



Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2021-2022

Board Members

President, Chris Ruhaak, December 31, 2023

Vice President, Eric Hough, December 31, 2024

Secretary, Jerry Mathiasen, December 31, 2022

Board Member, Mary Kramer, December 31, 2025

Board Member, Kelly Dix, December 31, 2026

Big things are on the horizon.

Here we are in the wake of COVID-19 and slowly our day-to-day is settling into what is often called our “new normal.” Education programs are back to being offered in person, visitors continue to stream out to see us for the rejuvenating experiences our parks offer, and Pottawattamie Conservation is busy thinking about our mission and how we can better serve the residents of the county.

If there’s one thing we learned from the pandemic, it’s that offering high-quality natural areas is one of the most impactful things we can do to improve people’s health and relationship with the land we all depend on.

With that, this year our team has been especially focused on communicating the benefits of connecting with the outdoors, expanding public land and recreation, and offering more opportunities for visitors to engage in conservation work that inspires them to preserve the unique beauty our county offers.

As Pottawattamie Conservation looks to the future of recreation and public lands in the county, we are committed to better serving residents and providing high-quality experiences that celebrate some of the last wild, untouched places left in our area. Big things are on the horizon for recreation in Pottawattamie County, and we can’t wait to share what’s to come.



Thank you for supporting conservation efforts and to the county residents, park members, donors, and partners who make our work possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Shoemaker".

*Mark Shoemaker
Executive Director, Pottawattamie Conservation*

Mission Statement

The mission of Pottawattamie Conservation is to provide meaningful experiences for people of all ages with the unique natural resources of Pottawattamie County through diverse and sustainable education, recreation and conservation opportunities.



Major Organization Highlights for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

- Pottawattamie County purchased the 106-acre Mt. Crescent Ski Area property adjacent to Hitchcock Nature Center.
- Parking, road, and trail renovations were made at Hitchcock Nature Center to better accommodate increased visitation.
- A new pedestrian bridge was installed at Arrowhead Park, connecting the east and west sides of the park for the first time in nearly 10 years.
- The first annual Bison Fest with education stations, recreation activities, and food was hosted at Botna Bend Park with great attendance from the public.
- Plans to expand and modernize campsites at Olde Town Park were finalized.
- New archery targets were installed at Narrows River Park.
- Local cattle were used to manage 170 acres of remnant and reconstructed prairie at Hitchcock Nature Center, expanding this low-cost and impactful land management practice on public property in Pottawattamie County.
- Nearly 200 pounds of native seed were collected by staff and volunteers to help with prairie reconstructions and over seeding of disturbed sites.
- Pottawattamie Conservation staff supported efforts that led to Council Bluffs being designated as a Bee City USA by the Xerces Society, a major step in the right direction for protecting pollinators.
- Staff organized and led the first School of the Wild in Pottawattamie County. This week-long outdoor learning experience for 5th graders was hosted at Hitchcock Nature Center with students from College View Elementary in Council Bluffs and at Arrowhead Park with students from Underwood Elementary in Underwood.

Thank you to our 2021-2022 partners!

21st Century Learning Centers
712 Initiative
Agri-Land Insurance Agency
American Association of Zookeepers and
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo
American National Bank
American Wealth Partners
Arrowhead Park Camp Host: Todd Sliger
Audubon Society of Omaha, Gilchrist
Foundation
Barleys
Barnhart Crane & Rigging
Benjamin Vogt, Monarch Gardens LLC.
Botna Bend Park Camp Hosts: Ed & Cindy
Manzer
Boy Scouts of America
Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School
CMET
Campground hosts: Jordan Mellor, Angie
Schroeter, and Marty and Dixie McFarland
City of Council Bluffs
City of Council Bluffs Parks & Recreation
Collective for Youth
Council Bluffs Chamber of Commerce
Council Bluffs Convention & Visitors Bureau
Council Bluffs Fire Department
Council Bluffs Public Library
Council Bluffs Rotary
Council Bluffs Trees Forever
DeSoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge
Denny Meek
Dustin Clayton
Environmental Education Program Volunteers
FNBO
Fontenelle Forest
Full Fledged Brewing Company
Galasso Family Foundation donation
Gene Olsen

Gilbert M. and Martha Hitchcock Foundation
Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska Troop 45483
Golden Hills RC&D
Google
Greater Omaha Area Trail Runnerz (GOATz)
HGM Associates, Inc.
HOKA
Harrison County Conservation
Hawk Migration Association of North America
Henningsen Construction, Inc.
Hitchcock HawkWatch
Husch Blackwell
Iowa Association of Naturalists
Iowa County Conservation System
Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Iowa Native Plant Society
Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
Iowa Prairie Network
Iowa West Foundation
Kelly McKay
Leach Camper Sales
Leadership CB
Loess Hills Alliance
Loess Hills Lodge Welcome Desk Ambassadors
Loess Hills Missouri River Region
Loess Hills Nordic Ski Patrol
Loess Hills State Forest
Matthew Schipper, Arrowhead Trail Run
McMullen Ford
Michelle Biodrowski
Midstates Bank
Mt. Crescent Ski Patrol
Mulhall's
NP Dodge Real Estate
National Parks Service
Natural Areas Management Volunteer Crew
Neola Lions Club
Nick Salick

PEAK Performance
Peter Kiewit Foundation
Petersen Law, PLLC
Pinnacle Bank
Pollinator Alliance of the Heartland (PATH)
Pottawattamie Conservation Camp Hosts
Pottawattamie Conservation Board
Pottawattamie Conservation Donors
Pottawattamie Conservation Foundation
Pottawattamie Conservation Volunteers
Pottawattamie County Board of Supervisors
Pottawattamie County Bowhunters
Pottawattamie County Buildings and Grounds
Pottawattamie County Jail
Pottawattamie County Secondary Roads
Pottawattamie County Secondary Roads
Bridge Crew
Pottawattamie County Sheriff
Rasmussen Mechanical Services
Resource Enhancement and Protection
Program
Roger Claussen
Ron Cisar

Shelby County Conservation
Snyder & Associates
St. Albert Catholic School
State Farm - Judd Knispel Agency
Tagge Rutherford
Ted Nugent's Kamp for Kids Volunteers
The Dyke Family
The Nature Conservancy
Thien Farm Management
Thomas Jefferson High School
Trees for Kids
Tri-Center High School
U.P. Museum
UP Foundation
US Fish and Wildlife Service
Union Pacific
United Credit Union
United States Postal Office
University of Iowa: School of the Wild
West Pottawattamie County Extension
Western Engineering
Western Iowa Development Association
WholeTrees Structures

**“If I have seen further, it is by
standing on the shoulders of giants.”**

— Isaac Newton

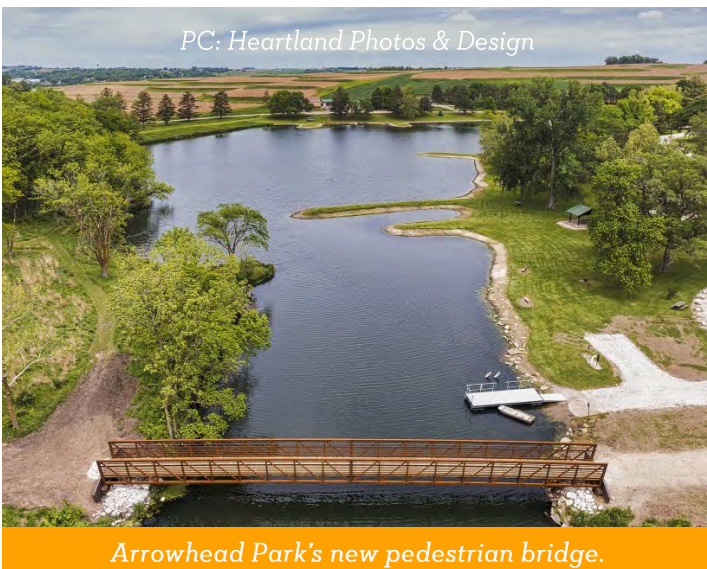
Pottawattamie Conservation is nothing without its partners. It is because of support from Pottawattamie County residents, volunteers, donors, sponsors, grantors, schools and universities, community organizations, local businesses, students, and conservation groups that our team can provide high quality recreation and environmental education opportunities to more than 200,000 visitors every year.

Thank you!

Arrowhead Park | 147-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

- Installed a new pedestrian bridge connecting the eastern and western sides of the lake for the first time in nearly 10 years
- Installed a new water fountain and bench donated by the Dyke family in memory of long-time park visitor Jerry Dyke
- Hosted annual events including the Arrowhead Fishing Derby and Chili Fest with great attendance
- Worked with partners to host the annual Arrowhead Trail Run and Ted Nugent's Kamp for Kids
- Hired seasonal and part-time staff and an intern to support park operations during the busy summer season and on weekends
- Worked with the Boy Scouts of America Troop 38 of Neola, Minden, & Persia who installed wooden privacy fencing at Arrowhead's three modern cabins



PC: Heartland Photos & Design

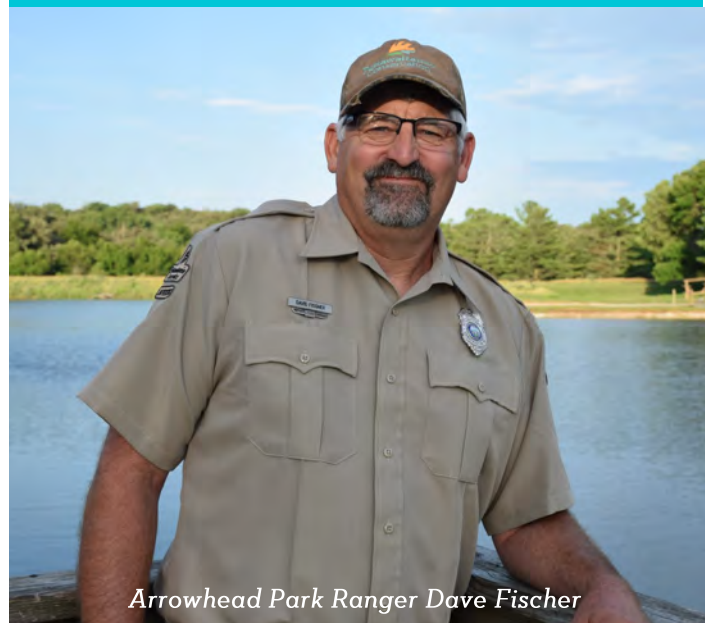
Arrowhead Park's new pedestrian bridge.



New water fountain & dog waterer donated by the Dyke's.

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Renovate Campground 3 and Campground 4 by adding new 10x20-foot concrete pads and installing full hookups to Campground 4
- Expand Arrowhead Park's Hilltop and White Pine camping cabins including the addition of a bedroom as well as a modern restroom



Arrowhead Park Ranger Dave Fischer

Botna Bend Park | 119-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

Hosted annual events including the annual Maple Tree Tap, the first annual Bison Fest, Botna Bend's Pancake Feed, and a Halloween campground event with great attendance from the community



Bison Fest: Fossil Artifact Table



Bison Fest: Bison Wool-Spinning



Bison Fest: Atlatl Throwing

"This campground is very pleasant with awesome amenities for campers...Scenery is gorgeous. Highly recommend camping at this campground it also has buffalo and elk exhibits that are serene and beautiful." – Katrina Clarke | Camper at Botna Bend Park



Botna Bend Park Ranger Jon Fenner



Botna Bend Park Assistant Ranger Cory Thomas

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Renovate and expand the South Campground to accommodate several new campsites with electric and water hookups
- Replace the boat ramp
- Resurface park roads
- Complete construction of a new workshop building for park maintenance equipment

Hitchcock Nature Center | 1,200-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

- Expanded and resurfaced park roads and campground roads
- Expanded the front entrance and installed four new pay stations and a new roll gate
- Expanded the overflow parking lot
- Added new ADA parking stalls
- Cut a new pedestrian trail to connect parking at the Boardwalk trail shelter and the overflow parking lot to Fox Run Ridge trail and the Loess Hills Lodge
- Resurfaced camping pads
- Hosted the HawkWatch 30 Year Celebration event with great attendance
- Installed a propane fireplace in the Loess Hills Lodge
- Installed native gardens at the Loess Hills Lodge and main park entrance
- Prepared a site for a new shelter facility to be constructed near the playground

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Install a Little Free Library in the campground
- Install heating in the shower house, making it operational year-round
- Screen-in camping cabin patios
- Install a Motus tower in the campground, joining an international research effort to track migrating birds, insects, and bats
- Install full hookups for RV campers in the Top Campground Loop
- Acquire ~90 acres of land east of the park, previously owned by Doris Ferguson, to expand outdoor recreation opportunities
- Open part of the Owen-Rahel Wildlife Preserve and Estate for public use
- Expand the hiking trail system to connect to Mt. Crescent Ski Area



Scouts plant a native garden at the Loess Hills Lodge.



Hitchcock Nature Center Park Ranger Chad Kunze

Hitchcock Nature Center (Continued)

To accommodate higher visitation, 40 new parking spaces were added and the front entrance and park roads were expanded.



Mt. Crescent Ski Area | 106-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

- Pottawattamie County purchased the 106-acre Mt. Crescent Ski Area property on December 30, 2021 with support from the Iowa West Foundation.
- With the purchase, ownership was immediately transferred to Pottawattamie County. Management of the property was officially transferred to the county on July 1st, 2022.
- Conservation staff worked with the SE Group, RRC Associates, and ResortLogic, LLC to conduct a feasibility study of the area and determine possible stages of development and viable four-season recreation opportunities.

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Make important infrastructure updates to electrical, snowmaking, and equipment to improve conditions and the customer experience
- Explore four season recreation opportunities to offer to the public
- Host environmental education events



Narrows River Park | 36-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

- Installed educational signage for the park's native garden
- Installed new floor coating in men's and women's restrooms
- Planted new trees around the park
- Installed new archery targets
- Planted native species in raised planters
- Installed new entrance sign with new Pottawattamie Conservation logo.
- Installed temporary educational sidewalk stickers about the Big Muddy
- Despite historic Missouri River lows, previous boat ramp improvements made the ramp usable for longer and easier to access by the public
- Native plants that were seeded in the previous year took hold and came up this summer, including lots of Black-eyed Susan and Bee Balm!



New signage highlights native plant species in the park.

Despite low water levels, boat ramp usage was high.



Narrows River Park Ranger Ryan Penney

Olde Town Park | 9.5-acre property

2021-2022 Park Highlights:

- Finalized plans to add eight new campsites with electric and water hookups
- Began installation of power and water at new campground sites
- Broke ground on campground construction and renovations



Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Complete Olde Town's campground expansion and renovations
- Install a new pay station
- Replace the boat ramp



Natural Areas Management

*Without a doubt, this year's shining moment for the Natural Areas Management team was Pottawattamie County's purchase of the 106-acre Mt. Crescent property. Acquiring this ground not only expands public recreation but also includes 75 acres of high-quality remnant prairie, oak savannas, and woodlands. While exploring the new property our team discovered a state endangered plant, Scarlet Globemallow (*Sphaeralcea coccinea*), which is only seen in a handful of locations in the Loess Hills. Since purchasing the land we also put fire breaks in place to make future prescribed burns safer and begin the process of rescuing prairie that has been taken over by trees and brush.*

The work toward our management objectives also took a big step forward this year with a major expansion of prescribed cattle grazing at Hitchcock Nature Center. Hosting grazers like cattle increase our capacity to combat invasive plant species, diversify our prairie's structure and composition, and showcase the potential for cooperation with local ag producers.

The past year brought challenges and opportunities as we expanded our operations, but we plan to continue to adapt and thrive with the same resilience inherent to the prairie as we implement land management practices across Pottawattamie County, expand our knowledge and networks, and help build the next generation of wildlife professionals.



Cattle grazing on invasive brome at Hitchcock Nature Center.



NAM Technician Aric Ping treating Canadian Thistle.



NAM interns conduct a growing season prescribed fire.



Researchers study lichens as part of a multi-state inventory.

Natural Areas Management (Continued)

2021-2022 Department Highlights:

- Expanded cattle grazing to include 170 acres, an increase from 20 acres, at Hitchcock Nature Center
- Expanded the intern crew to include a 9-month crew lead position
- Began managing property at Mt. Crescent Ski Area including re-discovering the Scarlet Globemallow, a rare plant in the Loess Hills, and establishing fire breaks
- Collected ~200 pounds of native seed to help with prairie reconstructions and over seeding of disturbed sites
- Completed edge feathering along drainages at Farm Creek Public Wildlife Area and Wheeler Grove Conservation Area
- Completed 25 acres of forest thinning between Hidden Valley and Badger Ridge trails
- Lead fire learning courses including field days and a pack test
- Treated invasive species at several parks and wildlife areas
- Conducted prescribed fire on a total of 1,521 acres including public and private property
- Nancy Wilson and John Pearson studied lichens at Hitchcock Nature Center as part of a multi-state inventory
- Collected hay at Farm Creek Public Wildlife Area and transported it to Botna Bend Park for use by bison and elk herds

Pottawattamie Conservation's Natural Areas Management department is proud to offer support to community groups including the following organizations: The Nature Conservancy, Fontenelle Forest, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Harrison County Conservation, Loess Hills Coop Burn Week, and local fire departments (county wildfire response)

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Add ~400 acres and up to 3 miles of new trails at Hitchcock Nature Center
- Plant 60 acres of high-diversity prairie
- Re-plant the Pheasants Forever Habitat Area to high-diversity native prairie
- Secure funding to restore 108 acres of remnant prairie and woodland on three new properties
- Participate in the Loess Hills Burn Week
- Continue to build strong, local partnerships



Natural Areas Management Specialist Chad Graeve

Environmental Education

This year the Environmental Education team focused our efforts on providing programs to underserved communities by expanding afterschool programming, offering School of the Wild, and enhancing the biodiversity of schoolyards to positively impact students. Enhanced biodiversity also creates positive impacts for communities, which is why our team prioritized native garden education and projects across the county through programming and education, native garden and tree plantings, and assisting the City of Council Bluffs to receive a Bee City USA designation through the Xerces Society.



Students plant a memorial tree at Roosevelt Elementary.



A student analyzes pond water during School of the Wild.

2021-2022 Department Highlights:

- Hosted the first School of the Wild in Pottawattamie County, a week-long outdoor learning experience supported by the University of Iowa.
- Led field trips for all Council Bluffs Community School District 3rd graders
- Organized and hosted the 1st annual Bison Fest event at Botna Bend Park!
- Partnered with Collective for Youth to provide “Learn Archery” programs
- Expanded after school programming at Bloomer, Rue, and Carter Lake Elementary and added a middle school curriculum at Wilson Middle School
- Worked with local partners to get Council Bluffs designated as a Bee City USA and contributed to public outreach efforts
- Hosted a teacher extern through Iowa STEM who prepared information about indigenous people of the Loess Hills to be displayed in the Loess Hills Lodge Gallery
- Hosted the Gardening for Diversity program series in collaboration with the Council Bluffs Public Library as part of the One Community Reads program
- Worked with local Girl Scouts to install a native garden at the Loess Hill Lodge
- Worked with Council Bluffs Trees Forever and Trees for Kids to plant native trees at Roosevelt Elementary and Tri-Center Community School District schools.
- Supported College View Elementary 5th grade students to plant a native garden
- Hosted a new 10-part program series with local naturalist Dustin Clayton

Environmental Education (Continued)



Summer campers explore the West Nishnabotna Water Trail.



Educators teach the basics of ice fishing at Arrowhead Park.

Program Testimonials

"So. Many. Things. Dustin does such a good job providing a wealth of information in such an engaging manner. He clearly has a passion for the subject matter and his enthusiasm is contagious. I learn so much and always look forward to the next class."

Participant in Dustin Clayton's "Awakening to the Living Land" series

"I was amazed at the care [Ron] took to set up the space and provide resources relevant to the topic at hand...Ron is that revered, wise elder with so much knowledge and experience to share!...He had me laughing, crying, and leaving inspired to continue learning. I can't wait to take the full series in 2023."

Participant in Ron Cisar's "A Land Ethic Workshop" series

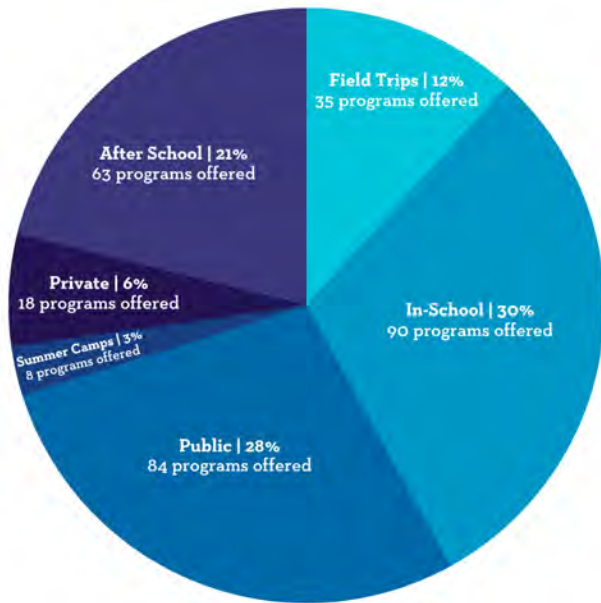


Environmental Education Coordinator
Amy Campagna

Looking Forward: 2022-2023

- Hire a new full-time naturalist, Dustin Clayton
- Implement new training for interns
- Host education programs, like the annual Night Sky event, at Mt. Crescent Ski Area
- Finalize and implement plans for Loess Hills Lodge Gallery updates
- Offer Homeschool in the Hills programs monthly during the 2023-2024 school year
- Work with Lewis Central Community School District to offer annual field trips to all students in a to-be-determined grade level
- Bring more schools to the "wild side" by increasing participation in School of the Wild programming for 5th grade students in partnership with the University of Iowa

Environmental Education Programs



2021-2022 Totals:

298 Programs offered / 8,271 Participants
1,467 Education hours provided



Summer Camp: Archery



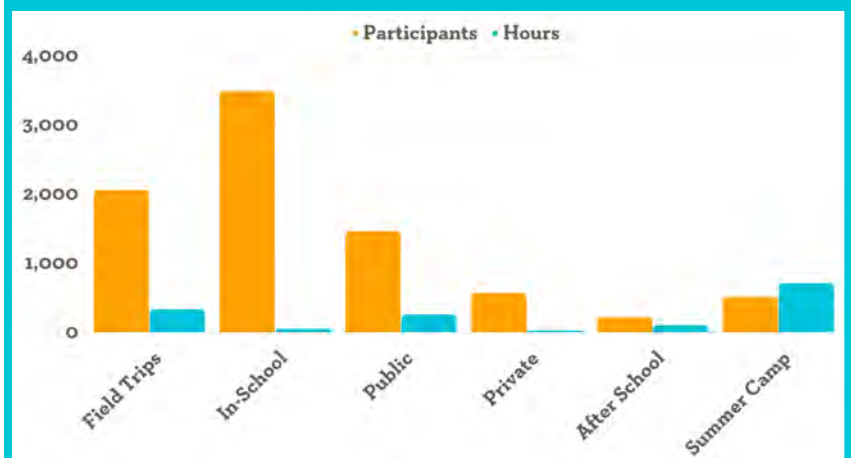
Public Program: Gardening for Diversity



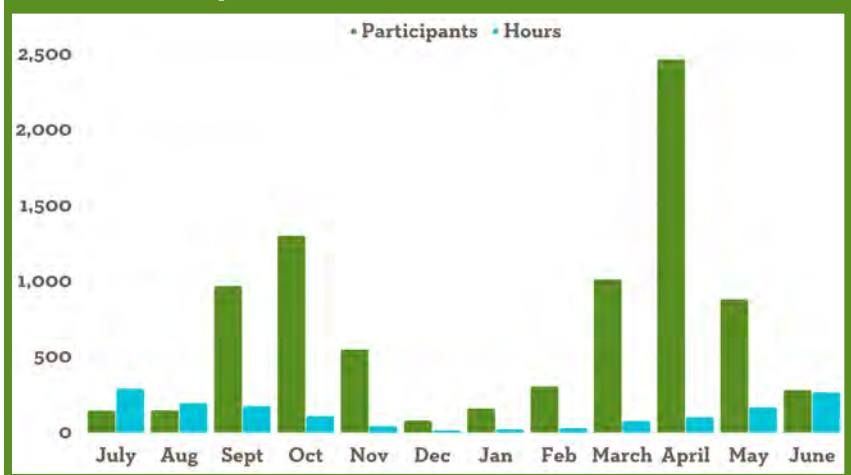
thank you for taking us
to where i get happy!!



Participants & Education Hours Provided Per Program Type



Participants & Education Hours Provided Per Month



Volunteer

2021-2022 Department Highlights:

- Hosted several engaging volunteer events including the 30 Years of Hitchcock HawkWatch celebration, Trailblazer Bonanza in honor of National Trails Day, and Operation Dump Busters park and habitat area cleanups in honor of Earth Day
- Expanded volunteer offerings and recruitment efforts



Tri-Center & St. Albert students haul firewood.



HawkWatch founders Loren & Babs Padelford



Visitors learn about raptor conservation at the 30 Years of HawkWatch Celebration.



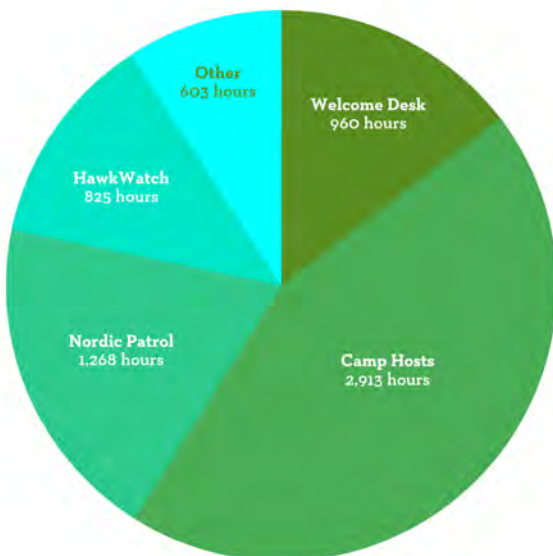
Volunteers take an educational hike.



Visitors and students clean up public recreation areas in honor of Earth Day.

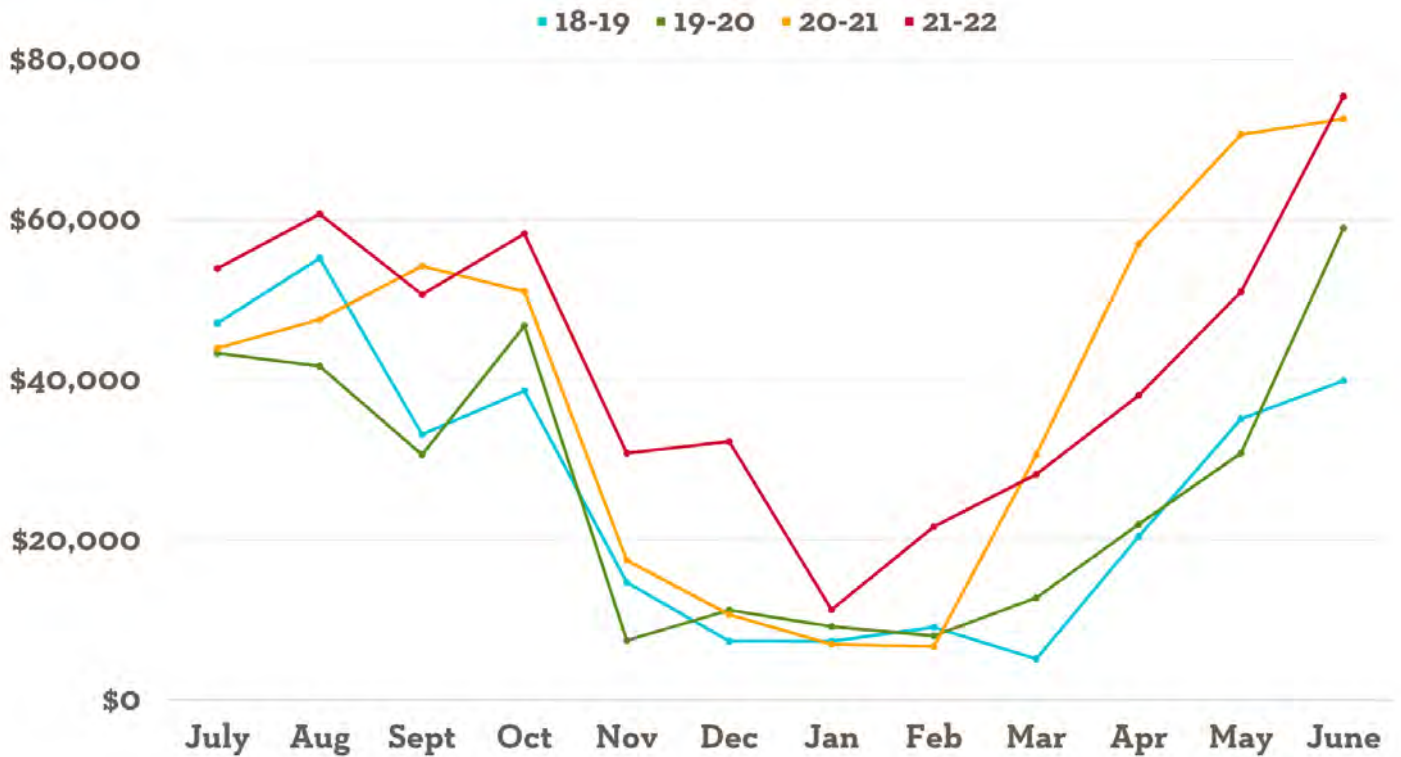


Volunteer Hours: 6,569 total



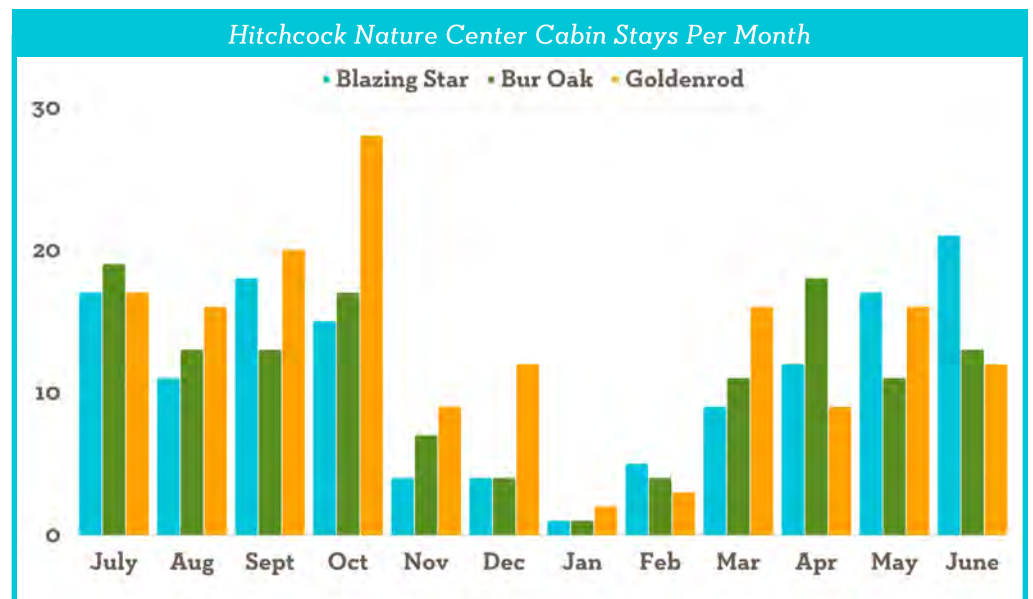
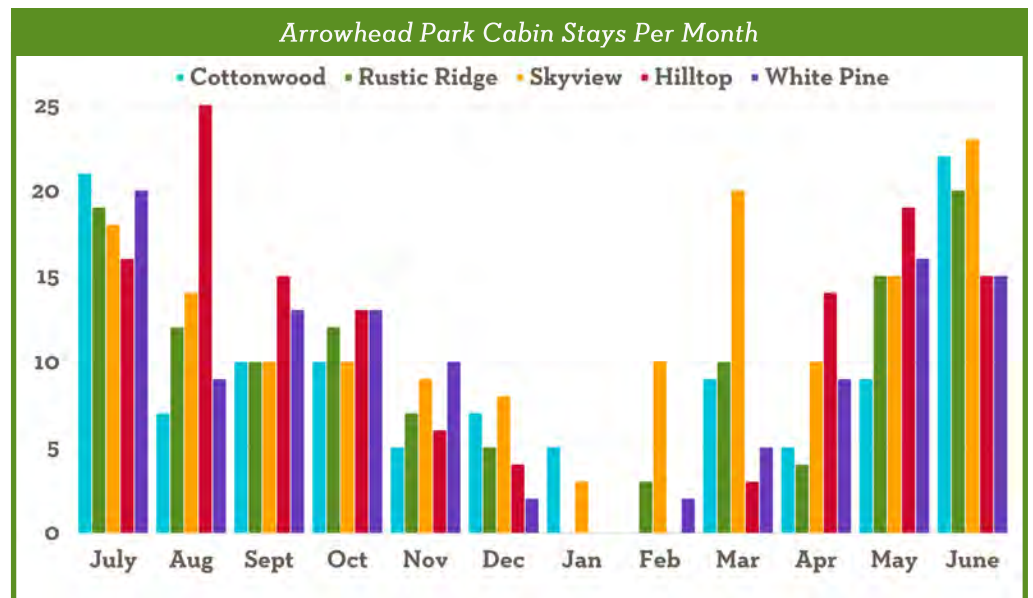
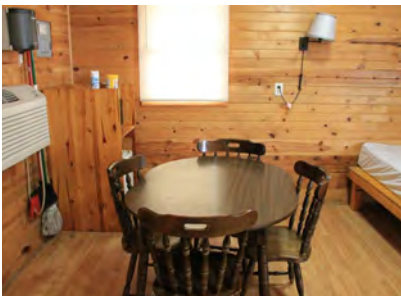
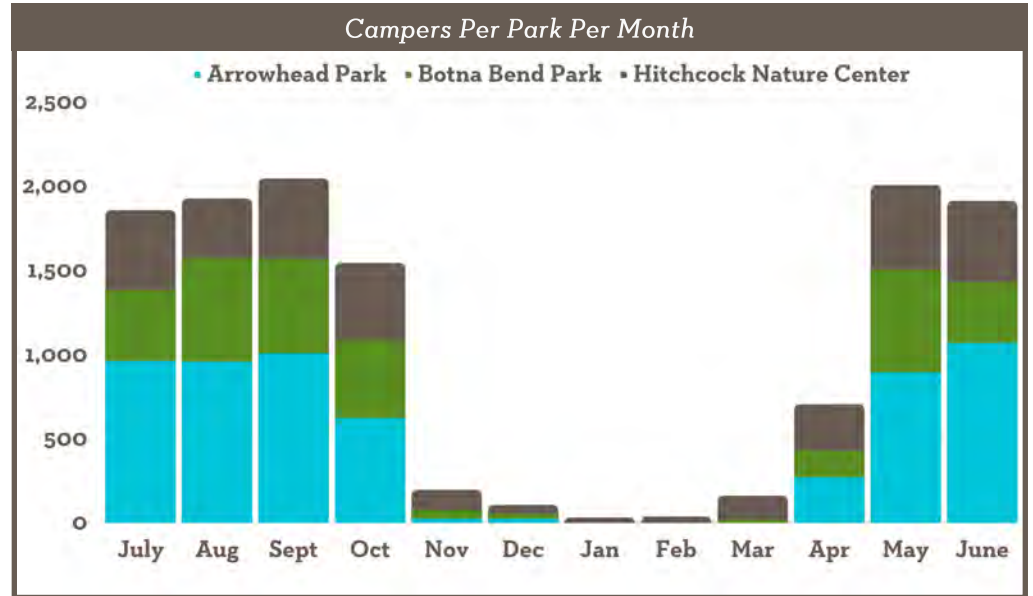
Volunteer & Facilities Coordinator Dana Kruse

User Fees 2021-2022: \$512,348 | +9% YOY



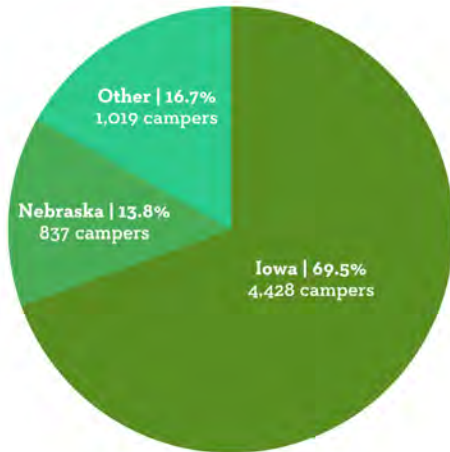
Fiscal Year Overview



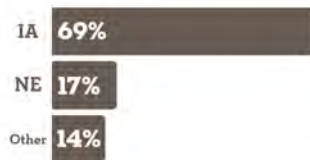


Camping Demographics: State

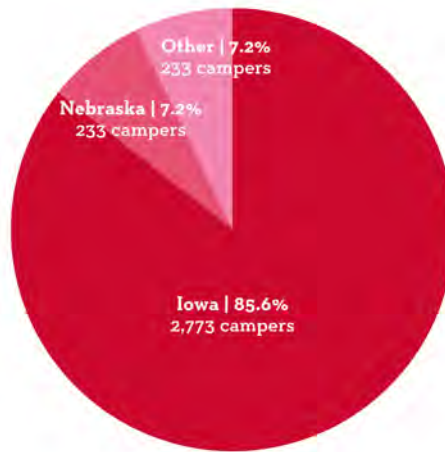
Arrowhead Park



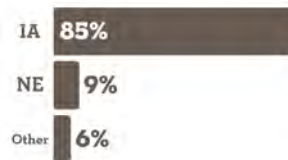
vs. FY 2020-2021



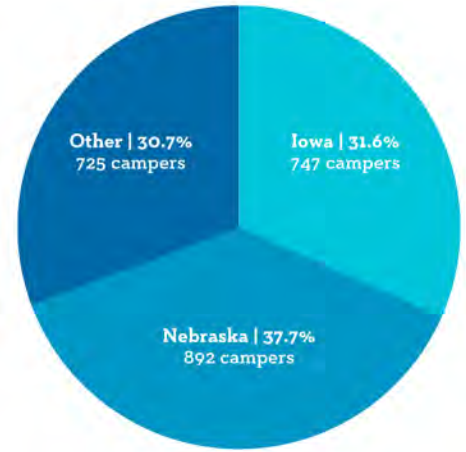
Botna Bend Park



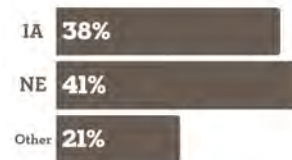
vs. FY 2020-2021



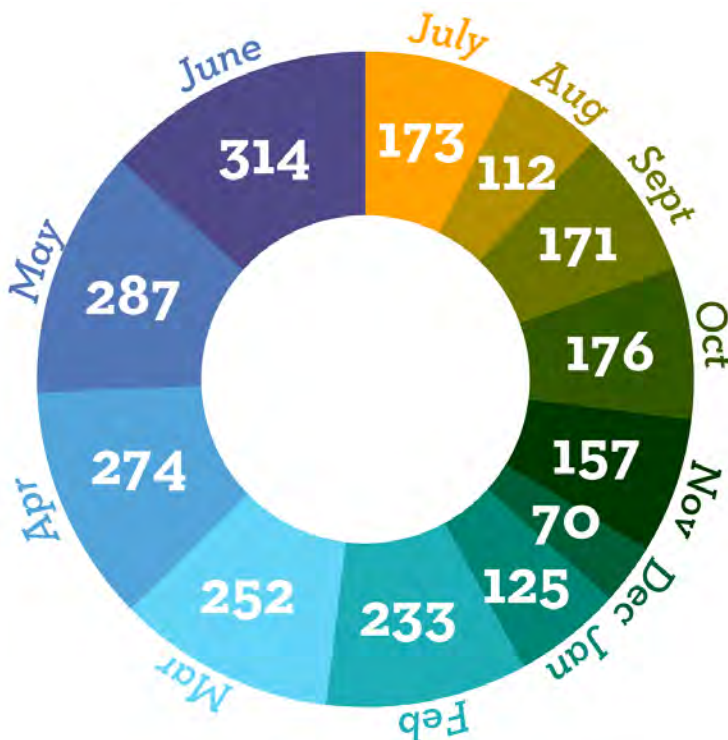
Hitchcock Nature Center



vs. FY 2020-2021



Park Memberships: 2,344 | +0% YOY



Membership Details

- In-county: 878
- Out-of-county: 1,163
- Family: 157
- Supporter: 83
- Extra: 63

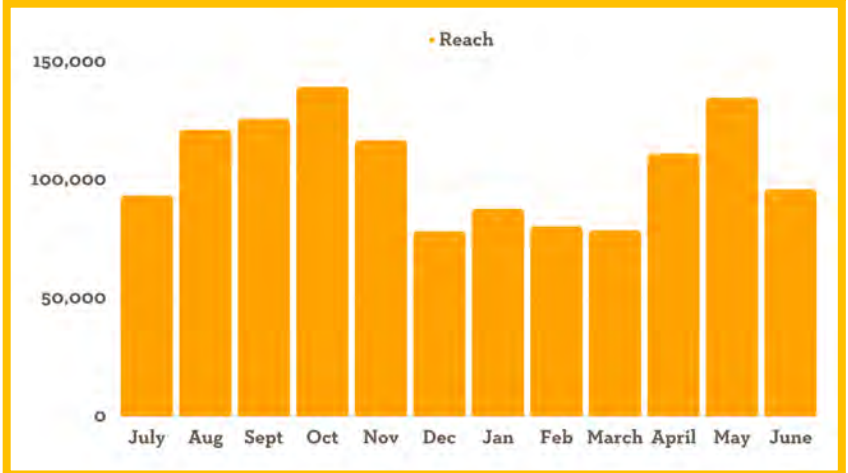
Marketing Reach: 1,260,505 individuals

Individuals are reached through several different channels, including:

- *Social Media*
- *Email*
- *Website* (pottconservation.com)

Social media channels include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Youtube.

People Reached Per Month: 1,260,505 Total Individuals

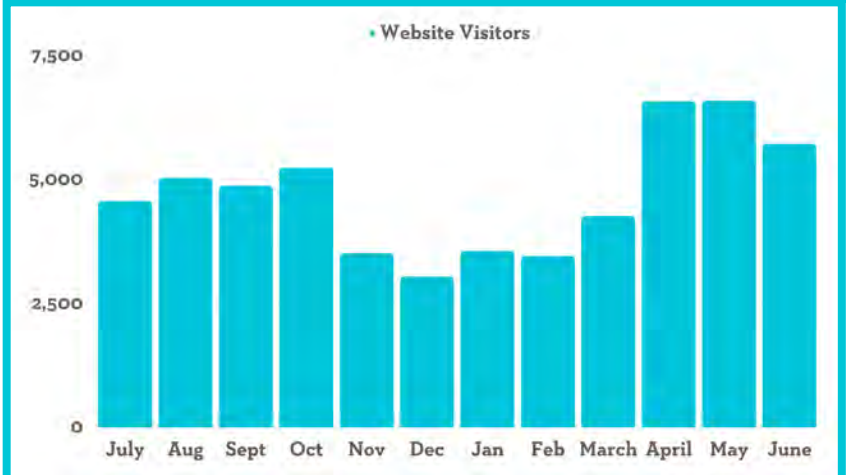


Top-visited web pages for 2021-2022 include:

- *Hitchcock Nature Center*
- *Home*
- *Arrowhead Park*
- *Calendar*
- *Facilities*

Pageview Breakdown: Hitchcock Nature Center (40k), Home (12k), Arrowhead Park (10k), Calendar (5k), Facilities (4k)

Website Visitors Per Month: 56,381 Total Visitors



Hitchcock Nature Center's Facebook and web page remain one of the best ways to inform and educate the public online.

Follower Growth Per Month: 3,607 New Followers





Arrowhead Park's Modern Cabins.

PC: Heartland Photos & Design



Arrowhead Park's new pedestrian bridge.

PC: Heartland Photos & Design

