

Des Moines County Conservation

FY24-25 Annual Report



Chris Lee, Executive Director
Des Moines County Conservation
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Des Moines County Conservation is dedicated to the sustainability of natural resources through land stewardship, conservation education, and by providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

FY24/25 Highlights

Annual Report Highlights

Improvements at Starr's Cave Nature Center

With grants from the Murray Foundation and other donations, we completed ADA-accessible walkways at Starr's Cave Nature Center. The new sidewalks now connect a paved parking area to the nature center, the shelter house, and the ADA-accessible trail.

With a grant from Delta Dental, we replaced our 30+ year old non-functioning outdoor water fountain with a new hydration station that includes a drinking fountain, bottle filler, and even a dog waterer.

Inside the nature center we updated some displays and added changing stations in the bathrooms.

Due to a water line leak somewhere under Irish Ridge Road that resulted in a couple months without water at the Nature Center, we ended up contracting with Rathbun Rural Water Association to run new water service to the park.



New concrete at Starr's Cave Nature Center

New software, fee structure

This year we implemented new event and membership management software called RecDesk. Now, registration for almost all of our events are run through the system as well as our shooting range memberships. The system also allows for digital check in at events and at the shooting range.

We also increased fees this year. Full hookup campsites went from \$25 to \$30, electric-only sites went from \$20 to \$25, and we went to a single household membership rate for the shooting range at \$45. Lifetime shooting range memberships went from \$500 to \$750.

Foundation hosts inaugural River Days event

The Partners for Conservation Foundation, a local nonprofit that supports much of the work we do here at the conservation department, hosted the inaugural Burlington River Days event in June. The event featured live music, a carnival, a boat parade and boat show, and "River Days Olympics" – a series of fun challenges hosted by local conservation and wildlife organizations. There was even a giant giveaway, the grand prize of which was a brand new boat. The event raised over \$20,000 for the foundation and plans are already underway for next year's event.

Burlington River Days



Staff Update

Part-time technicians Bryce Wade left this year and was replaced by Jacklyn Wolken who previously served as our Naturalist. We hired Shania Hansen to fill the Naturalist role. Shania previously worked in Henry County as an assistant naturalist.

Technician Derek Hester left in May. We promoted Brian Havener into that position. Brian had been one of the part-time technicians prior to that. Due to budget constraints, we did not backfill that part-time technician position.

Grant Swanson returned for his third summer internship with our field team. Kendall Colter also joined the team for

her first summer internship with us. At the nature center, Trevor Skalinski joined the Environmental Education team for his first summer internship, though he has volunteered with us many times in the past.

On the Conservation Board, Cathy Ziglar completed her final term having served for over 13 years with the department. Terry Davis was appointed to take her seat on the board. Then, following Jim Garnjobst's resignation due to health issues, Kathy Wunderlich was appointed to fill out his remaining term. Sadly, Jim Garnjobst passed away in late October. Jim had served on our board for 12 years.



Trevor Skalinski



Shania Hansen

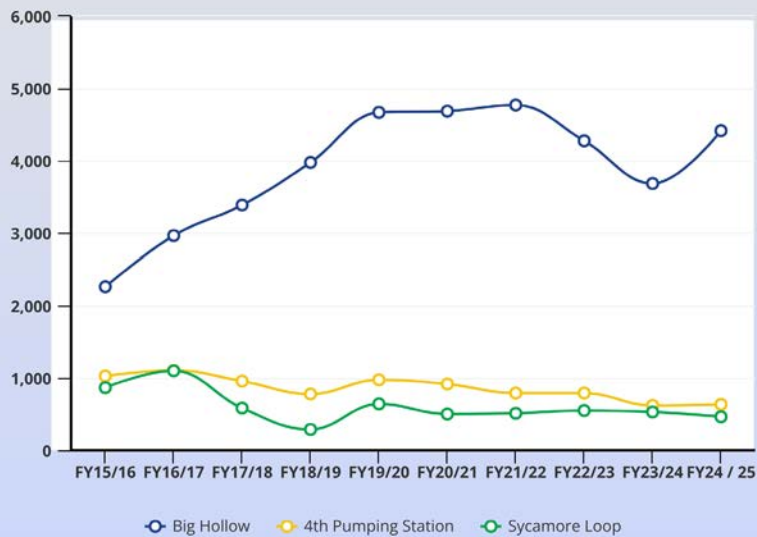


Kendall Colter



Brian Havener

Total Number of People Camping by Area



TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE CAMPING IN DES MOINES COUNTY



INCLUDES ALL CAMPGROUNDS PLUS THE CABINS

Outdoor Recreation

Annual Report July 2024 to June 2025 John H. Witte, Jr. Observatory Complex

- Open 41 times for 1027 public visitors, 615 hours of Volunteer time.
- Open 24 times of telescope training and member only use, 22 times for maintenance.

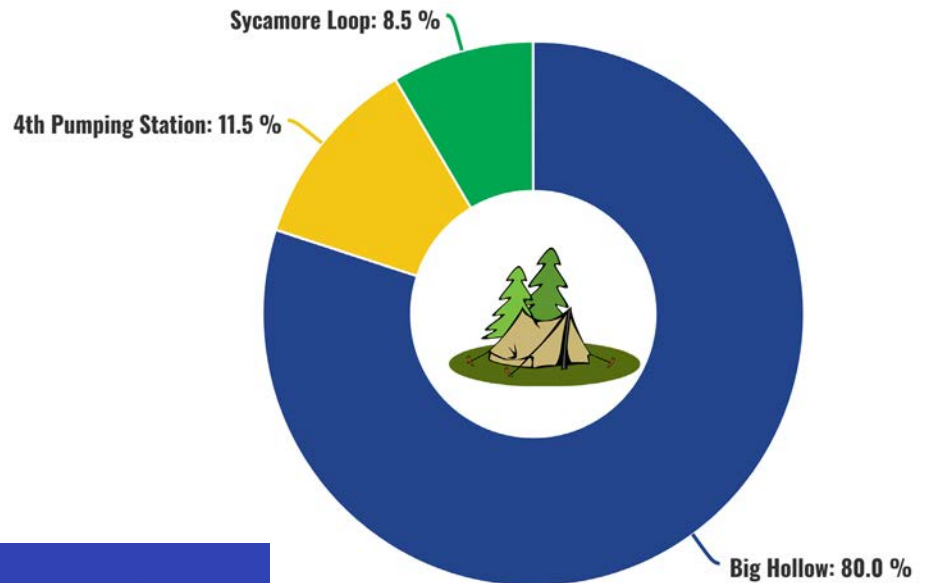
Updates to Observatory Complex

- Brandon Telescope
- New equipment for the Alvan Clark telescope
- Updated Learning Center – posters and stickers from NASA and lighting.
- Serviced Dome Motor
- Witte Dome chasing minor leaks.



Where Are People Camping?

Based on total nights, FY24/25



Shooting Range Membership

*Based on paid renewals



Trails

Park / Area	Miles of off-road Trails
Big Hollow	10.3
Flint River Trail	8.2
Hunt Woods	2.3
Luckenbill Woods	2.2
North Gorge Trail	1.5
Sarr's Cave	3.7
Total: 28.2 miles	

Big Hollow Recreation Area

18853 152nd Ave, Sperry
798 acres



Leopold Recreation Area

11816 Mill Dam Rd, Burlington
235 Acres



Starr's Cave

Nature Center & Preserve

11627 Starr's Cave Rd, Burlington
184 acres



Hickory Bend Conservation Area

16256 155th Ave, Sperry
269 acres



Welter Recreation Area

16839 Skunk River Rd, Burlington
79 acres



Luckenbill Woods

8795 Hawkeye Rd, Mediapolis
76 acres



Hunt Woods

12412 65th St, Burlington
58 acres



Kevin J Gahn Memorial Recreation Area

13724 Washington Rd, Burlington
56 acres, Public access is limited



FEMA Buyout Properties

57 Parcels, No public Access
102 acres

Sullivan Slough River Access

3175 Sullivan Slough Rd, Burlington
22 acres



4th Pumping Plant Recreation Area

2073 Pumping Station Rd, Oakville
17 acres



Chautauqua Roadside Park

10530 Mediapolis Rd, Mediapolis
10 acres

Hawkeye Dolbee River Access

4629 Lake Rd, Oakville
10 acres



Tama Beach River Access

13518 Tama Rd, Burlington
3 acres



Casey Barrow River Access

1867 180th St, Burlington
2 acres



Edgewater Beach River Access

13290 Tama Rd, Burlington
1 acre



Zion School

16495 155th Ave, Sperry
1 acre



North Gorge Trail

9668 Golf Course Rd, Burlington
36 acres

















Harold and Mildred Linder Conservation Area

3807 170th St, Sperry
105 acres



Legend

-  Camping
-  Hunting
-  Mississippi River Access
-  Swimming
-  Boat Access
-  Picnic Area
-  Shelter Houses
-  Dump Station
-  Restrooms
-  Fishing
-  Hiking
-  Bike Trails
-  Electrical Hook-Ups
-  Water

Land Stewardship

LAND STEWARDSHIP

Our focus this year was on maintenance. We worked hard at staying on top of invasive species, doing the maintenance mowing on areas that we had cleared last year, and applying fire when and where we can. Our fall burn season was short, resulting in fewer timber burns than we had hoped for. We also added some new food plots this year.

Public Land

- 7.18 acres of new food plots planted
- 5.78 acres of existing food plots maintained
- 24.57 acres of prairie burned
- 26 acres of timber burned



ENVIRONMENTAL/CONSERVATION EDUCATION PROGRAM

Activities of the EE Program Staff

JULY 2024 – JUNE 2025

Programs, Events, and Services

For the Fiscal Year 2024-2025, the Environmental Education Department at Starr's Cave Nature Center recorded a total of 16,449 visitors accessing our facilities and grounds. This figure is notable, especially considering it includes a month where the door counter malfunctioned in September, showing 0, meaning our actual casual visitation for the full year is likely even higher than reported. This overall visitation figure represents a change from the previous year's peak of 19,393.

The shifts in our program and participant numbers were significantly influenced by the active recruitment for a new naturalist position, which created a staffing gap impacting our core capacity for conservation education – a foundational element of our mission to develop an environmentally responsible community. Specifically, we were unable to offer spring field trip programming or in-class programming during this period, which contributed significantly to the observed decreases in school and youth group participation.

Despite these challenges, we remained steadfast in our commitment to the quality and variety of our environmental education programming. Through the dedicated efforts of our team, we continued to offer impactful annual educational programs such as Eagle Watch, Summer Camps, Monarch Watch, Fishing activities, Firearm Safety, and Hunters Education courses, all meticulously



Archery



Fall leaf hike

designed to foster environmental stewardship and provide outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities that complement learning. Beyond these, we also successfully hosted a diverse range of running and trail usage events that encouraged active participation, including the Memorial Day Veterans 5k, The Gobble Hobble, Ugly Sweater 5k, Westland Mall Crawl, Woodland Warrior Challenge Run, Donate Life 5k, and Mayday Half Marathon, further broadening our community engagement.

Casual visitation reached 11,911 for FY 24-25, indicating robust public engagement with the natural resources and facilities we manage through land stewardship, providing a vital backdrop for our educational efforts. While many traditional educational groups, such as those for preschool through fifth graders and youth groups, saw notable decreases in participation due to the specific programming gaps mentioned, public programs were a positive outlier, experiencing a substantial increase of 495 participants to a total of 2,378, even with fewer program offerings.

Demonstrating adaptability and our commitment to our vision for department administration, we also successfully launched new initiatives like Hook & Hunt and CORES (Community Outdoor Recreation Education Specialist) to diversify our outreach and educational methods. Regarding monthly trends, participation generally peaked in the fall (with September's casual visitation data being absent due to the malfunction),

Conservation Education

with October displaying high engagement, while program numbers were higher in summer months like July and June. Winter months (December to February) typically saw a noticeable slowdown. This data highlights a transitional year, where the impact of a key personnel vacancy was evident in our environmental education outreach, but also underscored our ability to maintain program quality, innovate, and uphold our department's mission.

Furthermore, enhancing our commitment to providing quality and accessible outdoor education, we finished the concrete ADA accessibility project, significantly improving access for all visitors to our educational facilities and trails, and, through a generous Delta Dental Grant, successfully installed an outdoor bottle filling station, promoting sustainability and convenience for our program participants.

This ongoing success is made possible through the generous support of our community partners, including Kiwanis of Burlington, the Aldo Leopold Chapter of Pheasants Forever, The Murray Foundation, and the Community Foundation, to name a few, who are vital to sustaining our environmental education initiatives.



Youth Shooting Day

Group	# of Programs	+/- change from previous FY	# of Participants	+/- change from previous FY
Preschool – K	6	-14	122	-303
1st – 2nd	21	26	437	-407
3rd – 5th	17	-30	350	-557
6th – 8th	4	2	40	-12
9th – 12th	5	-2	70	-33
Homeschools	6	-1	124	-10
Care Centers	4	-3	44	-35
Youth Groups / After School	38	-30	757	-403
Civic Groups	2	0	57	-68
Public	49	-10	2,378	495
Professional	2	-2	21	-78
Hunter/Range Safety	2	1	44	32
Camps	47	0	163	21
Totals	203	-63	4,607	-1,358



Ugly sweater Sk

Starr's Cave Nature Center Visitation											
Type of visitation	FY 12-13	FY 13-14	FY 14-15	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	FY 22-23	FY 23-24	FY 24-25
Attending a Program	3,252	5,706	6,116	5,116	5,000	5,121	1,423	214	4,993	5,938	4,538
Renting the Building	1,465	1,850	2,263	2,000	2,000	2,500	1,000	200	0	0	0
Casual Visitation	2,532	3,067	5,263	4,263	9,595	8,743	8,344	7,001	8,851	13,455	11,911
Totals	7,249	10,623	13,642	11,379	16,595	16,364	10,767	7,415	13,844	19,393	16,449

Volunteer Recognition

CHEERS TO OUR GREAT VOLUNTEERS!

At our annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner in August 2024, we recognized some of our great volunteers with the following awards:

Volunteer of the Year: Alison Powell

This year's Volunteer of the Year Award went to Alison Powell for her dedicated service to staffing the nature center on weekends.



Volunteer Group of the Year: Aldo Leopold Pheasants Forever Chapter

The Volunteer Group of the Year Award went to the local Aldo Leopold Pheasants Forever chapter for their outstanding service at raising funds for public land expansion, volunteering with our public programs, and improving habitat throughout the county.



Environmental Educator of the Year: Madison Hay

This year's Environmental Educator of the Year Award goes to Madison Hay for her dedicated service to our education programs and summer camps.



Outstanding Service Award: George Van Hagen

This year we presented George Van Hagen an Outstanding Service Award for his extensive volunteerism keeping our parks clean, assisting with our monarch tagging, and helping with multiple education programs throughout the year.

Volunteers really are critical to our operations. They help with everything from field work, to youth programs, to department administration. Des Moines County Conservation appreciates all the volunteers that help us throughout the year, and we look forward to being able to recognize everyone in person at next year's volunteer recognition event.

You can watch the presentation videos on our YouTube Channel.



Scan this code to
watch the videos!



Financial Statement

REAP Fund - Revenue

Account	Revenues
0023-2-22-6110-846067 REAP GRANTS-CONTR-EQUAL SHARE	7,588.00
0023-2-22-6110-846067 REAP GRANTS-PER CAPITA	8,879.00
0023-4-22-6110-600000 INTEREST ON INVESTMENTS	2,276.28
Total - REAP Revenues	18,743.28

Conservation Reserve Fund - Revenue

Account	Revenues
0027-0-22-0300-900000 TRANSFER FROM GENERAL BASIC FUND	457,949.00
0027-1-22-6110-412000 BOAT TITLES	1,260.00
0027-1-22-6110-441021 SHOOTING RANGE CERT-NEW	5,335.00
0027-1-22-6110-441022 SHOOTING RANGE CERT-RENEWALS	16,655.00
0027-1-22-6110-520000 CABIN RENTALS	13,405.00
0027-1-22-6110-520031 CAMP FEES-SYCAMORE LOOP	5,672.00
0027-1-22-6110-520038 CAMP FEES-BIG HOLLOW CREEK	83,370.00
0027-1-22-6110-520039 CAMP FEES-4TH PUMPING STATION	18,080.00
0027-1-22-6110-520041 CAMP FEES-MISC RELATED TO CAMP	11,355.00
0027-1-22-6110-523044 REC FACILITY RENT SHOOTING RANGE	100.00
0027-1-22-6110-523047 REC FACILITY RENT-SHELTERS	345.00
0027-1-22-6110-839062 SALE OF OTR COMM-TIMBER	18,874.50
0027-1-22-6110-847000 MISC REIMB	2,629.80
0027-1-22-6110-847064 MISC REIMB-PLANTING SERVICES	19,188.94
0027-1-22-6120-529000 PROGRAM FEES	11,613.50
0027-1-22-6120-810000 DONATION	47,589.00
0027-3-22-6110-265500 FISH HABITAT COST SHARE GRANT	69,155.00
0027-3-22-6110-265600 LAND & WATER CONS FUND GRANTS	149,614.00
0027-4-22-6110-920000 SALES OF GENERAL FIXED ASSETS	12,048.75
Total - Conservation Reserve Fund Revenues	944,239.49

General Supplemental - Expense

Account	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditures	% Rem.	\$ Balance
0002-22-6100-000-11000 FICA	9,781.00	9,590.77	1.94	190.23
0002-22-6100-000-11100 IPERS	12,069.00	12,015.16	0.45	53.84
0002-22-6100-000-11300 GROUP INSURANCE	28,909.00	29,015.68	-0.37	-106.68
0002-22-6110-000-11000 FICA	20,394.00	20,138.43	1.25	255.57
0002-22-6110-000-11100 IPERS	23,453.00	23,040.53	1.76	412.47
0002-22-6110-000-11300 GROUP INSURANCE	57,818.00	56,332.20	2.57	1,485.80
0002-22-6120-000-11000 FICA	10,050.00	9,299.49	7.47	750.51
0002-22-6120-000-11100 IPERS	10,668.00	11,402.02	-6.88	-734.02
0002-22-6120-000-11300 GROUP INSURANCE	28,909.00	28,006.44	3.12	902.56
Total - General Supplemental	202,051.00	198,840.72	2.00	3,210.28

Conservation Reserve Fund - Expense

Account	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditures	% Rem.	\$ Balance
0027-22-0220-000-42360 CONSULTATIONS & SURVEYS	2,517.00	2,516.60	0.02	.40
0027-22-0220-000-61050 STARRS CAVE NATURE CENTER	20,685.00	20,558.91	0.61	126.09
0027-22-0220-000-62010 PARKS/PERM. IMPROVEMENTS	77,452.00	77,451.97	0.00	0.03
0027-22-0220-000-62810 BHCRA/PERM. IMPROVEMENTS	100,911.00	100,910.31	0.00	0.69
0027-22-6100-000-10010 ADMINISTRATORS/EXEC DIRECTOR	72,606.00	72,327.23	0.38	278.77
0027-22-6100-000-10050 CORR OFF/P RNGR/OFC MGR/CIV ATTY	51,368.00	51,072.51	0.58	295.49
0027-22-6100-000-10200 LONGEVITY	3,880.00	3,880.00	0.00	0.00
0027-22-6100-000-26000 OFFICE SUPPLIES	1,000.00	537.27	46.27	462.73
0027-22-6100-000-26200 DATA PROCESSING SUPPLIES	3,900.00	4,439.80	-13.84	-539.80
0027-22-6100-000-29400 WEARING APPAREL & UNIFORMS	2,000.00	1,857.12	7.14	142.88
0027-22-6100-000-40000 OFC PUBLICATIONS & LEGAL NOTICES	300.00	238.11	20.63	61.89
0027-22-6100-000-41400 TELECOMMUNICATIONS SRVS	8,000.00	9,094.96	-13.69	-1,094.96
0027-22-6100-000-42210 SCHOOL OF INSTRUCTION	6,000.00	3,645.46	39.24	2,354.54
0027-22-6100-000-44400 OFC & DATA P EQUIP REPR/MAINT	500.00	0.00	100.00	500.00
0027-22-6100-000-48000 DUES & MEMBERSHIPS	3,000.00	4,870.79	-62.36	-1,870.79
0027-22-6110-000-10020 DEPUTIES/ASSTS/INVESTI/FOREMAN	54,238.00	51,246.90	5.51	2,991.10
0027-22-6110-000-10030 CLERKS	47,135.00	46,864.34	0.57	270.66
0027-22-6110-000-10050 CORR OFF/P RNGR/CIV ATTY	7,081.00	7,080.70	0.00	0.30
0027-22-6110-000-10070 PARK TECHNICIANS	92,152.00	91,242.78	0.99	909.22
0027-22-6110-000-10100 TEMPORARY & PART TIME	68,900.00	62,447.49	9.37	6,452.51
0027-22-6110-000-10200 LONGEVITY	4,160.00	4,510.00	-8.41	-350.00
0027-22-6110-000-20200 CHEMICALS & GASES/HERBICIDES	1,500.00	691.12	53.93	808.88
0027-22-6110-000-20300 FERTILIZER & SEED	200.00	145.50	27.25	54.50
0027-22-6110-000-20400 TREES & SHRUBS	2,466.00	2,465.92	0.00	0.08
0027-22-6110-000-21210 PARKS - ROCK & SAND	4,000.00	5,249.43	-31.24	-1,249.43
0027-22-6110-000-21400 TRAFFIC & ST SIGN MATERIALS	1,500.00	513.75	65.75	986.25
0027-22-6110-000-21910 PARKS - ALL OTHER EXPENSES	51,000.00	49,232.88	3.46	1,767.12
0027-22-6110-000-23210 PARKS - CUSTODIAL	2,000.00	2,852.65	-42.63	-852.65
0027-22-6110-000-25000 FUELS	22,000.00	18,455.67	16.11	3,544.33
0027-22-6110-000-25100 LUBRICANTS	1,000.00	334.67	66.53	665.33
0027-22-6110-000-29000 MINOR EQUIPMENT & HAND TOOLS	1,000.00	950.82	4.92	49.18
0027-22-6110-000-29300 SAFETY & PROTECTIVE SUPPLIES	1,500.00	3,667.29	-144.49	-2,167.29
0027-22-6110-000-29302 LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPLIES	7,743.00	7,742.72	0.00	0.28
0027-22-6110-000-43000 NATURAL & LP GAS	6,500.00	4,946.48	23.90	1,553.52
0027-22-6110-000-43110 PARKS - ELECTRICITY	25,000.00	22,198.32	11.21	2,801.68

Conservation Reserve Fund - Expense - Continued

Account	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditures	% Rem.	\$ Balance
0027-22-6110-000-43200 WATER USE	4,800.00	5,281.57	-10.03	-481.57
0027-22-6110-000-44000 MOTOR VEH EQUIP REPAIR/MAINT	7,000.00	6,040.74	13.70	959.26
0027-22-6110-000-44300 OPER & CONSTR EQUIP REPAIR/MAINT	10,000.00	8,488.79	15.11	1,511.21
0027-22-6110-000-48320 CONTRACT MOWING	26,865.00	26,585.00	1.04	280.00
0027-22-6120-000-10070 NATURALIST/PARK TECH/RD BIOLGIS	54,355.00	54,103.54	0.46	251.46
0027-22-6120-000-10090 OTHER/LT	42,960.00	44,417.85	-3.39	-1,457.85
0027-22-6120-000-10100 TEMPORARY & PART TIME	32,000.00	28,293.00	11.58	3,707.00
0027-22-6120-000-11000 FICA	1,582.00	489.60	69.05	1,092.40
0027-22-6120-000-11100 IPERS	1,953.00	604.16	69.07	1,348.84
0027-22-6120-000-29700 EE PROGRAM SUPPLIES	5,000.00	6,823.75	-36.48	-1,823.75
0027-22-6120-000-42940 MARKETING SERVICES	3,700.00	3,868.22	-4.55	-168.22
Total - CONSERVATION RESERVE FUND EXPENSE	947,089.00	923,696.69	3.00	23,392.31

REAP Fund - Expense

Account	Adjusted Appropriation	Expenditures	% Rem.	\$ Balance
0023-22-0220-000-61050 STARRS CAVE NC	15,000.00	11,040.00	26.40	3,960.00
Total - REAP FUND EXPENSE	15,000.00	11,040.00	26.40	3,960.00

Summer camp creek stomp



Staff Directory

Administration



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Board Member Directory

Board Member Directory		
Position	Name	Term Expires
Chair	Julie Solinski	12/31/2025
Vice-Chair	Ron Helling	12/31/2027
Secretary / Treasurer	Dan Hockett	12/31/2028
Member	Kathy Wunderlich	12/31/2026
Member	Terry Davis	12/31/2029

Conservation Board Meetings

- July 3, 2024 RM
- August 7, 2024 RM
- September 4, 2024 RM
- September 30, 2024 WS
- October 2, 2024 RM
- November 6, 2024 RM
- December 3, 2023 WS
- December 4, 2024 RM
- January 8, 2025 WS
- January 8, 2025 RM
- February 12, 2025 WS
- February 12, 2025 RM
- March 5, 2025 RM
- April 2, 2025 RM
- May 7, 2025 RM
- June 4, 2025 RM

RM - Regular Meeting

SM - Special Meeting

WS - Work Session

Hickory Bend





Des Moines County Conservation

