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2020 (Pandemic Year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Contact Hours</th>
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2021

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PUBLIC PROGRAMS

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<th>Attendees</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Homeschool</td>
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YOUTH PROGRAMS

- In 2020 we conducted 25 youth programs and in 2021 we conducted 239 youth programs.
- Offered spring, winter, and summer skills programs (fishing, kayaking, archery, bouldering, survival, geocaching) for 10-16 year olds.

CAMPS

- A total of nine camps were held during 2020. Due to Covid-19, the number of participants was reduced to 10 campers.
- A total of 11 camps were held in 2021 with 128 youth in attendance.
- Examples of camps offered include:
  - Geology
  - Paddling
  - Shooting
  - Fishing
  - Survival
  - Noisy Nature
  - Nature Discovery
  - Water Wonders

ADULT PROGRAMS

- In 2020 we conducted 23 adult programs and in 2021 we conducted 62 adult programs.
- OWLS made a virtual return in 2020, followed by an in person return in July 2021
- Book Worms was virtual in 2020 with 12 participants and in person in 2021 with 20 participants.
- Multiple programs were given to senior center and assisted living centers in 2021
- Wellness programs continued including Shinrin Yoku, Drummings, Mindfulness and Movement, and Sunset Yoga
- Offered classes, including Water Color, Holiday Wreath Making, Master Conservationist, and partnered with Queer Hikers of Iowa in 2021
- Women in the Woods has continued to be a popular program that fills up every month. It's a great way for women to connect and learn about nature
FAMILY PROGRAMS

- In 2020 we conducted 63 family programs and in 2021 we conducted 124 family programs.
- Examples of family programs included:
  - Toddler Tales
  - Antler Shed Hunt
  - Knee-High Naturalists (new in 2021)
  - Nature Story Hour and Playdates
  - Owl Prowl
  - Light the Night
  - Hike & Hot Cocoa
  - Mysteries of the Moon
  - Critter Club
  - Monarch Tagging
  - Fall Colors Hike
  - Princess Adventures
  - Wild Night Life & Hike
  - Geocache Egg Hunt
  - Winter Hike
  - Meteor Shower Watch
  - Bat House Building
  - Fossils of Iowa

HOMESCHOOL

- In 2020 18 programs were offered with 444 students. We recognized that school learning looked very different during the last two years. To provide outdoor learning opportunities for school age children we developed mini two-hour field trips in a small group setting. Each small group consisted of five learning pods. A different theme was offered each week for six weeks.
- In 2021, homeschool programs were offered in two sessions twice a month with a new theme each time. In 2021 56 programs were offered with 1,345 students. Themes included:
  - Nature Journaling
  - Tree Detectives
  - Leaf Explorations
  - Wind Energy
  - Seeds, Seeds, Seeds
  - Nature Poetry
A NEW WAY OF LEARNING

Due to Covid19 the number of in-person programs was dramatically reduced in 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Very few school programs, both classroom and field trips were conducted. For safety, public programs that normally had no registration were changed to very limited registration. In lieu of in-person programming staff found creative ways to connect the public through passive and active education methods, the following projects were completed:

- Added 45 activities and original videos to the At Home Learning Resources page on the PCC website
- Over 500 people completed the Jester Park Geocaching Challenge. Six different geocaches were hidden throughout Jester Park. Once all six were found, individuals could turn in their passport to the Jester Park Nature Center to claim their reward - a special geocoin!
- Developed creative and adaptive programming
  - Virtual
  - Facebook Live
  - Story Book Walks at Jester Park (May to October 2020 - April to November 2021)
  - Mobile displays in the Jester Park Nature Center rotated themes/topics

- Polk County Chill Out Challenge – January 2021
  - Polk County Conservation created an online family challenge that encouraged people to get outside and explore our county parks in the winter. Weekly missions were posted and teams could earn points by completing the missions. The game was played using the GooseChase app.
  - 209 families participated from 34 metro areas communities participated

- Fun in the Sun Challenge – July 2021
  - Polk County Conservation created another online family challenge that happened during the summer months instead of winter.
  - 148 families participated from 31 metro area communities for a total of 594 people

- Gigi the groundhog was hidden in celebration of Groundhog Day throughout the month of February, participants were asked to take photos and submit them if they found Gigi!
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

SPECIAL EVENTS
Environmental Education staff participated in the following special events (event partners are in parentheses)

- **Plein Air - Artists in Action** at the Jester Park Nature Center
- **Hike-n-Seek** (Iowa Geocachers Organization)
- **Central Iowa Tourism booth** at the Iowa State Fair
- **Monarch Festival** at the Blank Park Zoo. Participants learned about monarch tagging
- **Spooky Science** at the Science Center of Iowa

INTERVIEWS/TV/RADIO

- **WHO Radio** - Artifact Exhibit
- **Hello Iowa WHO Channel 13** - Artifact Exhibit Project
- **Channel 8** - Monarch Migration Story

PARTNERSHIPS

- Unity Point sponsorship of “Rooted in Nature” Nature/Health & Wellness programs $3,000 yearly and provide SWAG items for participants
  - Worked with UnityPoint Health to create a Rooted in Nature video.
- Mitchellville Library with Story walk at Thomas Mitchell Park (2021)
- Queer Hikers of Iowa to lead two hikes in our parks (BW and YB)
- The Office of the State Archaeologist – Professional partners of the artifact exhibit project
TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MEDIA

- 58 Guide by Cell messages (pre-recorded audio messages visitors use their cell phones and, can engage and leave feedback 24/7.
- Guide by Cell numbers set a record breaking year for use during the pandemic
  - 2020 = 5,643 calls: averaging 15 calls per day; 3,125 first time callers, 131.38 hours of messages listened to in the year
  - 2020 QR codes scanned = 514 page view from 189 total users
- 2021 = 4,008 calls; averaging 5.8 calls per day; 2,125 first time callers; 95.30 hours of messages listened to in 2021
  - 2021 QR codes scanned = 401 page views from 173 total users
- Weekly posts were shared to the JPNC Facebook page to promote EE programs
- One very lucky monarch hitched a ride on Southwest airlines to Texas after a late metamorphosis, this story was shared on social media and aired on Channel 8 News, see picture.
- Transitioned to online health forms for camp, recording program numbers and equipment rentals.

![Chart comparing social media engagement metrics for 2020 and 2021]

- Twitter followers
- PCC FB likes
- JPNC FB likes
- Pinterest followers
- E-Newsletter subscribers
- YouTube subscribers
- Instagram followers

2020 | 2021
The Youth Corps program hired 58 young people for sessions ranging from four to ten weeks. These youth and their leaders spent a total of 8,175 hours working and learning in Polk County. Crews were mainly based at Jester Park and Easter Lake Park, but they also spent time at Chichaqua, Yellow Banks, Brown’s Woods, Strasser Woods/Fourmile, Jester Park Equestrian Center, and Fort Des Moines.

Our crews pulled 930 lbs. of garlic mustard, removed 1,200 lbs. of curly dock, helped plant over 7,000 native seedlings, harvested 791 lbs. of raw native seeds, and helped manage invasive species on more than 12 acres. Crews picked up 1,286 lbs. of trash this year, spread mulch at Easter Lake and Jester Park’s playgrounds, mended the entire bison/elk electric fence, and helped maintain over 7 miles of trails.

There were many other specialty projects the groups were happy to help with this summer and fall. Many thanks to Parks and Natural Resources staff for guiding Youth Corps crews on projects and to EE staff who helped lead educational programming on many occasions.
2021

- Polk County Conservation Youth Corps bounced back in 2021 after a year of adversity and challenge in the 2020 program year. Six paid crews of youth (ages 15 - 18) and four crew leaders (aged 19+) spent the spring, summer, and fall seasons learning the importance of stewardship in several Polk County parks through guided service projects and education.

- A total of 52 Polk County Conservation Youth Corps Crew Members served in the 2021 program year, completing a variety of projects including invasive species removal, trail maintenance, prairie seed collection, and planting of native seedlings.

- Our crews removed **15 acres** of invasives species, collected **1.5 tons** of trash, improved **15 miles** of waterway, and helped maintain **6 miles** of trails.

- This valuable work experience not only is an opportunity to create young advocates for Iowa’s natural places, but also accumulates to over **8,000 hours** of work in our Polk County parks. This unique program would not be possible without the generous support it has received, including a substantial grant of $15,000 received in 2021 by Microsoft.
In 2020, Environmental Education staff coordinated local artists/volunteers to create an education mural on the floor of the Outdoor Recreational and Wellness Center. This mural is not only a piece of art but will help staff discuss safe paddling techniques.

- Worked with Iowa Nordic Skate Ski Club to maintain cross-country ski trails throughout the winter.

- As part of an Eagle Scout project, rain barrels were constructed, stored, and sold in the Outdoor Recreation & Wellness Center. In 2020 approximately 50 barrels were sold at $50 each, and in 2021 60 barrels were sold. These 110 barrels collectively will hold 5,500 gallons when they fill.

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Revenue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archery/Air Rifle</td>
<td>262</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bouldering Wall</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>$5,751.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cross Country Skiing</td>
<td>269</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snow Shoe</td>
<td>190</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paddling</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>$4,194.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merchandise (ex. stickers/rain barrels)</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>$4,402.33</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,571</strong></td>
<td><strong>$29,292.95</strong></td>
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A $16,762 REAP-CEP grant “Growing River Literacy” was funded. This grant will allow PCC to produce a series of short videos promoting some of Central Iowa’s most scenic and popular water trails. These virtual tours will serve as a digital resource for those who are interested in paddling a particular section of a river. Each video will give paddlers technical information and increase river literacy through environmental education about river flora, fauna, geology, history, water quality, river ethics, and safety. Click here to view (https://youtu.be/hcOi_EWABxE)

Developed interpretive signage for:
- Bio retention cells and prairie reconstruction outside the Jester Park Nature Center
- Pollinator signs for the Easter Lake gardens and prairie reconstruction near shelter #1 and #2
- Interpretive signage at a variety of locations and topic around Fort Des Moines Park as well as new tree identification markers for the arboretum

Jester Park Lithic Artifact Exhibit - Polk County Conservation was awarded a Historic Resource Development Program grant through the Iowa Dept. of Cultural Affairs for $25,000. The Jester Park Lithic and Historic Artifact Exhibit will be created at the Jester Park Nature Center. Additional funding has been awarded by:
- Iowa Archaeology Society
- Central Iowa Mineral Society
- The Great Outdoors Foundation
- State Historical Society of Iowa, grants
- National Association for Interpretation, grant
- Iowa Association of Naturalist, grant
- Twenty individual private donations totaling over $16,000
AMERICORPS

- Polk County Conservation partnered with AmeriCorps for the 2021 summer to provide seven summer positions, consisting of four Youth Corps crew leaders and three naturalists. For the year 2020-2021 AmeriCorps offers twenty different programs that members can participate in; Polk County Conservation has engaged their Youth Corps members and seasonal naturalists in the Iowa AmeriCorps 4-H Environmental Education program. The main focus of the AmeriCorps 4-H program is to allow members to coordinate youth development programs across Iowa, with a focus on educating youth on environmental issues and why preserving Iowa’s landscape is essential.

CURRENT STAFF

- Patrice Petersen-Keys: Environmental Education Coordinator
- Heidi Anderson: Naturalist
- Lori Foresman-Kirpes: Naturalist
- Jenna Gatzke: Naturalist
- Lewis Major: Naturalist
- Lindsey Page: Assistant Naturalist
- Allison Wisgerhof: Youth Corps Coordinator

COMMITTEES & ADVISORY BOARDS

- Patrice Petersen-Keys: Polk Environmental Education Resources Chair, Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) - Conservation Education Program (CEP) Committee
- Heidi Anderson: Polk County Conservation Safety Committee, Polk County Conservation Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee, Polk County Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Committee
- Lori Foresman-Kirpes: Vice President & Treasurer for the Central Iowa Tourism Board, Polk County Wellness Committee Advisory Board, Planning Committee for Travel Iowa Market Place statewide meeting, Polk County Art Committee
- Lewis Major: Sign & Public Art Committee