

Nature

—
FOREVER CONSTANT



POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION / 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



The year 2020 was extraordinary by any measure. A worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, civil unrest, and an exceptionally destructive wind event termed a “Derecho” reshaped our societal and physical landscapes. But nature, and our society, have again proven to be resilient in the face of change.

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Our parks, trails, and natural areas have been busier than ever in the history of Polk County Conservation! Overflowing parking areas, campgrounds filled to capacity, and entire families on weekday picnics were common throughout the seasons. Our numbers bear out the observations, as we recorded well over 4 million visitors within Polk County Conservation areas in 2020, a 31% increase over the previous year!

Our workforce adapted, bringing environmental education online in new and creative ways. Our parks and trails were packed with people exploring, recreating, and just relaxing in nature. We cautiously opened picnic areas and campgrounds with new concepts such as social distancing and size limits for events. Our staff, joined by hundreds of volunteers, cleared away the destruction of hundreds of felled trees on our trails and in our parks.

Resilience and adaptation, two key concepts in ecology, have proven once again to be key concepts in human society. We look forward to the year ahead, embracing the reinvigorated interest in all things outdoors. See you on the trail!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard A. Leopold".

Richard Leopold
Director
Polk County Conservation



YEAR AT A GLANCE

Trail users participating in a self-guided StoryWalk along Discovery Trail at Jester Park.

Volunteers assisting with Derecho storm damage cleanup.



THE RETURN TO NATURE

Nature became a refuge for our community in 2020 and Polk County Conservation's parks, trails, and open spaces were no exception to this. When schools, businesses, and restaurant doors closed, our community retreated outdoors to enjoy the mental and physical health benefits these spaces provide. Park and trail usage increased significantly and continued to maintain their popularity throughout the year. Social media, website, and email communication became vital for Polk County Conservation to communicate safety procedures, closings, and more to the public during the pandemic.

CREATIVE COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Continuing to engage with our community in 2020 was vital and Polk County Conservation's creativity saw no boundaries. Programs and events were created that not only engaged the community, but got them out in our parks and trails during each season. In-person events were held in a safe, socially distant manner, while the majority of our programs were held virtually or through social media. From celebrating Art Week with the Art Adventures scavenger hunt where participants were given clues to find art panels hidden throughout Polk County, hiding geocaches in Jester Park for the Jester Park Geocaching Challenge in exchange for a special geocoin, hosting a Virtual Fall Makers Market to support Des Moines' local businesses during the holidays, to taking our environmental education programs online via zoom, there was no shortage of adventure for the public to choose from.

DESTRUCTIVE DERECHO DAMAGES PARKS & TRAILS

As if a worldwide pandemic wasn't challenging enough this past year, the state of Iowa was thrown another curve ball on August 10th. A straight-line wind storm swept across Iowa producing widespread high winds gusting up to 140 mph which is the equivalent to a major hurricane. Polk County was spared the brunt of the devastation unlike many of our county conservation peers to the east. However, we still saw damages totaling roughly \$390,000. Crews and volunteers worked tirelessly to remove debris and hazardous trees from all of our parks and trails so they were accessible and presentable to park visitors.



Any projects that have been funded fully or in part by Polk County Water & Land Legacy throughout this document are denoted by the PCWLL logo water droplet.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

The 2020 Annual Report includes "highlight" information from January 1 – December 31, 2020.

PARK AND TRAIL ENHANCEMENTS

Chichaqua Valley Trail

Structural repairs to the Mud Creek Bridge along the Chichaqua Valley Trail between NE 64th St. and Grant St. were completed in December.

Jester Park

Landscaping around the Jester Park wayfinding signs was completed in June. Also, a new dump station that will be located near Skull Pond is currently in the design phase with construction anticipated to be completed by the fall 2021. And new bridal cottage with updated landscaping and a limestone step path were installed near the Jester Park Lodge in the summer.



New bridal cottage and landscaping in front of the Jester Park Lodge.

Yellow Banks Park

Improvements to the trail around Oakview Pond were completed in January. Work on the foundation and framing of the new maintenance shop was completed in the spring.

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

The new Natural Resources Headquarters at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt was completed in the fall. The facility has consolidated all natural resource staff and operations, and is expected to improve efficiency and the continuity of operations. Landscaping around the facility began in December.

Trestle to Trestle Bridge

In January 2019, an ice jam washed away the Trestle to Trestle Trail Bridge in Johnston. A trail reroute was established and designs for the new bridge were finalized. Design, engineering and permitting work was completed in December. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2021.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Polk County Conservation welcomed:

- Kelly Blair, *Riding Instructor* (June 2020)
- Sierra Carmichael, *Riding Instructor* (March 2020)
- Donna Carter, *Equestrian Center Clerk* (October 2020)
- Cassie Cook, *Conservation Ecologist* (July 2020)
- Brad Janssen, *Park Ranger* (January 2020)
- Stacey Lundquist, *Human Resources Specialist* (January 2020)
- Delaney O'Donnell, *Equestrian Program Coordinator* (June 2020)
- Shae Rossetti, *Community Outreach Coordinator* (December 2020)
- Janean Struthers, *Natural Resources Technician* (July 2020)

Polk County Water Quality Monitoring Program

Polk County Conservation's Water Quality Monitoring Program completed its fifth year of monitoring in September. Trained staff, city partners and volunteers conducted bi-monthly assessments on 70 sites throughout Polk County. Baseline water quality data for Beaver, Big, Bluff, Camp, Carney, Case Lake Inflow, Crawford, Deer, Des Moines River Trail (at Hartford Ave.), Easter Lake Outlet, Fourmile, Frink, Greenwood Pond Inflow and Outflow Creeks, Golf, Indian, Jordan, Little Beaver, Magnolia, Mud, North Walnut, Paw, Prospect Park (unnamed creeks), Rock, Santiago, Saylor, Spring, Walnut, and Yeader creeks, as well as two drainage ditches, was collected during this past year. The goal of this program is to assess the water quality of watersheds within Polk County; creating a better understanding of the needs of our watershed system.



The new hiking bridge located near Oakview Pond at Yellow Banks Park.



photo by: Lee Navin

Hikers taking in the views on one of the fishing piers at Fort Des Moines Park.

Conservation Corps

A six-member team from the Conservation Corps of Iowa began their 10-month term in Polk County Conservation's family of parks and trails on February 18. Devoting their time to bond-specific projects, these individuals focused primarily on timber stand improvement & invasive species removals.

Youth Corps

Polk County Conservation's Youth Corps program (serving ages 15-18) adapted to work safely with the threat of the Coronavirus through summer and fall 2020. Paid summer crews primarily worked at Easter Lake Park and Jester Park where they removed invasive plants, picked up trash, maintained trails, and helped establish new native plantings.

Crews continued into the fall when a second group was made possible with financial support from the Great Outdoors Foundation. Teenagers on fall crews spent time working and learning at seven different parks during their 10-week session. In a year when everyone was socially isolated and largely at home, 58 young people spent a total of 8,175 hours working and learning outside in Polk County. Through Youth Corps, Polk County teens gained building blocks to be outdoor stewards, environmental advocates, and confident leaders. In 2020's absence of in-person school for many, Youth Corps was also a valuable outlet for teenagers to socialize safely and find respite in nature.



2020 PCC Youth Corps crew members posing for photo opportunities while they removed invasive species

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

RECREATION ENHANCEMENT

Easter Lake Park

Installation of a new handicap accessible fishing dock near Shelter #4 was completed in June. The boat ramp parking lot underwent renovations in August that included an asphalt overlay of the entire parking lot and entrance road, expansion of the boat ramp, and improved traffic circulation and layout.

Designs and cost estimates were developed for the installation of an accessible fishing boat dock, expanded beach and boardwalk, new beach concession/rental building, picnic shelters, natural playscape, expanded parking, and headquarters for the Des Moines Rowing Club. This project is currently on hold until 2021.

Lauridsen Skatepark

Polk County Conservation took over management of the Lauridsen Skatepark in December with the grand opening slated to take place on May 22, 2021. The skatepark is located in the heart of downtown Des Moines on five acres at the northern edge of the Principal Riverwalk and just east of Wells Fargo Arena and Iowa Events Center. Designed by California Skateparks, the Lauridsen Skatepark will be the largest open skatepark in the United States.

Yellow Banks Park

Surveying began in December within Yellow Banks Park to expand RV camping and add a new natural playscape.

Three cabins set to be built in Yellow Banks Park are currently on hold due to financial constraints in 2020. Staff will revisit this project in the future when more funding becomes available.



Families and friends came together in search of the art panels and were able to go on an outdoor adventure while they were at it.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Art Adventures in Polk County

In celebration of Art Week Des Moines, Polk County Conservation, the Great Outdoors Foundation, Mainframe Studios, and the organizers of Art Week partnered together to offer a self-guided art treasure hunt that encouraged the community to explore various parks and trails in Polk County.

Local artist, Ryan Topete, painted 10 commissioned painted wood panels that were hidden in natural landscapes throughout Polk County. Clues for these panels were released to the public on Polk County Conservation's social media every other day. Once participants solved the clue and found the panel, they were asked to take a photo, tag the partners, and were able to keep the art they found. Communities that were involved in Art Adventures were Altoona, Ankeny, Bondurant, Clive, Grimes, Johnston, Pleasant Hill, Polk City, Urbandale, West Des Moines, and Windsor Heights

Virtual Fall Makers Market

Polk County Conservation hosted the 2nd Annual Fall Makers Market virtually from November 12 – December 12. The virtual market was hosted on the Jester Park Nature Center's website, where 21 local vendors were highlighted and featured across social media platforms to showcase their products. The event reached over 12,000 people on social media and increased our website traffic from roughly 300 users in a month to over 2,000+ users during the first week of the Makers Market. While we weren't able to physically be together for this event, it proved successful in bringing our community together in a different light.

Jester Park Geocaching Challenge

Polk County Conservation's Environmental Education Department launched a geocache challenge over the summer. Six different geocaches were hidden throughout Jester Park and participants were encouraged to download a geocaching passport that included details about the locations of the geocaches.



Guests can rent canoes, kayaks, standup paddle boards, and more at the Easter Lake Park Boat Rental located at the beach.

Participants of all ages were excited to get in on the geocache challenge!



Once all six geocaches were found, users were asked to turn in their completed passports to Polk County Conservation staff in exchange for a special geocoin. Over 500 people completed the Jester Park Geocaching Challenge in 2020.

Self-Guided Adventures

While in-person events and programs were limited, creative ways to engage with the community and get them outside was key. One way Polk County Conservation staff did this was through the creation of StoryWalks. StoryWalks are self-guided hikes highlighting a nature-themed children's book on signs posted along a trail. Books and trail locations differed each month, inviting park visitors of all ages to immerse themselves into the stories and trails along the way.



Park visitors were greeted with new stories along a different trail each month for a self-guided adventure for all ages.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

HONORS & AWARDS

Polk County Designated a Bird Friendly Community

Bird Friendly Iowa announced that Polk County is among the first counties in Iowa to be designated as a *Bird Friendly Community*. Polk County is committed to preserving and expanding habitat and encourages citizens to engage in birding, bird conservation and related outdoor recreation activities.

Bird Friendly Iowa is a partnership of several Iowa conservation organizations, agencies and individuals including Trees Forever, Iowa Audubon, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Iowa DNR, Iowa Wildlife Center, Iowa Ornithologists' Union, and the Iowa County Conservation System.



LAND PROTECTION & RESTORATION

Additional Acreage Added to Our Park System

- Three parcels totaling 15.5 acres were acquired as additions to the east side of Yellow Banks Park. The properties adjoin the Alitz Tract which was acquired in 2013. These acquisitions add 5.5 acres of oak-hickory woodland and provide the opportunity for protection of the Yellow Banks Pond watershed. Future plans for these sites include removal of an abandoned home site, addition of a driveway for access off Vandalia Drive, and installation of fencing.

- A 0.8-acre inholding along Fourmile Drive was purchased in August 2020 as an addition to our growing acreage in the Fourmile Creek Greenway. Removal of undesirable trees has commenced on the property, as this site will be restored to native prairie/oak savanna in coming years. Polk County Conservation and the City of Des Moines continue to work with willing landowners to acquire the few habited parcels remaining in this flood-prone area.

- Twenty-five acres in the floodplain of the South Skunk River at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt was purchased in November 2020. It adds to recent nearby acquisitions on the south side of the river and will eventually be restored to a wetland-prairie complex. Polk County Conservation continues to acquire property in this important landform – focusing on less-desirable farm land in the flood plain to return these properties to their highest and best use - providing wildlife habitat and other ecosystem services.

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

Planning, preliminary survey, and design work is underway for the restoration of a recently acquired 74.4-acre parcel at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. When completed, this area will feature five acres of restored wetland, a four-acre restored oak savanna, and more than 60 acres of restored tallgrass prairie.

Kay's Triangle and Big Ravine, located within Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, were seeded with 15 species of native grasses and 65 species of wildflowers in the spring.

Fourmile Creek Greenway

The Fourmile Creek Greenway restoration process began in January. This project will involve restoration, conversion, and enhancement of prairies, forests/woodlands, savannas, wetlands and oxbows over the course of 5-7 years.

Design of the stormwater wetland at the corner of 35th street and Hull began in December. Anticipated completion date for construction is June of 2021. Once completed, this wetland will reduce pollutants from 25



Yellow Banks Pond at Sunset. Photo by Justin Roberts.

Fall can be one of the best times to explore the oxbows and waterways at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt.



acres of residential stormwater before the water enters Fourmile Creek.

Jester Park

In order to capture runoff from spring seeding near the Jester Park Golf Course parking lot, a wetland was constructed.

Three bioretention cells designed to reduce water pollution and treat runoff from the parking areas at the Nature Center were installed and planted with native prairie grasses and wildflowers in June. This project included the installation of 12,750 plants, mulch, and amended soil.

Renovations to Skull Pond, located across from Shelter #2, began in December and will continue throughout winter 2021. Other renovations include reworking the golf cart bridges, shoreline improvements, and a new outlet structure.

Yellow Banks Park

Design work to address erosion on the ravine that carries outflow from the newly-renovated Oakview Pond to Yellow Banks Pond was started in the fall. Anticipated physical improvements will stabilize soils, allow native vegetation to reestablish, limit sediment transport into Yellow Bank Pond, and increase the longevity of recent renovation efforts within the pond itself.

ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS

RESOURCE ENHANCEMENT

Conservation Corps

In February, the Conservation Corps of Minnesota & Iowa officially moved their headquarters to the former Polk County Conservation Administration Building, located within Jester Park.

Public Art

A floor mural was created by retired West Des Moines Art Teacher, Jan Hutchison, with the help from three other volunteers. Led by Naturalist Lewis Major, the four artists put in nearly 90 hours of volunteer time on this project. The mural is located on the floor of the Jester Park Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center, where Polk County Conservation naturalists use the art piece as a learning tool to those who are about to take to the water to give a bird's-eye view of possible situations they may need to navigate through or around.

Polk County Conservation employee, Brent Hansen designed and created a sculpture entitled "Ant Hill". The sculpture was completed and installed west of the Jester Park Nature Center in August and complements the other art pieces along the sculpture trail.



PCC employee and "Ant Hill" sculpture artist Brent Hansen and his family enjoying the new attraction at the Jester Park Nature Center.

Jester Park

A new mindful contemplative area was installed in the summer behind the Jester Park Nature Center with help from a generous, in-kind donation from Redbud Landscaping. This area is used for public programming and invites park users to sit quietly amongst nature.

Mally's Park

With the assistance of park stewards from Cummins Central Power, creek access steps were installed at Mally's Park, south of the Chichaqua Valley Trail bridge in January. A canoe/kayak launch was also installed in the spring of 2020 in conjunction with the Central Iowa Water Trails project.

Trails End Wildlife Area

A ribbon cutting celebration was held on October 29, 2020 in partnership with JEO Consulting Group for Trails End Wildlife Area. Eventually, this 200+ acre expansive natural area will be the largest mitigation bank in the state and offer visitors a variety of low impact outdoor recreation opportunities. It will provide miles of multi-use trails for walkers, runners, bird watchers, and others looking for respite in the natural world. It also will allow for incredible wildlife-watching opportunities. The area is currently traversed by two paved trails, the Gay Lea Wilson and the Chichaqua Valley trails with additional trailside amenities under consideration. The area will include a pond/wetland of sufficient depth and size to support a fishery. Several parking lots will be installed, and restroom and picnic facilities are under consideration.

Easter Lake Park

The Gwendolyn and Greta Faye Mix Pollinator Gardens were planted on the north side of the park in June and July. Now, over 2,000 native plants will greet you when you walk through the park through a generous donation.



*Polk County Conservation
Youth Corps crew members
assisting in the planting of
the 2,000+ native plants at
Easter Lake.*



GRANTS (awarded July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)

The following are grants and reimbursements awarded for Fiscal Year 19/20. The annual amounts listed are the award totals. Depending upon the grant specifics the award may be received in one year or over a multi-year period.

- **Wildlife Habitat Stamp –**
Dykstra land acquisition \$242,833

- **IDALS Water Quality Initiative –**
Fourmile Wetland. \$65,000

- **Veterans Administration Adaptive Sports Grant –**
Equestrian Center. \$107,207.75

BUDGET SUMMARY

The General Basic funds expended for the various departments covered salaries, supplies, and services. The General Supplemental funds covered employee benefits. The Insurance expenditures were for Unemployment Insurance, Workers’ Comp Disability, Workers’ Comp Medical Expense, and Liability Insurance premiums.

Projects continued with REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection) funds were wayfinding signs, various grant matches, and various supplies and equipment.

Projects completed or continued with the Polk County Water and Land Legacy dollars have been highlighted throughout the annual report by the blue water drop designation.

Polk County Conservation continually monitors revenues and expenses to assure budget compliance. In addition, a user fee committee annually reviews the various direct user charges for camping, shelter rentals, educational programs, special events, and other fee based activities to assure that a fair mix of user fee charges and general Polk County taxpayer support is maintained in the annual budget.



photo by: Bryce Olsen

FINANCIALS

POLK COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
 FINANCIAL STATEMENT • JULY 1, 2019 – JUNE 30, 2020 CASH BASIS

REVENUES

	General Basic	General Supp.	Insurance	Reserve	REAP	PCWLLBond	Enterprise Fund	TOTALS
Property Taxes	\$5,639,874	\$1,415,592	\$222,692	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$7,278,157
Recreational Fees	502,305	0	0	0	0	0	0	502,305
Miscellaneous Federal Grants	0	0	0	0	0	191,085	0	191,085
Miscellaneous State Grants & Reimbursements	0	0	0	0	116,946	370,314	0	487,260
Land Rent	360,723	0	0	0	0	0	0	360,723
Building & Shelter Rentals	45,630	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,630
Misc Business Permits & Licenses	1,775	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,775
Firewood Sales	19,060	0	0	0	0	0	0	19,060
Miscellaneous Sale of Commodities	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
FEMA	165,088	0	0	0	0	0	0	165,088
Returned Check Fee	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30
Miscellaneous Contributions & Reimb. Other Govts	0	0	0	0	0	79,377	0	79,377
General Administration Fees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fee Based Program Revenues	92,899	0	0	0	0	0	0	92,899
Commissions	1,734	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,734
Motor Vehicle Fuel Refunds	11,606	0	0	0	0	0	0	11,606
Miscellaneous Contributions & Donations	71,297	0	0	0	0	229,420	0	300,718
Miscellaneous Receipts	3,589	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,589
Fixed Assets Sold	21,484	0	0	0	0	0	0	21,484
REAP Annual Per Capita Payment	0	0	0	0	109,282	0	0	109,282
Bond Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	4,241,757	0	4,241,757
Golf Course Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	0	288,437	288,437
Jester Park Lodge Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	0	76,919	76,919
Jester Park Cabin Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	0	102,803	102,803
Miscellaneous Revenues	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,306	4,306
Fund Interest	0	0	0	0	1,091	174,097	5,451	180,640
TOTAL REVENUES	\$6,937,120	\$1,415,592	\$222,692	\$—	\$227,319	\$5,286,051	\$477,916	\$14,566,689

EXPENDITURES

	General Basic	General Supp.	Insurance	Reserve	REAP	PCWLLBond	Enterprise Fund	TOTALS
Conservation Infrastructure/Equip.	\$450,412	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$—	\$450,412
Environmental Education	644,262	165,140	0	0	0	0	0	809,401
Natural Resources	964,751	328,922	0	0	0	0	0	1,293,673
Administration	1,257,651	214,620	0	0	0	0	0	1,472,271
Community Outreach	177,311	36,749	0	0	0	0	0	214,060
Conservation Grants	372,797	0	0	0	0	0	0	372,797
Parks Advocacy	1,220,362	284,384	0	0	0	0	0	1,504,746
Construction, Maintenance, Operations	1,052,922	235,091	0	0	0	0	0	1,288,013
Equestrian Center	796,652	150,687	0	0	0	0	0	947,339
Insurance, Unemployment, & Workers Comp. Medical	0	0	222,692	0	0	0	0	222,692
Resource Enhancement & Protection	0	0	0	0	909	0	0	909
PCWLL Bond Expenditures	0	0	0	0	0	5,286,051	0	5,286,051
Enterprise Transfer to Operations & Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	0	102,538	102,538
Golf Course Minor Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	198,486	198,486
Golf Course Project Note Repayment	0	0	0	0	0	0	275,000	275,000
Jester Park Cabins Minor Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	41,854	41,854
Jester Park Lodge Minor Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	137,345	137,345
Miscellaneous Enterprise Minor Repairs & Maintenance	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,939	3,939
Gain in Fund Balances	0	0	0	0	226,410	0	(281,246)	(54,836)
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$6,937,120	\$1,415,592	\$222,692	\$—	\$227,319	\$5,286,051	\$477,916	\$14,566,689

2020 FACTS AND FIGURES

PARK VISITATION (where recorded)

Brown's Woods	172,644
Carney Marsh	60,214
Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt	143,764
Chichaqua Valley Trail	79,040
Easter Lake Park	1,331,351
Fort Des Moines Park	336,274
Four Mile Creek Greenbelt	20,073
Gay Lea Wilson Trail	33,967
Great Western Trail	81,022
High Trestle Trail	55,449
<i>(near PCC gazebo area)</i>	
Jester Park	1,251,921
<i>(includes Mile Long Boat Ramp, Golf Course, Equestrian Center, Nature Center, and Lodge)</i>	
Mally's Park	40,900
Thomas Mitchell Park	227,017
Trestle to Trestle Trail <i>(closed due to construction)</i>	0
Yellow Banks Park	388,840

Total Park Visitation 4,222,476 +

**PCC is unable to accurately calculate total park visitation from traffic counters. The estimated visitation total of 4,222,476+ people reflects only those parks and trails equipped with counters or alternative ways for tracking visitation.*

RENTAL FACILITY RESERVATIONS

Chichaqua Longhouse	56
Easter Lake Park Shelters	205
Fort Des Moines Park Shelters	123
Jester Park Nature Center/ Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center	15
Jester Park Shelters <i>(including amphitheater)</i>	155
Jester Park Lodge	18
<i>(37 Events Cancelled due to Covid-19)</i>	
Mally's Park Shelter	12
Thomas Mitchell Park Shelters	73
Yellow Banks Park Shelters	49
Jester Park Cabins	862
Thomas Mitchell Park Cabin	92

TOTAL Facility Reservations 1,660

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

- 168 school programs involving 3,373 students
- 25 youth programs involving 417 youth
- 9 camps involving 90 youth
- 23 adult programs involving 284 adults
- 63 family programs involving 3,946 participants
- No bus trips were conducted
- 58 virtual programs (participants unknown)

Due to Covid-19, the number of in-person programs were dramatically reduced. In lieu of in-person programming the following projects were completed:

- Created 45 new activities and videos for the At Home Learning Resources page on Polk County Conservation's website.
- Launched the Jester Park Geocaching Challenge with over 500 participants completing six different challenges.
- Created and installed interpretive signage for bio retention cells, prairie reconstruction, pollinator gardens, and tree identification markers in multiple park locations.
- Updated 58 Guide by Cell messages found throughout Polk County Conservation parks and trails.
- Conducted mini fall school field trips consisting of two-hour long field trip opportunities by separating groups into five different learning pods.
- Developed the following creative and adaptive learning programming: *Virtual Zoom Events, Facebook Live Events, Story Book Walks*

The Environmental Education staff connected with various audiences for a total of 7,997 hours.

VOLUNTEER HOURS CONTRIBUTED

Hundreds of volunteers contribute thousands of hours to conservation efforts throughout our family of parks and trails. These dedicated individuals make up the various corporate groups, scout troops, park stewards, trail ambassadors, collegiate classes/clubs, and others. During a time in which events were held in smaller groups than normal and large events were cancelled, 1,400+ Polk County Conservation volunteers managed to put in over 9,000+ hours of service with Polk County Conservation. In Iowa, volunteer hours are valued at \$24.03/hour, totaling over \$216,270 worth of work accomplished by volunteers.

Over 88 public, private, and co-hosted volunteer-based events/workdays took place throughout Polk County Conservation's parks and trails in 2020.

BOARD MEMBERS AND STAFF



Polk County Conservation volunteers came together in January 2020 to remove unwanted trees along Fourmile Creek during the Fourmile Felling Frenzy.

ADMINISTRATION

Richard Leopold, *Director*
Douglas Romig, *Deputy Director*
Natalie McFarlane, *Senior Accountant*
Katie Stoklasa, *Administrative Supervisor*
Stacey Lundquist,
Human Resource Specialist
Ginny Malcomson,
Administration Specialist
Missy Smith, *Nature Center Coordinator*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Kami Rankin,
Community Outreach Supervisor
Shae Rossetti,
Community Outreach Coordinator

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Patrice Petersen-Keys,
Environmental Education Coordinator
Heidi Anderson, *Naturalist*
Janna Coulter, *Youth Corps Coordinator*
Lori Foresman-Kirpes, *Naturalist*
Lewis Major, *Naturalist*

NATURAL RESOURCES

Doug Sheeley,
Natural Resources Manager
Amanda Brown, *Water Ecologist*
Cassie Cook, *Conservation Ecologist*
Melissa Schmeling,
Volunteer Coordinator
Pat Spain, *Volunteer Coordinator*
Jessie Farley, *Natural Resources Technician*
Dan Hrubes, *Natural Resources Technician*
Travis Maak, *Natural Resources Technician*
Lael Neal, *Natural Resources Technician*
Al Pasker, *Natural Resources Technician*
Janean Struthers,
Natural Resources Technician
Shawn Warren,
Natural Resources Technician

BOARD MEMBERS

Ryan Crane, *Board Chair*
(began service April 2020)
Jill Altringer, *Vice-Chair*
Jim Cataldo, *Secretary*
Pamela J. Mollenhauer
(began service May 2020)
Greg Lewis (began service February 2021)
Lance Northway (served through December 2020 as Board Chair)
Tom Levis (served through March 2020)

PARKS DIVISION

Erich Braun, *Parks Superintendent*
Zachary Deutmeyer,
Conservation Park Ranger
James Dotzler, *Conservation Park Ranger*
Charlie Finch, *Conservation Park Ranger*
Brad Janssen, *Conservation Park Ranger*
John Mackey, *Maintenance Park Ranger*
David Weidt, *Conservation Park Ranger*
Eric Baker, *Maintenance Park Ranger*
Tyler Naeve, *Maintenance Park Ranger*
Chance Patrick, *Maintenance Park Ranger*

CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, AND OPERATIONS

Ron VanDenBroeke,
Construction Maintenance Manager
Adam Fendrick, *Park Planner*
Ken Young, *Mechanic Supervisor*
Barney Feezell, *Construction Technician*
Brent Hansen, *Construction Technician*
Luke Harshbarger, *Mechanic*
William Deaton, *Mechanic*

JESTER PARK EQUESTRIAN CENTER

Claudia Starr, *Equestrian Center Manager*
Liz Peitzman, *Barn Supervisor*
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