



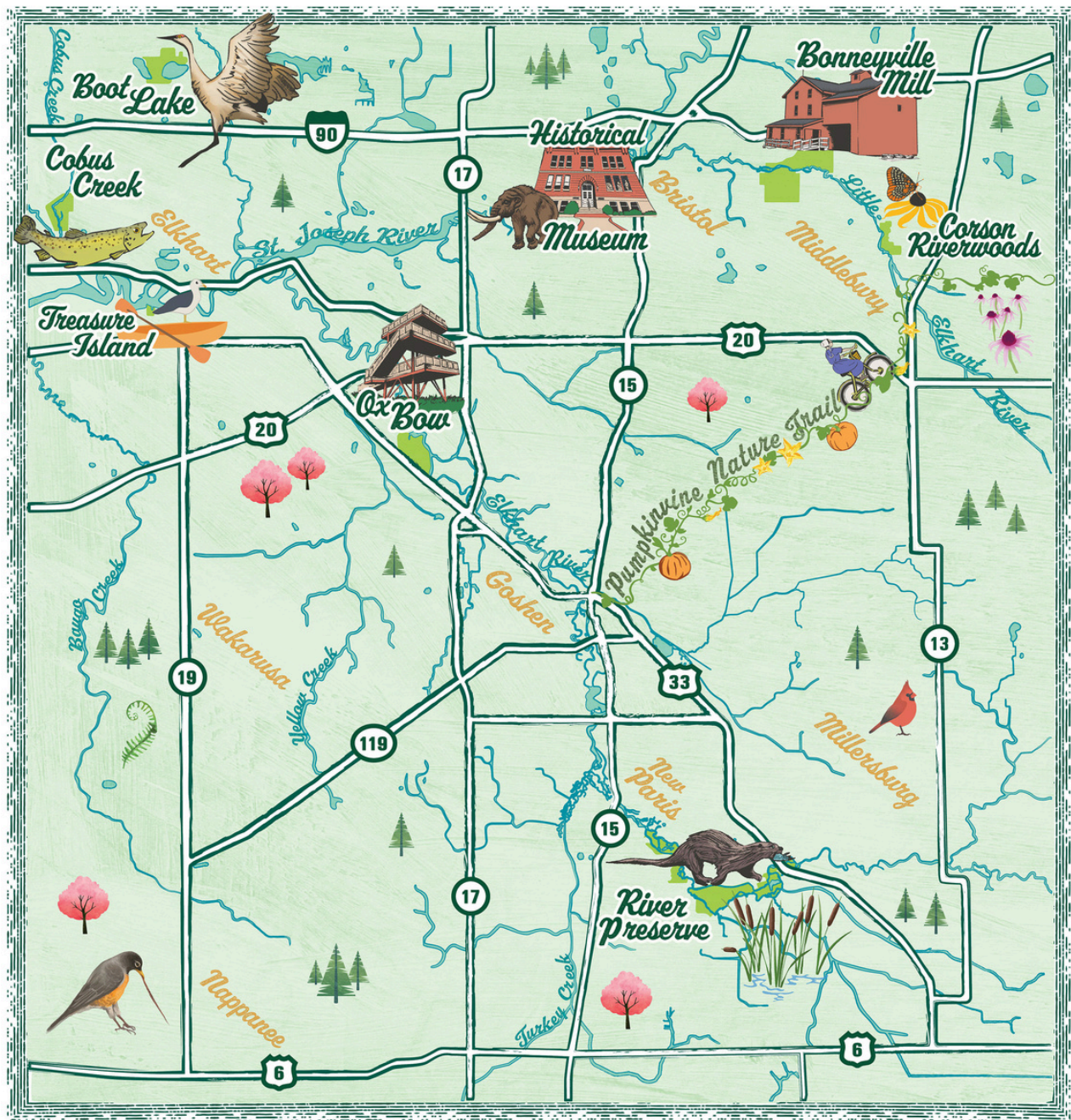
2023-2024
**Annual
Report**
& highlights



ELKHART COUNTY
PARKS
— .ORG —



explore Elkhart County Parks



Ox Bow
23033 C.R. 45 • GOSHEN, IN
ACRES: 200



Boot Lake
51430 C.R. 3 • ELKHART, IN
ACRES: 300



Elkhart County Historical Museum
304 W. VISTULA ST. • BRISTOL, IN
TUES-SAT • 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.



Bonneyville Mill
53373 C.R. 131 • BRISTOL, IN
ACRES: 222



Cobus Creek
30680 C.R. 8 • ELKHART, IN
ACRES: 84



Treasure Island
56226 ARMOUR AVE. • ELKHART, IN
ACRES: 4



River Preserve
17477 C.R. 46 • NEW PARIS, IN
ACRES: 358



Pumpkinvine Nature Trail
COUNTY-WIDE • SEE WEBSITE FOR ACCESS POINTS
MILES: 16.5



Corson Riverwoods
12773 C.R. 12 • MIDDLEBURY, IN
ACRES: 82



Reflections from the Director

If you ask our team what they enjoy about their careers, most would say it is the **reward of serving our community**. There is intrinsic value in connecting people to the *legacies and landscapes* of Elkhart County.

Many of us grew up with plenty of places to ride bikes, chase butterflies, catch fish, build forts, visit museums, and play in open fields and forests. With no state parks, state historic sites, or federal parks and forests in the county, Elkhart County Parks serves the community by protecting these important spaces **to ensure the next generation has those experiences**.

Over the past two years we have worked hard to ensure the community continues to have great places to live, work, and play. The rewards of developing Corson Riverwoods County Park, unplugging a decades old log jam, providing improved restroom facilities, and witnessing the Friends of the Pumpkinvine open the 'last gap' of the trail leave a great sense of satisfaction that we truly are doing good things in the community.

Not only do we connect people to the outdoors, we connect them to the culture and history of the place they live with sites such as Bonneyville Mill, DeFries Gardens, and the Elkhart County Historical Museum. Thank you to our staff, boards, partners, funders, visitors, and volunteers who help us to meet the mission of ***inspiring connections with culture and nature!***

Ronda DeCaire, Director of Parks

Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board

Klaus Mueller
Karin Frey
Karen Mackowiak
Robert Kelly
Larry Andrews
John Hardy
William Wilson

*Inspiring
connections
with culture
& nature*



County Commissioners

Brad Rogers
Suzanne Weirick
Bob Barnes

County Council

Douglas Graham
Randall D. Yohn
Darryl J. Riegsecker
David L. Hess
Adam Bujalski
Thomas Stump
Steven Clark





Major Highlights

Plan for the Future

The Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board and staff hosted a series of public meetings and survey to gather input for the 2024-2028 Five Year Master Plan. More than 500 people participated in the public questionnaire that was distributed in both English and Spanish. The final plan identifies the needs and goals of the department over the next five years. It can be found here: elkhartcountyparks.org/about/masterplan



River Recreation Revival

For more than two decades, a section of the Elkhart River north of Ox Bow County Park was slowly 'collecting' trees and creating a large log jam. In 2022, the park closed the paddle launch for those entering the water. Then in 2023, the Elkhart County Commissioners and Council supported funding to remove the log jam near the park to create safer recreation opportunities for paddling, boating, fishing, and other water users.



Major Highlights

Restrooms Replacement

With support from the Elkhart County Commissioners, County Council, Stormwater, and Surveyors Office, the Elkhart County Parks completed the construction of its largest ever capital improvement project with the installation of 4 modern restrooms and 11 latrines along with accessibility to each location. The design, engineering, infrastructure and restrooms were a \$4M project funded by the American Rescue Plan Act to help protect water resources from aging restroom infrastructure and improve accessibility in most of the parks. The grand opening was celebrated with a 'toilet paper cutting.' A majority are now open to the public with the rest coming onboard in 2025 after public water testing is complete.



Disc Golf Improvements

Ox Bow County Park's Flying Disc Sanctuary received a facelift prior to celebrating 35 years of the course with founders Dan Shenk (*left*) and Jim Ingold (*right*). Volunteer and disc golf advocate, Jason Samuel (*center*) spearheaded fundraising efforts to match a Community Foundation of Elkhart County grant. More than \$29,925 was raised to replace baskets, tee pads, signage, and kiosk. In addition, a new putting green was incorporated and leagues have been implemented. As a result, the number of annual disc golf passes sold has doubled since 2019 and players have joined us from across the region as well as from 26 different states.





Major Highlights

Corson Riverwoods County Park

Phase One of the Corson Riverwoods County Park was completed in late 2023 with a parking lot and 1.5 mile looped trail. A playpath was installed in 2024 (see below). In 2025 a shelter will be constructed and restrooms opened to the public. Future plans will include an expanded trail system to explore scenic views of the Little Elkhart River and wetlands. This 84 acre park northwest of Middlebury was donated by Mr. Tom Corson and development funded by many grants and partners including a READI 1.0 and Community Foundation of Elkhart County grants.



Pollinator Playpath Installation

A main feature of Corson Riverwoods County Park is Elkhart County's first trail designed for children. The "Pollinator Playpath" features four accessible play pods strategically placed along a 1.5 mile trail to encourage families to move together. Ladybugs, bees, butterflies and hummingbirds are featured in the climbing equipment. The pollinator themed playpath encourages fun physical activity for families while exploring and learning about our native pollinators. Fourteen acres of prairie habitat and trees have also been planted at the site to increase pollinator habitat.



Programs & Events

Special Events include Dogs, Hayrides, Bugs

The Elkhart County Parks attracts an average of **5,000 people to special events EACH year**. Major events the past two years included Dogapalooza, Perseids Party, Cast Iron Cookout, Illuminated Hike, Bug Night, Bonneyville Birdfest, Halloween Campfire & Hayrides, Pancake Breakfasts, Disc Golf Ribbon Cutting & Concert, and Holiday at the Mill.



Learning Field Trips

One of the most important visitor groups to the Elkhart County Parks are school-aged children. Teaching the next generation about the cultural and natural history of their local community is vital to our mission. **In 2023 and 2024 our staff provided field trips for more than 15,250 children** from local schools, preschools, homeschools, and scout troops.



Community Outreach

The Elkhart County Parks interpretive team enjoyed hosting booths at regional events and festivals. **In 2023 and 2024 they reached approximately 19,774 citizens via hands on education booths** at events, such as the

WaNee Pedal Party, Middlebury Riverfest, Hispanic Heritage Festival, Master Gardener Tour, EnviroFest, and Teacher Resource Fair. In addition, they hosted a week long educational display at the Elkhart County 4-H Fair in a brand new exhibit space.





In the Parks

Pumpkinvine Trail Improvements

The Friends of the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail (Pumpkinvine Trails Coalition) are one of the most significant partners to area parks. In 2024 they completed the construction of 'the gap' to keep the 17+ mile trail off road. In addition, they coordinated the repaving of the trail east of CR 127 in 2024.

We appreciate their effort in assisting with the on going care of one of Elkhart County's greatest assets.

Multi-use trails such as the Pumpkinvine are not only used by the local community for leisure and travel, but help boost the economy by attracting tourism spending.



One-Room School House Refresh

The One Room School at Bonneyville Mill has been hosting a monthly open house for visitors to explore the classroom space. In addition, the facility recieved a much needed facelift of repairs and painting in 2024. The facility continues to be available for One-Room School House programs for students to experience life of yesteryear.



Goats Hired to Clear Invasive Plants

Special visitors to Boot Lake Nature Preserve spent a month in 2024 eating invasive plant species. 'Goats on the Go' was hosted at the preserve thanks to a special donation from the Davis family. The goats helped to clear about an acre of invasive plants to help with restoration of the land in a sustainable manner.



In the Parks

Baintertown Shelter Roof Replaced

Baintertown Shelter in River Preserve County Park received a much needed roof replacement. Along with the upgrade of a new latrine nearby, this scenic little shelter is a great place to host your next birthday party! For more information about this and other shelter rentals, find more on the website at elkhartcountyparks.org.



Improved Security for Parks

The Elkhart County Parks hired a public safety officer in 2023 and transferred some of the part-time staff to assist in 2024. This has helped to provide better customer service and interactions with park visitors and at events. In addition, new security systems including cameras and other features in buildings were installed to protect park assets.



Other Park and Facility Enhancements

In addition to regular routine maintenance, many other improvements were accomplished within the County Parks. The projects included parking lot improvements, canal cleanups, invasive plant removal, new equipment purchases, storm damage repairs, shop organization, trail erosion repairs, bridge replacement, signage, and more.





Historical Museum

Exhibit Room Renovation: *Clues through the Lens*

The Elkhart County Historical Museum completed a room remodel that includes new windows. This opened the opportunity for its newest exhibit, *Clues through the Lens*, which incorporates thought-provoking photographs from the collection of the Elkhart County Historical Society. The exhibit interprets more than 60 historic and current photographs of the region spanning from the 1860s to 2024. The images allow visitors to discover, inspire, and transform their thoughts as they engage with the past to the present.



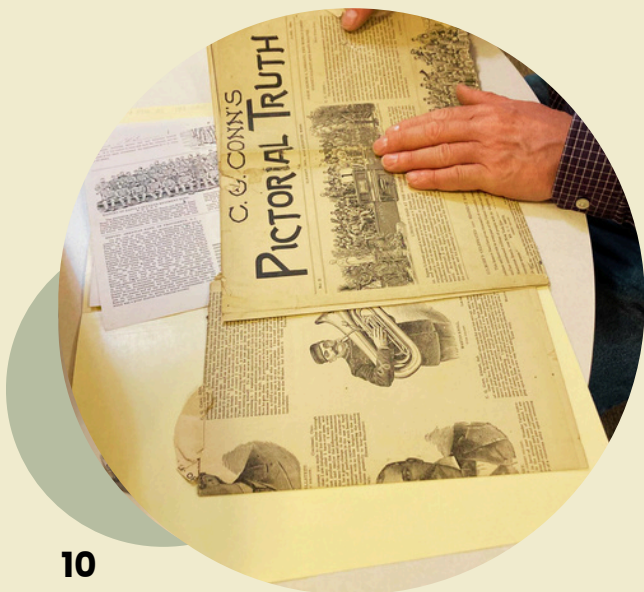
Emma Malloy Historical Marker Now on Display

The Elkhart County Historical Museum staff have worked diligently the past several years to ensure that a State Historical Marker was dedicated to Emma Malloy outside of the Elkhart Public Library. Ms. Malloy (1839-1907) was an activist, evangelist, and political reformer who advocated for women's rights. She co-founded the Observer newspaper in Elkhart in 1872 and her speeches catapulted her to an international stage as she lectured around the world.



Indiana Memory Project Images Expand

The Elkhart County Historical Museum was loaned a large-format scanner from the Indiana State Library for the past two years. It was used by volunteers and staff to scan more than 10,000 images in the Elkhart County Historical Society's collection. Many of these images can be found online at the Indiana Memory Project: digital.library.in.gov



Milling Around

Extended Mill Hours Increase Attendance

Over the past several years, we have grown the opportunity for the community and tourists to visit the mill. First the mill open season was expanded by four weeks from mid-April to mid-November. In 2023 we opened on Tuesdays, adding a sixth open day to the week.

As a result, we have been able to reach approximately **2,000 additional annual visitors** during these extra open hours. **In addition, the Mill celebrated 50 years of being open to the public for interpretation!**



Limited Edition Grains Showcased

Bonneyville Mill began featuring 'limited edition' grains for sale that are not a part of the typical line-up of corn and wheat ground. The new grains each had their own 'grain day' at the mill, which features grinding demonstrations and taste tests. They were then sold in limited batches for a short time. Special grains featured were Barley, Durum Wheat, Blue Corn, and Triticale.



Mill Revenue Increases

With expanded hours, gift shop items, introduction of corn bread and pancake mixes, and limited edition flours in addition to the traditional grains ground and sold at Bonneyville Mill, the department **increased sales by 49% over the past four years**. In 2025, we will release the sale of vintage style County Park posters to add to the array of special gift items.



Habitat Happenings

Improving Natural Resources

One of the greatest assets of the Elkhart County Park & Recreation Board is the land entrusted in our care.

The wetlands, rivers, prairie, and woodlands that encompass more than 1,300 acres of habitat alongside areas for recreation protect some of the last remaining natural resources in Elkhart County. In 2024, the department hired its first Natural Resource Coordinator to lead the protection of these habitats. A land management plan is being written to help guide decisions on such things as non-indigenous plants, restoration of native habitats, protection of rare flora and fauna, and more.



Citizen Science

Local citizens helped the County Parks collect scientific data. The Christmas Bird Count contributes data on winter bird populations on a national scale and is entering its 30th year. During the 2024 count, a record number of 87 species and 28,031 individual birds were reported. Staff also worked with 13 observers the past two years to identify more than 65 species of plants during a Spring Wildflower BioBlitz using the citizen science iNaturalist app.



Prairie Maintenance

The Elkhart County Parks maintains some of the prairie habitat in our natural areas through prescribed burns. Places such as Boot Lake Nature Preserve and the River Preserve County Park held prairie burns in 2023 and 2024. In addition, the department also maintains prairie habitat through mowing procedures and will re-establish more prairie in the future.

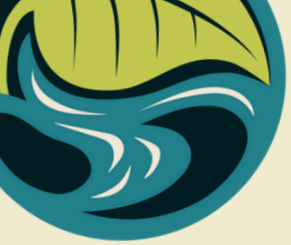


Research in the Parks

Five partners utilized various Elkhart County Parks to research wildlife and habitats over the past two years.



- In 2023, IU South Bend biology students concluded a **study to compare urban and rural habitats and moth populations**. They included a site at Bonneyville Mill County Park. On left is a beautiful yellow IO Moth that was found during their research.
- The Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and Little Elkhart Chapter of Trout Unlimited (LECTU) worked together to not only release trout, but to **monitor brown trout populations for naturally breeding specimens** in the Little Elkhart River near Corson Riverwoods County Park.
- Entomologists at Environmental Solutions & Innovations, under a grant from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, did a multi-year statewide study to search for the federally endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee. Boot Lake Nature Preserve was one of the sites for Elkhart County. Although no Rusty Patched bees were discovered, **eight other bumble bee species were documented in Elkhart County** including the Black and Gold, Two-spotted, Lemon cuckoo, Half-black, Brown-belted (photo to left), Common Eastern, as well as two species in decline; the American and Golden Northern Bumble Bees.
- in 2024, Delaney Jones, a master student at Purdue University **researched Spotted Lanternfly populations in Ox Bow County Park**. The invasive brown and orange moth first found in the U.S. in 2014 and in Indiana in 2021 can devastate certain plant species, including fruit crops. Although none were caught in traps, she did document adult specimens in the park. This research continues into 2025 and will help staff to eliminate this insect as it is found.
- Loyola University Chicago is **researching populations of Butler's and Kirtland's snakes** throughout northern Indiana. Boot Lake Nature Preserve continues to be a part of that study. To date, only common snake species have been found by the students, but the research continues.



Partnerships &

Partnerships and collaborations are vital to the Elkhart County Parks and we appreciate all who help us create a great community. Collaborative partnership highlights in 2023 & 2024 include:

- The **Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau** partnered with the Elkhart County Parks on several projects including the ever popular Quilt Garden & Mural Tour. New projects also included filming ‘*Elkhart County Storytelling*’ at the Mill, involving the department in the ‘*Well-Crafted*’ promotion series, and involving staff in the ‘*Elkhart County People and Places*’ podcasts.
- A partnership was created in 2023 to highlight a national ‘**Stand Down**’ event for Veterans in Elkhart County. Multiple area park agencies and the **Office of Veteran’s Affairs** hosted, and **Goodwill** sponsored this new annual event to honor the service and sacrifice of all veterans.
- With rivers flowing through most of our Parks, it is no surprise that staff are involved in the monitoring and protection of these natural resources. Some of our river related partnerships include the **Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy**, **Upper and Lower Elkhart Watershed** steering committees, **Elkhart River Challenge** and **Elkhart River Restoration Association**.
- Trail partnerships are an important aspect to the Elkhart County Parks for planning, as well as maintaining. **The Friends of the Pumpkinvine (now known as The Pumpkinvine Coalition)**, other area park departments, **Community Foundation**, and other non-profits are leading the vision for the **Connect in Elkhart County** multi-use plans. Staff have partnered by offering a Sweet Cycle Rides program, and participating in the WaNee Non-motorized Connection Plan Steering Committee. The County Commissioners also completed a trail bridge project over US 33 which will be a part of this growing network.
- We are partners with area libraries by offering free checkout of Ox Bow Park passes at every library in the County. In addition, the **Elkhart Public Library** hosted a “Books and Boots” program and **Middlebury Library** presented programs celebrating the outdoors, as well.
- The Elkhart County Historical Museum partnered with the **Indiana Historical Society** to host a ‘Deaccessioning Demystified Workshop’ for other professional museum staff in the region. They also partnered with **The Elkhart Truth** to protect some of the archives in the former Truth Building and accepted several items in the **Elkhart County Historical Society’s** collection.
- **Indiana Land Protection Alliance** and **Wood Land Lakes RC&D** designed wetland interpretation signs and placed one along the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail for trail users to take creative selfies and learn about these amazing habitats that help control stormwater.
- **Goshen Health** worked with area park departments to offer a Park Bench Fitness program. Participants could scan a QR code from a sign near the bench to access free exercise videos in English and Spanish. There were more than 570 code scans and 722 video views of the exercise program. Elkhart County Parks hosted Park Bench Fitness signs at Ox Bow, River Preserve, and Cobus Creek parks.



Collaborations

- Multiple natural resources agencies and volunteers led by a City of Goshen AmeriCorps member came together to create a **Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA)** for Elkhart County. The group works together to educate about native plants and removal of invasive species.
- Staff are members of the **Elkhart County Museum Association** and partnered with various museums in Elkhart County, including loaning items to enhance Ruthmere's "Roaring Indiana in the Jazz Age" exhibit.
- We greatly appreciate the volunteers from the **Indiana Master Naturalist** and **Michiana Master Gardener** programs who provide much needed volunteers in a variety of tasks from maintaining the quilt garden to monitoring bluebirds.
- The **Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association (NIMBA)** has been working to modernize the MTB trail at Bonneyville Mill including new berms, wallride, and dirt tabletops for added adventure.
- We appreciate our natural resource partners who provide support and expertise: **Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Acres Land Trust, Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center.**
- The Elkhart County Parks extends a big thank you to **other County Departments** that support staff, including the Elkhart County Commissioners Office, Elkhart County Council, Elkhart County Highway, Health Department, Soil & Water, Planning & Development, Redevelopment Commission, Stormwater, Surveyors Office, Sheriff Department, Auditors Office, and Elkhart County Landfill.



Thank you to the following outside supporters who hosted events and leagues and attracted approximately 9,000 people each year:

DISC GOLF/ULTIMATE FRISBEE

- Maple City Ice Bowl
- Be My Valentine Doubles
- Birthday Bash Competition
- Maple City Spring/Summer/Fall Leagues
- Turkey Shoot Disc Golf Event
- Goshen Ultimate League
- Summer Sizzler/The Classic/Dog Days Doubles Three Day Event

5K/WALKS/RIDES

- Ridge, Run and Roll
- Ride to End ALS
- Paws for a Cause 5K Run/Strut your Mutt
- Pumpkinvine Bike Ride
- Haunted Hilly/Hustle
- ADEC Ride-A-Bike
- Fall Social Ride

DAY CAMPS

- Cub Scout Day Camp
- Mini 4-H Day Camp

CROSS COUNTRY MEETS

- Early Bird Invitational
- Tri Cross Country Meet
- Dual Cross Country Meet
- Sectional Cross Country Meet
- Minutemen Classic Invitational
- Northern Indiana Conference (NIC) Stomp
- Northern Lakes Conference (NLC) Round Robin
- NIC/NLC Meet

OTHER

- Concord High School Senior Sunset
- Soccerland
- Community Health Clinic
- Picnic in the Park Storytime w/Cleveland Library
- NIMBA Time Trials



Thank you

Donors & Sponsors

Special Event Sponsors

Thor Industries
Interra Credit Union
Brinkley RV
South Bend-Elkhart Bird Alliance
Connect in Elkhart County

Projects and Programs

Mary and Rick Davis
Ron Geyer
Goshen Public Library
Goshen Health
Community Foundation of Elkhart County
Friends of the Elkhart County Parks
Ox Bow Elementary School

Disc Golf Renovation Sponsors

Jason & Jenni Samuel Family
James Ingold
Community Foundation
of Elkhart County
Robert Weed Plywood
Unique Siding & Remodeling
Dan & Kathy Seltenright
Concord Ox Bow PTO
ADGC
Caleb Morris
Casey Stump
Goshen Brewing Company
Elkhart Public Library



Goshen Ultimate
Leatherman Supply
Meade Septic Design
Friends of the
Elkhart County Parks
St. Joe Valley Disc Golf Club
Lycro Manufacturing
Maple City Disc Golf

Endowment Builders

Elkhart County Parks Legacy Fund

Mr. & Mrs. Lynn Bradley
Ms. Karen Mackowiak
Mr. & Mrs. Jon Kauffman-Kennel
Mr. Timothy Armstrong
Ms. Janelle Kantola
-in memory of daughter
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Watson



DeFries Gardens Endowment

Mr. Robert Steury
Mr. & Mrs. Edward Minnick
Mr. Jarold Tyler & Ms. Mary Klassen

*Thank you to the Community Foundation
of Elkhart County who hosts these
endowments and matched these gifts by 25%*



*In Honor of Lynn Matthews'
Retirement:
Tim & Delia Waits*

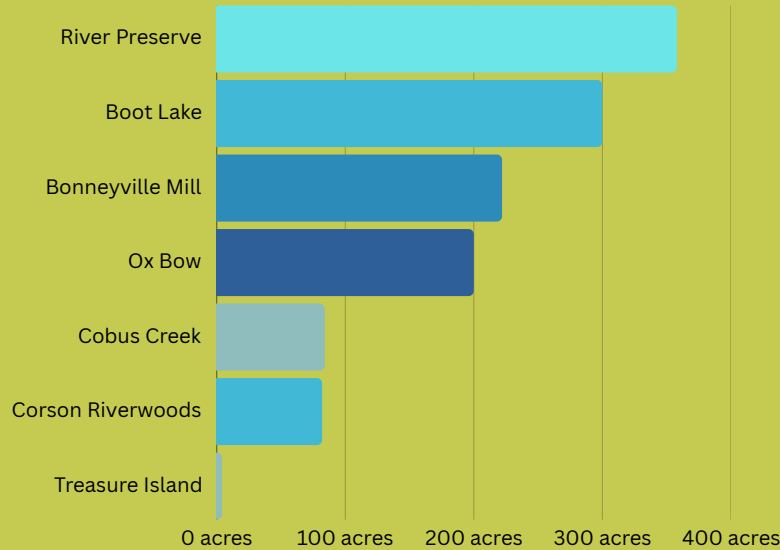
*In Memory of Parents:
Dale & Jewel Love*

*In Memory of Eva Long:
Robert and Gabriela Moore*

*In Memory of Kris Barone:
Joe and Donna Hibshmann
Tim Madison
Zolman Family*

By the Numbers

County Parks by the Acre

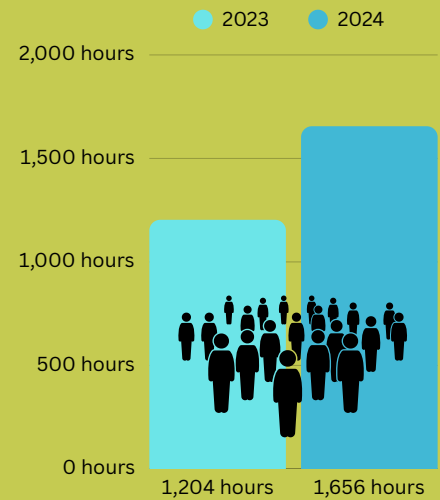


Public Safety Impact

More than **4,500** Public Engagement Contacts with visitors in 2024 to improve communication with visitors and provide customer service.



Volunteer Hours



Note: Some volunteers don't track their hours, so this number is higher!

Indiana Memory Project

Museum Images Viewed



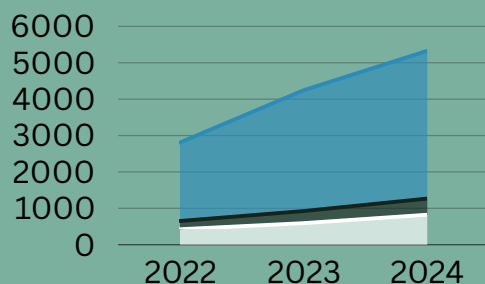
2023: 7,050

2024: 11,548

Disc Golf Stats

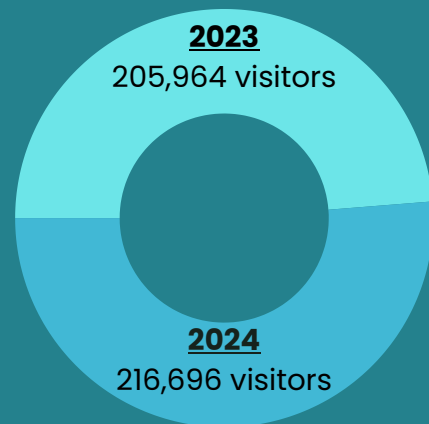


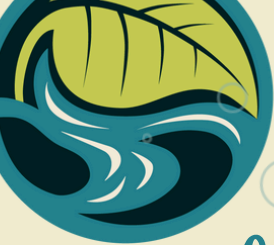
- Unique Players
- First Time Players
- Total Rounds



Most Visited Park?

Ox Bow County Park





By the Numbers

Popular Programs



Pancake Breakfast

178

Illuminated Hike

380



Crossroads Tours

134



Holiday at the Mill

857

Bug Night

230



Nature Field Trips

5,600



Halloween Hayride

2,000



Dogapalooza

1,724



Bird Fest

217



Perseids Party

150



Disc Golf Concert

312



Cast Iron Cookout

125



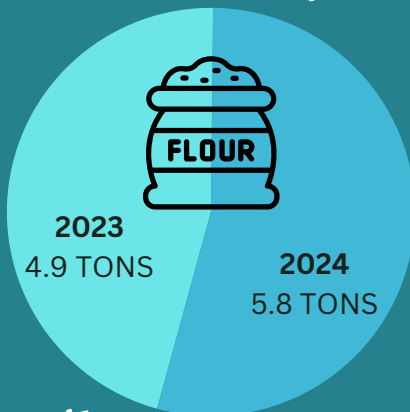
By the Numbers

Top 10 Invasive Species



Grinding Grains

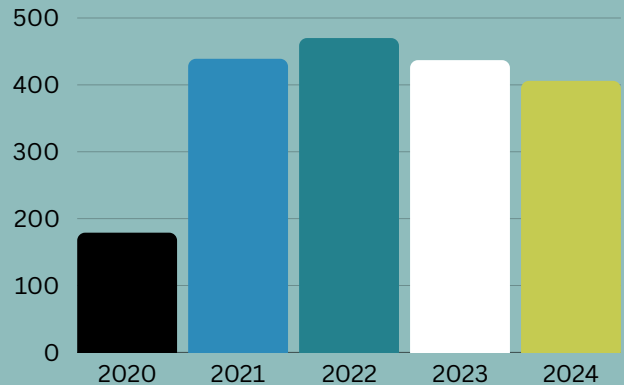
Amount of wheat, corn, and other grains milled and sold at Bonneyville Mill.



Fun Fact ONE ton of flour weighs the same as a bison

Facility Rentals

Total number of facilities rented at Ox Bow, Bonneyville, Historical Museum, River Preserve, and Cobus Creek over the past five years.



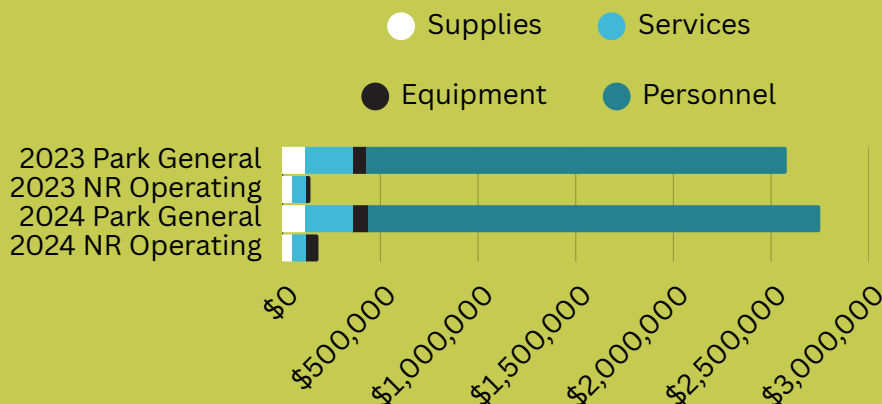
Note: restroom construction project impacted the ability to rent some shelters in 2024

Pumpkinvine Trail

Electronic trail counters record an average of **290,000** annual users of the multi-use Pumpkinvine Nature Trail



Park Operating Budget



Tax Fact



An Elkhart County homestead with a gross property value of \$200,000 generates \$17.55 in the Park General Fund towards your local County Parks. In a household with a family of five this equates to \$3.51 per person per year.

Non-reverting (NR) Operating funds are generated from user fees such as programs, sales, and facility rentals and are used to supplement the budget.



Vibrant Volunteers

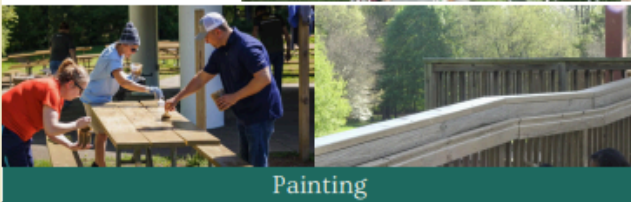
RVIA Refresh of Ox Bow Park

**RVIA DAY
MAY 10
2023**

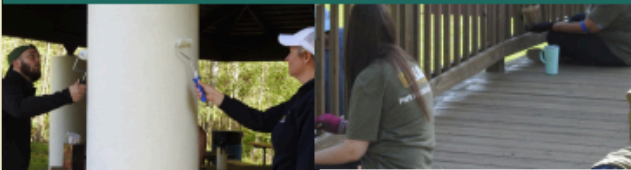
MODERN RESTROOM REMODEL



In May of 2023 we were honored to be selected by the RV Industry Association's (RVIA) Emerging Leaders Coalition for their Annual All-Industry Volunteer Day.



Painting



litter pickup

Hundreds of volunteers spent the day repairing and renovating roofs, bridges, stairs, shelters, and playgrounds, in addition to concrete work, picking up hundreds of pounds of litter, and removing invasive species.

CHAPEL ROOF REPLACED



invasive removal,
tee pad concrete,
trees & playgrounds mulched



NEW STAIRS TO BOARDWALK



The Department especially appreciated the leadership or staff from Lippert and Forest River for organizing the event, and finding expertise and donations to accomplish so much.

THEME BRIDGE & BOARDWALKS REPAIRED



Staff and event organizers are looking forward to the RVIA All-Industry Volunteer Day that will be held on May 15, 2025 at Bonneyville Mill County Park.

Special thanks to volunteers and sponsors from these industries:

Forest River, Lippert, Patrick, SiteWorx, Airxcel, LaVanture Products, Valley Screen, Boring-Smith, Lionshead, DeWalt, UFP Factory Built, Cripe's Septic, Genesis Products, Hull, PalletOne, Duo Form, American Bolt & Screw, Global Link, Dave Carter & Associates, Ranger Distribution, Inc., and Great Lakes Lamination

vibrant Volunteers

Volunteer opportunities in the Elkhart County Parks Department come in all shapes and sizes. Some spend time weekly or monthly helping independently or alongside staff. Others may contribute one- time on a solo or group project. These are some amazing volunteer highlights:



Logan Labno, Middlebury Boy Scout Troop 007, completed an Eagle Scout project by installing a storybook trail along the Pollinator Playpath at Corson Riverwoods.

Girl Scouts assisted with planting almost 250 tree seedlings at Corson Riverwoods County Park in the spring of 2024.



- In 2023 & 2024, Freedom Builders coordinated a crew of local volunteers to assist with restoring three trail bridges at Bonneyville Mill County Park. Their expertise and hard work helped reconnect our trail system safely.
- Heartland RV chose Bonneyville Mill in 2024 as a site to lend a helping hand. More than several dozen employees used their expertise to assist with stair and foot bridge rebuilding as well as trail and garden maintenance.
- Special thanks to Robert Adam Construction for their assistance and in-kind donations in these projects as well.



Cub Scout Pack 797 attended a program in the fall of 2023 and immediately became immersed in giving back to the community. They are the first Hispanic/Latino Cub Scout Pack in Michiana and have given more than 100 hours of community service to the department. Some of them are pictured to the left participating in the community ofrenda & Dia de los Muertos program at the Elkhart County Historical Museum.





Vibrant Volunteers

*Thank you to the following volunteers who tracked their hours
and to the many others not listed here!*



Teruko Aleo
Annie Alvarado
Michael Ardnt
Dennis Badke
Dave Baer
Mark Baker
Jim Bare
Joleen Bartlett
Poorna Bhagat
Jan-Garrit Bouwman
Nancy Brown
David Bruemmer
Ben Buck
Jim Buller
Sherrie Bullock
Sue Bumgardner
Bryan Canen
Trista Cave
Elma Chapman
Hayden Cottey
Kristi Culp
Nhim Danh
Lindsey Daniels
Mark Daniels
Tyler Daniels
Sandra Darr
William Delio
Carmen Driscoll
Margaret Easton
The Franke Family

Frank Fisher
Patty Fowler
Jim Fuehrmeyer
Anna Fussner
Casey Gose
Sarah Gothe
Katrina Graber
Carla Gull
Tai Gunter
Becky Gute
Christine Guth
Marilyn Hammer
Ziah Harris
Robert Harrison
Chuck Harvuot
Olivia Hays
Paul Hochstetler
Mary Ann Holderman
Hope Holtzclaw
Heather Horst
Lois Horvath
LouAnne Hostetler
Dean Howard
Charli Hurley
Luisa Ixmattlahua-Garay
Mary Kauffman Kennel
Ruth Kauffman
Dan & Rae Landis
Brad Lantzer
David Laren Stayton

Larry Lehner
Samuel Linares
James Loewen
Keith Loutzenhiser
Pierce Lucas
Jared Lyle
Karen Mackowiak
Charise Markin
Eli Martin
Lori Massa
Debra McClain
Connor McCoy
Avery McDowell
Dany Meier
Sheila Meinert
Ruth Middleton
Randy Miller
Roger Miller
Carole Mitchell
Jeff Mitschelen
Meg Mitzel
John Monger
Ellen Morey
Klaus Mueller
Aliah Munoz Sonora
Tyler Nowak
Kathleen Nussbaum
Leilandra Opaczewski
Aaliyah Ortega

Chris Osborn
Katie Pollock
Delaney Powell
Judy Preheim
Carol Rayl
Kristina Redman
Elias Rice
Emily Roberts
Ricki Rollins
Bob Roth
Susan Rowe
John Ryan
Jason Samuel
Christen Savage
Charly Serrano
Braden Shaffer
Steve Shantz
Tammy Shidler
Emily & Elowen Slabaugh
Jeanette Slater
John J. Smith
Randy Snyder
David Stayton
Clyde Stickler
Linda Strain
Alayna Suddarth
Steve Thomas
Marc Toles
John Treacy

Jim & Jon Tyson
Dawn VanMeter
Sonja Vera
Hank Wait
Jenna Wait
Delia Waits
Pat & Tom Watson
Pat Weigold
Nathan Williams
Rick Williamson
Allison Yacks
Wendell Yancy
Brian & Kathy Yoder
Christian Zeser
Sherrie Zou

Elkhart County Historical Museum Volunteers:

Melissa Baysingar
Michael Case
Wanda Hoffman (pictured above)
Jeffrey Keim
Rita Parsons

Special thanks to these volunteer groups:

Cause for Paws Club - Monger Elementary
Christmas Bird Count Volunteers
Concord High School Student Council
Corvilla
Disc Golf Volunteers
Elkhart County Historical Society
Elkhart High School Servant Leadership Class

Friends of the Pumpkinvine
Friends of the Elkhart County Parks
Girl Scout Troup
Goshen College - Community Engagement Day
Heartland RV
Interra Credit Union/Do Well to Do Good Day
Scout Troup Pack 797

Michiana Master Gardeners - Quilt Garden
RVIA Work Day Leadership and Volunteers
Teen IMN group
Volunteer Work Day Participants
Wabash One Company
York Elementary -1st, 2nd & 3rd grades

County Park Board

*A huge thank you to Larry and Jeff for your dedication
and service to the citizens of Elkhart County.*



The Elkhart County Park and Recreation Board experienced transition in 2023 and 2024.

Jeff Burbrink (pictured on right) was an ex-officio of the Park Board through his position at the Elkhart County Extension office. His knowledge of plants and trees and experience leading the Master Gardener program was a natural fit for this role. He accepted a position in LaGrange County, and his seat on the board was filled by Robert Kelly, County Extension Director.

Larry Andrews (pictured on left) retired from the Park and Recreation board after 30 years of service in December of 2024. His passion is preservation of history in Elkhart County and he served on the Museum and Finance committees. His appointment beginning in 2025 has been filled by Crystal Welsh who has an urban planning and natural resource background and passion for the outdoors.

2024 Staff Members

Full-time Staff:

Andy Langdon, Interpretive Naturalist
Annie Aguirre, Marketing Coordinator
Bernard Cunningham, Deputy Director of Operations
Brandon Blackmer, Mill Interpreter
Brian O'Connor, Park Services II
Courtney Franke, Mill Manager
David Leith, Park Services I
David Story, Park Services III
Dennis Russell, Park Services III
Donny Aleo, Deputy Director of Interpretive Services
Jacob Metzler, Public Safety Coordinator
James Holtzclaw, Interpretive Naturalist
Jason Woody, Park Services I
Jenifer Blouin Policelli, Curator of Education
Julia Parke, Museum Manager
Krista Daniels, Interpretive Naturalist Manager
Krystin Harrison, Park Services III
Marlene Lantzer, Secretary
Michelle Nash, Curator of Collections
Tyler Ellis, Park Services I
Nicholas Steele, Park Services II
Robyn Buenger, Bookkeeper
Ronda DeCaire, Director
Sherry Plank, Park Services III
Traci Stickler, Park Services II
Vince Gresham, Natural Resource Coordinator
Wilma Harder, Park Services I

Part-time & Seasonal Staff:

Adeline Russell, Seasonal Mill/Visitor Services
Alex Kaminsky, Public Safety
Benjamin Mathews, Public Safety
Sarah Ross, Public Safety
Bethany Goddard, Gate Attendant
Daniel Day, Park Services
David Gall, Park Services I
Edgardo Rosa, Park Services
Gary Rorie, Park Services
Ron Gaghan, Museum Maintenance
Kady O'Hara-Landa-Museum Visitor Services
Joni Decker, Gate Attendant
Pam McCowan, Gate Attendant
Priscilla Hile, Seasonal Mill Attendant
Ron Yoder, Park Services
Sara Rheinheimer, Park Services
Selena Reeves, Gate Attendant

DeFries Gardens Seasonals:

Jon Cutrell, Garden Consultant
Tesesa Klein, Garden Attendant
Dala Bruemmer, Garden Attendant

Best of luck to our past co-workers who have retired or moved on to new opportunities:

Lynn Matthews, Park Services III
Natasha Tucker, Park Services I
Patrick McGuire, Curator of Education
Sarah Gothe, Interpretive Naturalist

Part-time staff:

Debra Hoke
John Metz
Emily Strzelecki
Austin Milcherska
Olivia Krall

In Memory of:

Roger Yoder
who passed only
several weeks
after retirement



