connections with the county’s natural, cultural, and historic heritage.

Mission Statement

Since the last Master Plan, the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board updated and adopted its mission statement to a more modern and concise sentence. This allows for us to market our mission in many ways via signage, publications, business cards and more.

Inspiring Connections with Culture & Nature

Guiding Principles

- **Integrity**

The Department will work toward its mission in an honest and ethical fashion. As a result, it will develop a commitment to its customer base and be viewed as dependable in its facilities and services.

- **Accountability**

The Department will strive to be responsive and dependable in dealing with park visitors, citizens and elected officials.

- **Quality Service**

The Department will strive to provide the highest level of service in a fiscally responsible manner bringing excellence to all facilities and services.

- **Teamwork**

The Department will make every effort to retain a diverse staff who will work together to promote a positive attitude, clear communication and support for each other as well as Department activities.

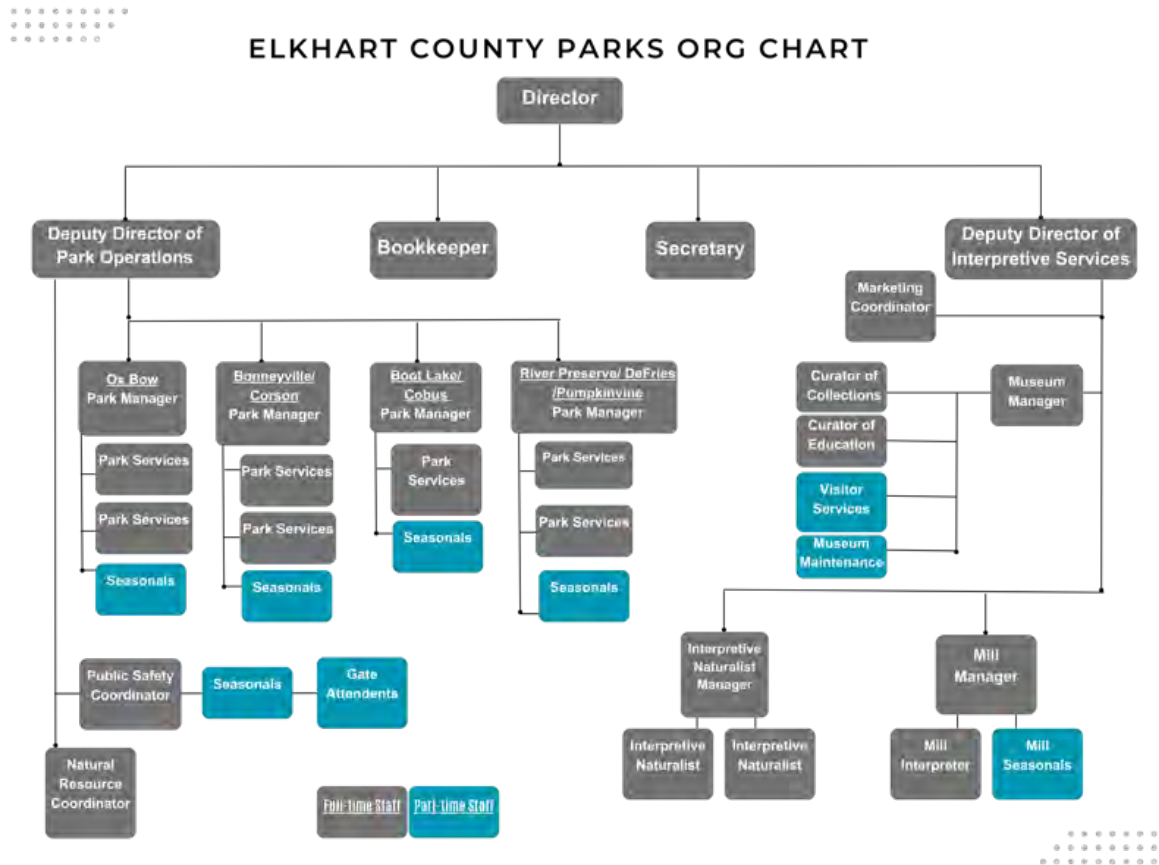
- **Vision**

The Department will look to the future by using creativity and educational opportunities to develop new programs and services that will manage, protect and maximize our resources on a sustainable basis for present and future generations.



Organizational Structure

The Elkhart County Parks has a dedicated team of full and part-time staff who have a passion for the outdoors, education, history, and working with the public. The Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Department is organized as follows:



Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board

The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board was established in 1966 under the 1965 Park and Recreation Law. In 1982 the Park Board was re-established under Indiana Code 36-10-3. The seven-member Board is appointed by the County Council, County Commissioners, Circuit Court Judge and the Mayor of Elkhart. The Director of the County Extension Service is an ex-officio member of the Board. The members each serve 4-year staggered terms.

Name	Term Expires
Klaus Mueller	12/31/2026
Robert Kelly	Ex Officio
Karin Frey.....	12/31/2027
Larry Andrews.....	12/31/2024
Karen Mackowiak	12/31/2024
John Hardy.....	12/31/2025
William Wilson.....	12/31/2027

The Park Board meets on the second Monday of each month at 4:30 pm at various park locations throughout the year. The Board makes policy and operational decisions, approves requests for use of park facilities, receives updates on departmental activity and approves the annual budget. The meetings are open to the public.

Park Partnerships

The following volunteer organizations partner with the Elkhart County Parks to support programs and facilities either financially or through physical volunteer efforts. Most are non-profit organizations with separate boards and separate mission statements. Their mission in assisting the Elkhart County Parks is greatly appreciated by staff and the general public.

- **Friends of the Elkhart County Parks**

The Friends of the Elkhart County Parks is a small volunteer organization that provides an opportunity for members of our community to share their skills, contributions, and knowledge to support the park system. The organization has assisted in obtaining grants and donations to assist the Park Department with the purchase of equipment and sponsoring events. It is an organization that continues to grow and partner with Elkhart County Parks in various capacities.

- **Friends of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail**

The Friends of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail, Inc. is a very successful non-profit corporation dedicated to converting the abandoned Pumpkinvine railroad corridor into a linear park and greenway. The organization is dependent on dedicated volunteers to carry out day-to-day work required to achieve short- and long-term goals. The Friends purchased the Pumpkinvine railroad corridor in 1993 and have since donated a majority of the land to local park departments for design, engineering, and trail construction as matches to grants. The Elkhart County Parks now manages more than 8 miles of the 17-mile-long trail while the Friends of the Pumpkinvine continues to be a source of funding and volunteers.

- **Pumpkinvine Advisory Committee (PAC)**

The Friends of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail, Elkhart County Parks, Goshen City Parks, Town of Middlebury, and Town of Shipshewana formed a committee in 2009 to meet bi-monthly and discuss projects and management of the 17-mile trail system.

- **Maple City Disc Golf**

Maple City Disc Golf volunteers help maintain the Flying Disc Sanctuary at Ox Bow County Park. They assist with maintenance of the course as well as host the following local disc golf tournaments: Michiana Ice Bowl, Birthday Bash, and Turkey Shootout. The group also runs weekly spring and summer leagues. Disc golf has once again been a growing sport since the Covid-19 pandemic. At the present time they are assisting with fundraising to make improvements to the tee pads, signage, and baskets to help celebrate the 35th Anniversary in 2024 of the 24-hole course.

- **Connect in Elkhart County**

The Community Foundation of Elkhart County and other community leaders hired a consulting firm in 2021 to visualize trails and trail connections across Elkhart County. This movement grew to the hiring of program coordinator to build a new non-profit structure similar to the Friends of the Pumpkinvine and Bike Elkhart to support municipal partners across the county with building future trails as well as maintaining.

- **Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association (NIMBA)**

The NIMBA constructed a 6.2-mile mountain bike trail at Bonneyville Mill County Park in 2014. They provide volunteers to construct and maintain this asset to the park system as well as provide leadership in planning mountain bike programs and events. Periodic trail maintenance is done by this group of dedicated volunteers.

- **Indiana DNR**

The Elkhart County Parks partners with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to operate Lieber Nature Preserve (Pipewort Pond) in Bristol. This 137-acre parcel is a State Designated Nature Preserve. In addition, Boot Lake Nature Preserve, is a State Dedicated Nature Preserve and is managed under the guidelines of a Master Plan created by the IDNR. The department also partner with the IDNR to assist with prairie burns within Elkhart County. There is potential for partnership with the Elkhart Bog in the near future as the site was opened to the public in 2022.

- **Elkhart County Historical Society**

Founded in 1896, the Elkhart County Historical Society (ECHS) opened a museum in 1907 at the Elkhart County Courthouse. Throughout the years it moved to various locations until the collection was placed in storage. In 1968 the ECHS partnered with the Elkhart County Parks Department to open the Elkhart County Historical Museum at the former Bristol High School. The Museum has offered publications, research opportunities, exhibits, and programs featuring a collection of over 30,000 artifacts and over 100,000 documents related to Elkhart County history. In 1991, the ECHS became a formal 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization to help support the Elkhart County Historical Museum with fundraising, volunteerism, and other in-kind support. As most historical societies, the ECHS operates as a public trust, serving present and future generations by collecting, preserving, and sharing artifacts, documents, and images pertaining to the unique culture and history of Elkhart County and its environs. The Elkhart County Parks serves as a partner to house the collection and provides management of staff, interpretive

guidance, planning and general operating support of the Museum as one of its many cultural sites within the department as it fits the mission of preservation, recreation, and education.

- **Elkhart County Genealogical Society**

The Elkhart County Genealogical Society is a non-profit organization that also finds its home in the Elkhart County Historical Museum. This group of dedicated volunteers seeks to further interest in genealogy in the Michiana area, contributes to the preservation of genealogical and historical records, strives for accuracy in research through careful documentation, and publishes a quarterly journal containing records of the area and other genealogical information of importance to society members. They also assist visitors to the Museum with research.

- **Bristol Alumni Association**

The Bristol Alumni Association is an organization consisting of alumni of the former Bristol School, which was donated to the Elkhart County Parks in 1967 and is now home to the Elkhart County Historical Museum. The association is dedicated to preserving and celebrating the memories, events, people, and school building that played and continues to play an important part in the lives of the alumni and Bristol community. Each year the organization holds an annual event at the former school, bringing together alumni of all generations. The organization has held fundraising campaigns to assist the Elkhart County Parks in much needed building repairs including remodeling of the restrooms and kitchen over the past five years.

- **Indiana Master Naturalists/Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District**

The staff of the Elkhart County Parks partners with the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District to offer an Indiana Master Naturalist (IMN) program. This natural resource education course takes place each year and provides learning opportunities with various park and environmental agencies throughout the county. As a part of this service learning program for adults, class attendees must complete additional hours of community service. An Elkhart County IMN



Alumni Group has formalized and IMN alumni have the opportunity to volunteer 30 additional hours per year and receive further education from the community. Many of the 303 graduates have helped the County Parks through volunteer hours. In total this group has given back 32,157 hours of volunteer service to area park and conservation agencies.

- **Volunteers and Volunteer Organizations**

Each year the Elkhart County Parks has almost 200 volunteers who donate more than 2,500 hours of time to area parks, museums, gardens, and the mill. Individual volunteers assist the Department along with volunteer groups such as the The Dahlia Society, Eagle Scouts, Scout Troops, Indiana Master Naturalists, Credit Union staff, area schools and universities, and many more. The largest volunteer event took place in May of 2023 when more than 400 employees from various RV companies spent a day restoring, building, and refreshing Ox Bow County Park. The value of the projects completed was more than \$125,000.

- **The Upper and Lower Elkhart River Watershed Plans**

The Lower Elkhart River Project launched in 2021 as a result from a Section 319 grant awarded to The Elkhart River Restoration Association (ERRA) to update the 2008 Elkhart River Watershed Management Plan (WMP). The update of the Elkhart River WMP was broken into two sections- the Upper Elkhart River Watershed sponsored by ERRA and the Lower Elkhart River Watershed sponsored by the City of Goshen, with the River Preserve County Park being the divider. The upper and lower watersheds combine to drain over 600 square miles into the larger St. Joseph River Watershed. The Elkhart County Parks are actively involved in both the Upper-and Lower Elkhart WMP's by serving on both the steering and education committees. The Elkhart County Parks Department staff also donated time over the course of two years to help sample and collect data from 38 sites throughout the watershed. The goal is to address water quality and quantity issues by implementing various "better" management practices (BMP's) throughout the watershed. A healthy watershed not only helps to further Elkhart County Parks' recreational goals but also helps to meet their mission of "inspiring connections with culture and nature".

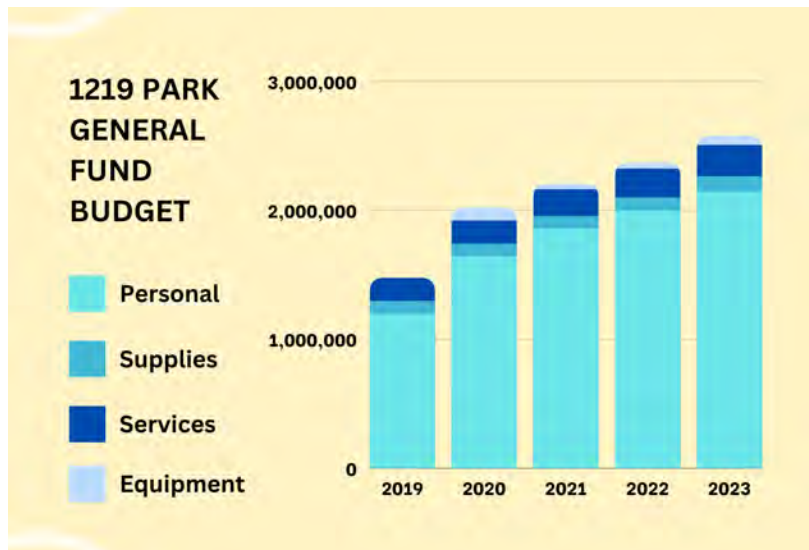
Elkhart County's Fiscal Resources

The Elkhart County Parks has slowly expanded its budget over the past five years; but has kept supplies and services nearly flat-lined for the tax appropriated budget as requested by the County Council. Employees have been able to receive market-rate increases provided by the Council to ensure quality staff can be rewarded and attracted to serve the citizens. Staff continues to be cautious of spending, and administration continues to keep funds in reserve for future economic declines, while balancing the needs of the department.

Departmental Budget

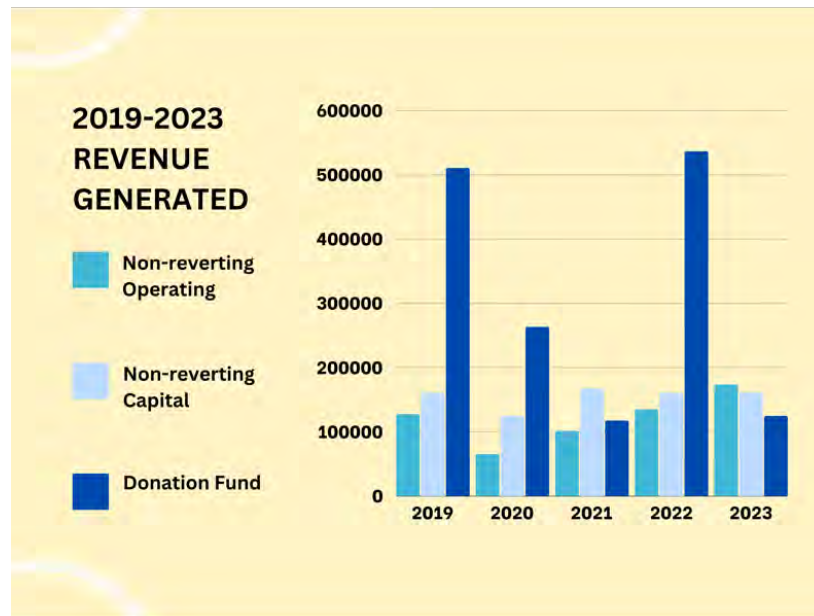
The Elkhart County Parks and Recreation Board has seen a steady increase in the 1219 general budget with most of the increases related to market rate adjustment of salaries to keep up with the private as well as public sectors. In return it has allowed departments to recruit and retain staff. The Elkhart County Council credits department heads throughout the County for using dollars wisely to be able to create this balance.

In 2023, the department was able to hire a full-time position of a Public Safety Coordinator and will soon hire a Natural Resource Coordinator. Neither position is new to the payroll, but changes were made to previous job descriptions. Additional part-time funds were also supplemented as duties increased in managing all facilities, although attracting part-time staff has been a challenge following the pandemic.



Two non-reverting accounts supplement the tax-appropriated budget. The 1178 Non-reverting Capital Fund receives its funds from the entrance fees to Ox Bow County Park. This account funds construction projects and land acquisition throughout the park system.

The 1179 Non-reverting Operating Fund receives its fund from user fees from the rental of shelters, school field trips, public programs and events, mill flour sales, and other user fees. These funds are used to supplement the tax-appropriated budget to help purchase supplies, services and equipment. Revenue in these two accounts experienced a dip in 2020 due to the Covid 19 pandemic but, have since recovered.



The Elkhart County Parks also has the ability to receive grants and donations and has had a successful past five years in the 4909 account. One the major accomplishments was receiving a large gift from the late Catherine Metzger, a former part-time employee and nature lover. She gifted \$200,000 from her estate and it was matched by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County to begin the Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund. It is an endowment fund that will continue to grow and help fund projects and programs throughout the Elkhart County Parks. In addition, the endowment left by the late Elisabeth DeFries continues to grow and support DeFries Gardens on an annual basis. Other major grants and donations over the past five years have come to support projects such as the Ox Bow Wetland Education Boardwalk, development of Corson Riverwoods County Park, and many other special events, exhibits, projects, and programs throughout the department.

Facility Inventory

The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board currently owns eleven (11) parcels of present and future parkland, including two historic sites and eight of the 18 miles of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail. The department also assists the Elkhart County Commissioners and Indiana Departments of Natural Resources in managing other recreational sites listed below.

Park operations staff care for the operations, maintenance, customer relations, and security of these facilities which includes 13 full-time staff and 19 part-time staff.

Park Sites – Owned 1,424.0acres

- Ox Bow County Park – 200 acres
- Bonneyville Mill County Park – 222 acres
- River Preserve County Park – 358 acres*
 - includes DeFries Gardens
- Cobus Creek County Park – 84 acres
- Boot Lake Nature Preserve – 300 acres
- Corson Riverwoods County Parks – 82 acres
- Elkhart Historical Museum – 1.32 acres
- Treasure Island Park – 4 acres
- Wolf Lake Property – 30 acres
- Turkey Creek Property – 23 acres
- Pumpkinvine Nature Trail – 18 miles (120 acres@60' width assumption)

Park Partnership Sites – Managed (not owned) – 155.14 acres

- Six-Span Bridge Access Site – 3.14 acres
- Lieber Nature Preserve – 135 acres
- MapleHeart Trail – 3.5 miles (17 acres @40 foot width assumption)

*The River Preserve County Park's acreage has been larger in the past due to an error in how it was measured. In 2017 the property acreage was properly calculated using GIS.

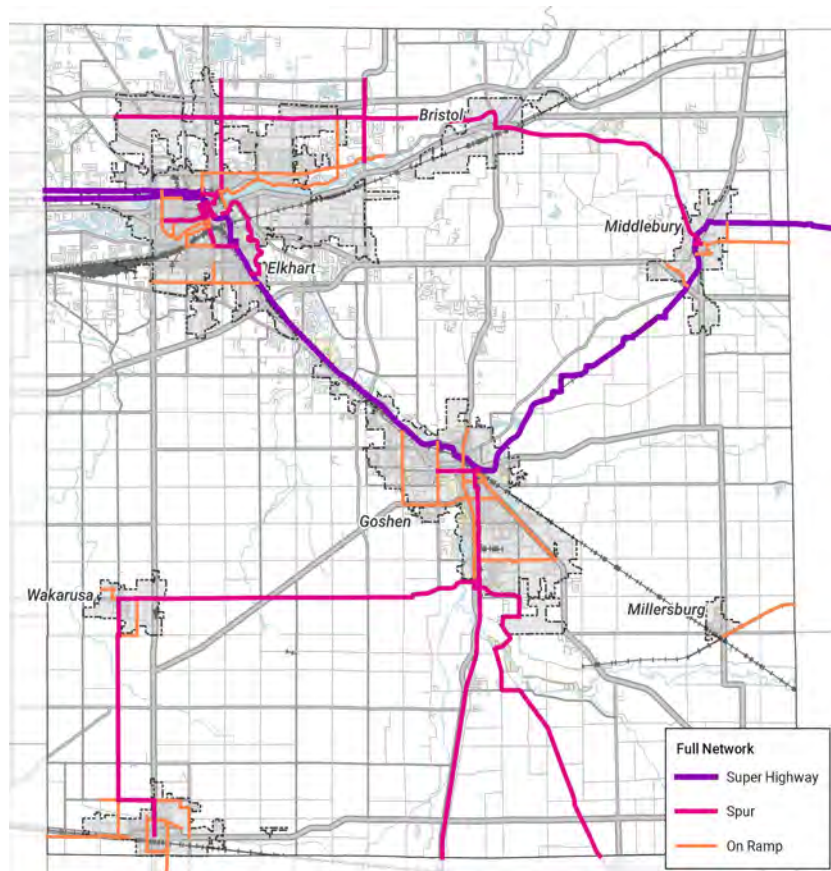
Trails and Pathways

Elkhart County boasts nearly 105 miles of trails and pathways, and Elkhart County Parks manages approximately 37 miles of that total (including nature trails within parks and hard surface trails outside of parks). Recognizing the importance of alternative modes of transportation and the recreational and economic value associated with trails, the *2022 Connect in Elkhart County: Network Implementation Guides* envisions the following:

A county where vibrant and active communities come together on a world-class, interconnected network of trails, streets, and public spaces where neighbors can meet, companies can grow, and visitors can experience everything our county has to offer. Together, we can build a 130-mile network of low-stress trails and streets that connect the communities of Elkhart County to each other and the county to the region.

Trails and Greenways

Elkhart County Parks continues to add to their trail network providing over 47 miles of maintained trails throughout the park system including the Pumpkinvine and MapleHeart Trails. With a few connections via roadway the trails connect Elkhart, Goshen, Middlebury and Shipshewana and provide opportunities for walking, running and biking for leisure as well as providing an alternative transportation route to commute between communities to get to work.



Significant investments have been made in walking and bicycling facilities in Elkhart County and its communities. These facilities provide opportunities for residents and visitors to walk and bike to many destinations throughout the county. However, the facilities are fragmented and disconnected. This plan details a three-tiered, interconnected active transportation network connecting Elkhart County communities to each other and to communities in neighboring counties. This network is comprised of:

- ≈ Super Highway
- ≈ Spurs
- ≈ On-Ramps

These components and the projects that comprise them are described on the following pages. The network builds upon the existing walking and bicycling facilities that have already been developed and the comprehensive active transportation planning that has previously been conducted within the county. The network is designed to connect Elkhart County communities, close gaps in the existing system, and provide a high-comfort and low-stress network that appeals to broad range of users.

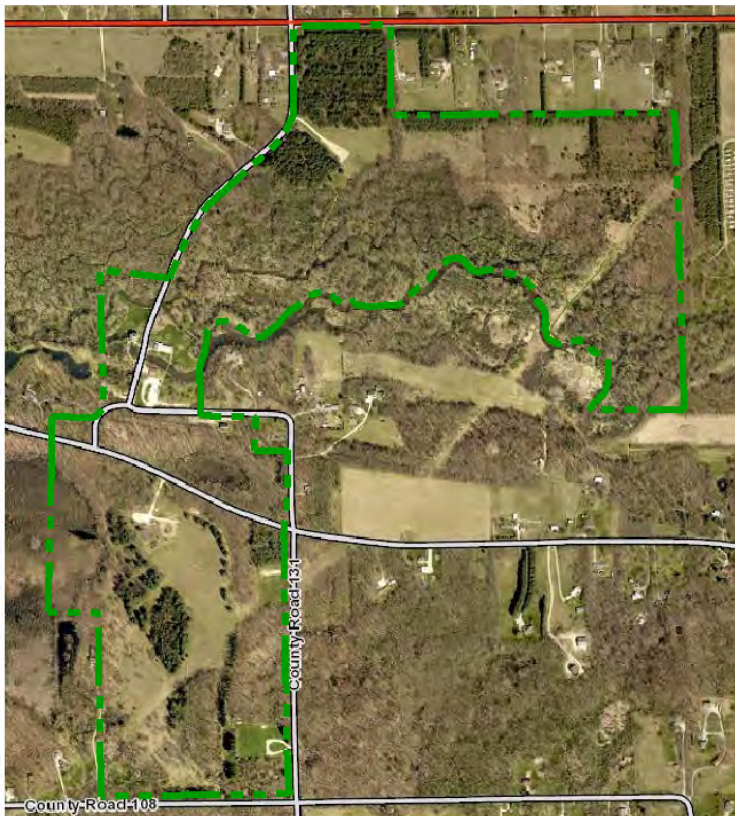
Source: *Connect in Elkhart County implementation Guide, May 2022*

Bonneyville Mill County Park

Size: 222 acres

53373 C.R. 131 – Bristol

Bonneyville Mill County Park had its beginnings in 1967 when a partnership with the Michiana Watershed, Inc. was formed to fundraise and acquisition the historic grist mill and surrounding land through a three-year option to purchase contract. Bonneyville Mill was a historic grist mill that had been constructed by Edward Bonney in the 1830s. The mill changed ownership many times throughout its history until its last private owner, Frank Mauck sold it to Michiana Watershed. The final payment for the mill and 155 acres was made in November 1969. Restoration of the Mill began in the early 1970s



and the property was fully dedicated and opened to the public in May of 1974. The mill staff began offering historical interpretation to school groups as well as the general public. In the 1980s, an additional 67-acre parcel of land was added to Bonneyville Mill County Park making the park 222 acres. In 2003, the non-profit One Room School House, Inc. completed the moving and restoration of a One Room School House once located on the Bullard Farm to Bonneyville Mill County Park. The facility provides an opportunity for school children to experience life in a One Room School, and the lower level is used for public programs and as a rental facility.

A unique blend of regional history and natural beauty can be found at Bonneyville Mill County Park. Gently rolling hills, woodlands, marshes and open meadows form a perfect background for the picturesque

Bonneyville Mill. This park has an historical theme and the main feature is the fully restored, water powered grist mill. The mill is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a tourist attraction for Elkhart County that attracts more than 11,000 annual visitors per year during open hours. Seven miles of developed and undeveloped trails meander through the park providing nature enthusiasts a chance to view abundant wildlife and beautiful wildflowers. The Little Elkhart River offers anglers small-mouth bass and stocked rainbow trout throughout the season. Bonneyville Mill County Park is a designated “wildlife viewing area” in the State of Indiana.

In 2013, the Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association began construction of a 6.2-mile trail on the south farm of the park. This trail has become an important outdoor adventure course for hundreds of mountain bikers each year and is a regional draw.

During winter Bonneyville Mill County Park offers cross-country skiers miles of challenging terrain and beautiful scenery making it one of the most popular cross-country ski areas in the region. The park's two sledding hills also provide hours of winter fun for the whole family.

Numerous picnic tables can be found throughout the park and are available for public use. Six shelters and the One-Room School House community room provide a perfect place for family gatherings, group activities and events.

Park Shelters

Meadow – Capacity - 50

Open-air shelter with beautiful view of surrounding countryside. Large area for recreation. Trails lead through rolling hills, woods and meadows. Close to observation tower, restroom, drinking fountain and open field recreation.

Lookout – Capacity - 50

Open-air shelter located next to the observation tower. Open area for recreation. Trails lead through rolling hills, woods and meadows. Just a short walk to restroom and drinking fountain.

Briar Patch – Capacity - 150

Enclosed shelter with picnic tables and electricity. Additional picnic tables and grills are located outside the entrance under a large covered area. Close to trails, restroom, drinking fountain and sledding hills. Briar Patch is open to the public as a warming house December thru February when skiing or sledding.



Kum Mol Rie – Capacity - 100

Located at the north end of the park off State Road 120. Shelter located near levee trail which winds along river to the mill and the eastern natural area loop trail. Open area for recreation with restroom, drinking fountain and horseshoe pits nearby.

Valley Line – Capacity - 50

Located on hill overlooking the mill valley. Shelter provides a quiet setting with views of Bonneyville Mill and the Valley Line pond.

Feedlot – Capacity - 150

Covered, accessible shelter located in the heart of the Mill Valley across from Bonneyville Mill. Close to trails, canal and river. Open areas for recreation.

Cara Jean Baldwin One Room School – Capacity - 35

Located in the mill valley, is a reconstructed turn-of-the century school house. The Elkhart County Park Foundation Community Room in the lower level of the school is reservable and includes a small kitchen, restrooms, tables and chairs and a wood-burning fireplace.

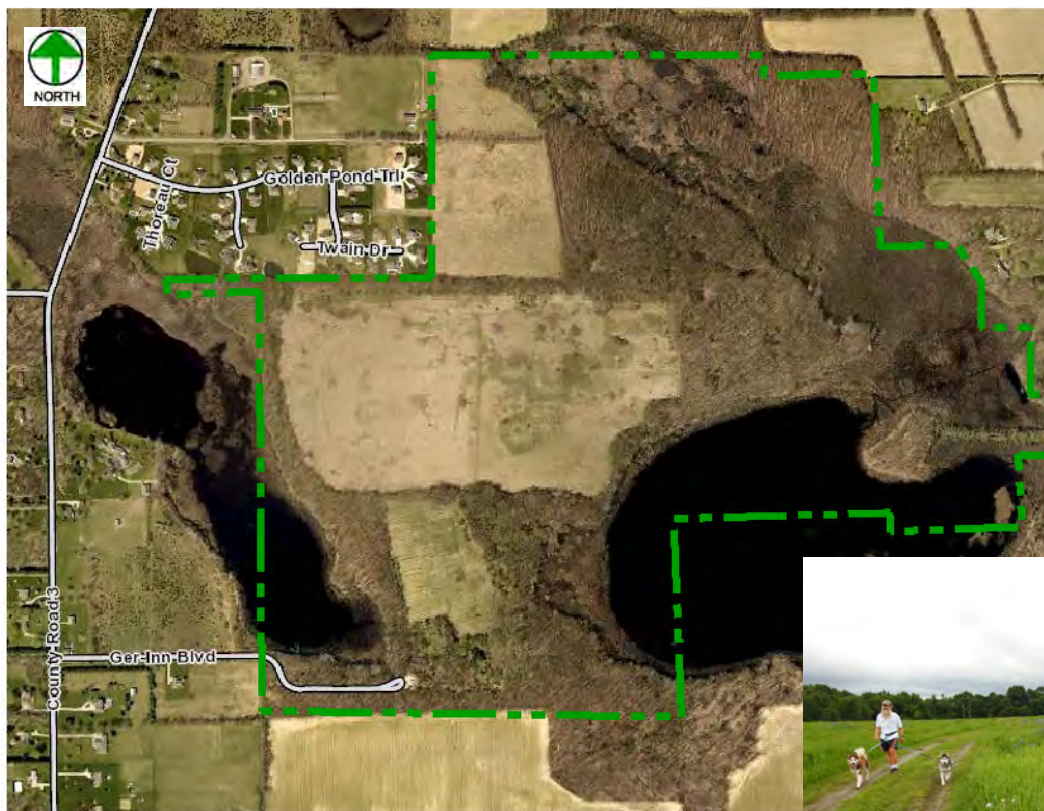
Boot Lake Nature Preserve

Size: 300 acres

Located on Williams Lane off of CR 3

In 2017 Boot Lake Nature Preserve was transferred from the City of Elkhart to the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board after discussions of the transfer first took place in 1999. A portion of the land was once the 'city sludge farm' which was professionally removed by private companies and then natural areas later restored by Elkhart EnviroCorps, an AmeriCorps National Service program. This 300-acre State Dedicated Nature Preserve protects a 90-acre tall grass prairie, two wetlands including a rare type of peaty muck flat, state endangered plants and animals such as the Purple Bladderwort and Blanding's Turtle. The site is also designated as an Important Bird Area with the National Audubon Society with more than 231 species of birds that have been documented at the property. After restoration and additional land acquisition the Indiana DNR designated the property as a state nature preserve in 2003.

Since the transfer of the property from the City to the County Parks, a new wetland overlook, updated kiosks, and cleanup of site by staff and volunteers have made a difference on visitor impact.



Cobus Creek Park

Size: 84 acres

Located at 30680 C.R. 8 – Elkhart

In 2004, the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board purchased an 84-acre parcel of land that included 3,300 feet on Cobus Creek, one of several designated cold-water trout streams in northern Indiana. In 2005, the department received a \$200,000 Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to construct an entrance road, parking, shelter, restrooms, playground, sensory garden, prairie, and fishing pier.

Cobus Creek County Park is located in the northwest corner of Elkhart County in Cleveland Township. The 84-acre parcel is situated on the south side of County Road 8, east of the Elkhart/St. Joseph County line. The main focus of the park is the preservation and enhancement of natural areas and open green space. The property contains 17 acres of wet meadow, 13 acres of wet woods, 18 acres of woods, 30 acres of former farm fields, a 5-acre pond, 1-acre meadow and a stream. The stream is a designated trout stream and was featured on the 1952 Indiana trout stamp.

Transformation of the park began in 2007 and was completed in 2009. Development included an entry drive, parking, walking trail, picnic shelter, restroom, playground, fishing access and a sensory garden. This park provides additional recreational opportunities in northwest Elkhart County such as playground, volleyball, open field recreation, hiking, jogging, bird & wildlife viewing, fishing and cross-country skiing.

Today, the Cobus Creek shelter is one of the most popular rented sites in the Elkhart County Parks.



Ox Bow Park

Size: 200 acres

Location: 23033 County Road 45, Goshen, IN 46528

In 1967 the Park Board and County administrators began planning the transfer and transformation of the County Home farm in Dunlap into a county park. The property was formally transferred in 1968 and named Ox Bow County Park in 1969. The property was designed and created with a vision to provide nature education and recreational space as well as ecological preservation along the Elkhart River. Although the park was already in use by



the public, a grand opening was held, and the park was formally dedicated in 1973. In 1980, the County Home was demolished, and an additional portion of land was leased to the Park Board by the County Commissioners, and is still owned by the Commissioners today with the intentions that it will one day be an official part of the park.

Today, Ox Bow's 200 acres is the most popular park in the system for reservations, field trips and outdoor recreation. Over five miles of nature trails lead hikers through meadows, marsh, woodland and prairies supporting a wide variety of plant and animal species. Deer, fox, raccoons and an abundance of songbirds are just a few of the wildlife that call Ox Bow home. The site contains a combination of open space and various habitats. The topography is generally flat with some rolling areas. The park also contains the remnants of an oxbow lake and two County Home cemeteries.

Ox Bow provides four seasons of outdoor enjoyment with well-maintained picnic areas, seven open shelters and one enclosed shelter. Volleyball courts, horseshoe pits and playgrounds can be found throughout the park. Other features include an archery range, observation tower, open play fields, canoe launch, open-air chapel and a 24-hole disc golf course. During the winter months, you can find groomed trails for cross country skiing as well as two sledding hills and a warming house.

Park Shelters

Fisherman's Camp – Capacity - 70

Open-air shelter located on the banks of the Elkhart River close to the canoe launch, observation tower and the Red Pines Campfire Area. Shelter includes campfire area, playground equipment, volleyball court, horseshoe pit, open play field, open-air chapel and trails are nearby. Handicap-accessible restroom, drinking fountain and picnic sites.

Coffee Tree – Capacity - 50

Open-air shelter with good views of the Elkhart River. Shelter includes a campfire area and a horseshoe pit is nearby. The shelter is located near several trails and just a short walk to the observation tower. Handicap-accessible picnic sites. Restroom and drinking fountain across road.

Honey Locust Shelter – Capacity - 70

Open-air shelter located near the oxbow of the Elkhart River. Hiking trails lead along the river, oxbow and through beautiful woodlands. It's a short walk to the spillway and fishing areas. Shelter includes a campfire area. A playground, horseshoe pit and volleyball court are nearby. Handicap-accessible restroom, drinking fountain and picnic sites.

Black Maple – Capacity - 60

Open-air shelter located in the heart of the park. The spillway and fishing pier are just across the road providing excellent fishing opportunities. The trails lead through the woodlands and board-walked wetlands with good wildlife viewing. A short walk will take you to the disc golf course or across the theme bridge to a playground area, open play field and volleyball court. Shelter includes a campfire area. Handicap-accessible restroom, drinking fountain and picnic sites.

Cottonwood – Capacity - 70

Open-air shelter overlooking the beautiful wetlands. The shelter is located across the road from the archery range and open play field with plenty of room for ball sports. Hiking trails, playground equipment, horseshoe pit and volleyball court are nearby. Shelter includes a campfire area. Handicap-accessible restroom, drinking fountain and overlook of Ox Bow wetland.

Farmstead – Capacity - 50

Open-air shelter located adjacent to the disc golf course. Secluded off the main roadway, the area provides good opportunities for viewing wildlife. The shelter is close to the spillway and fishing pier. Nearby trails lead you along the oxbow and wetland areas. Handicap-accessible restroom and drinking fountain.

Stable – Capacity - 110

Open-air shelter adjacent to the first tee of the disc golf course. Hiking trails, horseshoe pit and a volleyball court are nearby. Handicap-accessible restroom and drinking fountain.

Ox Bow Haus – Capacity - 50

Enclosed shelter with electricity and modern restroom facilities. Tables and chairs are provided. Picnic tables and grills located on back deck. Wood burning stove provides warmth during cooler months. Hiking trails, open play field, playground and volleyball court are nearby. Ox Bow Haus is open to the public as a warming house December thru February.

River Preserve Park

Size: 358 acres

Located at 67380 C.R. 29 – New Paris

The River Preserve County Park was donated to the Elkhart County Parks in 1971 by the Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO). Once the site of early mill operations and hydroelectric generation, the park contains the dams, canals and foundations of an earlier day. The property has as much historical significance as it does natural resources. The Baintertown area was once known as “Wyland Town” when the Wyland brothers and their families came from Ohio in 1831 to build a mill race, saw mill, and 18-room stone house. They later added a grist mill and woolen mill.

In the 1900s the area was owned by several power companies who harnessed energy from the hydroelectric power. The property today includes the remnants of the canal system, dams, and hydro plants at Baintertown and Benton as well as the Goshen Dam.

Later, three additional properties were donated within the watershed including 26 acres adjacent to the Baintertown section of the River Preserve, 23 acres of land near the River Preserve known as the Turkey Creek site, and the 14-acre DeFries Gardens.



Although the River Preserve County Park was previously reported in prior Master Plans and publication to be over 1,135 acres, the property was accurately calculated in 2017 with the use of GIS and measures approximately 358 acres, still giving it the honor of presently being the largest park in the County Parks system.

Visitors to the park will experience the natural beauty of Elkhart County. Wetlands along the Elkhart River provide excellent habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal species. The River Preserve provides visitors excellent opportunities for picnicking, fishing, canoeing/kayaking, hiking and nature study.

Park Shelters

Baintertown Park – Capacity - 50

Benton Spillway – Capacity - 25

Access Sites

Baintertown Hydro: 0.5 miles east of State Road 15 on County Road 29. Site contains a hydroelectric power plant, fishing and small boat/canoe access to the canal and Elkhart River, picnic site, trail.

Baintertown Park: 67380 County Road 29, New Paris, 1 mile east of State Road 15 on County Road 29, north at County Road 142. Site contains, accessible parking, trails, open shelter, accessible latrine, picnic sites, fishing and small boat/canoe/kayak access to the canal system.

Baintertown Dam and Wetland: CR 142 east of the Baintertown Park, New Paris. Site contains a seasonal restroom, trails, picnic sites, fishing, wildlife viewing, and small boat/canoe/kayak access to the Baintertown Canal.

Benton Hydro: 1-1.5 miles west of U.S. 33 on County Road 44, south ½ miles on County Road 127. Site contains trails, picnic site, fishing and small boat/canoe/kayak access to the canal system.

Benton Spillway: 68552 County Road 31, New Paris, 2 miles south of U.S. 33 on County Road 31. Site contains a dam, spillway, canal, accessible latrine, open shelter, trails, fishing and small boat/canoe/kayak access to the canal system, wildlife viewing area.

Benton Landing: an accessible IDNR public access site, located at 68105 US 33, Goshen, north side of Elkhart River Bridge on U.S. 33 in Benton, parking lot on west side of the road. Site contains picnic area, seasonal latrine, fishing and small boat/canoe/kayak access to the Elkhart River.



DeFries Gardens

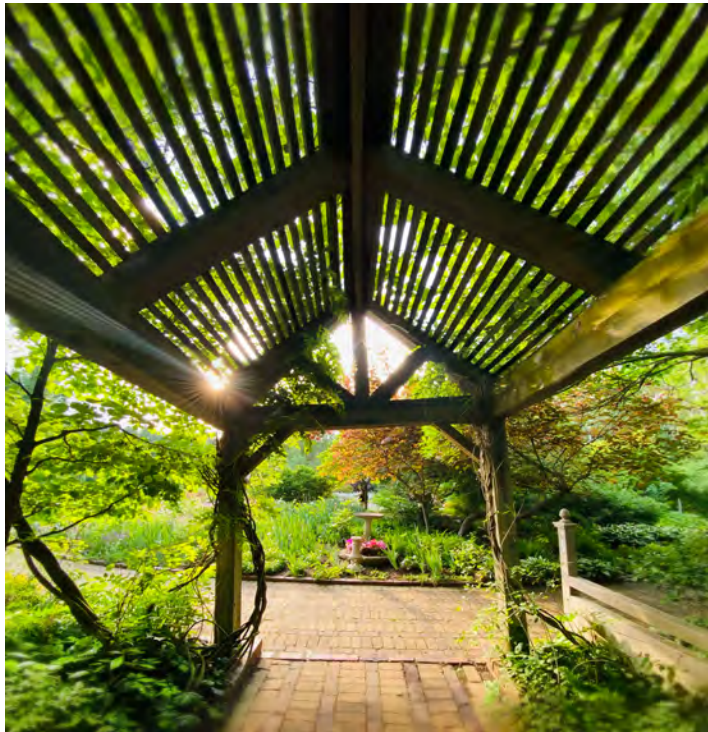
Size: 14 acres

Located at 17477 C.R. 46 – New Paris

A 14-acre parcel within the River Preserve County Park known as DeFries Gardens was donated by the late Mrs. Elisabeth DeFries in 1995. Mrs. DeFries later funded a Calendar Garden designed by Jon Cutrell as well as gifted the department a \$1.5M endowment through the Community Foundation of Elkhart County when she passed away in 2011 to care for the garden in perpetuity. This endowment allows for contracted maintenance care, part-time garden staff, plant material purchases, as well as large projects and continues to grow with further donations from community members.

The garden features a Winter House, Green House, Fall House, and Summer pavilion that are showcased within the circular Calendar Garden. Future projects include transformation of the former DeFries residence into a rental and program facility.

The site presently is home to the park manager office, maintenance facility, gardens, the former residence and parking. Visitors can enjoy the trail, Calendar Garden, homestead gardens, modern restroom and canoe/kayak access to the Elkhart River.



Corson Riverwoods County Park

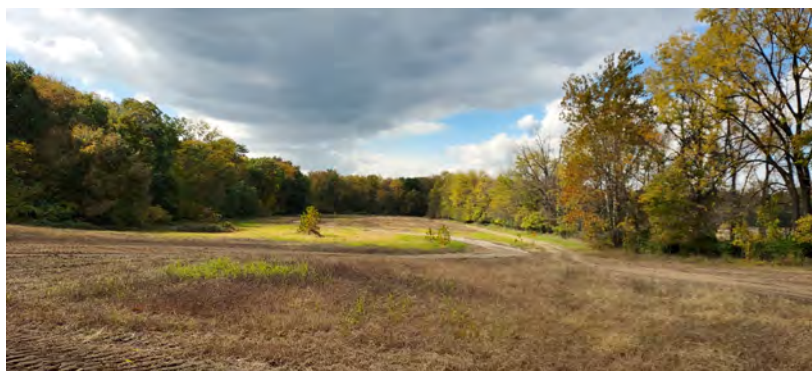
Size: 82 acres

Located along the Little Elkhart River between County Road 10 and County Road 12

In 2018 this parcel of land located northwest of Middlebury was gifted by Mr. Thomas Corson, founder of Coachman Industries. This site protects over 1 mile of cold-water trout stream along the Little Elkhart River and provides a buffer to this important habitat where evidence of naturally breeding brown trout have been found.

In 2023 the parking lot and trails were completed with a grant from the IDNR Land and Water Conservation Fund. An additional grant from the USFWS paid for 7,000 trees to be established and almost 14 acres of prairie to be developed. Phase II will begin in 2024 with a Pollinator Play-path, shelter and restrooms that have been sponsored by various other grants and donations.

A half-acre of land was recently donated.



Treasure Island

Size: 4 acres

Location: 56225 Armour Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46516

Located off County Road 16, 8/10 of a mile west of State Road 19 in Elkhart, IN.

Treasure Island is a 4 acre partially wooded site located on the banks of the lower St. Joseph River that was donated to the department in 1975. The park offers picnicking, fishing, and canoe/kayak access to the river.



Pumpkinvine Nature Trail

Size: 8 Miles owned by Elkhart County Parks

Total trail length: 18 miles (at 50 foot width = 100 acres)

Location: Goshen to Shipshewana

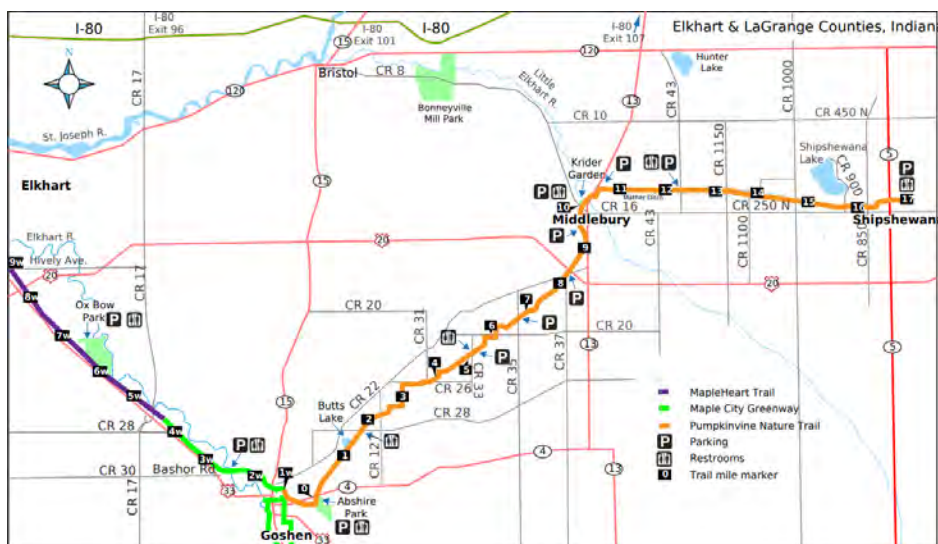
The Pumpkinvine Nature Trail is an 18-mile linear park and greenway developed mainly on the former Pumpkinvine railroad corridor. The Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board owns and manages 8 of the 18 miles. The history of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail dates back to 1978 when the concept was included in the 1979-1983 Elkhart County Park and Recreation Master Plan. Unknowingly a group of citizens in the late 1990s saw a vision of turning the abandoned railroad bed into a multi-use trail and formed the Friends of the Pumpkinvine. Many years and legal battles were spent acquisitioning the parcels, but today the trail is used by more than 250,000 people annually and its vision of a community asset has been fulfilled.



The Pumpkinvine has been a trail project woven together piece by piece and the last segment was completed in 2023. Grants and partners that have helped to construct the full-length of the trail include Transportation Enhancement grants, Eli Lilly grant, Indiana State Trails Grant, American Recovery (Stimulus) Grant, Recreational Trails grant, IDNR Bicentennial grant, Community Foundation of Elkhart County and hundreds of sponsors and donors.

In 2023, the final ‘gap’ was completed between Country Roads 35 and 20 which makes the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail even safer as it is fully removed from roadsides. The Friends of the Pumpkinvine will soon be donating that last portion to the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board.

The trail is a delight for walkers, runners, roller-bladers, cross-country skiers, and bikers as they travel through urban areas, small towns, and agricultural communities. The trail attracts visitors from across the US and around the world which brings commerce to Elkhart County and surrounding areas.



Undeveloped Park Land

Wolf Lake Site

Size: 30 acres

Located two miles north of Goshen along S.R. 15

Wolf Lake is one of the few undeveloped lakes in the county. The site contains a variety of habitats from a young forest, wet woodlands, marsh and the lake itself. The property has been land banked as a preserve by the department since its donation in 1975. Presently there is no public access to the property. The site is currently undeveloped and has the potential to offer a small parking lot and trail in the future via a partnership with the Indiana DNR.



Turkey Creek Site

Size: 23 acres

Located at the junction of Turkey Creek and the Elkhart River

This 23-acre site is located at the point where the Turkey Creek joins the Elkhart River. Currently there is no public access except by paddling to the site and, therefore, its best use is for preservation of habitat. There is much opportunity for expansion and protection of habitat in this area of the Turkey Creek watershed.



Historical Sites

Bonneyville Mill

Located at 53373 C.R. 131 – Bristol

Bonneyville Mill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. Established in the mid-1830's, Bonneyville Mill has produced quality, stone ground flour for more than 190 years. Each year the mill's historical interpreters lead thousands of visitors who come to the mill to experience the grinding of flour and experience this beautiful structure. The staff at Bonneyville Mill demonstrates and explains how water power has been harnessed to grind grain into flour and sell the flour to help raise revenue.

Not only does the mill attract local visitors and school groups, it also attracts thousands of tourists. Each year people sign the guest register from around the world. In the past five years, visitors have come from the following:

- 2019 – 36 States; 16 Countries
- 2020 – 35 States; 3 Countries
- 2021 – 45 States; 6 Countries
- 2022 – 40 States; 16 Countries
- 2023 – 38 States; 18 Countries

The Mill is a part of the heritage tourism of Elkhart County and brings with it a strong economic impact with tourist's spending money at local gas stations, restaurants, motels, and shopping centers. It also fits with the 'well-crafted' brand that Elkhart County uses to promote tourism throughout Elkhart County.



Bonneyville Mill also continues to be a part of the Elkhart County & Convention Visitors Bureau's Quilt Garden Tour with the display of a Quilt Mural on the barn. The Mill is said to be one of the most photographed locations in Elkhart County and is the 'poster-child' of the Visitor Bureau's Heritage Trail Audio Driving Tour as it is featured on the promotion's cover.

The mill recently expanded its hours to reach more guests and school groups and is now open mid-April to mid-November, 10am to 5pm, Tuesday through Sunday.

Historical Education

Bonneyville Mill provides historical education programs for students each year. These students hear the story of Edward Bonney and explore how the 190 year old mill continues to grind flour. Scheduled mill tours can be geared toward particular areas of interest (History, Science, Social Studies, Nutrition, etc.) when requested. In addition, the interpretive naturalists and museum staff also provide programs at the One Room School House located at Bonneyville Mill County Park.

Elkhart County Historical Museum

Size: 1.32 Acres

Located at 304 W. Vistula Street – Bristol

The Elkhart County Parks is unique in that it models many state and national parks in which preservation of history is an important part of its mission.

The concept for the Elkhart County Historical Museum began shortly after the department was founded when a partnership was created between the Elkhart County Historical Society and Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board that allowed for the Bristol High School to be purchased by Howard Rush and donated in May of 1967. A year later, the Elkhart County Historical Museum was opened to the public. Through the efforts of countless individuals, the museum has become one of the foremost institutions in northern Indiana dedicated to preserving and educating the public about local history. In 1991, the Elkhart County Parks assumed full operating support of the staff and operations of the Museum in partnership with the Society's collection. The Elkhart County Historical Society became a-501 (c) 3 non-profit and continued to assist with fundraising, volunteerism, and other in-kind support for the preservation of its collection. At this time, the structure was also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Today with professional staff, the Museum is dedicated to fostering appreciation and preservation of local history and culture through exhibits, education programs, and an accessible library and archives. Visitors to the museum can explore the many people, places and events that make up the history of Elkhart County and engage with the nearly 30,000 artifacts and over 100,000 documents related to Elkhart County history that the Society has collected since 1896.

Over the past five years, the first-floor galleries were updated to a series of exhibits entitled *Crossroads of Elkhart County*. These three galleries bring audiences the story of Elkhart County, often through the voices of the people who lived it. The timeline begins with the nomadic paleo people who passed through this area thousands of years ago and then moves to the Miami and Potawatomi and changes wrought by the arrival of the French. Visitors will explore the years of conflict and forced removal of Native groups from the region and transition to the industrial era with the arrival of trains and rise of industry, which occurred hand-in-hand with migration and the changing population.

The Museum serves almost 3,000 people annually through programs, tours and general visitors. The pandemic made a huge impact on the Museum attendance during 2020 with the facility being closed for much of the year.

The museum hosted several temporary exhibits designed by staff members over the past five years. These exhibits have included: World War I: Armistice Day Centennial (2018) Coverlets (2019) Elkhart in Winter photo exhibition (2019) Smithsonian Crossroads Traveling exhibit (early 2020) Emma Molloy (2021) Pearl Harbor 80th Anniversary (2021), Virtual on-line exhibits: Women Artists of Elkhart County and St. Joseph River images (in association with WNIT St. Joe River documentary) (2021) Quilts, Inspired by Nature (2022) sihsipaahkwikaani: Miami Maple Sugaring exhibit loan (2022) Encore: Quilts, Inspired by Nature (2023) Plop, Plop, Fizz, Fizz, Miles Markets Alka-Seltzer (2023) Clues Through the Lens (2023)

Researchers from Elkhart County and across the country draw on the wide range of resources available in the collection of the Elkhart County Historical Society and Elkhart Genealogical Society, which also houses their collection at the Museum. Museum staff and volunteers assist professional and amateur historians and genealogists with research, providing access to one-of-a-kind material and offering tutorials for beginning researchers. The large historical collection continues to be made increasingly public by museum staff via a partnership with the Elkhart Public Library. Archival materials have become increasingly accessible to researchers as museum staff and volunteers develop archival finding aids and make them available on the web.

The Elkhart County Historical Museum is fortunate that many non-profit organizations and members of the community are dedicated to helping the museum achieve its goals. The current hours of Museum operation are Tuesday-Saturday 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.



Field Trips and Museum Tours

School programs have been developed to cover various themes that are relevant to local history. Museum staff and volunteers present each topic through informative and interactive lessons. Reproduction artifacts and documented historic activities are included to provide students with a unique immersion experience. Each program was designed with an emphasis on state standards, and the programs are routinely updated to meet evolving curriculum requirements. The museum offers the following field trips for children:

- Everyday Items from the Past
- Our Story: Elkhart County
- Regional Native American History
- 19th Century School Lesson (held off-site at the One Room Schoolhouse)

Museum Public Programs

Over the past five years, there have been various programs offered by the staff of the Elkhart County Historical Museum mostly in the style of adult lectures with some family-oriented events. Programming during 2020 and portions of 2021 proved challenging with the Covid-10 pandemic and indoor facilities, but staff turned to technology and use of YouTube, and Facebook to reach audiences.

Public programs from the past five years include:

Stories of Elkhart (series):

- The Miami
- Paleo to Potawatomi
- Union City Cemetery
- Coverlets
- Natural Disasters
- Grace Lawn Cemetery Tour
- Bonneyville Mill
- Native Removal
- Covid-19 Pandemic
- Sneak Peak of Partly Dave
- Elkhart County History in Artifacts
- Myths and Legends
- Oakridge Cemetery Tour

History Detectives (series):

- LS & MS Railroad Machine Shop
- The Horticulturists
- Charles Gordone & Civil Rights
- Behind the Scenes
- The Bracero Program
- House Histories
- Dutch Kitchenettes
- Advertising Alka Seltzer

Museum Matinee (series):

- CG Conn
- E. Hill Turnock
- Bristol Fruit Hills

Other History Programs:

- Curator’s Talk: Crossroads-Forging a Path
- Stories of the Automotive History
- Crossroads of Elkhart County Guided Tours
- Virtual Tour of Elkhart
- “Celebrate the St. Joe” documentary
- Pearl Harbor Commemoration
- The Life of Dr. Franklin Miles
- The Life and Legacy of John F Funk
- The 1847 Court Case: Graves et al vs Indiana
- Howard Hawks Double Movie Feature (in partnership with Goshen Theater)
- The Story of Violet Schmidt
- The History of Benham West Neighborhood
- Siihsipaahkwikaani (Miami Maple Sugaring) Exhibit Tour
- Favorite Things Tour
- Profiles in Service

Family Programs:

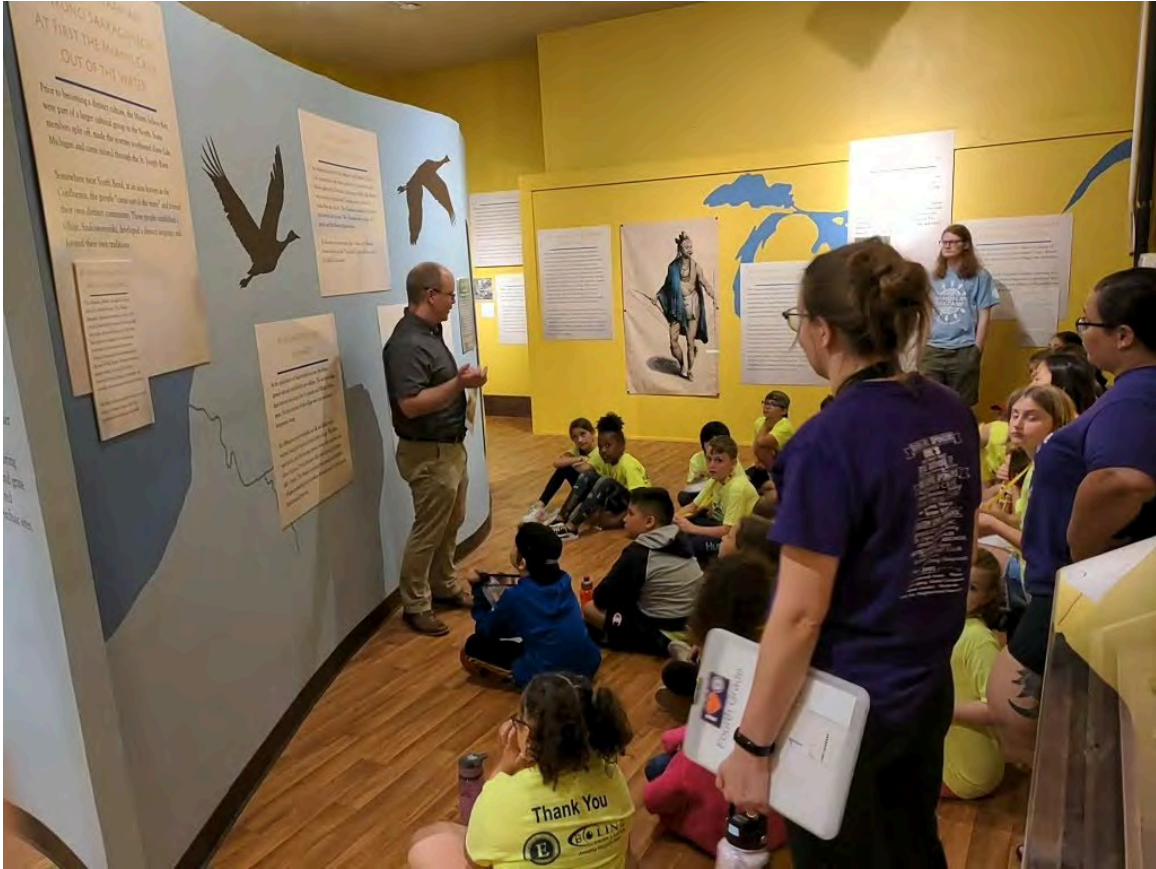
- Atlatl Night
- Museum Saturday Scavenger Hunt
- Friday Nights at the Museum (series)
- Winter Break Activity Day
- Museum Fridays in February
- Family Fun with Science

Archival Care Programs:

- Textile Care Workshop
- Digitization Workshop
- Photography Care Workshop
- Preserving Your Family Treasures

Walking Tours:

- Bristol Walking Tour
- Historic Goshen Walking Tour
- Historic Nappanee Walking Tour
- Historic Walking Tour of Elkhart
- Baintertown Park History Tour
- Grace Lawn Cemetery Tour



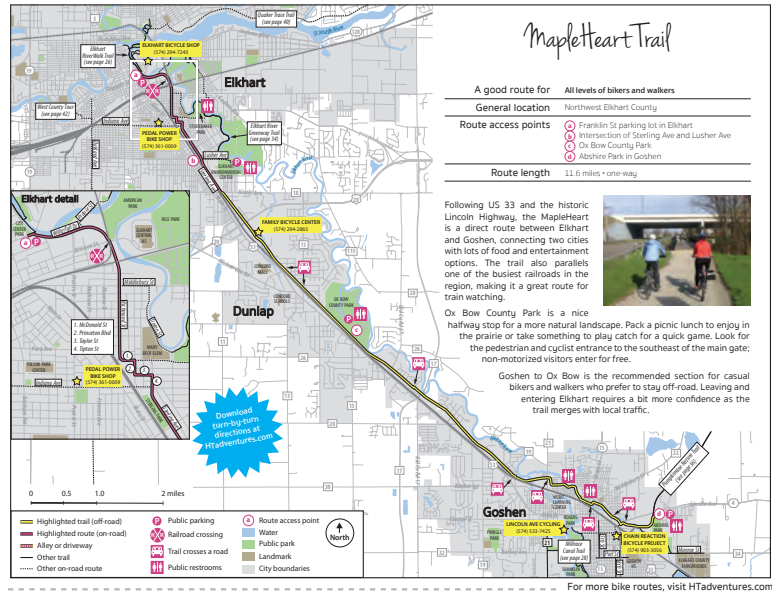
Park Partnerships

MapleHeart Trail

Size: 4.2 miles owned by Elkhart County Commissioners

Location: Goshen to Elkhart

The MapleHeart Trail is a linear urban trail that stretches from Goshen to Elkhart and is part of a regional trail network connecting to the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail in Goshen. The Elkhart County Parks works with the County Commissioners to maintain the trail between the overpass of US 20 and Wakefield Road. The trail is used by walkers, runners, and bikers, especially those that commute to work. The trail is also connected to Ox Bow County Park which has an additional 1-mile paved bike trail within its interior. In the future, an additional overpass link will be created to cross the US 33 corridor.



Six-Span Bridge Site

Size: 3.14 acres

Located at 54424 S.R. 120 – Elkhart

This is a two-acre site on the upper St. Joseph River with a boat launching facility that was constructed by the Elkhart County Commissioners to provide river access for boaters. In 2022 a separate ADA accessible dock for kayaks and canoes was added to the facilities. Future plans include a picnic shelter and restoration of a pole barn into an office/meeting space. Funds for the project will come through the Redevelopment Commission and ownership will be maintained by the County Commissioners.



Lieber Nature Preserve

Size: 135 acres

Located at 51602 C.R 23 – Bristol

The preservation of Pipewort Pond and the surrounding property is a partnership with the Indiana Division of Nature Preserves. The 135-acre preserve features a bog, wildlife viewing, and a variety of Indiana’s endangered and threatened plant species. The site is open to the public for hiking and nature study. In 2023, the IDNR enhanced the site with an expanded parking lot and new wetland overlook.



Park Programs and Events

The Interpretive Services Division houses the interpretation, education, event planning, marketing, and volunteer section of the department. The nine full-time and four part-time staff have offices divided among Ox Bow County Park, Bonneyville Mill, and the Elkhart County Historical Museum.

Interpretive Programming

The Interpretive Services staff provide a diverse selection of recreation, education, and leisure opportunities to area residents. Elkhart County Parks offers programming that encourage people to be more active in the outdoors. Staff provide these opportunities through field trips, bus tours, day camps, monthly public programs, community outreach, and special events. Two staff are Certified Heritage Interpreters, and one museum staff is a Certified Interpretive Guide through the National Association of Interpretation (NAI).

The team builds partnerships within the community including with the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District, Indiana Master Naturalist program, and local Group of Regional Environmental Educators Network (GREEN).

Interpretive Naturalists

Environmental Education Field Trips

Environmental education is offered by three full-time staff of the Interpretive Naturalist Section. Education programs provide hands-on activities and group hikes at the various county park sites. The staff also provides off-site programs for schools, clubs and other groups. To encourage participation of schools, programs are designed to meet Indiana State Standards for curriculum requirements. Schools from all seven school corporations within Elkhart County attend field trip, as well as other schools from adjoining counties.



The following programs are offered year-round:

- Animal Habitats
- Animal Adaptations
- Animal Tracks & Sign
- Animals of Indiana
- Benefits of Bats
- Birds
- Mammals
- Insects
- Fish
- Reptiles & Amphibians
- Weather & Clouds
- Recycling
- Predators & Prey
- Geologic Forces
- Wild About Wetlands
- Survival Skills
- Orienteering & Maps
- Nature Hikes

A unique partnership with Concord Ox Bow Elementary school began in 2013 and continues a decade later. The school has land that adjoins Ox Bow County Park, allowing for field trips to take place without the need for bus transportation. The school requests visits from the interpretive naturalists three times per year per grade. The program enhances the science programs taught at Concord Ox Bow Elementary school.

Monthly Public Programs

The Elkhart County Parks Interpretive Naturalists provide a wide variety of monthly Public Programs to the general public. These interpretive programs consist of topics related to nature, culture, and the environment. Topics presented over the past five years include:

Programs offered as series:

- Hiking Club (Monthly: March to Nov. in different locations)
- Nature Nuts (Monthly preschool program)
- Epic Explorers
- Wednesday Bird Walks (bi-monthly)
- Nature Readers Book Club (2019)
- Books & Boots (2023 in partnership with Elkhart Public Library)
- Yoga in the Parks
- Chair Yoga (2023)

Educator Workshops:

- Hoosier Riverwatch Volunteer Training
- Project WET/WILD Workshop

Natural History: FAUNA

- Wetland Wonders
- Fun with Frogs and Toads
- Owl Prowl
- Monarchs on the Move
- Wildlife Moms
- Amphibian Night
- Winter Wetland Hike
- Tracks & Snacks
- Bat House Workshop
- Timberdoodle Trek
- Wildlife Dads
- Backyard Mammals
- Animal Tracks
- Barred Owls: Walk & Talk
- Creatures of the Night: Bats
- Creatures of the Night: Beavers
- Creatures of the Night: Spiders
- Wildlife Track Trek
- Birding by Ear Workshops
- Groundhog Day
- Beavers of Elkhart County
- Bird Language Lessons
- The Scoop on Squirrels
- Woodpeckers

- Busy Beaver Adventures
- Bat Walk
- Trout Day
- The Stink on Skunks
- The Amazing Turkey Vulture
- All About Bird Nests
- Eastern Coyote
- Do Hummingbirds Really Hum?
- Firefly Flashdance Tour
- Feed the Birds
- Breakfast with the Birds
- Spring Birding Challenge
- Wild Bird Banding Demo
- Suet Making Workshop
- Bird Feeding Basics

Natural History: FLORA

- Winter Tree ID
- Native Plant ID
- Wildflower Bioblitz
- Tree ID Hike
- Edible Wild Mushrooms
- Traditional Herbal Uses
- Wild Edibles
- Dandelions: Weeds or Wildflowers?
- DeFries Gardens Spring Plant Exchange
- Cobus Creek Fall Plant Exchange
- Wildflower Walk
- Tree ID 101

Outdoor Recreation/Fitness

- Bike Hikes
- Moving with Morgan
- Mushing 101
- Bike Rodeo
- Yoga in the Parks (series)
- Deer Fly Dash/5K Run & Walk
- Exploration Packs (series)
- Kite Creations
- Sweet Cycle Ride
- Survival: Fire Making
- Survival: Orienteering

- Cobus Creek Family Campout
- Cross Country Ski Night
- Basics of XC Skiing
- Backyard Maple Sugaring
- Beginning Backpacking Clinic
- Fishing: Pond to Plate
- Hydro Hustle Adventure Race
- Chair Yoga
- Fall Bike Ride

Astronomy

- Winter Astronomy
- Astronomy Night
- Perseids Party
- Comet NEOWISE Viewing
- Summer Astronomy

Regional Tours

- Bison Ranch Tours
- Kellogg Bird Sanctuary Tour
- Saw Whet Owl Banding Trip
- Sandhill Crane Migration Trip
- Pisgah Marsh Trip

Arts and Crafts/Hands-on Learning

- Needle Felting
- Basket Weaving
- Animated Pull Toy Workshop
- Wooden Dog Planter
- DIY Animated Flip Toy
- Ginger Bird House
- Wreath Workshop
- Pinecone Centerpiece
- Natural Dyes
- Pecking Chickens Toy Workshop
- Makers Mingle
- Plein Air Watercolor Painting
- Fall Stories & Suncatchers
- DIY: Dog Biscuits
- Nature Notebooks
- Board Games in the Parks

Mill & History Programming

- One Room Schoolhouse Open House (series)
- Bake Day: Scottish Oatmeal
- Bake Day: Rye Flour
- Bake Day: Soft White Wheat
- Bake Day: Red Wheat
- Bake Day: Spelt

- Feature Grain Day
- Homemade Cinnamon Rolls
- Sourdough Bread Making 101
- Basics of Yeast Bread
- Cast Iron Cookout and Swap Meet

Themed Hikes

- First Day Hikes
- A Walk in the Woods
- Earth Month Hike
- Spring Equinox Hike
- Boot Lake Prairie Hike
- Fall Equinox Hike
- St. Patrick's Day Scavenger Hunt
- Singing Insects Sound Hike
- Mutt Strut/Dog Walks
- Park in the Dark
- Winter Nature Hike
- Wildlife Hike
- Hiking with Apps
- Thirst for Nature Hike
- Winter Solstice Hike
- Summer Solstice Hike
- Valentine Stroll
- Explore Boot Lake
- Illuminated Trail Hike
- Lieber Nature Preserve Hike
- Tails & Trails
- Scavenger Hunt (bi-lingual)
- Neature Hike
- Peace with Nature (bi-lingual)

Sustainability

- Recycling Center Tour
- Compost vs. Vermi-compost
- A Solar Adventure
- Goshen Eco-village Tour
- Worm Bin Workshop
- Herbal Oils and Salves
- Beginning Beekeeping
- Zero Waste Cleaning
- Climate Change: Why it Matters
- Making a Safer Home
- America Recycles Day
- Carbon Sequestration Talk
- Farm to Fork: Elkhart Food Council

Service Learning Programs

- Indiana Master Naturalist Course
- Junior Indiana Master Naturalist
- Teen Indiana Master Naturalist

Volunteer Work Days

Boot Lake:

- Prairie Weed Removal
- Seed Collecting
- Invasive Tree Removal
- Garlic Mustard

River Preserve:

- Invasive Species Removal
- Baintertown cleanup
- Canal Cleanup
- DeFries Gardens Cleanup

Cobus Creek:

- Sensory Garden
- Cobus Creek Restoration

Ox Bow:

- Trail Maintenance
- Thistle Removal
- Firewood Cutting
- Garlic Mustard

Day Camps

- Jr. IMN Day Camp
- Nature Explorer Day Camp
- Adventure Day Camp
- Adventure Bike Day Camp

Major Special Events

The Elkhart County Parks offered new and continued traditional special events. Major events are defined as those that are a half day or longer, involve multiple staff and facilities, extended planning time, and often attract 100 to several thousand people.

Dogapalooza offers a variety of activities for pets and their owners including a police K-9 demonstration, dog toy making, contest, booths, and much more. In 2023 the event was combined in partnership with the Elkhart County Humane Society's fundraising 5K.

Bug Night continues to be popular in celebration of insects. Area agencies host insect related booths, insect snacks are served, and programs and activities are held centered on the insect world. The highlight is the chocolate covered crickets!

Bonneyville Buckwheat Pancake Breakfasts attract large crowds in the spring and fall. The spring 2023 event was held in conjunction with Trout Day to feed hungry fisher-people on the opening day of trout season.

A double feature **Movie Night in the Park** was hosted in 2022 and offered the showing of the movie *Luca* in both English and Spanish. Movie goers gathered their blankets and lawn chairs and enjoyed an evening of popcorn and the large screen in the open air.

Elkhart County Parks Photo Contest is an annual event to promote the environmental, recreational and historical resources of Elkhart County. Local judges choose winners and then all photos are placed on display for over a week. This competition has moved to an on-line digitized version to reach a broader audience and to adapt to the changes Covid-19 brought. It continues to use the digital format today.

Halloween Campfire and Hayrides exploded in 2022 with thousands now attending this popular multi-night event. Participants enjoy an evening in Ox Bow Park with a campfire, food trucks, decorated woods, and hayride through the darkness of the park.

Holiday at the Mill continues to be hosted in November at the end of the mill season. It features Bonneyville Mill decorated for the holiday season. Flour and corn meal are sold, cookies are available for sampling, items are sold in the gift shop, children visit with Santa, and hands-on crafts are offered. The event attracts hundreds of people each year.

Elkhart County 4-H Fair – Each year the Elkhart County Parks rents a booth at the local fair. Over 25,000 visitors come to visit the displays, turtle tank, and talk with park staff and volunteers during the weeklong fair.

Partner Special Events

The Elkhart County Parks works with other agencies to provide special events to the community. Schools, organizations, and others are welcome to fill out special event forms to host events within the Elkhart County Parks.

Sectional/Regional Cross-Country Meets – The Elkhart County Parks serves as the home course for two area high school cross country teams, as well as sectional, regional, and two conference final meets hosted by various junior and high schools:

- Early Bird Invitational Cross Country Meet
- NIC Stomp Cross Country Meet
- Elkhart Central vs. Memorial XC Meet
- Hokem Karen Cross Country Meet
- Tri Cross Country Meet
- County Clash Cross Country Meet
- NIC/NLC Cross Country Meet
- Sectional Cross Country Meet
- Regional Cross Country Meet
- Edison Lakes Cross Country Meet
- Quad Cross Country Meet
- Minute Classic Cross Country Invitational
- NLC Round Robin Cross Country Meet

Other community events, disc golf tournaments, and 5Ks planned and presented by area organizations, libraries, and agencies within the Elkhart County Parks include:

- Annual Pumpkinvine Bike Ride
- Pioneer Trails Klondike Derby – Pioneer Trails District Boy Scouts of America
- Eastside Boy Scouts Day Camp – Boy Scouts of America
- Get Fit Get Healthy 5K Run/Walk for Wellness – Goshen Health
- Elkhart Out of the Darkness Walk – American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Indiana Chapter
- Orienteering Event - Orienteering Cincinnati
- Ox Stock Summer of Love – Elkhart Public Library
- Miles for Music – Goshen High School Music Department
- Run with the Son 5K & Fun Walk – Bible Memory Ministries
- Paws for a Cause 5K & 1 Mile Strut Your Mutt – Humane Society of Elkhart County
- Ecto-Fest “Zombie” Run & Zombie Dash – Elkhart Civic Theatre
- Frightening 5K Haunted Hilly - Elkhart County Down Syndrome Support Group
- International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day – Elkhart County Suicide Prevention Coalition
- Boo Dash – Crossroads Community Church
- Reading Roundtable – Cleveland Branch Library

- Hoosier Club Challenge Disc Golf
- Edible Plant Walks – Middlebury Public Library
- Community for Immigrant Justice 5k – National Immigrant Justice Center
- Elementary Mile Run – Fairfield School Corporation
- Turkey Shootout – Michiana Disc Golf Club
- Quilt Garden Ride – Bike Elkhart County, Inc.
- Maple City Ice Bowl – The Window
- Be Mine Valentine – Maple City Disc Golf
- March Madness – Maple City Disc Golf
- Mini 4-H Day Camp – Elkhart County 4-H
- NRCher Spirit Society 5K Fun Run – NRCher Spirit Society
- Outdoor Mindfulness – Middlebury Public Library
- Midweek Mini – Maple City Disc Golf
- Jason’s Birthday Bash – Maple City Disc Golf
- Picnic in the Park Storytime - Middlebury Public Library

Compliance with State and Federal Regulations

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law on July 26, 1990, by President George H. W. Bush. This law is an attempt to achieve inclusion in society for individuals with disabilities. It does this by codifying requirements that create the conditions to permit individuals with disabilities of all kinds equal access to all parts of society. The ADA differs from the individual state discrimination laws in that it has a more sweeping range and applies retroactively to existing facilities.

Katie Niblock is the Elkhart County ADA Coordinator and ensures compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. She may be contacted at:

Elkhart County Highway Division
 610 Steury Avenue
 Goshen, IN 46528
 Phone: (574) 534-9394
 Fax: (574) 533-7102
 Email: kniblock@elkcohw.org

In addition, she will assist with the grievance procedure (a copy of the *Grievance Procedure under the Americans with Disabilities Act* can be found in the Appendix of this document).

The Elkhart County Park & Recreation Department complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits discrimination in the provision of services, programs or facilities to individuals with disabilities.

Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Accessibility

Elkhart County strives to provide park and recreation facilities and programs that are accessible to people with disabilities. Every effort is made by the Elkhart County Parks and Recreation Department to provide accessible facilities as plans are made for improvement and expansion of

park facilities. These efforts include, but are not limited to, provision of accessible play equipment, shelters, picnic tables, and restroom facilities for all new park improvements.

The Elkhart County Parks and Recreation Department plans on adapting and improving access to all of its facilities as the needs and requirements of the population evolve. Annual assessments are conducted for accessibility of facilities. Older facilities are brought into compliance on an annual basis based on replacement schedules and priority, and financial opportunities.

Older facilities are the most challenging, but as new amenities are updated and created, the Elkhart County Parks looks forward to creating an even more inclusive park experience.

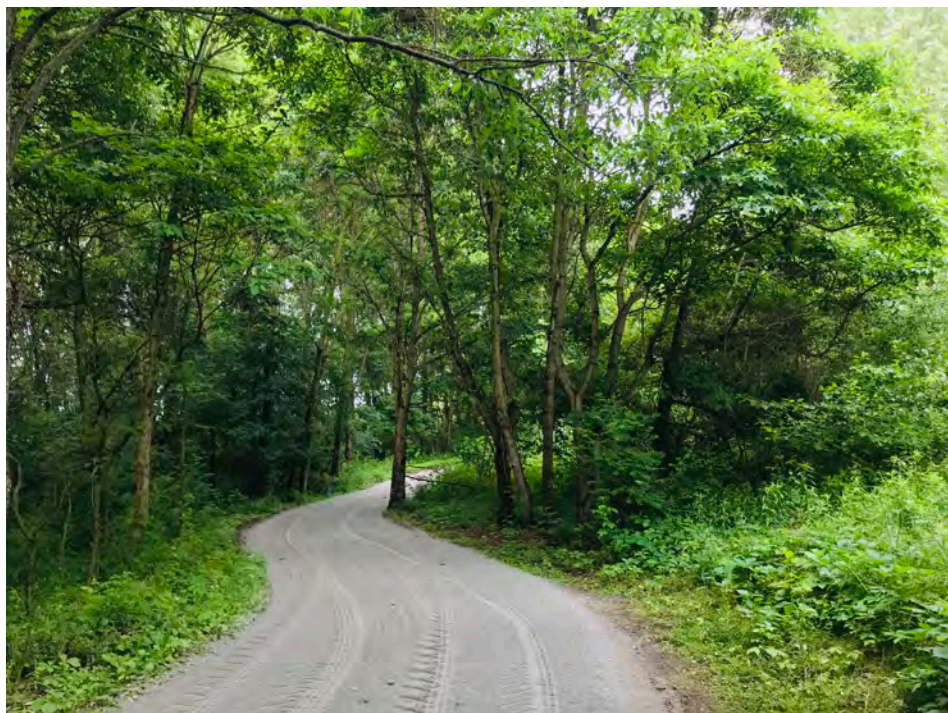
Presently the Elkhart County Parks is working with the Elkhart County Commissioners, Elkhart County Council, and the Stormwater Division to utilize \$4,000,000 in American Rescue Plan funds to install four modern restrooms and replace eleven latrines in five major parks including Ox Bow County Park, Bonneyville Mill, Boot Lake Nature Preserve, River Preserve County Park, Corson Riverwoods County Park, and on the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail.

All of these restrooms will be ADA compliant and will include updated paved accessible parking areas and accessible routes to the restrooms in all of the fifteen locations.

This is the largest capital project investment the Elkhart County Parks has ever made and it will be replacing many latrines that are 50 years old.

In addition, the recent path installed at Corson Riverwoods County Park is fully accessible as will be the Pollinator Playpath playground areas. This is another \$500,000 investment in making the Elkhart County Parks accessible to all.

Both projects will be completed in 2024.



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Community Profile

History and Settlement

Elkhart County is part of the ancestral homelands of the Miami and Potawatomi people. It was the Miami who gave this area its name when they established the village Mihšiiwiteehinki (Elk's Heart) at the confluence of the St. Joseph and Elkhart rivers. The Potawatomi established villages throughout the area, and both Miami and Potawatomi lived in the region for decades before being forcibly removed in the 19th century. Despite this, people of both Miami and Potawatomi heritage live in Elkhart County today.

As the United States expanded westward, the Elkhart Prairie and the promise of good soil brought Americans to this area. Towns such as Elkhart, Goshen, Middlebury, Bristol, Jimtown, and New Paris were all established during the 1830s in the newly formed Elkhart County. The next decade saw the population boom, and cultural groups like the Anabaptists settle on the land and formed the identity of Elkhart County.

A major change took place with the arrival of the railroad in 1851. The mostly agrarian society shifted as trains brought industries to Elkhart County. The city of Elkhart became the world leader in band instrument manufacturing, and Nappanee, a town formed by railroads in the 1870s, became known for constructing kitchen cabinets. Agriculture continued to be strong in the eastern part of the county with the Bristol Fruit Hills, Middlebury's Krider Gardens, and Goshen's Kunderd Gladioli Farm all shipping products grown in Elkhart County to various parts of the Midwest and the nation. The manufacturing of recreational vehicles began in the early 20th century and expanded all across Elkhart County as the United States built roads and highways, connecting the country. Today the RV industry stretches all across the county and Elkhart County is known as the "RV Capital of the World."

Today, Elkhart County is divided into sixteen townships. The largest city in the county is Elkhart, with Goshen being the second largest and the county seat. The city of Nappanee and the incorporated towns of Middlebury, Bristol, Wakarusa, and Millersburg are also in Elkhart County, along with New Paris, the largest unincorporated town in the state of Indiana. These communities were developed as small agricultural trading centers and grew into a diversified manufacturing base.



Elkhart County is part of the Elkhart-Goshen Metropolitan Statistical Area, which in turn is part of the South Bend-Elkhart-Mishawaka Combined Statistical Area. Located along the Indiana / Michigan border, it is also considered part of the broader region of Northern Indiana known as Michiana. Containing 463.17 square miles, the area is referred to as the recreation vehicle (RV) capital of the world and is known for its sizable Amish and Old Order Mennonite population.

Distances from Elkhart County, Indiana

City / Location	Miles
Chicago, IL.....	124
Indianapolis, IN	141
Detroit, MI	200
Cincinnati, OH.....	240



Elkhart County Government

Elkhart County Board of Commissioners

Elkhart County is governed by a board of three county commissioners. The commissioners are elected from separate commissioner districts by vote of the county as a whole. The Board of Commissioners constitutes the legislative body of the county for ordinance purposes and is the executive branch of the County. The board is responsible for county buildings, lands and property; purchasing and authorizing payments; signing contracts; supervising and directing County departments; and performing many other governing functions.

Elkhart County Board of Commissioners Members

Brad Rogers, President	District 2
Bob Barnes.....	District 1
Suzanne Weirick, Vice President	District 3

Elkhart County Council

The financial powers of the County are placed in the County Council. The Council appropriates all funds and levies all County taxes. There are seven Council members, four Council districts, with one member from each district, and three Council members elected at large.

Council Districts:

- 1 – Concord, Osolo and Washington Township
- 2 – Concord, Baugo, Cleveland Townships
- 3 – Concord, Jefferson and Elkhart Township
- 4 – Concord, Locke, Union, Benton, Clinton, Harrison, Jackson, Middlebury, Olive and York Townships

Elkhart County Council Members

Doug Graham.....	District 1
Randall Yohn.....	District 2
Darryl Riegsecker.....	District 3
David Hess, Vice-President.....	District 4
Adam Bujalski.....	At-Large
Thomas Stump, President.....	At-Large
Steven Clark.....	At-Large

Major Industries *(Source: Economic Development Corporation of Elkhart County)*

Elkhart County is known as the “RV Capital of the World”. There is also a variety of other industries, such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare and education. The largest employers in Elkhart County are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Thor Industries, Inc. (13,622) | 6. Beacon Health System (2,600) |
| 2. Forest River, Inc. (10,000) | 7. Elkhart Community Schools (1,800) |
| 3. Lippert Components, Inc. (7,500) | 8. Indiana Univ. Health, Goshen (1,517) |
| 4. Patrick Industries (2,900) | 9. Gulf Stream Coach, Inc. (1,500) |
| 5. Winnebago (2,754) | 10. Goshen Community Schools (1,442) |

Transportation *(Source: Greater Elkhart Chamber)*

There are 216 miles of highways in Elkhart County including 21 miles of the Indiana Toll Road, 91 miles of federal highways, and 104 miles of state highways. County Roads, most of which are paved, cover 1,340 miles. These highways and roads crisscross the county so that all parts are accessible.

The major traffic corridors connecting Elkhart County to other areas include:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| • US 31 corridor | • CR 6/Cleveland Road corridor |
| • CR 17 corridor | • US 20 corridor |
| • Nappanee Street/ SR 19 corridor | • US 33 corridor |

Four railroad lines serve the county with 60 miles of track. Amtrak offers the only rail passenger service from Elkhart County. The Robert R. Young Memorial Railroad Yard is a major freight yard providing a rail route for westbound freight shipments from the east through Chicago and also serves points in northern and central Indiana.

Three airports serve small private planes and small corporate jets.

Greyhound Bus Lines and Coach USA Lines service Elkhart County. There is also a Trolley Interurban Bus Service that runs through Elkhart and Goshen.

Natural Resource Focus

Since the completion of the previous *Five-Year Parks and Recreation Master Plan*, Elkhart County Parks has been working towards its continued mission of protecting natural resources through the protection of habitat and establishing a role that will be dedicated to creating land management plans and combatting issues such as invasive species removal.

The leadership within the department has recognized the threat invasive species pose to the system's natural resources, which is the department's greatest asset. As a result, a Natural Resource Coordinator position has been created. The role of the new Natural Resource Coordinator will be to help develop land management plans, project lists, budgets and assist in seeking grants and volunteers for restoration work. This role will create land management plans for each park and focus on best management practices for landscaping, invasive removal, and restoring habitat.

Some of this work has already begun with park services staff performing invasive removal of non-natives such as bush honeysuckle, multi-flora rose, phragmites, glossy buckthorn, and tree of heaven.

In addition, the new Corson Riverwoods County Park has been the recipient of Partners for Wildlife grant and recently was planted with 7,000 tree seedlings and 14 acres of prairie.

In addition, the Elkhart County Parks is partnering with volunteers and other natural resources agencies to create a CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) for Elkhart County. This partnership is just getting its feet off the ground in 2024 and is an initiative led the City of Goshen's Environmental Resilience department.

The Elkhart County Health Department provides a seasonal surveillance program to monitor populations and types of mosquitos, ticks, and diseases. They monitor several hundred sites throughout the county each year, and generally include one or two county parks. The mosquito diseases of concern are Eastern Equine Encephalitis and West Nile Virus.

In addition, the Elkhart County Parks helps them to distribute educational materials about ticks and tick-borne diseases as well as prevention ideas.

The Elkhart County Parks does not tend to have an issue with geese as other urban and municipal parks do. Riparian vegetation along shorelines and rivers is a natural deterrent in a majority of our parks.

The Elkhart County Parks does have occasional challenges with beaver and muskrat periodically. Historically the department has had a trapping program to help maintain population control, but in recent years staff have tried to use alternative methods for controlling beaver damage such as removing dams, diverting water through dams with piping, and placing chicken wire around major trees. This is another reason The Elkhart County Parks are hiring a Natural Resource Coordinator to assist the department in expertise in these areas and to develop a plan for balance with the natural resources we protect.

The Natural Resource Coordinator will also create land management plans for the identification and protection of endangered/threatened species found within the parks. The Elkhart County Park Department has already documented the state endangered Blandings Turtle in almost every one of the county parks. In addition, Boot Lake Nature Preserve is a state dedicated nature preserve and protects rare and endangered plants that include Robbins Spikerush (*Eleocharis robbinsii*), Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*), Dwarf Umbrella-sedge (*Fuirena pumila*), Tall Beaked-rush

(*Rhynchospora macrostachya*), Long-beaked Rush (*Rhynchospora scirpoides*), Weakstalk Bulrush (*Scirpus purshianus*), and Purple Bladderwort (*Utricularia purpurea*).

Elkhart County Parks does not worry about the condition of turf areas. Areas are mowed, but not maintained for sport facilities. On occasion, the Ultimate Frisbee group donates time and equipment to aerate the field they play in during the summer months.

The 80 acres of tall grass prairie at Boot Lake Nature Preserve are maintained by winter/early spring prairie burns. The Prairie is divided into three sections, and we alternate the prairie burns as to not burn the entire area at one time.

The two Cobus Creek County Park prairie areas total approximately 15 acres and have been maintained through an annual mowing which has proven effective for that site. The Natural Resource Coordinator will help to evaluate the need for prairie burns in other parks in the future to re-establish areas planted decades ago at the River Preserve and Ox Bow County Parks.

Regardless, Elkhart County Parks has made great strides in obtaining a position that will solely help direct this movement, and it is hopeful for continued progress in making the system's natural resources healthier and more diverse for the citizens and tourists served, as well as for the species and habitats protected.

Natural Features and Landscape *(Source: Soil Survey of Elkhart County, Indiana)*

Physiography, Relief, and Drainage

Elkhart County is mainly in the St. Joseph drainage basin, the mouth of which is at St. Joseph, Michigan. This basin drains into Lake Michigan and subsequently into the Atlantic Ocean. A very small area in the southwestern part of the county is in the Kankakee River drainage basin, which drains into the Mississippi River.

The 573-square-mile area drained by the Elkhart River, upstream from Goshen, includes about 120 square miles in southeastern Elkhart County. Many abandoned meanders occur in the Elkhart River Valley. Solomon Creek is a small stream that has a wide valley. Haphazard drainage patterns mark moraine areas in the county, and local watershed divides occur near the crests of the moraines.

There are several lakes in the county, and most of them are shallow. Gauging stations are located on Heaton, Hunter, Indiana, Simonton, and Wolf Lakes. Stream gauging stations are located on the St. Joseph River at Elkhart, on Christiana Creek at Elkhart, and on the Elkhart River at Goshen.

Climate

In winter, the average temperature is 25.9 degrees F and the average daily minimum temperature is 18.5 degrees. The lowest temperature on record, which occurred at Goshen College on January 21, 1984, was -24 degrees. In summer, the average temperature is 71 degrees and the average daily maximum temperature is 82 degrees. The highest temperature on record, which occurred at Goshen College on June 25, 1988, was 102 degrees.

The average annual total precipitation is about 35.27 inches. Of this total, about 20.4 inches, or 58 percent, usually falls in May through October. The growing season for most crops falls within this period. The heaviest 1-day rainfall during the period of record was 5.7 inches on July 26, 1981. Thunderstorms occur on about 42 days each year, and most occur between April and September.

The average seasonal snowfall is 38.4 inches. The greatest snow depth at any one time during the period of record was 28 inches recorded on January 27, 1978. On an average, 54 days per year have at least 1 inch of snow on the ground. The heaviest 1-day snowfall on record was 14 inches recorded on January 26, 1978.

The average relative humidity in midafternoon is about 62 percent. Humidity is higher at night, and the average at dawn is about 82 percent. The sun shines about 73 percent of the time possible in summer and 44 percent in winter. The prevailing wind is from the west or southwest. Average windspeed is highest, between 11 and 12 miles per hour, from December to April.

As a result of climate change, the region will experience occasional changes or natural catastrophies from time to time. One such event was a major 500-year flood event in February 2018. Many homes and businesses experienced major damage throughout the floodplains of Elkhart County. Most of the Elkhart County Parks include rivers within their parks, but fortunately the Elkhart County Parks did not receive a lot of permanent damage from the flooding due to the fact that there are no enclosed buildings located within the floodplains. Department staff did encounter clean-up in some areas of flood debris and some damage to board walks, but nothing permanent.

Elkhart County Parks has had no major weather issues the past five years except for a few windstorms that included tree debris pick up. With climate change, we continue to see a lack of snow for winter sports such as cross-country skiing, snow shoeing and sledding. There is no rental of equipment, therefore it does not impede on revenue generation, and an increase of walkers and runners during mild winter months continues.

The Elkhart County Parks and Recreation Board continues to own the Goshen Dam and monitors during flood conditions. In 2022, a major toe drain repair was performed to help ensure the structure meets state safety guidelines for dams.

Water Resources

The principal surface-water feature in the northern part of Elkhart County is the St. Joseph River. This river enters the county from Michigan in the northeastern part of the county, near Bristol. It then flows west across the county and through Elkhart into St. Joseph County. The county is divided by the Elkhart River, which enters at the southeast corner of the county and flows to the northwest to Elkhart, where it joins the St. Joseph River. The two major lakes in the county are Simonton and Heaton Lakes. Both are at the northern edge of the county and north of the St. Joseph River.

The St. Joseph River basin presents one of the most complex geological settings in Indiana resulting from the impact of three major ice lobes, a thick mass of glacial materials, and an irregular bedrock surface. Because of this complexity, the delineation of distinct aquifers may not be possible in some areas. Seven regional aquifer systems are identified within the river basin based on similarities in geological environments. Four aquifer systems have been identified in Elkhart County. These are the Nappanee, the St. Joseph, the Howe, and the Natural Lakes and Moraines aquifer systems. In very general terms, however, the county can be divided into two regions—an upland area to the south and a river valley area to the north. The thick glacial till of the upland area over the deep aquifer system provides aquifer protection because of the low permeability of the glacial till. Sandy and loamy soils and shallow aquifers are dominant in the north and the river valley area. Because the soils are highly permeable and the water table is at or near the surface in many areas, this region is highly susceptible to ground-water contamination.

Most of the county's population and manufacturing is in the river valley area. Because of existing ground- water contamination and the potential for additional contamination, the St. Joseph aquifer system in the northern and northeastern parts of the county and extending toward the southwest to the county line and into St. Joseph County has been designated a "Sole Source Aquifer." To receive this Federal designation under the Safe Drinking Water Act, the aquifer must supply at least 50 percent of the drinking water in an area with no alternative supply available in comparable quantity or quality.

The bedrock underlying Elkhart County is of Devonian and Mississippian age. Most wells in the county are screened in glacial materials well above the bedrock. The aquifers provide one of the most abundant water supplies in Indiana. Withdrawals of 200 to 500 gallons per minute are common. Continuous well yields of 500 to 1,500 gallons per minute are common in areas where sand and gravel deposits are thick. In contrast, the presence of thick localized clay deposits in the southern part of the county may make a sufficient domestic supply of 10 gallons per minute difficult to obtain.

Regionally, the direction of the flow of ground water generally follows the topography and ultimately is toward the St. Joseph River and its major tributaries.

Elkhart County Parks is proud to say that every parcel of land it owns has a body of water that is protected, whether it is one of the local rivers or a wetland. These water resources are then available for community to recreate whether it's a paddling down a canal, or bird watching at a wetland.

Major Rivers

The main rivers that run through Elkhart County are the St. Joseph River and the Elkhart River that meanders through the shallow Goshen Dam Pond. The St. Joseph River, which ends in Lake Michigan, is in the backyards of many homes in Elkhart. The river is a backdrop and playground for hundreds of residents.

The waterways aren't just the playgrounds of those who live on or near them. They enhance the "quality of life" that community leaders tout as a necessary ingredient in attracting people to move to or continue living in this part of the world.

A parking lot at the revamped Six Span Bridge has 65 spaces for fishermen or boaters. During the summer, bass tournaments happen twice each week on the river. In 2022, an accessible paddle launch was added to the Six Span area for canoe and kayak users.

The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board was also the recipient of a LARE grant to help study the possible removal or alteration of the two low head dams located within the River Preserve County Park. We are presently work on funding opportunities with the IDNR to help open up the river for aquatic species and recreation.

In 2023, the Elkhart County Parks partnered with the Elkhart County Commissioners and County Council to remove a large log jam in the Elkhart River northwest of Ox Bow County Park. This log jam had been several decades in the making and created a full closure to the river. It is now back open for safe recreation and to help prevent erosion of the shoreline and future issues of more debris building up with flooding.

Forest Resources

Elkhart County has very diverse native habitat areas due to the glacial action of the past. The native vegetation in Elkhart County was mainly deciduous oak-hickory hardwood forests and three natural prairies. In the northern portion of the county there were several areas of oak savannahs intertwined with the bogs and lakes of the region. Differences in natural soil drainage and variations in the kind of parent material affected the composition of the vegetative cover. Elkhart County had many shallow lakes, marshes and swamps that dotted the landscape. With advent of farming many were drained and the marshes many times drained. Remnants plant life from these remains can be found at Elkhart Bog and Leiber Nature Preserve. Animal life has suffered as man has made its mark on the land through time. Though many large mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and amphibians are now extinct in Elkhart County. It should be noted that a few species have returned. Success stories include the beaver, coyote, otter, turkey, walleye, muskie, and bald eagles along the St. Joseph River. The occasional badger and bobcat are sighted as well.

Elkhart County Parks has a wide variety of habitats that are protected throughout its park system. Wetlands, rivers, meadow, tall-grass prairie, riparian habitats, upland hardwood forests, and cold-water trout streams are found throughout the park system. A majority of these landscapes are not pristine as much of the land had already been transformed prior to coming into the department. For example, Cobus Creek County Park was used as farmland but the field has been transformed into tall grass prairie. Ox Bow County Park was once home to the County Poor Farm and Boot Lake Nature Preserve was once a city sludge farm. As a result, invasive species are found within each and every park. This list includes; tree of heaven, garlic mustard, Siberian elm, bush honeysuckle, glossy buckthorn, autumn olive, multi-flower rose, oriental bittersweet, and reed canary grass with bush honeysuckle being the most wide-spread throughout the park system. In 2023, Corson Riverwoods County Park began restoration efforts to reclaim agricultural land into wetland, forest, and prairie. In the future, a land management plan for each park site will help guide staff in restoration efforts.



Historic and Cultural Features *(Source: www.amishcountry.org/)*

Downtowns

In downtown Elkhart the 1848 brick home of the city's founder, Havilah Beardsley, flanks the north end of Main Street and the NYC RR Museum with rare rolling stock borders the southern end of downtown. The historic Lerner Theatre, is the cornerstone of the downtown Arts & Entertainment District and is presently planning an outdoor concert venue. The Midwest Museum of American Art, housed in neo-classical style bank building, stands at the center of the district and the Wellfield Botanic Garden on the north end of the city attracts more than 75,000 people each year. The Elkhart Health and Aquatics center which opened in 2019 hosts an Olympic-sized pool that holds 1.1 million gallons of water and attracts swim meets from across the Midwest.

The 1870 courthouse anchors downtown Goshen with its Main Street lined with refurbished brick buildings housing shops, coffee houses and bookstores. A fortress-like police booth stands on the courthouse square as a monument to the days when John Dillinger was the bane of local bankers. Down the street a red and white stripe awning adorns the Olympia Candy Kitchen where little has changed since it opened in 1912. Downtown Goshen is a vibrant community that celebrates the popular First Friday events each month with a different theme.

The rhythms of Amish life mesh easily with modern-day small town America in downtown Nappanee. Traveling down Main Street, US 6 or the Grand Army of the Republic Highway, one passes 19th century storefronts housing businesses from antique stores to butcher shops. In the early 1900's the Coppes brothers brought national attention to Nappanee with their ingenious "Dutch kitchenette". A remarkable collection of these cabinets is displayed at the Nappanee Center along with other remnants of the city's past. An additional cabinet has been added to the collection at the Elkhart County Historical Museum.

Neighborhoods

Elkhart County's historic neighborhoods tell rich stories about this area's people, heritage and businesses. Following the arrival of the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad shops in the 1860's, the State-Division Street Historic District just east of Elkhart's Main Street ranked as the city's "first fashionable subdivision". Today looking at Elkhart's historic neighborhoods' Italianate, Queen Anne, Four Square and Bungalow homes along with duplexes and flats, it's easy to imagine the economically diverse population that settled here.

Goshen's Dickerson Landing Neighborhood is one of the oldest areas in the city and borders the east side of the Elkhart River. Before Europeans came to this area, a major trail was traveled through the area between what is now Fort Wayne and Chicago. In 2023, a local group of citizens from Goshen dedicated a Bodewadmi-Myaamia Trail to recognize the rich history of the Miami and Potawatomi that once traveled that land. The nation's first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, also ran through the neighborhood. You can still cross the historic Fort Wayne Street Bridge that spans the river. And downtown, the 1870 Elkhart County Courthouse anchors the Goshen Historic District.

In 1874 Nappanee entrepreneurs seized the dream of the village of Locke by luring the B&O Railroad to their town's doorstep. Nappanee thrived; Locke did not. But Locke's entrepreneurial spirit lived. Villagers moved three buildings via sled 2 ½ miles from their quiet town to booming

Nappanee. Those same buildings still stand in the Downtown Nappanee Historic District as does the city's refurbished railroad depot—a fitting monument to Nappanee's victory.

Communities

The city of Elkhart sprung up at the conflux of the St. Joseph and Elkhart Rivers. Business flourished and entrepreneurs built lavish homes like Ruthmere, today a house museum. Railroads ruled in Elkhart's early history and celebrated at the NYC RR Museum. By mid-1930 Shult began producing travel trailers, leading the way to Elkhart becoming the world's "RV Capital". Today the RV/MH Museum Hall of Fame located northeast of Elkhart boasts an annual visitation of 30,000 people each year.

A historic courthouse anchors downtown Goshen with its Main Street lined with refurbished brick buildings. A restored Old Bag Factory houses shops of working artisans while Goshen College and local artists influences a lively art scene. The Goshen Theater was recently restored to its previous glory and celebrates the performing arts in its 600 seat historic structure.

Bristol was home to Indiana's first consolidated school. The school building is now the Elkhart County Historical Museum. Bristol also boasts the county's oldest church, and Indiana's historic gristmill, Bonneyville Mill, just outside the town. Local Bristol Parks have been enhanced to attract pickleball and paddlers.

Once, Middlebury's Main Street was a main route to and from Indianapolis. Today Queen Anne and Gothic Revival homes capture the feeling of bygone days. A town landmark, Krider Gardens, contains vestiges of a 1933 Chicago World's Fair exhibit. Middlebury Parks continues to expand its trail system to connect to the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail.

In 1874 a B&O Railroad route paved the way for Nappanee. Around that same time Amish pioneer, Christian Stahly, came to the area to purchase an 80-acre farm for his son. That farm became Amish Acres, which was sold over the past five years and has been transformed into The Barns at Nappanee which continues to host events, tours, and artisan markets.

Recreation

Elkhart County offers many public and private recreational opportunities. Elkhart, Goshen, Nappanee, Wakarusa, Middlebury, Bristol, Millersburg, and New Paris all have park departments of various sizes with ball diamonds, shelters, playgrounds, picnicking, and other features that complement the Elkhart County Parks.

Highlights of city and town parks located in Elkhart County include their various trail systems and greenways. Most notably the Elkhart Riverwalk, the Maple City Greenways (a network of 11 trails in Goshen totaling 30 miles), the Trails of Middlebury which includes the Ridge Run Trail, and the expanding Nappanee trails.

Park features in the Elkhart City Parks & Recreation Department include McNaughton Spray Park, Ideal Beach on Heaton Lake, NIBCO Water & Ice Park, and the Dr. Frank Booth Dog Park. Middlebury Parks features include Krider Gardens, Riverbend Park, and portions of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail. The Town of Bristol has also added many amenities to Cummins Park in recent years including a splash pad, paved trail, pickleball courts, and outdoor exercise equipment. Other local features include Nappanee's golf course, Goshen's future ice skating park and pools or spray parks located in almost all of the city and towns. Goshen also added a large inclusive playground which is inviting to children of all abilities.

Elkhart County also has numerous Township, school corporation, and private parks that contain little league baseball, softball, soccer, and football fields. There are also various churches that offer playground facilities throughout Elkhart County.

Some city and towns also offer small interpretive centers. The City of Elkhart manages an environmental park, the Elkhart Environmental Center. The Center promotes recycling, composting, sustainability, and environmental education. They have a visitor center, trails and wetlands. Also located in Elkhart is Woodlawn Nature Center, a non-profit facility that offers exhibits and education. Nappanee Park and Recreation has the Nappanee Environmental Education Area at McCormick Park area. Goshen Parks and Recreation Department operates the Rieth Interpretive Center where there are programs and exhibits with natural science topics.

In addition, the Wellfield Botanic Garden offers a 60-acre botanic garden with a walking trail, children's garden, and many educational programs. It was founded by the Elkhart Rotary Club and constructed on the City of Elkhart's North Main wellhead. It is operated as a non-profit and is in the process of completing a multi-million dollar campaign to build a new visitor center.

Vibrant Communities

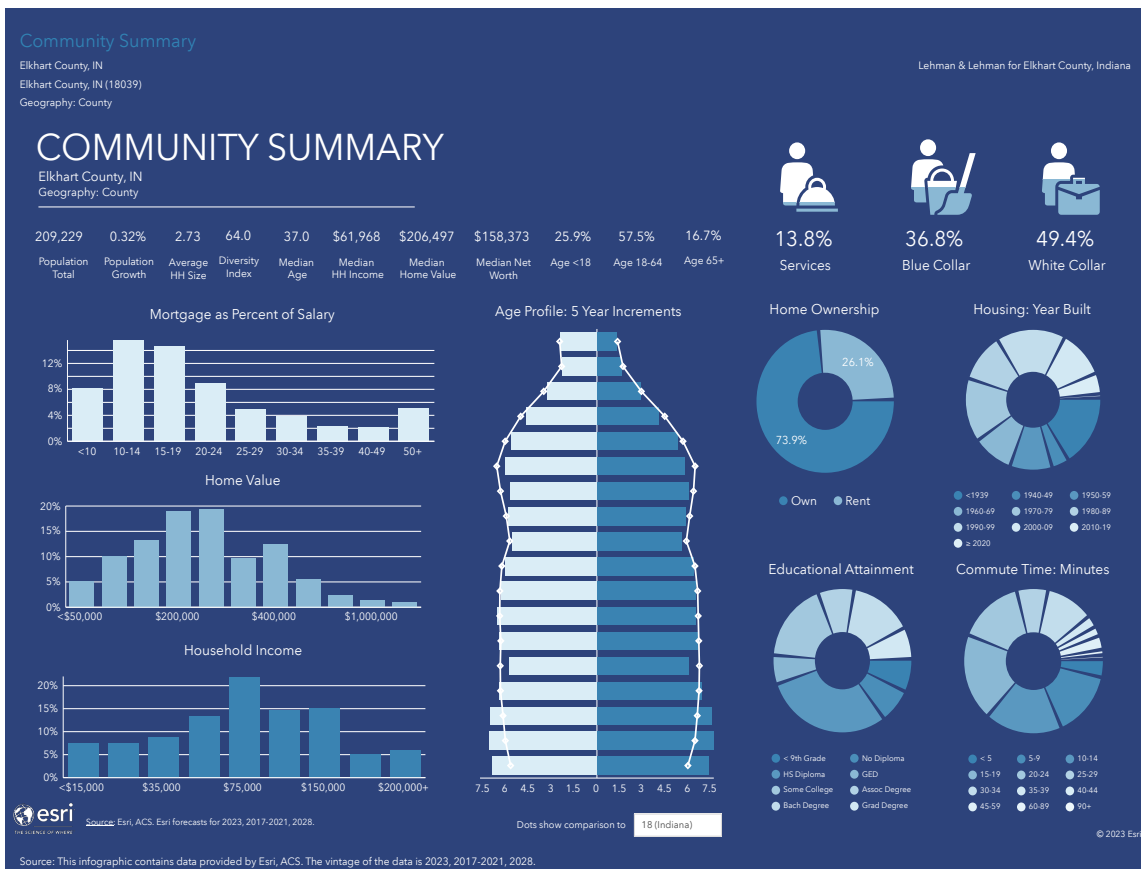
Elkhart County Parks staff have been involved with the *Vibrant Communities* initiative since 2016 when the Community Foundation of Elkhart County and the Elkhart County and Convention Visitors partnered to collaborate with community leaders, governmental agencies, businesses, and the general community. After months of planning meetings, brainstorm sessions and surveys, a comprehensive list of 77 Action Agenda items was created to help spur economic growth through quality of place and shape the future of Elkhart County. Among this list were several park and trail related goals including the need to complete the 40-mile looped trail system in Elkhart County that would include connecting the Pumpkinvine, MapleHeart and Quaker Trace trails. In addition, completion of the greenspace addition next to Six Span boat launch for canoe/kayak launch and the need for an interpretive center at Ox Bow County Park highlight the list.

The Covid 19 pandemic slowed some of the movement of the original *Vibrant Communities* movement, but much was accomplished across the many agenda items. In 2023, Vibrant Communities 2.0 Action Plan began development with many new ideas added as well as items not completed since 2016 moved to the new agenda.

Demographic / Socio-Economic Analysis *(Source: Esri, ACS)*

The population of Elkhart County has increased from 197,559 in 2010 to 207,047 in 2017 and is estimated to be 209,229 in 2023. The population, broken down by age, shows those under 18 years old comprise 25.8% of the population; 25 – 44 years old: 25.8%; 45 – 64: 23.2% , and 16.7% are age 65 and over.

The median age of 36.7 is in the age group that recent trends show pursues active recreation. Those 65 and older have become more active than in the past and are staying active longer, recognizing that regular physical activity substantially increases life expectancy and improves quality of life.

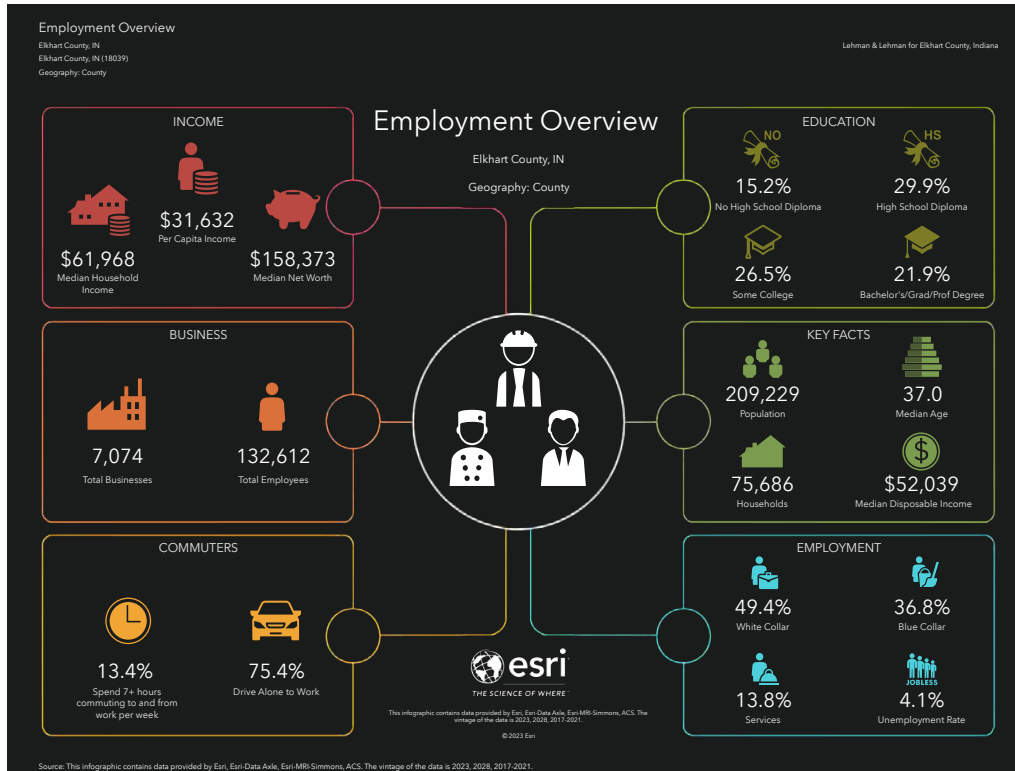


Income may increase as the residents’ age and many families expand to two incomes, which could provide more discretionary funds for entertainment. The median household income for Elkhart County residents in 2023 is \$61,968. The poverty rate for the county is 11.3%, which is just below the State rate of 11.6%.

The educational attainment stats indicate that 36.8% of residents have obtained a high school diploma, or equivalent. Those with some college – 17.6%, an Associate’s Degree – 6.4%, and those with a Bachelor’s Degree, or higher total 20.6% of the population.

Elkhart County is a diverse community with a growing Latino community which is presently 19.5% of the population with Black Americans making up 5.5% and the remaining residents are white or of other ethnic backgrounds. Twenty percent of the population speak languages other than English, such as Spanish, Pennsylvania Dutch or German.

Part of data tracking should include the monitoring of those members in the county that are users of the programs and services offered by the Elkhart County Parks Department. Tracking can be in the form of the users' profile, i.e., age, gender, family, etc. Also, using surveys after each program to determine satisfaction, needs, etc. This user information can help the department determine which programs/services should be added or eliminated.



This will also be useful information as the county continues to monitor population growth, along with the school corporation projections of the student population, for forecasting park & recreation needs, and reaching a diversity of people.

As residential growth and neighborhoods develop trails, greenways will become a recreation infrastructure that will become an important part of the implementation strategy allowing for connectivity throughout the county.

The demographic of the new residents (i.e., empty nesters, growing young families, single adults, etc.) will be studied annually, along with new housing starts to determine how new residential developments are being marketed. Working closely with the school corporations and studying changes in student demographics will provide additional insight for future planning.

The strategic implementation of these actions will need to be studied and evaluated on an annual basis with adjustments in programs, services and facilities evaluated annually

Recognizing all of the components that make up the Elkhart County population, as well as the projected growth, will help the park department determine strategic actions, promotion and improvement of quality of life venues for the community. Elkhart County Parks staff is constantly working on the diversification of program offerings each year to meet the needs of constituents. For example, Wednesday morning bird walks have been popular with the 'empty

nest' crowd who have the flexibility to attend a weekday program. There have also been surprises with some audiences reached. For example, when the Hiking Club was created it was intended to attract young families with an emphasis on improving their health, instead it attracted a very diverse group of people age-wise and many folks who rather walk with others than alone in a park, including seniors and the physically challenged.

Other diverse populations that utilize parks for large family picnics include the Amish community at Bonneyville Mill and the Latino community at Ox Bow County Park. The traditions of these cultures make use of the park system to create everlasting memories. The strategic implementation of actions will continue to be studied and evaluated on an annual basis, with special attention to more outreach programs to diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Demographic Implications

United for ALICE presents a comprehensive report on the financial struggles faced by households in Elkhart County, Indiana. ALICE, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, represents individuals and families who work hard but struggle to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, healthcare, childcare, and transportation. The current status report aims to shed light on the challenges faced by ALICE households and to propose strategies for creating a more financially stable community.

In Elkhart County, 38% of households are classified as ALICE, while an additional 16% live below the federal poverty line. This means that over half of the county's population is unable to afford the cost of living, despite being employed. The report examines the demographics of ALICE households, including age, race, education level, and employment status, to provide a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances.

Key findings of the current status include the high cost of housing in Elkhart County, with over 60% of ALICE households spending more than 30% of their income on rent or mortgage payments. Additionally, the rising cost of healthcare and childcare places a significant financial burden on ALICE families, often forcing them to make difficult trade-offs between basic needs.

To address the challenges faced by ALICE households, the findings report recommends a multi-faceted approach that includes:

- increasing access to affordable housing
- expanding healthcare and childcare subsidies
- improving transportation options
- investing in education and workforce development initiatives.

By implementing these strategies, Elkhart County can work towards creating a more inclusive and economically vibrant community where all residents have the opportunity to thrive.

United for ALICE calls upon community leaders, policymakers, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to come together and take action to support ALICE households and build a more equitable future for Elkhart County. By working collaboratively and leveraging resources effectively, we can create positive change and improve the lives of ALICE families in our community.

There are several key demographic trends that will affect Elkhart County Parks' planning for the next five years (and beyond). First, Elkhart County Parks will be providing experiences for a growing population. Second, the population is diversifying, both in race/ethnicity make-up and

age segmentation; therefore, Elkhart County Parks will need to be cognizant of the diverse types of recreation experiences it provides. Third, there is a high likelihood of consumer participation and spending for recreation services, experiences, and fees; however, recreation services need to balance discretionary spending wants and desires with true unmet needs and resident expectations. These data trends have several implications for the Elkhart County Parks system, including but not limited to:

Operations and Maintenance: With an increased population, there is a reasonable expectation that park and facility usage will also increase (although to what level is uncertain). Therefore, there will be increased operation and maintenance costs associated with maintaining the existing system due to increased use.

Capital Improvement Planning: Monitoring a capital improvement plan (CIP) that accounts for both existing facility and amenity replacements and developing new facilities and amenities is paramount as the existing system will need to be expanded.

Recreation Experiences: Elkhart County Parks will need to guarantee recreation experiences cater to a diverse population in terms of interests and affordability. Additionally, as a county park system, Elkhart County Parks will need to work to fill a recreation niche not provided by the strong local municipal recreation systems in the county.

Translating Data into Action

Suggested Steps towards improving the current status of ALICE in Elkhart County

To improve the current status of *United for ALICE* for Elkhart County, Indiana from a Parks and Recreation perspective, the following steps can be taken:

1. **Needs Assessment and Community Engagement:** Work with County Leadership and related agencies in conducting a needs assessment specifically focused on ALICE households in Elkhart County to understand their recreational needs, preferences, and barriers to access. Engage ALICE households directly through surveys, focus groups, and community meetings to gather input and feedback on desired recreational amenities and programs.
2. **Targeted Programming and Outreach:** Develop targeted recreational programs and initiatives designed to meet the needs of ALICE households in Elkhart County. Offer affordable or subsidized recreational activities, nature hikes, and cultural events, that are accessible to individuals and families with limited financial resources.
3. **Partnerships with Community Organizations:** Forge partnerships with local nonprofits, social service agencies, schools, churches, and businesses that serve ALICE households to expand access to recreational opportunities. Collaborate on joint programs, events, and outreach efforts to reach underserved populations and ensure that recreational resources are accessible to all residents.
4. **Financial Assistance Programs:** Establish financial assistance programs or scholarship opportunities to help ALICE households access recreational facilities, programs, and memberships at reduced or no cost. Work with local government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and corporate sponsors to secure funding and resources for these programs.
5. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Ensure that recreational facilities, parks, and programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible to individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, including ALICE households. Incorporate universal design principles, ADA-

compliant features, and accommodations to create welcoming and barrier-free environments for everyone to enjoy.

6. **Community Gardens and Urban Green Spaces:** Work with municipal park agencies in developing community gardens, urban green spaces, and pocket parks in neighborhoods with high concentrations of ALICE households to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, gardening, and community gathering. These spaces can also support food security initiatives and promote healthy lifestyles.
7. **Educational and Skill-building Programs:** Work with County Leadership and related agencies in offering recreational programs and workshops focused on skill-building, education, and personal development to empower ALICE households to enhance their well-being and quality of life. Topics could include financial literacy, nutrition and wellness, job training, and environmental education.
8. **Promotion and Outreach Campaigns:** Launch targeted marketing and outreach campaigns to raise awareness of recreational opportunities available to ALICE households in Elkhart County. Use a variety of communication channels, including social media, community newsletters, and local media outlets, to reach residents and promote participation in recreational programs and activities.

By implementing these steps, the Parks and Recreation Department in Elkhart County can work to improve the status of United for ALICE and ensure that ALICE households have access to affordable, inclusive, and meaningful recreational opportunities that enhance their overall well-being and quality of life.

Population

An increasingly common best practice for park agencies across the country is to align staff diversity with the population in which they serve. Specifically, staffing standards are being adopted that aim to match staff diversity with community diversity. As Elkhart County's population is expected to increase in both number and diverse populations, Elkhart County Parks may want to move toward continued diversification with their staffing structure and park board members. Improving this organizational area will have positive implications for communication and marketing, public outreach and transparency, and community support for departmental actions.

New Families

As more residential housing is built and an influx of young families move in, Elkhart County Parks must ensure they are relevant and communicating with this targeted audience. Young families pursue activities for their children and family-specific recreation experiences. With a multitude of similar providers in the county, Elkhart County Parks must ask itself, "What role do we play for young families within our county?" As the purveyor of natural, cultural, historic, and educational experiences, Elkhart County Parks' self-directed and leader-directed recreation experiences will need to continue evolving to match the expectations of more (and new) families to the area.

Pricing of Goods and Services

Elkhart County Parks charges fees associated with facility rentals, and certain programming. Elkhart County Parks will need to continue providing affordable recreation opportunities for residents. This idea can be delivered by instituting scholarship programs, and/or fee reductions. Additionally, fees and charges may incorporate SPI metrics when deciding on price points. SPI

metrics provide a market-driven understanding of the current (and potential) willingness to invest in various recreation-related goods and services.

Ox Bow County Park is the only park with an entrance fee. In addition, other fees are collected via Disc Golf, archery, shelter rentals, programs, and events as well as the sale of flour and gift ship items at Bonneyville Mill.

Many options for low-income populations are offered. All Elkhart County Parks as well as DeFries Gardens and the Elkhart County Historical Museum are free to enter with the exception of Ox Bow County Park, which charges a minimum of \$3/vehicle or the option of a \$25/year pass. Volunteers who give more than 20 hours of time are also eligible for a free annual pass.

In addition, since 2016 the Elkhart County Parks has offered at least one Ox Bow County Park pass that can be checked out for free at EVERY public library in the county with a library card. This partnership has grown and now 'Experience Passes' can also be checked out for other regional museums, gardens and attractions at the Goshen and Elkhart Libraries.

The Elkhart County Parks also offers a multitude of free and low-cost programming in its parks and at the Historical Museum to ensure people of all socio economic backgrounds feel welcomed.

Elkhart County as a whole has a close relationship with the Elkhart County Economic Development Corporation. The Elkhart County EDC understands the needs of business entities as well as their need to attract employees. Quality of life is a part of that equation which includes parks, trails, and museums. They feature a section on their website of "Culture and Recreation" which hosts links to the Elkhart County Parks.

In addition, the South Bend Elkhart Regional Partnership has been an important partner in the development of Corson Riverwoods County Park in which the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board received a grant for more than \$100,000 towards the upcoming Pollinator Play Path.

ADA Focus

With more people moving into the county, an aging trend will inevitably occur in the future. Making ADA-related improvements to the park system is necessary to both cater to existing residents and future newcomers. Parks are multigenerational and mobility issues (along with sensory, auditory, etc.) are common as people age; therefore, park design standards will need to continue enhancing ADA-related amenities and site designs. Existing infrastructure may need to be retrofitted to improve ADA-related barriers and challenges.

Recreation Experiences

Elkhart County residents have a strong tendency to consume a wide range of recreation behaviors. Therefore, Elkhart County Parks may want to track and compare existing system engagement with market research metrics. Additionally, concentrating in the areas that residents are most likely to participate in should be a strong consideration. However, activities such as archery and target shooting, fishing, and equestrian trails (to name a few) can benefit from Elkhart County Parks' presence in providing these services. These activities may not have a large number of similar providers offering these opportunities, which allows Elkhart County Parks to assert itself as a county leader in these areas. Elkhart County Parks may want to routinely track and monitor local market research metrics and compare them to the participation/usage trends it experiences for various recreation experiences annually.

Section D: Public Participation

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Public Participation

Park and Recreation Issues

The Elkhart County Parks Department recognizes the importance of providing service to the community, and the best way to provide service to the community is to ask what their needs, opinions, and preferences are, and apply that information to future planning. For this Master Plan several methods of public input were used: Community Survey, Park Board & Staff Retreat, SWOT Analysis, and Public Meetings. Summaries can be found below with more complete information in the Appendix of this document.

Key Themes

The public may not fully understand Elkhart County Parks. Stakeholders acknowledge that with a strong local municipal parks and recreation focus in the county, it is easy for the general public to not be as familiar with Elkhart County Parks' park properties as they relate to other parks and recreation departments/providers. This idea is highlighted by the fact that county park systems typically maintain park properties found in established cities and towns along with unincorporated areas of the county. For example, a resident in Goshen may go to Ox Bow Park and believe he or she is in a park operated and maintained by the City of Goshen because of its location. Therefore, it is more of a challenge (perhaps) for Elkhart County Parks to educate general park users about its brand, parks, services, programs, etc.

Elkhart County is a growing area with a growing expectation for parks and recreation. With such strong local municipal parks and recreation systems, Elkhart County residents view parks and recreation as an *expectation* instead of a *nicety* or value-added community service. There are diverse experiences available for Elkhart County residents, and parks and recreation services are seen as quality-of-life amenities, economic drivers, and attractions for new residents and businesses.

Elkhart County Parks provides great natural experiences. Stakeholders support Elkhart County Parks' focus on large park spaces, nature and environment, and unique destinations. Stakeholders see Elkhart County Parks bridging the gap between local municipal systems. Parks such as Bonneyville Mill County Park and Ox Bow County Park (among other park properties) are examples of the unique experiences afforded to Elkhart County residents. Stakeholders desire to see Elkhart County Parks continue to focus on creating unique destinations in the county such as the Elkhart County Historical Museum and DeFries Gardens.

There are still underserved areas in the county. Stakeholders acknowledge that the county is still underserved in terms of parks and recreation. They see these areas as high-priority land acquisition focuses and desire to see Elkhart County Parks lead the effort to acquire and preserve more land. However, the majority of stakeholders are unaware that Elkhart County is considered one of 14 counties in the state of Indiana to be 'critically deficient' in the amount of public land available.

The Elkhart and St. Joseph Rivers are opportunities for growth. Stakeholders want to see increased access to the rivers. Local municipalities have begun creating more projects along the river to increase access and recreational opportunities. Stakeholders see Elkhart County Parks as a large part of a needed collaborative effort to increase recreational opportunities on and along both the Elkhart and St. Joseph Rivers.

Unmet need exists within the county. Stakeholders provided a variety of different unmet needs examples throughout the county, but the following were repeated the most (in no particular order):

- Connectivity and trails
- Land acquisition and preservation

- Park amenities and programs that keep pace with the diversifying resident base
- Attainable programming and opportunities for low-income families
- More destination economic drivers (such as expanding river & waterway access)

Elkhart County Parks can be a catalyst for addressing community issues. Stakeholders agree that Elkhart County Parks can provide positive influences on community obesity, mental and emotional health, physical activity, social connectivity to each other, and aging in place. The benefits of parks and recreation services are well-known, and it is no surprise that stakeholders see Elkhart County Parks playing a prominent role in the county's efforts to address these societal challenges.

Diversification and dedicated sources are important for the future system. Stakeholders all acknowledge that Elkhart County Parks has done a tremendous job utilizing its financial resources. When thinking about the future system, stakeholders provided a variety of funding ideas for Elkhart County Parks to consider, including but not limited to:

- Grants (although they acknowledge this is not a sustainable funding source)
- Annual vehicle pass for all County Parks
- Develop higher revenue producing activities/facilities
- Increase share of current tax-appropriate budget
- Include County Parks & Increase County Innkeepers Tax by 1%
- Institute the use of a park bond for capital projects

Partnerships will be paramount to increased service delivery. Stakeholders agree that Elkhart County Parks has done a good job avoiding duplicating services of other providers. In an effort to see this continue, stakeholders mentioned a variety of partnership opportunities for Elkhart County Parks to consider expanding and/or beginning:

- Local units of government throughout the county
- Social equity organizations
- School systems
- Business sector
- Beacon Health and Aquatic Center
- Community Foundation of Elkhart County
- Health systems
- NIMBA (local chapter of the Indiana Mountain Bike Association)
- Churches and faith-based organizations

Focus on access. At the end of the day, stakeholders want to see Elkhart County Parks continue to focus on getting the most people access to parks and recreation services in Elkhart County as possible. This is an all-encompassing notion that pertains to land acquisition, trail development and connectivity, pricing of programs and services, partnerships, and much more. Stakeholders see Elkhart County Parks as a unifying entity that can help flesh out the governance/roles and responsibilities along the St. Joseph & Elkhart Rivers, fill park land service gap areas, create memorable experiences and destinations, and improve communication between parks and the public.

Public Input

As part of the master plan process solicitation from the general community, stakeholders and Park Board as well as the departmental staff, and others, was conducted.

- A community survey (also available in Spanish) was prepared for online participation via Survey Monkey and was available from July 13, 2023 through October 13, 2023. The survey was advertised on social media as well as the local newspaper and radio announcements and was also available in paper form at the park office and at the Elkhart County Fair. A total of 588 responses were collected during that time. A summary of the survey results can be found below.
- County Leadership, Park Board, and Staff Retreat was held on June 23, 2023 to brainstorm needs of the Department.
- A SWOT Analysis was conducted during September, 2023 by the Park Administration, Park Staff, Interpretive Naturalist Staff and Park Board. This provided an evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of each group and of each park of the Park Department. Results of the SWOT Analysis can be found below.
- Public Meetings were advertised in social media and were held on August 31, September 20, and September 28, 2023. A total of sixteen people (not counting Park Staff/ Park Board) attended the meetings. Results of these meetings can be found below.
- Master Plan Updates were given at Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board Meetings (open to the public) throughout the planning process. Dates and locations of the meetings are provided below.

Community Survey Summary

A community survey was prepared for online participation from July 21, 2023 through October 24, 2023. The survey was also available in Spanish. The survey was advertised on social media and the County /Park websites, as well as newspaper and radio announcements. The survey was also advertised in hand-outs at the Elkhart County 4-H Fair during the week of July 21-29, 2023. A total of 588 survey responses were collected.

Most Visited Parks – Question #1 was regarding which park or facility of Elkhart County Parks they have visited in the past 12 months. The majority stated “Ox-Bow County Park” (69%) with “Bonneyville Mill County Park” coming in second (54%). “Pumpkinvine Nature Trail” was the 3rd most chosen (42%).

Usership of Parks – Question #2 asked how often the Elkhart County parks or trails were visited. The majority (34%) stated they visit “1-5 times a year”, and those that visit a park “40 or more times a year” was 29 % of respondents.

Maintenance and Improvements – Question # 3 asked respondents to rate the upkeep and maintenance of the parks, trails, cultural resources, historic preservation and recreational facilities. 36% responded “Excellent”, 54% said it’s “Good”, and 6% stated “Fair”.

Park Operations – Question #4 asked if respondents were aware that Elkhart County Parks is operated separately from Goshen, Elkhart (City), Middlebury, Bristol, and Nappanee Park & Recreation Departments. 80% stated “Yes” and 20 % stated “No”.

Public Land – Question #5 asked if respondents were aware that Elkhart County is considered one of 14 counties ‘critically deficit’ in the amount of public land available to the present population according to the IDNR Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. 19% stated “Yes”; 86% stated “No”.

Protecting Open Space – Question #6 asked respondents to rate the importance of protecting natural open space and providing recreational opportunities via trails and waterways in Elkhart County. The majority (82%) said it is “Very Important”; 13 % said it is “Important”, while 3% replied “Somewhat Important”.

Preserving Historic and Cultural Resources – Question #7 asked the community how they would rate the importance of preserving historic and cultural resources of Elkhart County. 66 % stated “Very Important”; 24 % stated “Important”, while 8% stated “Somewhat Important”.

Benefits Provided by Parks – Question #8 asked respondents to choose which benefits the Parks Department provides. The top five answers (in order) were “Spaces to improve health and wellness”, “Enhances community appearance”, “Preserves natural areas”, “Opportunities for education” and “Creates a desirable place to live”.

Use of Park Facilities and/or Programs – Question #9 asked the community what reasons prevent their household from using an Elkhart County Park facility and/or program. The top five answers (in order) were “Too busy/lack of time”, “Too far from home”, “Weather”, “Didn’t know programs are offered”, “Didn’t know facilities exist”.

Leisure/Recreation Activities – Question #10 asked respondents which leisure/recreation activities their household presently participates in. The most popular responses were “Hiking/Walking”, “Events/Festivals”, “Gardening/Visiting Gardens”, “Bicycling”, and “Kayaking/Canoeing”.

Improvements – Respondents were asked in Question #11 to rate, by importance, the improvements to the Parks over the next 5 years. Top responses, in order: “Improve safety of parks”, “Implement sustainable design and green practices”, “Assist in connectivity of countywide multi-use trail system”, “Acquire land for new parks/open spaces/natural areas”, “Develop and expand river and waterway access sites”.

Other Improvements – Question #12 asked respondents to write in what improvements they would like to see added in the next five years that was not mentioned above. The consensus was the need for more, and to connect existing, trails as well as adding/maintaining amenities, such as restrooms, water stations, and benches along the trails. Other suggestions include adding splashpads, equestrian trails, kayak/canoe rental, and accessible play equipment at the parks.

Services – Question #13 Respondents were asked to rate, by importance, adding or expanding services over the next 5 years. Top responses, in order: “Program offerings for children grades 5-12”, “Programs for people with disabilities”, “Program offerings for seniors”, “Program offerings for children grades K-5”, and “Environmental education programs”.

Other Services – (Question #14) asked respondents to write-in suggestions for improving Elkhart County Parks Services. The most frequent response was to add guided nature walks followed by adding music events/concerts, and increase the use of the river with canoe/kayak rentals and trips.

Program Times – Respondents were asked in Question #15 what the two most convenient times for their household to attend programs are. The most convenient time was “Weekend (Sat.-Sun.) mornings (8a-12p)” with the second most convenient time being a tie between “Weekend (Sat.-Sun.) afternoons (12p-5p)” and “Weekend (Sat.-Sun.) evenings (5-9p)”.

Funding Strategies – The survey asked responders, in Question #16, ‘after first seeking all applicable grants and donations which funding strategies would you support for additional improvements and growth of the Elkhart County Parks and facilities?’ In order, the most replies were for “Annual vehicle pass for all County Parks”, a tie between: “Increase share of current tax-appropriated budget” and “Develop higher revenue producing activities/facilities”, “Include County Parks & Increase County Innkeepers Tax by 1%”, “Institute the use of a Park Bond for capital projects”, “Increase user fees (i.e. program & shelter fees)” followed by “Establish a 1% food and beverage tax”.

Support for Improvements & Growth – Question #17 followed up Question #16 by asking what the additional annual amount is that a household would be willing to pay to improve and support growth of the Elkhart County Parks. The top responses were “\$10-\$24 per year” (24%), “\$25-\$49 per year (23%), and “\$50-\$75 per year” (16%).

Communication – Question #18 asked respondents how they would like to learn about the Elkhart County Parks facilities and programs. The top responses in order of preference were “Park website”, “Facebook”, “In-park visits”, “Friend/Word of mouth”, and “Search engine (ex: Google)”.

Age of the Responder – Question #19 – The bulk of the representation responding to this survey (79 %) was from those between 30 - 69 years of age.

Gender – Question #20 revealed that 65% of those that completed the survey were female, compared to 31% percent male, while the balance was non-binary or preferred not to answer.

Race/Ethnicity – Question #21 revealed the majority of respondents were “White” (85 %), with 5% being “Hispanic or Latino”.

Place of Residence – The survey asked responders, in Question #22, to provide the zip code of their residence. The zip codes that received the most responses are 46526 (114), 46514 (95), 46528 (73) and 46516 (72).

Minors in Household – Question #23 asked the age range of children in the respondent’s household. The largest response was “No children living at home” (40%), followed by “5-12 years” (24%) and “13-18 years” (18%).

Other Suggestions – Question #24 asked respondents what other priorities, partnerships, or opportunities they suggest for improving the Elkhart County Parks. The majority had no suggestions. The most popular answers were to partner/collaborate with non-profits, Boy Scouts, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, Loveway, schools, and libraries to enhance learning experiences; keep up the good work; continue maintenance at Bonneyville and on trails.

Contact Information – Question #25 asked respondents to provide their contact information if they would like to receive additional information about the Elkhart County Parks programs and events. 165 respondents provided the information.

Responses to the Survey along with comments, suggestions and other remarks given are provided in the Appendix of this document.

Park Board Retreat

A Park Board Retreat was held on June 23, 2023 at the Elkhart County Historical Museum. The discussion responses collected are as follows:

Top Three Partnerships / Collaborations To Build

- Special Interest i.e., Boy Scouts, Schools/Colleges, Chambers of Commerce
- Local “Government” i.e., Sheriff, Fire, Council, Park Departments
- Executives / Donors / Estate Planning

Top Three Priorities (Capital Projects, Maintenance, Operations, Staffing, Funding, Programs, Services, Policies, Etc.)

- Facilities – Replacement Schedule
- Budget – Revenue Generation
- Programs – Equestrian, Special Needs

Top Three Opportunities to Explore (New Venues, Services, Audiences, Local and Regional)

- Southwest area expansion
- Private Vendor Sponsorships i.e., Aerial Adventure Course
- Sponsorship / Donors i.e., Shelter re-naming, Landscaping

Strength • Weakness • Opportunity • Threat (SWOT) Analysis

During the month of September 2023 SWOT analysis were conducted by Park Administration, Park Board, Park Staff, and Interpretive Naturalist Staff. An analysis was also done of each park. The results of these SWOT analysis follow:

Administration SWOT Analysis

Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin “STRENGTH”	Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin “WEAKNESS”
<p>Truly dedicated, hard-working employees</p> <p>Daily communication</p> <p>Flexibility/Flexible with needs of others</p> <p>Decades of experience/know the ropes</p> <p>Know each other well (good & bad)</p> <p>Get along well</p> <p>Authentic/passionate about what we do</p> <p>Appreciate humor</p> <p>Support of Council/Commissioners/Park Board</p> <p>Add to Quality of Life of citizens</p> <p>Variety of talents/passions of the outdoor field</p> <p>Never-ending list of ideas for our community</p> <p>Strive to do our best and support our staff</p> <p>Do our best to support our community/park patrons/partners/reservation customers, etc.</p>	<p>Clear communication: assumptions can sometimes be made, getting everyone on the same page at same time</p> <p>Some are anchored to the office more than they should be</p> <p>Time: stretched thin, respect of each other's time, deadlines, needing assistance; emergencies or urgent things interfere with planning/long term projects</p> <p>Staff believe our attitude is "we always do it this way" (sometimes we live in the past)</p> <p>Managers/staff 'delegate up' and not always taking full responsibility of tasks they should handle</p> <p>Staff feel they are at 'mercy of others' waiting for decisions, funding, etc.</p> <p>Staff not understanding long term vs short term projects and vise versa</p> <p>"Admin" seems to be a cuss word sometimes</p> <p>We are not in a park/with other staff = SILO</p> <p>Don't always show positive feedback</p>
Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin “OPPORTUNITY”	Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin “THREAT”
<p>Partnerships</p> <p>Continue to capture post-Covid audience</p> <p>Inspire self-initiative in staff (but keep at a balance)</p> <p>Attract and hire skilled professionals</p> <p>Sponsorships/Grants/Donors</p> <p>Growing Endowments & Friends group</p> <p>Use Master Plan as a tool to tackle back-burner projects/opportunities for problem solving</p> <p>Look through the eyes of the public</p> <p>We work in/for the outdoors and for the public</p> <p>Opportunities for personal and professional growth/learning new things</p>	<p>Funding/future recessions</p> <p>Change of elected officials (may not support parks/trails)</p> <p>Gossip amongst staff, changing stories, attitudes</p> <p>Location/environment of Administration Building: sound pollution (internal/external), public, isolation from staff, lack of privacy, safety when alone, building ages/issues</p> <p>Lack of Elkhart County funding/supporting DEI training</p> <p>Skill sets of present/future employees in a changing society (less hands-on/less trade skills) = increased costs in future to hire out specialized or licensed work/contract funding</p>

Park Board SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">"STRENGTH"</p> <p>Communication Experience Variety of viewpoints Variety of backgrounds/knowledge History/longevity with department</p> <p>Supportive of staff/department</p> <p>Fiscally responsible</p> <p>Mission driven (natural + historical) Open to new ideas Funding/support by taxpayers</p> <p>Director and deputy directors fight on behalf of department/board to build relationships with council/commissioners/partners Entrusted care of diverse, beautiful county park system spread out through county (except SW)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">"WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Government funding/potential reductions lack of diversity (board makeup vs community) Resistance to change Being stagnant Park board members should build stronger relationships with Council/Commissioners (attend their meetings, etc.) Lack of info about public meetings (i.e., place park board meeting in Compass/on web) Some citizens don't know about or visit County Parks (how do we reach them?) Board has no strong connection to 'movers and shakers' in community for outside support Not selling ourselves enough Lack of county owned recreation greenspace in southern part of County</p>
<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Growth of awareness via social media Biggest wealth transition will be in the next 15 years Estate planning: work with financial planners Grow our endowment funds Grow the Friends Group</p> <p>Grow our partnerships for support (ex: Elkhart County historical Society) Build relationships with other park departments; work together to share resources Capture next generation of park users Continue to promote parks as Quality of Life benefit for economic development Sell ourselves better!</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"THREAT"</p> <p>Economic collapse "Parks are a luxury" attitude rather than a necessity Growth of population vs. land available for protection Land costs keep increasing Goodwill of future elected officials and their support for parks/historical sites Next generation spending time outdoors may mean less supporters in future</p>

Park Staff SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"STRENGTH"</p> <p>Beautiful outdoor spaces Awesome & knowledgeable staff Volunteers Wide variety of recreation opportunities Staff expertise Awesome parks with variety Variety of nature programs for the public <i>Compass</i> magazine</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Need more part-time staff Communication between sections Need more trainings Could be more diverse (staff) Could be more inclusive (age, disability) "Rumor Mill" communication Conflict Inconsistency with procedures</p>
<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Very diverse community Blue ways County connections Community involvement Partnerships/partner programs Broader marketing opportunities</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p style="text-align: center;">"THREAT"</p> <p>Economy=cost of doing business lack of equipment Public apathy Erosion along trails and rivers Loss of staff coverage Vandalism Public impact of properties Weather Other agencies with better facilities (out-compete us)</p>

Interpretive Naturalist SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "STRENGTH"</p> <p>Educated/experienced staff Many parks available to us and we use all of them (we try to spread the love) Good relationship with schools in close proximity to park properties (Ox Bow Elem., Benton Elem., etc.) A diverse team Regular and open communication within the team Creativity Frugality Flexibility in program offering and working with groups Variety of program offerings Work well with other (we are a good partner) Programming materials/props (mounts, live animals, etc.) Willingness to ask if we need something</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "WEAKNESS"</p> <p>There are only 3 of us (have to turn people/groups away) Facility (no space, no privacy, no storage, all supplies are spread between multiple buildings) Too many additional responsibilities leading to disconnect with nature and what's happening outside sometimes Pricing of some programs (why do we charge schools and especially chaperones?) Frugality (sometimes makes the perception of a less than stellar program) Consistent and effective marketing for programs/events</p>
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Continued trust and support from Administration Training opportunities (need to take advantage of what is out there) Funding opportunities (grants, scholarships, donations, etc.) Cross connections/partnerships with other natural resource agencies (ex: VA meetings, trails gathering, EEAI, etc.) Scheduled "nature connect" days on Sling . New properties/undeveloped properties Technology</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "THREAT"</p> <p>Field trip and bussing cuts at schools Marlene retiring (potential for more scheduling load on naturalists) Internal disagreement/drama department-wide Lack of communication/understanding with ark management Area organizations with similar event/program on same date (compete of single audience)</p>

Bonneyville Park / Corson Riverwoods SWOT Analysis

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "STRENGTH"</p> <p>Likely the highest number of out of county visitors Significant, varied trail systems (hiking, biking, skiing) Cleanliness and aesthetic appeal well maintained Solid, skilled, detailed and dedicated staff Prompt attention to property needs when equipped Variety of services, facilities and landscapes while still preserving habitats Good overall clientele</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Aging equipment and buildings, no replacement/rotation plan in place Short staffed and spread to thin (lack of necessary equipment and supplies) Held back from real income potential via current avenues (very low fees or free services) / no profit margin to assist development PTSD</p>
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Community volunteer bank Visitor donations specific to location Partnerships with related outside organizations/associations (NIMBA, Dahlia Society, ECCVB, and other area city/county departments) BMP - Most photographed location in Elkhart County CRW - new property development potential</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "THREAT"</p> <p>Weather (heat, cold drought, rain, wind, flooding, etc.) Insufficient budget allocation Inflated costs of needs Unsustainable over development pressure Micromanagement Internal bureaucracy delays Inconsistent internet search information (locations, hours, events, property lines, etc.) Public perception and department reactions</p>

OxBow Park SWOT Analysis

<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"STRENGTH"</p> <p>Cleanliness of property Trails well maintained Equipment/vehicles available on-site Staff skills: carpentry, painting, construction Friendliness/ability to engage public Staff longevity</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Lack of staff/manager Accidents: vehicles & equipment Lack of formal training Intra-departmental communication Lack of leadership Lack of preventative maintenance Aging fleet/equipment Aging park infrastructure</p>
<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Educating youth/public about park careers Staircase to nowhere converted into overlook Wildlife education opportunities Update archery area to draw attendance Pergola in small bike loop for photoshoots Advertising Utilizing the old tower field for signed education (similar to permaculture site at EEC) Water trail development/dredging</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"THREAT"</p> <p>Lack of public knowledge of park related career opportunities Park overuse/misuse/intentional damage Night bikers in unlit park Lack of advertising Stairway to nowhere liability Spillway - accident liability & sedimentation of the canal Lack of lighting at upper field around dusk</p>

River Preserve & DeFries Gardens SWOT Analysis

<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"STRENGTH"</p> <p>Park has been well maintained Attractive landscape Customer satisfaction Committed employees Quality and affordability</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Aging Defries home and facilities Lack of personnel training Lack of security cameras Aging equipment</p>
<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>The place for conservation of wildlife Place for outdoor education Find ways to retain employees and actively recruit new employees Stay true to nature and less development</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"THREAT"</p> <p>Funding Shortage of qualified manpower/staff shortage Cost of material Security Less nature and more development Goshen Dam safety concerns</p>

Cobus Creek, Boot Lake, Treasure Island, and 6-Span SWOT Analysis

<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"STRENGTH"</p> <p>Equipment/vehicles available on-site Staff provide good customer service and mostly achieve voluntary compliance from the public Staff longevity & knowledge (full-time staff have degrees in field) Staff strive to keep equipment in good repair Seasonal staff are work oriented Resourceful staff, ability to lean upon one another Good communication within the team Annual inspections of properties/properties well maintained Set achievable goals</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin</p> <p>"WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Intradepartmental communication Lack of departments grooming for advancement Seasonal staff lack training opportunities Invasive species resources (time to treat/sometimes cost to treat) Lack an official plan for each property)e.g.: 6 Span "park" has been in hiatus for some time) Spread out nature of our properties (distance/travel times)</p>
<p>Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Education youth/public about park careers Blueway trails at Treasure Island and 6 Span Linear trail from Cobus to the Cleveland Library (or trails connecting our properties to ours or other properties) Update Treasure Island road and parking /fight erosion with tree and plantings or revetment Restart Cobus Creek stream revitalization Plant nursery options throughout Cobus Creek County Park (for other parks)</p>	<p>Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin</p> <p>"THREAT"</p> <p>Lack of public knowledge of park related career opportunities Park overuse/misuse/intentional damage Natural forces: erosion, rot, invasive species, etc. Economic health down the line (nation>state>county>department) Everchanging legal environment</p>

Elkhart County Historical Museum

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "STRENGTH"</p> <p>The staff - one of few in County with paid, fulltime, professionally trained staff</p> <p>Biggest history museum in County - facility & collection</p> <p>Follow guidelines and expectations of the museum & history</p> <p>Financially stable (as a part of County government/ECP)</p> <p>ECP partnerships with ECHS</p> <p>Regional leaders in museum community</p> <p>Exhibits and Programs - consistent, variety, quality of interpretation, bringing fresh content to the public</p> <p>Building - Collections storage; still has capacity, especially in Archives</p> <p>Collection - Covers general Elkhart County history, large photo collection; big archive - allows for a variety in interpretation</p> <p>Topics that the collection represents are represented thoroughly - across photos/objects/archives/library</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Not well- recognized by the general public in the community</p> <p>Collections - Not very diverse; doesn't really represent our county; lack of uniqueness; huge gaps - underrepresented areas/groups not represented at all; Disproportionately large Bristol collection</p> <p>Location - not a tourist draw; low visitation/attendance</p> <p>Building - Accessibility issues; HVAC, electrical systems outdated; constant need for both major and minor repairs; fundamentally poor design for a museum; audiences expect modern conveniences; bats, bugs, water - keep out what should stay out</p> <p>Identity/Branding - as stand-alone for marketing or as a Park unit - but a museum has unique attributes separate from a par</p> <p>Marketing/exposure problem</p> <p>Personnel - inadequate collections staff for size of collection and goals for collection; Part-time staff turnover</p>
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Supportive and diversifying funding sources – CEFCO, Bristol Alumni, Corporations</p> <p>Regional and EC Tourism Audience</p> <p>Trend toward museum visitors looking for authentic experiences away from technology</p> <p>CFEC priority for supporting grants for professional development opportunities</p> <p>AND Museum field emphasizes professional development and provides many professional development opportunities</p> <p>Inventory and deaccession process is catalyst for new exhibits</p> <p>Growing number of organizations representing diverse communities represent partnership opportunities</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "THREAT"</p> <p>Location – Bristol: Inconvenient; industrialization of Bristol makes it a culture for work, not a leisure/tourism draw</p> <p>Current national climate challenging history education AND (related but separate) Political climate challenges exploration of difficult topics</p> <p>Economy – constant threat of another recession</p> <p>Inflation – costs to maintain the building.</p> <p>If there were ever a dissolution of the ECP and ECHS partnership</p>

Bonneyville Mill

<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "STRENGTH"</p> <p>Team</p> <p>Work ethic</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Reliability</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – Internal Origin "WEAKNESS"</p> <p>Vision</p> <p>Money</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Resources</p>
<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Helpful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "OPPORTUNITY"</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Inspiration</p> <p>Cultural significance</p> <p>Historical significance</p> <p>Entertainment</p> <p>Public opinion</p>	<p style="text-align: center; background-color: #d9ead3; border: 1px solid black; margin: 0;">Harmful to Achieving the Objective – External Origin "THREAT"</p> <p>Money</p> <p>Misunderstanding</p> <p>Pre conceived ideas</p> <p>Nature (mill and waterway)</p> <p>Decay</p> <p>Indifference</p>

Public Meetings

As part of the master plan process solicitation from the general community was conducted during three (3) Public Meetings held at various park sites. Attendance sheets are in the Appendix of this document. The responses collected at these meeting are as follows:

Responses from Public Meeting #1

Elkhart County Parks 2024-2028 Five Year Master Plan
Held at Bonneyville Mill County Park - August 31, 2023 @ 6:00pm

The responses to these six questions were received by brainstorming with all the participants (7) in the room, 6 of whom were from the general public:

1. What is the best thing about Elkhart County Parks?

- WE exist! (many counties still don't have a park system)
- Preservation of natural areas
- Outstanding staff
- Good Facebook/social media presence
- Variety of programs and events (not just arts and crafts)
- Mostly free
- Accessible
- Not crowded
- Opportunities with nature
- Gardens in parks: Calendar Garden & Sensory Garden
- Number of school children reached via naturalists
- Trails well marked
- Indiana Master Naturalist program is top notch!
- Tourism reach especially via Pumpkinvine

2. What is the biggest weakness or limitation of Elkhart County Parks?

- Age of facilities
- Demographic challenges: especially with lack of transportation for some
- Funding
- More signage needed
- Location and age of Historical Museum
- More trails needed for trail runners and mountain bikers
- Lack of advertising (dollars) example: need to market t-shirt fundraiser more
- No county park in SW corner of Elkhart County
- How to reach people who don't know about us/visit parks
- Grow park partnership with Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

3. Is there an area within the County that needs to be served or connected by the County Parks?

- People without transportation
- Hispanic community
- Trails and pedestrian bridges
- SW and SE corner of Elkhart County
- Take Historical Museum exhibits 'on the road' to cover areas where people can't come to us
- Remove 'elitism' from outdoor recreation opportunities:
 - Connect with a more diverse groups via Tolson Center, Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brother & Big Sisters
 - Skills clinic for those new to recreation opportunities

4. What new facilities or improvements should be considered in the next five years?

- Exhibit inside old courthouse
- Kayak storage rack (like a bike rack)
- Kayak rentals via kayak lockers
- Ice rink
- Back country camping
- Outreach to Veteran's/Veterans programming
- 3D Archery Course
- Pump track for basic mountain bike skills
- An easier Mountain Bike Trail for beginners

5. What new programs or services should be considered in the next five years?

- Hunter education classes
- Field trip transportation scholarship
- Add parks to MACOG bus routes
- Offer programs in Spanish
- Afterschool archery program
- More temporary exhibits at Historical Museum
- Author book signings in Museum and in parks
- Native plant programs

- Move programs to different sites
- Promote programs more in advance
- Partner with others (for example Superhero Museum at Halloween Hayrides)

6. If a bag of money was to fall on Elkhart County and could only be used by the County Parks where should it be spent?

- 3D archery range
- New museum and/or multi-use event center
- Watertrails/blueways – education and marketing
- Buy more land for parks (especially in SW of county)
- Public facility upgrades
- Regional trail connectivity

These responses were received by hanging posters on the wall and encouraging participants to write in the answers:

TOP PRIORITIES

- Log jam (removed near Ox Bow)

- The Post Office (for distribution of marketing materials)

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS TO BUILD

- Paddlesport community
- Boys and Girls Club
- Tolson Center

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPLORE

- Boat lockers
- Museum remote location displays
- Getting a copy of the Compass in every Elkhart County residents' mailbox

Responses from Public Meeting #2

Elkhart County Parks 2024-2028 Five Year Master Plan

Held at Cobus Creek County Park – September 20, 2023 @ 6:00pm

The responses to these six questions were received by brainstorming with all the participants (5) in the room, 3 of whom were from the general public:

1. What is the best thing about Elkhart County Parks?

- Locations are accessible
- Variety of County Parks, yet all similar
- Transition/restoration of habitats over the years (example Cobus Creek County Park)
- Preserves history and brings it to life
- Waterways in every park
- Variety of trail types
- Staff are busy cleaning in the mornings
- Programs and experiences that are offered
- Birds!
- Museum and the Crossroads exhibits:
 - -Recognizing the less acknowledged and uncomfortable parts of history
 - Indigenous cultures
 - -Saturday tours have been great!
 - Mountain Bike Trail
 - Diversity of recreational uses in the parks (volleyball to picnics to playgrounds and much more)

2. What is the biggest weakness or limitation of Elkhart County Parks?

- Invasive species
- Budget challenges (impacts maintenance and amenities)
- Lack of a nature center
- Office space at Administration Office (size and location)
- Could we ever be at over capacity?
 - Wear and tear
 - Full parking lots

3. Is there an area within the County that needs to be served or connected by the County Parks?

- Wa-Nee/Baugo area lacking trails and parks
- Public transportation to parks lacking
- Needs for improving ADA
- Accommodations for sensory impaired/special needs
- Health of wildlife
- -imbalance of predator/prey
- -impact of climate change
- -over population of deer in some seasons/some parks

4. **What new facilities or improvements should be considered in the next five years?**
 - Trail connector to St. Joe County
 - Nature Center
 - Overlook on Buttonbush Lake at Boot Lake Nature Preserve
 - Major physical improvements needed at Museum

5. **What new programs or services should be considered in the next five years?**
 - Equipment rentals (xc skis, kayaks, family fun picnic kit, yard games, etc.)
 - Campground
 - Natural public art
 - “Gold Member” – give people an opportunity to pay more for their annual Ox Bow Pass and receive a special color sticker/pin/sticker or other trinket

6. **If a bag of money was to fall on Elkhart County and could only be used by the County Parks where should it be spent?**
 - Invasive plant species removal in all parks
 - Land acquisition to create more parks for the future
 - Multi-use interpretive center at Ox Bow County Park

Responses from Public Meeting #3
Elkhart County Parks 2024-2028 Five Year Master Plan
Held at Ox Bow County Park – September 28, 2023 @ 6:00pm

The responses to these six questions were received by brainstorming with all the participants in the room, 5 of whom were from the general public:

1. **What is the best thing about Elkhart County Parks?**
 - Safe places to enjoy nature (Cobus, Ox Bow, River Preserve, Boot Lake as examples)
 - Every park has something different (unique and wide array of activities)
 - Provide a variety of education and program opportunities
 - Great places to bring friends who are traveling through the area
 - Convenient locations: Can visit any of the parks within a half hour drive
 - Cross Country meets are well attended
 - Parks are well cared for
 - Great place to bring kids/grandkids (“screen-a-ma-tize vs. leaf-a-ma-tize”)
 - Stories and history of each park
 - Compass magazine
 - Monthly programs such as hiking club and bird walks
 - Wish we had more parks!
 - Impact on community after-Covid (programs, events, etc.)

2. **What is the biggest weakness or limitation of Elkhart County Parks?**
 - Need better clarity with communication on events/programs.
 - -For example tonight’s meeting was advertised at Ox Bow Haus Shelter in one place and Cottonwood Shelter in others.
 - -Unable to see event on the website the day of the event as it erases it at beginning of day.
 - -Could allow extended night hours for night sky viewing (or more night time programs).
 - -Log jam in the river

3. **Is there an area within the County that needs to be served or connected by the County Parks?**
 - Trails: poor bicycle accessibility and safety in some areas = need for more trails (group was excited about the upcoming CR 17 bypass over CR 33)
 - Growth of trail transitions from urban to rural areas: Street lanes for bikers to connect with trails
 - Wa-Nee Trail
 - Park also needed in the Wa-Nee area (southwest Elkhart County has no County Park)

4. **What new facilities or improvements should be considered in the next five years?**
 - Provide access to Wolf Lake
 - Canoe/Kayak lockers and facilities
 - Identify and market Blueway connections
 - Gardens, Art, and other facilities

- Tree top walk with a zipline
- Dredge canal at Bonneyville (“don’t want to grind to a halt.”)
- Nature Center/Interpretive Center
- More interpretive signage in parks to help tell the stories of the parks/educate about what people see

5. What new programs or services should be considered in the next five years?

- More interpretation
 - -programs
 - -signage (give site context)
 - -county home history for example
 - -books: write the history of each park
 - -tell more of the story of the land before settlement: Miami and Potawatomi
 - -more programs similar to the “History Detective” series at Museum
- Pop-up naturalist programs in different parks and parts of County
- Volunteer opportunities: Expand/more awareness/training
- Programs to teach people to ‘re-wild’ their land

6. If a bag of money was to fall on Elkhart County and could only be used by the County Parks where should it be spent?

- More land
- Land in Nappanee
- More staff
- Keep rewarding staff with pay increases
- Land for equine trails
- Discovery Center at Ox Bow
- Trail Development
 - -safe access
 - -outside parks
 - -raised trails at Bonneyville in flood plain

Park Board Meetings

Master Plan Updates were given at Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board Meetings (open to the public) throughout the planning process as noted below.

June 12, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: River Preserve County Park, DeFries Gardens

- Director shared with Park Board that an outline and agenda has been set for the Master Plan retreat on June 23 which will involve park staff and board members.

July 10, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: Bonneyville Mill County Park, One Room Schoolhouse

- Staff shared that the Master Plan retreat was a success and that a majority of the staff and several park board members were present to discuss top priorities for the next five years and beyond. Next steps are to schedule public meetings, distribute community survey, and have each section perform a SWOT analysis.

August 14, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: Ox Bow County Park, Ox Bow Haus Shelter

- Director reported that during the first week of the Master Plan survey, more than 230 participants responded. Public meeting dates are being set and a news release and social media ads will help advertise as well as email invites to user groups and partners.

September 11, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: Cobus Creek County Park

- Director reported that the first Five Year Master Plan meeting was held on August 31 at 6:00 PM at Bonneyville Mill and was a success with eight attendees from a variety of backgrounds. Board member Karen Mackowiak attended and felt it was successful despite the low number of people.

October 9, 2023 at 4:30pm

Location: Ox Bow County Park, Ox Bow Haus Shelter

- Staff reported that the final two Master Plan meetings held on September 20 at Cobus Creek County Park and September 28 at Ox Bow County Park were a success. Ronda appreciated Park Board members attending the Public Meetings to listen to the feedback from the community. Although the groups were small, good conversations and feedback were discussed at all three meetings. Ronda shared copies of answers to the Community Survey as well.

April 8, 2024 at 4:30pm

Location: Elkhart County Historical Museum

- The draft of the Master Plan was distributed and reviewed by the Elkhart County Park Board at a public meeting. A PowerPoint presentation also outlined the planning process.

Needs Analysis

Through a culmination of work sessions, public surveys, ongoing discussions, and adherence to standards and guidelines, the master plan process for Elkhart County has identified several crucial planning components centered around addressing community needs. These components encompass:

1. **Connectivity:** Elkhart County boasts a wealth of high-quality trails and greenways managed by both the County Parks system, which includes the renowned Pumpkinvine Nature Trail, and various municipalities within the county. The ongoing community planning initiative, Connect in Elkhart County, aims to enhance connectivity by establishing alternative transportation links to key community destinations. Elkhart County Parks actively participates as a stakeholder in this visionary planning effort.
2. **Park and Open Space Acreage:** Elkhart County has been classified as a "critical county" in terms of park and open space acreage according to the Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Indiana's Level of Service guideline specifies a requirement of 55 acres per 1,000 persons which creates a shortfall of 8,173 acres of public recreation acres in the county.

The County leadership will need to develop a long-term strategy in addressing this level of service standard and deficiency of park acres.

Revenue and Funding Strategies: The County Parks system requires continued focus on revenue and financial strategies to support its growth and development in the years ahead. This entails fostering unique partnerships, collaborations, and financial incentives, including estate planning and gifting programs, to augment funding for park initiatives. These strategies will remain integral to the sustained progress of Elkhart County Parks.

Trails & Connectivity

Connectivity throughout Elkhart County is seen as a valuable quality of life infrastructure, connecting neighborhoods with communities and destinations for work, leisure, education, and transportation.

Connect in Elkhart County is an initiative spearheaded by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County in partnership, with stakeholders, including Elkhart County Parks. The primary focus of

the Community Foundation is to enhance the quality of life in the county by expanding the trail network and connecting amenities and destinations.

The program aims to achieve community objectives such as promoting connectivity fostering development and enhancing residents' quality of life. This is accomplished through;

1. **Enhancing Transportation Infrastructure;** *Connect in Elkhart County* invests in improving road networks, public transportation systems and active transportation options like biking and walking paths. These enhancements increase mobility alleviate traffic congestion and provide access to services for both residents and visitors.
2. **Driving Economic Growth;** The initiative drives growth by improving market access attracting businesses and creating a business environment within Elkhart County. Enhanced transportation infrastructure facilitates the movement of goods and services supports industries such, as manufacturing and tourism and encourages investments leading to job creation.
3. **Enhanced Connectivity and Accessibility;** *Connect in Elkhart County* improves connections and accessibility by offering affordable and convenient transportation choices for people of all ages and abilities. By expanding public transit options implementing ride sharing services and developing pedestrian infrastructure the program aims to make transportation more accessible while fostering inclusion. This is especially beneficial for groups like seniors, individuals with disabilities and those with income.
4. **Environmental Sustainability;** The initiative focuses on promoting sustainability through initiatives that reduce vehicle emissions preserve resources and encourage alternative modes of transportation such as walking, biking and carpooling. Investments in eco infrastructure like electric vehicle charging stations and multi modal transportation centers aim to create an environment that supports public health while bolstering climate resilience efforts in Elkhart County.
5. **Community Health and Well-being;** *Connect in Elkhart County* prioritizes community health and well-being by advocating for transportation options, outdoor activities, and physical exercise. The presence of sidewalks, bike lanes and trails do not encourage physical activity but also helps combat sedentary lifestyles leading to improved overall health outcomes for residents. Moreover, improved access to healthcare facilities plays a role in promoting health equity, within the community by emphasizing care practices.
6. **Social Equity and Inclusion;** The initiative aims to promote fairness and inclusivity, in transportation by ensuring that all community members benefit from transportation investments regardless of their income, race, age or where they live. *Connect in Elkhart County* places a priority on considering fairness in transportation planning and decision-making processes. This includes addressing differences in access to transport options and striving for opportunities for everyone in the community to engage in social and cultural activities.

In essence the *Connect in Elkhart County* program has the potential to bring about changes within the community. It can foster an accessible and sustainable future for both residents and businesses in the area. Through investments in transport infrastructure support for growth and improvements to quality of life this initiative helps strengthen community bonds while

enhancing the well-being of Elkhart County residents. Elkhart County Parks remains committed to these shared objectives alongside the Community Foundation, as partners moving forward.

Another community resource that supports trails & connectivity is *Vibrant Communities*. *Vibrant Communities' Action Agenda 2.0* is a collection of recommendations derived through community input to help evaluate quality of place and identify gaps and opportunities for growth in the communities of Elkhart County. The following are countywide action items for a long-term plan for Elkhart County:

Countywide Parks & Trails

- **Toll Road Gateway Signage** Elkhart County will develop a gateway signage program along the toll roads or major highways which enter the county to direct, enhance, and support visitor experience.
- **Wa-Nee Visionary Trail Project** Comprehensive plans from both Nappanee and Wakarusa include the vision of a multi-use path connecting the two communities. This visionary trail is a product of many rounds of public input, to build a safe, accessible, and vibrant trail for walkers, runners, and cyclists that connects the communities of Nappanee and Wakarusa. This trail will link downtowns, schools, and neighborhoods to each other, and immerse us in the countryside we all know and love.
- **Countywide and Regional Multimodal Loop** Elkhart County will explore/develop a multimodal loop that connects all of Elkhart County's communities and our regional neighbors, with an emphasis on highlighting assets such as scenic parks, trails, rivers and other amenities. This multimodal loop is part of 130-mile network of low-stress streets and trails which should support residents and visitors and be accessible to everyone. We believe we should be a leader in connecting people to the great outdoors.
- **Elkhart County Greenspace** Elkhart County Parks and the municipal park agencies will explore, identify, and develop a plan to address the countywide deficit of greenspace versus the growing population. The plan will incorporate recommendations of the Indiana DNR Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, best served locations, natural resource protection, potential opportunities to acquire land, and resources necessary to manage additional properties.
- **Elkhart County Discovery Center** Elkhart County Parks will plan to build a multi-use interpretive and event center that encompasses the mission of "Inspiring Connections with Culture and Nature." This regionally unique destination will celebrate all that Elkhart County has to offer as a place to live, learn, and play. The site will feature state of the art history and nature placemaking exhibits, indoor spaces and outdoor greens for education and community gatherings, as well as connections to trails, the river, and great outdoors. It will bring the Elkhart County Park's 50-year-old mission under one modern roof and give the community and visitors a 'space to discover their place' in a park that attracts a quarter million annual visitors.
- **County Park Restroom Amenities** Elkhart County will install new public restrooms in most of the Elkhart County Parks to update current facilities for accessibility, groundwater protection, and increased needs for modern and sanitary visitor services.
- **Elkhart County Blueways** Establish a countywide blueway task force to research and develop a countywide collaboration plan for recreational use of connective blueways. Plan should address public access points, safety concerns, security needs, takeouts, costs, profit sharing and potential rental equipment/company options (i.e. kayak/canoes).

Countywide Environmental & Natural Resources

- **Natural Resources** Elkhart County will work with local, state, and conservation agencies such as land trusts to explore ways to preserve, protect, and celebrate Elkhart County’s unique natural resources and ecosystems. From the vast river system to wetlands, bogs, and woodlands, the protection of these resources will balance the impact of development and help preserve the beauty of Elkhart County.
- **Native Plantings** This broad initiative will promote and increase public pride and awareness in native plants. It will educate and encourage use of ornamental native plants instead of exotics and strive to make Elkhart County a leader in sustainable landscaping.
- **Sustainable Foods** Elkhart County will use and celebrate locally grown and produced foods which will support local pride, health, and an understanding of sustainable food practices. Elkhart County will strive to be known for educating its residents on sustainable practices and to be known for its public/private gardens, enthusiasts, and events.
- **Supporting Healthy Living for Residents** We will foster a community of healthy residents. We will promote active living, and regularly participating in placemaking activities which support and improve the health and wellbeing of our people and their surrounding environment.
- **Supporting Diversified, Equitable and Inclusive Environments** We will continue to develop partnerships which allow us to help create, support and provide access to a built environment which observes and aligns with our values of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Park and Open Space Acres

As mentioned above, Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has identified Elkhart County as a “critical county” in the inventory of Park & Open Space acres.

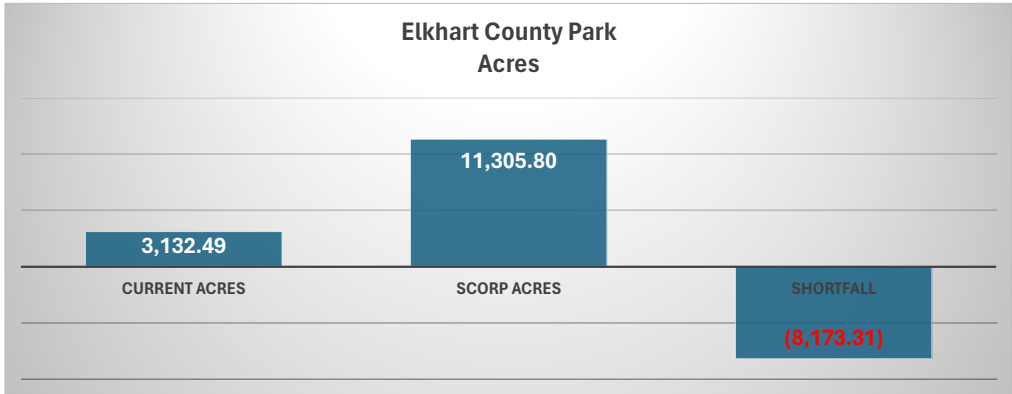
Indiana uses level of service (LOS) guidelines to determine if there is an adequate supply of acreage or deficit in the needs of the county residents. Those SCORP LOS standards are:

- 20 acres of locally owned / operated public outdoor recreation acres per 1,000 people
- 35 acres of state & federally owned / operated public outdoor recreation acres per 1,000 people

Elkhart County has a shortfall of 8,173.31 acres of park acres.
(Information below, taken from SCORP 2021-2025 Plan.)

Indiana Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2021-2025

SCORP LOS	2018 Population	Recommended SCORP Acres	Current County Acres	Deficiency
Local Acres (@ 20a/1000)	205,560	4,111.20	2,687.54	(1,423.66)
State & Fed. Acres (@ 35a/1000)	205,560	7,194.60	444.95	(6,749.65)
TOTALS		11,305.80	3,132.49	(8,173.31)



Over the past few years, the Elkhart County Parks director has raised awareness of the SCORP plan and its numbers with the Elkhart County Commissioners and Elkhart County Council. As a result, an upcoming 60 acre parcel will eventually be transferred from the County Commissioners to create a new park along County Road 17.

One of Elkhart County's greatest challenges is the lack of state and federal land within Elkhart County. There are only a few large parcels of intact land left that could be possible sites for state park or fish and wildlife area. As decades expand and development continues, this will be an ever-increasing challenge for Elkhart County.

By implementing the following strategies, Elkhart County can work towards achieving the SCORP level of service and provide residents and visitors with high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities that enhance their health, well-being, and quality of life.

1. **Needs Assessment:** Work with County Leadership and related agencies in conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to identify gaps and deficiencies in outdoor recreation facilities, programs, and services within Elkhart County. Gather input from residents, stakeholders, and community organizations to understand their preferences, priorities, and unmet needs.
2. **Strategic Planning:** Develop a strategic plan for improving outdoor recreation in Elkhart County, setting clear goals, objectives, and action steps to address identified needs and priorities. Prioritize projects and initiatives based on their potential impact, feasibility, and alignment with SCORP level of services. Establish this issue as a primary goal of the County's Strategic Comprehensive Plan.
3. **Infrastructure Investments:** Allocate resources and funding to develop, maintain, and enhance outdoor recreation infrastructure in Elkhart County, including acreage, parks, trails, and natural areas. Focus on projects that address critical needs, serve underserved populations, and promote equitable access to recreational opportunities.
4. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Forge partnerships with government agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and community groups to leverage resources, expertise, and support for outdoor recreation initiatives in Elkhart County. Collaborate on joint projects, fundraising efforts, and advocacy campaigns to maximize impact and sustainability.
5. **Public Engagement and Education:** Engage residents, stakeholders, and the public in the planning, development, and management of outdoor recreation resources in Elkhart County. Educate the community about the importance of outdoor recreation for health, well-being, and quality of life, and encourage participation in recreational activities and volunteer opportunities.
6. **Inclusive and Accessible Design:** Ensure that outdoor recreation facilities and programs in Elkhart County are designed to be inclusive and accessible to individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Incorporate universal design principles, ADA-compliant features, and accommodations to ensure that everyone can participate and enjoy outdoor activities.
7. **Environmental Stewardship:** Promote environmental stewardship and sustainability in outdoor recreation planning and management in Elkhart County. Implement conservation practices, habitat restoration efforts, and sustainable land management strategies to protect and preserve natural resources for future generations to enjoy.
8. **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Regularly evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of outdoor recreation initiatives in Elkhart County, gathering feedback from residents, stakeholders, and users to assess progress towards SCORP level of services goals and objectives. Adjust and improvements as needed to ensure that recreational resources meet the evolving needs of the community.

Section E: Plan of Action

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Proposed Action Plan.....	Page E – 5
Action Year Budget Summary	Page E – 16
Funding Resources.....	Page E – 17

Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

Department Goals and Strategies

1. Improve the quality of life for citizens by preserving culture and history, providing education and experiences, and promoting health and wellness.

- Generate sites and user experiences that ‘inspire connections with culture and nature’
- Be a part of a community team to promote and improve trails and blueways throughout Elkhart County
- Plan, grow, and develop the county park system to meet the needs of the growing population including acquisition of new land for future park development
- Provide opportunities for diversity, equity, and inclusion of all citizens
- Expand community partnerships with stakeholders, organizations, volunteers, and business community
- Continue to establish partnership with health department, hospitals, and other wellness organizations
- Be a key participant in Vibrant Communities 2.0 and Connect in Elkhart County and help create a more vibrant community to live, work, and play

2. Create parks and historical sites that are unique destinations

- Promote the unique facilities of the Elkhart County Parks to the citizens and visitors of Elkhart County
- Diversify and attract participation in public programs, special events, and facility visits.
- Maintain and build park facilities that contribute to the economy of Elkhart County through tourism.
- Establish the Pollinator Play Path as a National Demonstration Site
- Improve the interpretative, wayfinding, and informational signage throughout the department.
- Plan, fundraise, and build a multi-functional and modern interpretive facility as a feature destination.

3. Diversify funding of the Elkhart County Parks

- Continue to raise awareness of and grow the Elkhart County Parks Legacy Endowment Fund
- Generate projects for diverse grant applications such as the Land & Water Conservation Fund
- Increase opportunities for donations and gifts of land to the department.
- Increase revenue generation through review of user fees.
- Seek sponsorship opportunities with business entities for events, exhibits, and amenities.
- Continue to engage with non-profit partners on collaborative events.
- Work with commissioners and council to identify capital needs and other sources for revenue.

4. Establish a plan to improve and update equipment, buildings, and amenities

- Establish equipment and facility replacement plans and reduce deferred maintenance.
- Build new accessible restrooms and amenities throughout the Elkhart County Parks
- Update shelters, playgrounds, and other facilities to enhance visitor experience.
- Incorporate ADA transition plan in all park improvements.
- Create safer parks and destinations with a trained staff while also updating policies and park ordinance.

5. Protect the natural resources within the Elkhart County Parks and throughout Elkhart County

- Establish a land management plan for each park and nature preserve location.
- Identify rare and endangered plant and animal species found on properties and in region.
- Assist partners to identify critical areas in Elkhart County threatened by loss of habitat and destruction of natural resources.
- Assist community partners with the establishment of a CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area) to help educate the community about native plants and reduce invasives.
- Assist with watershed management plans and initiatives as well as stormwater management

Plan of Action

The following pages form the recommended 5-year Action Plan for Elkhart County Park & Recreation.

This matrix of actions is used as a guide and reviewed quarterly. This allows for the Master Plan to be a working document that is utilized to lead and guide staff.

The Action Matrix is organized with the stated Actions, related Park Site(s)/Facility, Estimated Costs (if applicable), Funding Source(s), the Action Priority, and suggested Year of Implementation.

In addition, the Action Plan is organized into five (5) Categories:

- Capital Improvement Actions
- Administrative Policy / Procedure / Planning Actions
- Programs / Services Actions / Public Outreach / Marketing Actions
- Maintenance & Equipment Actions
- Creative and Engagement Actions and Partnerships

For implementation of Actions over the next 5 years only the “A” Priorities are considered. The “B” and “C” Priorities are noted as potential elements to consider past the next 5 years or, if circumstances permit, to be reassigned to an “A” Priority.

There are several Actions that may be implemented, or assisted by others in collaboration with the Park Department, i.e., County Planning Department, non-profit Friends group, etc.

The following graphic shows the funding sources that will be instrumental in the implementation of the Action Plan over the next five years:

Funding Key:
ARPA: American Rescue Plan Act
DE: DeFries Endowment
EN: Endowment Funds
GD: Grants and Donations
GF: General Fund
IDNR: Indiana DNR
INSWMP: Indiana Stream & Wetland Mitigation Program
LWCF: Land Water Conservation Fund
NRC: Parks Non-reverting Capital
NRO: Parks Non-reverting Operating
READI: Regional Economic Acceleration Development Initiative
TA: Parks Tax Appropriate Budget
TIF: Tax Incremented Funding

Action Plan

A – Primary in next 5 years
 B – Secondary in next 5 years (5 to 10 years)
 Priority Criteria: *C* – Unlikely in next 5 years (10 to 20 years)
 X – On-going or No Cost

Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS (repairs, new development, land acquisition, etc.)													
Acquire land adjacent to existing parks as opportunities arise	Parks	All	\$1,000,000	NRC, GD, LWCF	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 500,000.00	\$ 500,000.00				
Acquire land in other areas of Elkhart County where habitat needs protection such as woodlands, wetlands, and riparian habitats, including in SW area of county which is undervalued	Parks	All	TBD	NRC, GD, LWCF	A	Capital Improvement							
Develop site plan for a Veterans Memorial Park	Parks	Commissioner/Council	\$50,000	GD, GF, TIF	A	Capital Improvement	65 will need to be donated by County Commissioners	\$ 50,000.00					
Funding and development of Veteran's Memorial Park	Parks	Commissioner/Council	\$5,000,000	GD, TIF, LWCF	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 2,500,000.00	\$ 2,500,000.00				
All facilities are updated, include recommendations of ADA transition plan	Parks	All	Included in next object amounts	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement							
Installation of 4 modern restrooms and 11 benches in all County Parks (except Coburn) in addition to accessible parking and routes to each	Parks	All	\$4,500,000	ARRA/ GF	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 4,500,000.00					
Assess and consolidate locks/keys/keys throughout department	Parks	All	\$10,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/Equipment		\$ 10,000.00					
Implement swipe-card locks on renewable enclosed shelters and other buildings for improved access control	Parks	Various Sites	TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/Equipment							
Sustainable pervious parking lot options for each park to balance with impervious areas for stormwater management and user access	Parks	All	TBD	NRC, TA	B	Capital Improvement							
Develop plan for a dog park within park system	Parks	TBD	TBD	GD, GR	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 20,000.00
Develop group camping sites within department (i.e. south including back country and/or canoe sites at Turkey Creek and/or Treasure Island)	Parks	TBD	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							
Installation of solar lighting in select areas to increase staff and public safety	Parks	TBD	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
Ensure connection of major parks by multi-use trail systems that are implemented	Trails	All	TBD	GD/TIF	B	Capital Improvement							
Accessible paved path designed for each park	Trails	TBD	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
BONNEVILLE MILL COUNTY PARK													
New Entrance Sign on State Road 120 to increase marketing of Mill	Bonneyville	Entrance	\$10,000	NRO	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 10,000.00					
Collaborate with County Highway for safe bike/pedestrian crossings	Bonneyville	CR 131/CR 8	\$12,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 12,000.00					
Evaluate, design and replace, or remove lookout tower	Bonneyville	Lookout	TBD	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement		TBD					
Develop site plan for Rum Mill site area	Bonneyville	Rum Mill site	\$5,000	NRO	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 5,000.00				
Review integrity and evaluate design of stone dam, spillway head race, and millpond	Bonneyville	Mill	\$75,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 75,000.00				
Upgrade waterways throughout mill roadway to enhance water power to the mill	Bonneyville	Mill	\$150,000		A	Capital Improvement				\$ 150,000.00			
Establish commercial/retail kiosk area for baking with mill flour products, cooking classes, and events	Bonneyville	Mill/Foodst	\$20,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 20,000.00				
Build isolated room in barn for producing product mixes with mill flour	Bonneyville	Mill/Foodst	\$1,500	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 1,500.00					
Color repair and painting of OFFICE ROOM STORAGE HOUSE	Bonneyville	ONS	\$18,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 18,000.00					
Repair bath room of residential house	Bonneyville	Residential House	\$1,500	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 1,500.00					
Porch repair of residential house	Bonneyville	Residential House	\$5,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 5,000.00				
Major roof/plywood repair Briar Patch	Bonneyville	Briar Patch	\$125,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement						\$ 125,000.00	
Replace/Upgrade Briar Patch Shelter including electric	Bonneyville	Briar Patch	\$250,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 250,000.00				
Expand year-round, maintained, permanent parking at Briar Patch	Bonneyville	Briar Patch	\$150,000	NRC, TA, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 150,000.00				

Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

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Park Component / Plan of Action	Park Site(s)	Division or Site	Total Costs (2024 – 2028)	Funding Source	Priority	Category	Notes / Comments	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS (repairs, new development, land acquisition, etc.)													
Valley Line Latrine repair	Bonnyville	Valley Line	\$1,500	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 1,500.00					
Replace weathervane	Bonnyville	Valley Line area	\$55,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement						\$ 55,000.00	
Replace roof on maintenance shop	Bonnyville	Maintenance Shop	\$39,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 35,000.00					
Exterior paint of maintenance shop	Bonnyville	Maintenance Shop	\$18,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 18,000.00					
Public restroom remodel	Bonnyville	Maintenance Shop	\$25,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 25,000.00				
Upgrade to Mountain Bike Trailer features and erosion prevention	Bonnyville	Mountain Bike Trail	\$3,000	NIMBA	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 3,000.00					
Move Mountain Bike Trail Head to Blair Patch area	Bonnyville	Mountain Bike Trail	\$2,000	NIMBA	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 2,000.00					\$ 450,000.00
Replacement of Lookout and Meadow shelters	Bonnyville	Lookout/Meadow	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 200,000.00
Replace Kum Mui Re	Bonnyville	Kum Mui Re	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
Remove Freshet shelter for enclosed sides and drop down ceiling	Bonnyville	Milffeddit	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
Exterior repair and paint of white house	Bonnyville	Residential House	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 15,000.00
Plan for future interpretive use of house	Bonnyville	Residential House	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							
Update site plan/engineering design of the South farm site	Bonnyville	Bear Patch/ Meadow/ Lookout	TBD	NRC, TA	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 15,000.00
Wildland hardwood addition	Bonnyville	Valley Line area	TBD	NRC, GD	B/C	Capital Improvement							\$ 150,000.00
Planning for Mountain Lake Pump Truck	Bonnyville	Mountain Lake Trail	TBD	NIMBA, GD	B/C	Capital Improvement							\$ 5,000.00
Allocate and restore historic interpretation ticket station	Bonnyville	DHS	TBD	GD, NRC	C	Capital Improvement							
BOOT LAKE NATURE PRESERVE													
Marked survey along northwest corridor/subdivision and construct fence	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		\$10,000	NRO	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 10,000.00					
Design and build parking lot, including overflow parking for large programs and events	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		\$120,000		A	Capital Improvement						\$ 120,000.00	
Transform small pavilion into education kiosk including interpretive signage and program seating	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		\$12,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 12,000.00				
Establish trail and observation deck to Burtonbush Lake	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 150,000.00
Plan for future service building	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		TBD		B	Capital Improvement							\$ 250,000.00
Protection of buffer areas around wetlands with land acquisition	Boot Lake Nature Preserve		TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							
COBUS CREEK COUNTY PARK													
Upgrade overflow parking lot into permanent parking spaces	Cobus Creek		\$60,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 60,000.00				
Install labyrinth garden	Cobus Creek		\$12,000	NRC, GD, TIF	A	Capital Improvement						\$ 12,000.00	
Install new pedestrian bridge with weight limit for equipment	Cobus Creek		\$12,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement							\$ 12,000.00
Develop connection between Cobus Creek County Park and Cleveland Township Library	Cobus Creek		TBD	GD, TIF	B	Capital Improvement							
Explore feasibility of automated entry gates at Boot Lake and Cobus Creek	Cobus Creek/ Boot Lake		TBD		C	Capital Improvement							
CORSON RIVERWOODS COUNTY PARK													
Complete development of a park shelter.	Corson Riverwoods		\$250,000	LMCF, GD, NRC, TIF	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 250,000.00					
Permanently enter area sign	Corson Riverwoods		\$10,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 10,000.00					
Construct kiosk	Corson Riverwoods		\$3,500	NRC	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 3,500.00					
Boardwalk to river's edge	Corson Riverwoods		\$100,000	TIF	A	Capital Improvement						\$ 100,000.00	
Pollinator Play Path and Hummingbird Art Sculpture	Corson Riverwoods		\$275,000	READI, TIF	A	Capital Improvement		\$ 275,000.00					

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CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS (repairs, new development, land acquisition, etc.)													
EIKHART COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM													
Replace air conditioning/humidity controls in annex	Museum		\$170,000	GD, NRC, EDS	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 170,000.00				
Replace ceiling lights in gymnasium with energy efficient fixtures	Museum		TBD	GD, ECHS, NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
Develop a capital plan for accessibility, climate control and updates to the Museum	Museum		TBD	GD, ECHS, NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
GOSHEN DAM													
Feasibility study of Goshen Dam (high hazard dam)	Goshen Pond Dam		TBD	GD, NRO	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 200,000.00
Spillway reconstruction	Goshen Pond Dam		TBD	GD, GF	C	Capital Improvement							\$ 5,000,000.00
OX BOW COUNTY PARK													
Trail head development: kiosks, trail grade and info signs, picnic sites, etc.	Ox Bow Park	TBD	\$15,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 15,000.00				
Remove Fairstead Shelter	Ox Bow Park	Fairstead	\$3,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 3,000.00				
Improvements to Upper Field parking lot	Ox Bow Park	Upper Field	\$50,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 50,000.00				
Cottonwood Shelter overlook replacement	Ox Bow Park	Cottonwood	\$50,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 50,000.00				
Repair and replace aging playground equipment	Ox Bow Park	Cottonwood, Upper Field, Fibersmans	\$375,000	NRC, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 125,000.00	\$ 125,000.00	\$ 125,000.00		
Replacement of roofs on four shelters	Ox Bow Park	Black Maple, Coffee Tree, Stable, Honey Locust	\$100,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	\$ 25,000.00	
Update, repair and replace bear dwalls	Ox Bow Park	Apple Orchard Trail, Winner Trace, Inner Loop	\$150,000	NRC, NRO, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00		
Installation of National Fitness Campaign adult exercise equipment	Ox Bow Park	County Home Property	\$250,000	Health Dept Grant	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 250,000.00				
Service Center parking lot upgrade with new gravel	Ox Bow Park	Service Center	\$10,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 10,000.00				
Expand Fibersmans Shelter parking area	Ox Bow Park	Fibersmans Shelter	\$15,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 15,000.00				
Storage unit for equipment and lumber	Ox Bow Park	Service Center	\$14,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 14,000.00				
Study feasibility, hire design firm, fundraise, and build an interpretive facility that features Elkhart County's cultural and history	Ox Bow Park	County Home Property	TBD	GD, LWCF, NRC, GF	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 20,000,000.00
Design and construct megalithic vehicle and foot traffic bridge over pond/spillway	Ox Bow Park	Spillway	TBD	LARE, SW	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 500,000.00
Design and construct indoor rental pavilion (Capacity 75-150) with modern restrooms with ADA facilities	Ox Bow Park	Upper Field	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 200,000.00
Increase electric capacity for special events	Ox Bow Park	Chapel Area/Lower Field	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 10,000.00
New entrance sign	Ox Bow Park	Gatehouse	TBD	NRC, NRO, TA, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 45,000.00
Resurface upper field parking lot	Ox Bow Park	Upper Field	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							
Accessible removable portable bench on Elkhart River	Ox Bow Park	Beard Branch	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							
Gatehouse ramp sign for park access/visibility	Ox Bow Park	Gatehouse	TBD	NRC, GD	C	Capital Improvement							
PUMPKINVALE NATURE TRAIL													
Design and install a retention basin or raise trail near 7.5 mile marker to prevent seasonal flooding of trail	Pumpkinvale		\$50,000	GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 50,000.00				
Develop trailhead kiosk at CR 35	Pumpkinvale		\$4,000	GD	A	Capital Improvement							\$ 4,000.00
Transition of Gap II land from the Friends of the Pumpkinvale to Park Board	Pumpkinvale		\$0	-	A	Capital Improvement		X					
Develop an capital treatment or replacement programs	Pumpkinvale		TBD	GD, NRO	B	Capital Improvement							

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								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS (repairs, new development, land acquisition, etc.)													
RIVER PRESERVE COUNTY PARK													
Full removal of Baintown Dam and River & Canal Rehabilitation in partnership with IDNR	River Preserve	Baintown Dam	\$150,000	INSMWP	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 150,000.00				
Replacement of roofs on Baintown and Benton Shelters	River Preserve	Baintown and Benton	\$24,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,000.00			
Rebuild or rejuvenate Benton Hydro levees (north and south sides)	River Preserve	Benton Hydro	TBD	NRC	A	Capital Improvement							
Expand Benton Hydro Parking Lot	River Preserve	Benton Hydro	\$5,000	NRC	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 6,000.00				
Design/build renovation of Deerfish Homestead	River Preserve	Deerfish Garden	\$300,000	EN, GD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 300,000.00				
Renovate and expand parking at Deerfish Gardens; particularly in front west garage	River Preserve	Deerfish Garden	\$50,000	DE	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 50,000.00				
Restore exterior of Baintown Power Plant building and add interpretive signage to outside	River Preserve	Baintown	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 30,000.00
Alter Benton Dam with rock riffle and river restoration	River Preserve	Benton Dam	TBD	GD, INSMWP	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 375,000.00
Construct a trail between Baintown Canal and abandoned railroad	River Preserve	Baintown Canal	TBD	NRD, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 25,000.00
Develop a small natural playscape adjacent to parking lot at Benton Dam	River Preserve	Benton Dam	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 15,000.00
Construct new maintenance facility	River Preserve	Benton or other feasible area	TBD	NRC	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 200,000.00
Create an accessible picnic pad	River Preserve	Deerfish Garden	TBD	NRC, DE	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 10,000.00
Develop an accessible trail between Benton Landing and Benton Dam	River Preserve	Benton	TBD	NRD	C	Capital Improvement							
Develop board walk and overlook at Benton Dam wetland area	River Preserve	Benton Dam	TBD	ARC	C	Capital Improvement							\$ 25,000.00
Install automatic gate at entry drive	River Preserve	Deerfish Garden	TBD	NRC	C	Capital Improvement							\$ 10,000.00
SIX-SPAN BOAT LAUNCH													
Remodel of pole barn for office/program/rental space	Six-Span Bridge		\$100,000	TIF	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 100,000.00				
Construction of pavilion	Six-Span Bridge		\$125,000	TIF	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 125,000.00				
Installation of a paddle rental/locker facility	Six-Span Bridge		\$20,000	TIF, CD	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 20,000.00				
WOLF LAKE COUNTY PARK													
Develop access line and parking area at Wolf Lake	Wolf Lake		\$75,000	NRC, TA, GD, IDNR	A	Capital Improvement							\$ 75,000.00
Entrance sign and kiosk at Wolf Lake	Wolf Lake		\$10,000	NRC, TA, GD, LWCF	A	Capital Improvement			\$ 10,000.00				\$ 125,000.00
Develop accessible trail to lake including boardwalk/jay	Wolf Lake		TBD	NRC, TA, GD, LWCF	B	Capital Improvement							\$ 120,000.00
Construct a small shelter and lounge	Wolf Lake		TBD	NRC, TA, GD, LWCF	C	Capital Improvement							\$ 120,000.00
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT TOTALS:								\$ 5,424,000.00	\$ 1,545,000.00	\$ 1,798,000.00	\$ 3,080,000.00	\$ 2,666,000.00	\$ 28,145,000.00

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ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY / PROCEDURE / PLANNING ACTIONS														
Renew lease of County Home property adjacent to Kow from commissioners	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Review each park policy and make recommendations to the Park Board for updates	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure	X	X	X	X	X			X
Review and update park ordinances with necessary updates, with final approval from Commissioners and Park Board	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure	X							
Review part open hours and recommendations of park staffing forecasted procedures.	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Define MOU with DNR in care of Usher Nature Preserve and other natural areas in Elkhart County	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Update Six Span Boat Launch MOU with expansion of site	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Update MOU with NIMBA for Mountain Bike Trail maintenance	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Complete MOU with Pumpkinvine Advisory Committee Members	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X		X				
Discontinue MOU and transfer Goshen Dam boat launch back to Goshen City Park	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Evaluate user/entrance fees and gates at areas such as Cobles, Foot Lake, Bonneyville, Gosson Riverwoods, Deerfield, Museum, Six Span	Administration	Park Board	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure				X				
Park Board members to increase civic and public engagement	Administration	Park Board	\$0	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X		X				X
Review gifts, donations, and naming policies/procedures and create policy and marketing materials	Administration	Park Board/Staff	\$0	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X		X				
Review revenue generation including cost recovery pyramid, fees for services, fund development, in-kind donations, sponsors for large projects, building endowments for each park, QR codes for donations, donation tubes at entrances	Administration	Park Board/Staff		NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X		X				X
Design and implement peer employee recognition program	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Design employee department onboarding manual	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Develop an equipment replacement plan	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure				X				X
Streamline waiver for volunteers, vendors, etc.	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Work with County IT to evaluate technology needs for the department including computer and fiber infrastructure development	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X						
Increase accessibility and support for professional development	Administration	Staff	\$15,000	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00
Explore sites and options for a 3D archery range	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure				X				
Work with Elkhart County on phasing in paperless time management system for payroll	Administration	Staff	\$19,000	TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		\$ 19,000.00						
Develop inventory of green practices and policies for Department to help prepare for environmental resiliency	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure			X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop sign/kiosk inventory	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Explore addition of a 6cc golf course in the Middleburg/Prattsville area	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, NRC, GD	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure								X

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								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
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Develop methods such as using Teams to increase and improve all department communication	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Engage community with growing endowment funds at the Community Foundation	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Grow the Friends of the Elkhart County Parks to a 8 to 12 member, non-profit	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Work with Emergency Management on Goshen Dam Flood Emergency Plan implementation of practice exercises with local police/sheriff/file	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X				
Evaluate winter access to parking lots as climate change produces milder winters	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRC	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X				
Land management plan for each park/nature areas; including survey of the affines, bird use, best management practices, removal of invasives, restoration of native habitats	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, NRC, GD, TA	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X		
Update gatehouse and mill money management/procedures; new register system and possible incorporation of Apple Pay/Venmo/and other digital payment methods	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X			
Conduct park visitor counts in all parks using traffic and trail counters	Administration	All Staff	\$4,000	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure			\$ 4,000.00				
Reevaluate and revise emergency action plans and Standard Operating Procedures; standardize plans across department and train staff	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Improve information sharing on security, guest, and safety issues within the park system	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Achieve annual growth in revenue generation	Administration	All Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Administrative / Policy / Procedure		X	X	X	X	X	
Seek private vendor partnerships for paddle lockers, bike share, mountain bike concessions, adventure aerial course	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, GD	A/B	Administrative / Policy / Procedure			X	X	X		
Conduct Recreation Impact Fee Study and related Ordinance for the County	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, GD	B	Administrative / Policy / Procedure				X	X		
Create a trail terrain rating system for all park trails	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	B	Administrative / Policy / Procedure			X	X			
Develop department-wide marketing strategy and marketing plan	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	B	Administrative / Policy / Procedure			X	X	X		
Promote and packaging of venues for rentals such as company picnics and weddings	Administration	Staff	TBD	NRO, TA	B	Administrative / Policy / Procedure					X		
Develop formal internship/work-study program	Interpretation	All Staff	TBD		B	Programs / Services		X	X	X			
ADMINISTRATIVE – POLICY / PROCEDURE / PLANNING TOTALS:								\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
								22,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00	3,000.00
								\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$

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Eikhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

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PROGRAMS / SERVICES / PUBLIC OUTREACH/MARKETING ACTIONS													
Improve visitor experiences by evaluating, planning, and creating interpretive signage in locations such as the Mill, Cobas Creek, or Bow, River Preserve, One Room School, etc.	All Sites	Interp. Staff	\$15,000	NRO, GD	A	Programs / Services		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00
Increase accessibility of Boneyville Mill flour products in the community	Boneyville	Mill	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop interpretive plan for the Mill Valley	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRO, GD	A	Programs / Services					X		X
Expand public open hours and programming of the One Room Schoolhouse, including volunteer docent program	Boneyville	One Room School	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X			
Remove collections from non-collection spaces at Museum	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X		
Seek sponsorships and install temporary exhibits; including Indiana Semiquicentennial/Waterways exhibit	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	\$10,000		A	Programs / Services		X	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	X	X	X
Continue to host regular Museum Committee Meetings with Park Board/Elkhart County Historical Society and staff for future planning	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Asist partners in research, writing, and photographs for future Courthouse exhibit	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD	NRO, TA	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X			
Museum staff will continue to grow and expand programming through Elkhart County	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD	GD, NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Develop and market One-Room School program to a wider regional audience	Field Trips	One Room School	\$1,000	NRO	A	Programs / Services		\$ 1,000.00					
Expand communication and marketing of environmental/historical education program offerings to public, private, and parochial schools as well as homeschoos	Field Trips	Interp. Staff	\$500	NRO, TA	A	Programs / Services		\$ 500.00					
Implement teacher survey to identify quality of programs and needs being met through environmental education and historical interpretation	Field Trips	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services			X		X		
Update curriculum plans for school-based education programs, including signing with Indiana State Standards in income schools	Field Trips	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services							
Create field trip subsidy/scholarship program for low-income schools	Field Trips	All Staff	TBD	GD, Endowment	A	Programs / Services				X	X	X	X
Update and reprint field trip offering brochure for educators	Field Trips	Interp. Staff	\$2,000		A	Programs / Services		\$ 2,000.00					
Create innovative ways to expand program reach in odd season months (November to March)	Field Trips/Programs	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Achieve annual growth in Mill and Museum general attendance	Interpretation	Mill and ECHM Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Achieve annual growth in public program and special event reach	Interpretation	All Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Development of interpretive water trails throughout park system and Elkhart County	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	\$2,000	NRO, GD	A	Programs / Services					\$ 2,000.00		
Evaluate staff-led field trips safety and liability standards	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services			X				
Gather community input via survey and focus groups on the development of new programs and interpretive services that support inclusivity and diversity	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	\$1,000	NRO	A	Programs / Services		\$ 500.00	500.00				
Identify and address gaps in interpretive programming	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services				X			
Educational marketing wrap for naturalist trailer	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services			X				
Enhance Museum and DocFes portions of the website with interactive pages that engage visitors on or off sites	Museum/DocFes	Naturalists Staff	\$4,500	TA, NRO	A	Programs / Services		\$ 4,500.00					
Improve public education on invasive species removal (signage, social media, programs, volunteer projects)	Outreach	Naturalist Resource Coordinator	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	X
Market programs and park news to park neighbors and community leaders via expansion of Compass mailing list	Outreach	Admin Staff	\$1,000	NRO, TA	A	Programs / Services		\$ 1,000.00					

Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Park Component / Plan of Action	Park Site(s)	Division or Site	Total Costs (2024 – 2028)	Funding Source	Priority	Category	Notes / Comments	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
On Row River Program initiative with Goshen Health Program, Cobleskill Creek, Pamphlet	On Row River Program, Cobleskill Creek, Pamphlet	All Staff	\$200	In-kind	A	Programs / Services		\$ 200.00					
Create guidelines and policy for independent instructors offering programs at park facilities	Public Programs	Admin Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services			X				
Diversify audiences reached through age-specific programs (ex. Senior Stroll, toddler nature playtimes, etc.)	Public Programs	Interp. Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Establish a bike scholar ship/rental partnership to utilize during bike related programs/summer camps	Public Programs	Interp. Staff	\$2,000	GD	A	Programs / Services		\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00				
Identify grant opportunities and sponsorships to support new and existing programs including collaboration between staff to better communicate timing of requests	Public Programs	Interp. Staff	TBD	GD	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Continue to increase efforts in environmental sustainability education	Public Programs	Naturalists	\$500	NRO	A	Programs / Services		\$ 500.00					
Plan new events and public programs to offer diversity each year to general public including bilingual/Spanish programming	Public Programs	Interp. Staff	\$3,000	NRO	A	Programs / Services		\$ 500.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00	\$ 500.00
Continue outreach to variety of socio-economic groups and promote inclusivity and increase diversity of audiences	Public Programs	Interp. Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Create more collaborations with area artists including music in the parks, open-air performers, art guides, etc.	Public Programs	Naturalists	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Provide "experiences" through programming.	Public Programs	Naturalists	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Quarterly collaborative community program presented by entire interpretive division	Public Programs	All Staff	TBD	NRO	A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Create volunteer opportunities/marketing/outreach/data collection	Volunteers	All Staff	TBD		A	Programs / Services		X	X	X	X	X	
Information kiosks at Boneyville Mill in main parking and Bear Patch parking areas.	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRO	B	Programs / Services							\$ 7,000.00
Develop barn into a Mill interpretive station to improve visitor experience and knowledge	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRC, NRO, GD	B	Programs / Services							\$ 30,000.00
Design and build a blacksmith demonstration area	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRC, GD	B	Capital Improvement							
Implement audience feedback procedures for exhibits and general visitation at Museum	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD		B	Programs / Services							
Museum staff will work to create a regional library of lending equipment	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD	GD	B	Programs / Services							
Museum staff will work to host a traveling exhibit in areas outside of Museum	Elkhart County Historical Museum	Museum	TBD	GD	B	Programs / Services							
Organize and write the history of each park	Interpretation	Interp. Staff	TBD		B	Programs / Services							
Create opportunities for diverse activities and outreach partnerships with schools, such as year long projects, STEW, connecting to outdoor labs	Partnerships	Interp. Staff	TBD		B	Programs / Services							
Install underwater turbine observation system	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRO, GD	C	Programs / Services							
Expand opportunity for selling Mill floor products through a possible small on-site bakery or pretzel shop	Boneyville	Mill	TBD	NRC, NRO, GD	C	Programs / Services							
PROGRAMS / SERVICES TOTALS:								\$ 12,700.00	\$ 11,500.00	\$ 9,500.00	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 3,500.00	\$ 37,000.00

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Elkhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

A Park Component / Plan of Action	B Park Site(s)	C Division or Site	D Total Costs (2024 – 2028)	E Funding Source	F Priority	G Category	H Notes / Comments	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
MAINTENANCE & EQUIPMENT ACTIONS													
Partner with local conservation organizations for stream restoration to benefit trout habitat	Cobus Creek		TBD	NRO	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		X	X	X	X	X	
Develop accessible picnic sites throughout parks	All	All Parks	TBD	NRO	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		X	X	X	X		
Develop shelter, building, equipment replacement schedules	All	All Parks	TBD	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		X	X	X	X		
Improve and increase wayfinding signage, including bilingual signage	All Sites	All Staff	\$10,000	NRO, TA, NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	
Trail repairs and connections at Bomeyville Mill, particularly in floodplain	Bomeyville		TBD	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		X	X	X			
Install irrigation system and well in sensory garden	Cobus Creek		\$1,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 7,000.00					
Seasonal path development in woodland and wet meadow sections to north and south of park.	ConsonRivewoods		TBD	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			X				
Farm debris removed from wetland edge/overlook	ConsonRivewoods		\$1,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 1,000.00					
Evaluate and stabilize condition of Museum building to ensure value of property is kept up for future use if new interpretive center is constructed	Elkhart County Historical Museum		TBD	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		X	X	X	X	X	
Conduct repair on west side of gym and storm water drainage copers	Elkhart County Historical Museum		\$2,500	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 2,500.00					
Purchase of vehicles for natural resources/public safety divisions	Equipment	Operations	\$43,000	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 43,000.00					
Purchase a dump truck with chipper box for park and forestry maintenance	Equipment	Operations	\$100,000	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment				\$ 100,000.00			
Replace high/low wood chipper for park and trail maintenance	Equipment	Operations	\$18,000	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment				\$ 18,000.00			
Towable wood chipper for trail use	Equipment	All Parks	\$4,500	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			\$ 4,500.00				
Golden Dam Inspections every two years	Golden Dam		\$15,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 5,000.00				\$ 5,000.00	
Safety signs and repair/replacement of pier	Golden Dam			NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Reconstruct fire pit options at shelters	Ox Bow Park	Black Maple/Coffee Tree/Honey Locust/ Stable	\$10,000	NRC, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00	\$ 2,500.00	
Road improvement, grade and roll road	Ox Bow Park	Coffee Tree to Stable	\$25,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment				\$ 25,000.00			
Complete fence along and restoration of Dike Golf Course: tee pads, baskets, signs, block, etc.	Ox Bow Park	Dike Golf	\$25,000	GD, NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 25,000.00					
Installation of rain barrel at gatehouse	Ox Bow Park	Gate House	\$300	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			\$ 300.00				
Ox Bow House electrical upgrades	Ox Bow Park	Ox Bow House	\$8,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 8,000.00					
Reinforce/fix of spillway bridge	Ox Bow Park	Ox Bow Park	\$5,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			\$ 5,000.00				
Implement different trash containment/procedure system	Ox Bow Park, River Preserve	Ox Bow Park	TBD	NRC, NRO	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			X	X			
Replace lawn mowers	Ox Bow Park, River Preserve	Ox Bow Park, River Preserve	\$40,000	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00				
Repair trail damage between CR 127 and 126, and CR 31 and 33	Pumpkinvine		\$20,000	NRC, GD	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			\$ 20,000.00				
Widen and repair the bridge at Benton Dam needle gates	River Preserve	Benton Dam	\$10,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 10,000.00					

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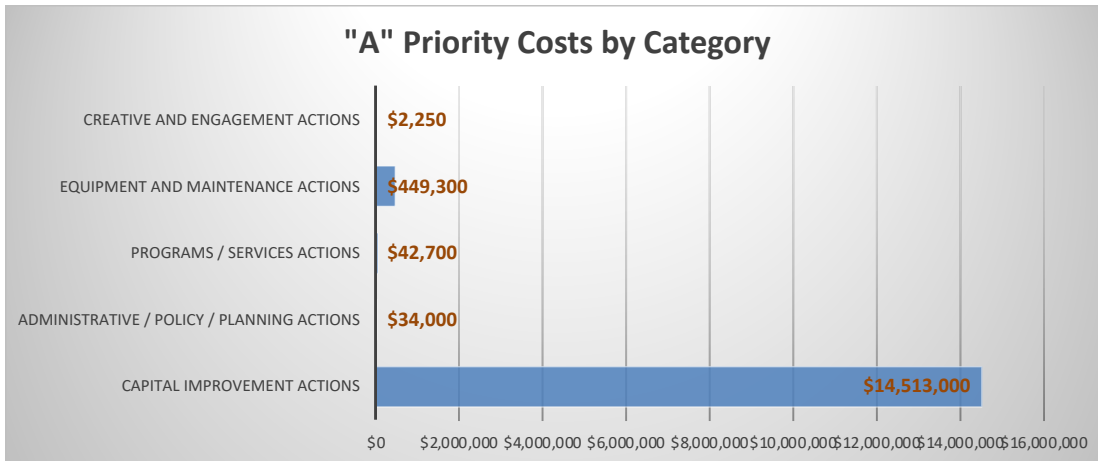
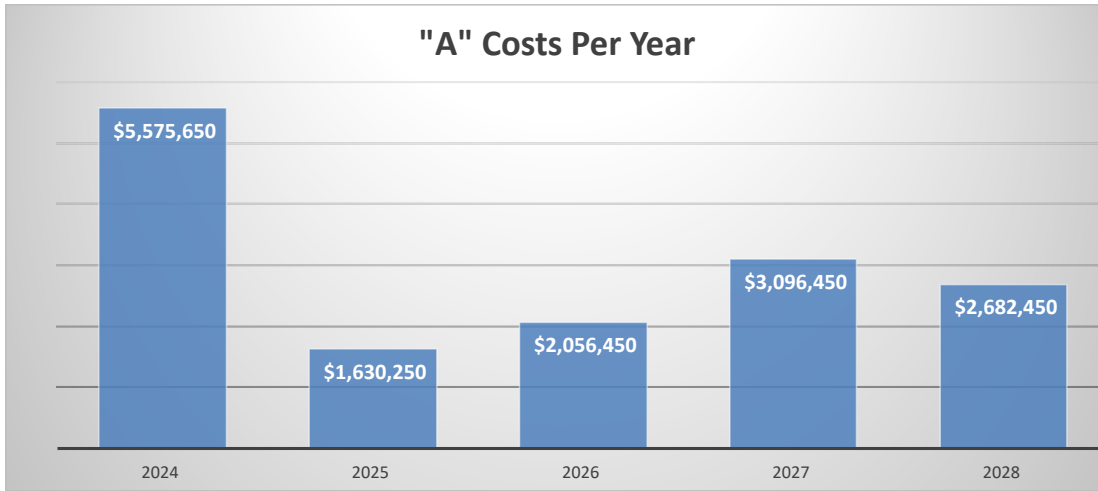
A Park Component / Plan of Action	B Park Site(s)	C Division or Site	D Total Costs (2024 – 2028)	E Funding Source	F Priority	G Category	H Notes / Comments	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
Replace all kiosks	River Preserve	Bainertown Benton	\$9,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00		
Repair soffit and fascia on DeFries home	River Preserve	DeFries Gardens	\$1,000	DE	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 1,000.00					
Repair erosion along riverbank at Treasure Island Park	Treasure Island Park		\$20,000	NRC, GD	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 20,000.00					
Re-design and make improvements of road and parking area	Treasure Island Park		\$50,000	NRC	A	Maintenance/ Equipment		\$ 10,000.00	\$ 40,000.00				
Purchase Utility Vehicle to replace aging equipment for park, trail, and facility maintenance			\$35,000	NRO, TA	A	Maintenance/ Equipment			\$ 25,000.00				
Complete energy audits for each park	All	All buildings	TBD	NRO	B	Maintenance/ Equipment			X				
Develop "adapt-a-trail" and "adopt-a-waterway" program	All	All Parks	TBD	NRO, GD	B	Maintenance/ Equipment			X				
Tree sprays, watering tank for trucks, small greenhouse for nurseries	All Parks		TBD	NRO, TA	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 20,000.00	
Portable saw mill to be sustainable with creating own lumber	All Parks		TBD	NRO	B	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Remove tube bridge due to erosion issues and seasonal flooding	Bonneyville		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 5,000.00	
Evaluate electrical system in Bonneyville Mill	Bonneyville	Mill	TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 10,000.00	
Painting of Bear Patch Shelter	Bonneyville		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 20,000.00	
Review stage condition	Elkhart County Historical Museum		TBD	GD	B	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Replace stairs to river with a river overlook / deck	Ox Bow Park		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 5,000.00	
Update archery range	Ox Bow Park		TBD	GD	B	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Repair and add walls to gatehouse interior	Ox Bow Park	Gate House	TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 3,000.00	
Purchase of mini-excavator	River Preserve	Operations	TBD	NRO, TA	B	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Accessible picnic areas at Treasures Island	Treasure Island Park		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 1,000.00	
Construct landing for water traffic to park	Treasure Island Park		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 4,000.00	
Install signage kiosk	Treasure Island Park		TBD	NRC	B	Maintenance/ Equipment						\$ 3,000.00	
Board decking at Cobus; removal of reed canopy grass in wetlands	Cobus Creek		TBD	NRC	C	Maintenance/ Equipment							
Construct well pipe from river to Bainertown pond and wetland	River Preserve	Bainertown	TBD	NRC	C	Maintenance/ Equipment							
EQUIPMENT AND MAINTENANCE TOTALS :								\$ 116,500.00	\$ 70,300.00	\$ 245,500.00	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 9,500.00	\$ 71,000.00

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Ekhart County Parks & Recreation Action Plan 2024-2028

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Five - Year Plan					Future Priority Estimates
								2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	
CREATIVE AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS & PARTNERSHIPS													
Continue to partner with Connect in Elkhart County and other entities and non-profits to support multi-use trail connections including 40-mile loop, and connections from St. Joe County, Wekarusa, Nappanee			TBD	GO/TIF	A	Capital Improvement		X	X	X	X	X	
Continue to be a part of the Vibe Art Communities 2.0 and foster the vision of park enhancing the quality of life for all Elkhart citizens			TBD	NRC, NRO, GD	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Develop partnerships with local artisans and businesses to promote Bortomville Mill four products			TBD	NRO	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Establish greater connections with Visitor Bureaus, Chambers of Commerce, and Economic Development			TBD	NRO	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Continue to network with area park departments in Elkhart County			TBD		A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Support the newly formed Elkhart County CISMA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area)			TBD	NRO	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Continue to offer all libraries in Elkhart County an Ox Bow Park pass that is available as an "experiential" checkout with library cards			\$250	In-kind	A	Creative & Engagement		\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	
Continue to engage local hospitals and medical professionals to promote parks as a partner in healthy lifestyles.			TBD	GD	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Seek partnerships with local colleges and universities for service learning opportunities with students and faculty			TBD	NRO, GD	A	Creative & Engagement		X	X	X	X	X	
Promote recreational use of waterways in Elkhart County as part of the Elkhart County Waterways Alliance: including development of interpretive canoe trail routes with waterway and informational signage (ex. location, river miles, emergency contacts)			\$2,000	GD	A	Creative & Engagement		\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00	\$ 400.00	
Feasibility study of future equestrian park, including coordination of volunteers to fundraise for such a large endeavor and/or developing with other possible partners such as playgrounds or gateway			TBD	GD	B	Creative & Engagement					X	X	\$ 20,000.00
Work with MACOG and other transportation partners to develop plan for public transportation to area parks as well as future implementation of electric vehicle infrastructure			TBD	GD	B	Creative & Engagement			X	X			
CREATIVE AND ENGAGEMENT TOTALS:								\$ 450.00	\$ 450.00	\$ 450.00	\$ 450.00	\$ 450.00	\$ 20,000.00
TOTALS "A" Priorities:								\$ 5,575,650	\$ 1,630,250	\$ 2,056,450	\$ 3,096,450	\$ 2,682,450	\$ 28,273,000
TOTALS "A" Priorities Per Year:								\$ 5,575,650	\$ 1,630,250	\$ 2,056,450	\$ 3,096,450	\$ 2,682,450	\$ 28,273,000

Action Year Budget Summary



Funding Resources

Many are the demands on local government to fund the variety of programs provided to the public sector. Following, is a brief description of the principal resources available to the Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board for implementing programs for recreational purposes.

NRC — Non-Reverting Capital Funds

Non-Reverting Capital Fund Accounts are created for the purpose of acquiring land or making specific capital improvements. All proceeds from gate entry fees at Ox Bow County Park are deposited into this capital fund.

NRO — Non-Reverting Operations

Non-Reverting Operating funds are created for park purposes from which expenditures may be made by appropriation by the Parks and Recreation Board. All receipts from program participation, event admissions, concessions, rentals, sales of merchandise and food, user fees from disc golf and archery operations and revenue generated by park operations throughout the park system and rental fees from facilities are deposited into the non-reverting operating fund.

TA — Park General Budget

Each year a significant portion of the tax appropriated Park General Fund is devoted to personnel expenses. These expenses include base salaries, medical and life insurance benefit coverage, and PERF (Public Employee Retirement Fund) contributions. In addition to personnel expenses, this fund is also used to cover maintenance costs associated with park upkeep, operating expenses, and costs associated with promoting and running the recreation program and special events as well as machinery, equipment and building repairs.

COIT — County Option Income Taxes

Adopted by county councils, city councils and towns, this income tax raises funds for new spending for all local units except schools.

CEDIT — County Economic Development Income Taxes

Revenue raised by CEDIT must be used for economic development projects or public capital projects.

CCF — Cumulative Capital Fund

The Park and Recreation Law 36-10-3-20 allows money to be placed in a fund for the purpose of acquiring land or making specific capital improvements. The Park and Recreation Department can also make requests to the County Council for funds from the general CCD Fund for specific projects.

DE— DeFries Gardens Endowment Fund

The Elkhart County Parks is very fortunate to have an endowment fund for the operation of the DeFries Gardens site located within the Elkhart County River Preserve. This fund was left by Elisabeth DeFries to maintain the homestead and gardens located at the site. The endowment is cared for and maintained by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County.

GD — Gifts and Donations

Donations of money, land, and time are important resources to the Park Department. Many recreation activities and special events would not occur if such donations were not received from individuals, service clubs, and businesses. Over the past five years, the Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund was created at the Community Foundation of Elkhart County. Proceeds from this endowment can be used each year for various projects. Also, land donations to the park system have been received since early in the history of the Park Department and, where

advantageous, these land donations should be encouraged and received by the Park Board.

GOB — General Obligation Bonds

General obligation bonds, which are retired by tax money, provide a funding source for implementation of large scale projects or improvements. The Park Board can not exceed a set percentage (2%) of the assessed valuation of the taxing district. Public hearings must be held and approval is required by the County Council. The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board has never bonded, but may want to review this option for major repairs and updates.

RIF — Recreation Impact Fees

A Recreational Impact Fee Ordinance allows for the new housing developments to assist in the funding of facilities (based on identified recreational standards) to serve that particular population growth. This funding source is not to be used for current facility deficiencies.

TIF – Tax Incentive Financing

For recreation and trail amenities within or near TIF districts, the redevelopment commission (RDC) can play a partner role in helping to fund capital costs involved with developing new park and trails amenities. This aids in improving quality of life and reducing blight.

HIF — Highway Impact Fees

Similar to the Recreation Impact Fee funding source, the City’s Highway Impact Fees can be used for trail development within road right-of-ways.

LWCF — Land and Water Conservation Funds

Administered by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation, these funds are used most predominantly for park development of outdoor recreation facilities. These grant funds can be utilized to finance up to 50% of the cost of eligible projects and are awarded annually. To qualify for LWCF funds, a city/county must have a park and recreation board established in accordance with state statutes and have an approved Park and Recreation Master Plan.

HCT – President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust

President Benjamin Harrison Conservation Trust was created to fund the purchase of natural areas for public use. Funded by the sale of environmental license plates and donations, the money is used for land acquisition. A Project Committee reviews the proposed projects submitted to the Conservation Trust Committee, which in turn recommends approval by the Governor. The Trust Committee members are appointed by the governor and legislative leaders. A portion of the Conservation Trust funds is available to the Division of Outdoor Recreation for the purchase of land that meets established criteria. Projects could include greenways and land for trails.

RTP —Recreational Trails Program

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is an assistance program of the Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Federal transportation funds benefit recreation by making funds available to the States to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both non-motorized and motorized recreational trail uses. The RTP funds come from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, and represent a portion of the motor fuel excise tax collected from non-highway recreational fuel use: fuel used for off-highway recreation by snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, off-highway motorcycles, and off-highway light trucks.

HPF — Historic Preservation Fund Program

Each year, the U.S. Congress appropriates approximately funds to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) The HPF provides matching grants to encourage private and non-federal investment in historic preservation efforts nationwide, and assists State, local governments, and Indian tribes with expanding and accelerating their historic preservation activities nationwide. HPF grants serve as a catalyst and "seed money" for preserving and protecting our nation's irreplaceable heritage for this and future generations.

LARE — Lake and River Enhancement

The goal of the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Lake and River Enhancement Section is to protect and enhance aquatic habitat for fish and wildlife, to insure the continued viability of Indiana's publicly accessible lakes and streams for multiple uses, including recreational opportunities. This is accomplished through measures that reduce non-point sediment and nutrient pollution of surface waters to a level that meets or surpasses state water quality standards. To accomplish this goal, the LARE Program provides technical and financial assistance for qualifying projects.

OG — Other Grants

Other grant sources, besides the traditional recreation related ones sponsored by the state and federal government, exist for park improvement projects. Also, there are urban forestry grants available and grants from the Indiana Arts Commission that can be related to park and recreation projects. Private companies are also often sponsors of foundations and grant programs that may be related to an aspect of park and recreation such as tree planting, aid to persons with disabilities, or programs for disadvantaged youth. Companies also sometimes sponsor volunteer programs to the community with their employee or executive resources. In addition, Elkhart County Parks has opportunities to apply for a grant with the Community Foundation of Elkhart County.

Funding Sources

- A. Indiana Department of Transportation
- B. Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation
- C. Indiana Committee for the Humanities
- D. Indiana Arts Commission
- E. Indiana Department of Aging and Community Services
- F. Indiana Federal Property Program
- G. Indiana Department of Commerce
- H. Indiana State Board of Health
- I. U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration
- J. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- K. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- L. U.S. Armed Services
- M. U.S. Department of Education
- N. President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports
- O. Green Thumb, Inc.
- P. The Nature Conservancy
- Q. Acres, Inc.
- R. The Trust for Public Land
- S. National Association for the Exchange of Industrial Resources
- T. Fish America Foundation

- U. Capital Fund Drive Campaign
- V. Memorial Giving
- W. Deferred Giving
- X. Public-Private Partnerships
- Y. Private Philanthropy
- Z. Park Foundations and “Friends” Groups

The aforementioned funding sources are not intended as an exhaustive list of available sources. In carrying out its responsibilities, the Park and Recreation Board will continue to research various federal grant-in-aid programs and private sector resources that could be utilized in the development of park and recreation projects.

