

WAUKESHA COUNTY PARK SYSTEM

# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS ANNUAL REPORT

2024



Waukesha County  
Park System

# HELLO!

The Waukesha County Park System experienced another outstanding year of volunteer engagement, with individuals, families, businesses, and community organizations all playing a vital role in supporting our parks and programs.

The volunteer program is designed to create meaningful, mutually beneficial opportunities by aligning volunteer interests and skills with a wide range of projects, events, and initiatives across the park system. This approach ensures a rewarding experience for our volunteers while advancing the department's goals in conservation, education, and community enrichment.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all who generously contributed their time, talents, and resources in 2024. Your commitment to environmental stewardship continues to strengthen our mission and enhance the quality of life in Waukesha County.





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# 2024 VOLUNTEER HOURS

Volunteer Role	Hours
Park Maintenance	2368.45
Natural Land Management	773.75
Citizen Science	774.75
Retzer Teaching Naturalist	684.25
Special Event	489.25
Retzer Animal Care	301.75
Scouts	244.25
Adopt-A-Drain	580.00
Adopt-A-Trail	662.00
Adopt-A-Park	200.25



**8,522.70**  
**TOTAL HOURS**

No matter what work they do, volunteers are contributing in invaluable ways to the Waukesha County Park System and the community.

A total of 8,522.70 volunteer hours were contributed to Waukesha County Parks with volunteer service being valued at a whopping **\$285,425.22** in 2024!

Waukesha County Parks and Land Use also hit the goal to have an overall engagement rating of 4 out of 5 stars from the annual Volunteer Engagement Survey.

Measuring satisfaction allows for staff to make improvements to programs so that the maximum benefit may be realized to both the volunteer and the park system.

**WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/PARKVOLUNTEERS**

\* In its newest Value of Volunteer Time report, Independent Sector, with the Do Good Institute, announced on April 19, 2024 that the latest value of a volunteer hour is estimated to be \$33.49. The 2023 volunteer hour value in Wisconsin was \$31.80. Source: <https://independentsector.org>



# VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

2024



Overall  
Volunteer  
Experience  
Rating of

4.65/5 STARS



96%

would  
**RECOMMEND**  
our volunteer  
program to  
a friend or  
colleague!



Waukesha County  
Park System





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

## CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMS

Supported by  
**FRIENDS** of Retzer

The Friends of Retzer Nature Center have been supporting Waukesha County Park System's **Conservation in the Parks** Citizen Science Programs with both financial and volunteer support since 2019. Thank you Friends!

**MISSION:**  
Making sure that common  
species remain common  
and that rare, threatened,  
and endangered species  
are protected!

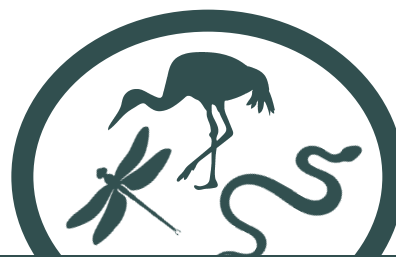


## THE DATA

The data collected through the Conservation in the Parks programs provides Waukesha County with valuable information to help shape park and habitat management plans.

Many species are indicators and are closely associated with plant community type, quality, and structure. Having this data recorded also allows us to apply for special grants and other funding opportunities.

The data is also submitted to other organizations throughout the region, the state, and nationally.



**200+** SPECIES  
RECORDED

**SINCE  
2018**



**1,500+** VOLUNTEERS



**10,000+** HOURS

[WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/CONSERVATIONINTHEPARKS](http://WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/CONSERVATIONINTHEPARKS)





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMS

## INVERTEBRATE MONITORING



### ODONATE MONITORING (DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES)

- **93** Dragonfly and Damselfly Species Recorded



Participate in dragonfly and damselfly counts across multiple locations in 2025! Learn from our staff and experts from the Wisconsin Dragonfly Society about the different species found in our parks!

[WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/CONSERVATIONINTHEPARKS](http://WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/CONSERVATIONINTHEPARKS)

### Common White Tail



### BUMBLE BEE MONITORING



- **11 of 20** Species of Bumble Bee Discovered in Waukesha County

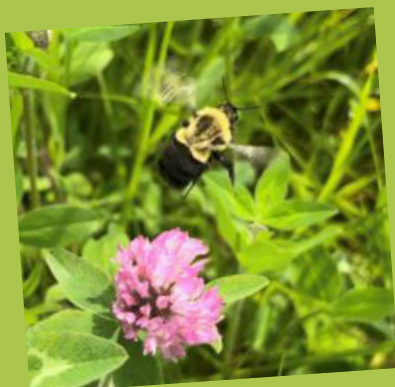


#### **Red-Belted Bumble Bee**

A very common bee in urban parks and gardens, most often found in Canada and western, midwestern, and northeastern United States.



We're still looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help monitor bumble bee populations in Waukesha County Parks and greenways. By becoming a community science partner, you'll play a key role in supporting pollinator conservation. Volunteers complete a short online training and are assigned a specific natural area to "adopt." From April/May through October, you'll visit your site six times to photograph bumble bees and submit your sightings to the Wisconsin DNR's Bumble Bee





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

## CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMS

### INVERTEBRATE MONITORING



#### FRESHWATER MUSSEL MONITORING

- 11 Volunteers
- 22 Hours Donated



#### Fun Fact

In Waukesha County, volunteers trained through the Mussel Monitoring Program have been instrumental in identifying and cataloging native mussel species, some of which can live over 100 years. Their presence and health are key indicators of the overall condition of our local waterways. By participating in this program, volunteers contribute to the conservation of these ancient and vital creatures, helping to ensure the health of our aquatic ecosystems for generations to come.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Giant Floater Mussels (*Pyganodon grandis*) are nature's water purifiers. They are excellent biological indicators of water quality. They are long-lived and relatively immobile, accumulating contaminants in water that can be scientifically analyzed. This makes them valuable for monitoring environmental health. These mussels, reach up to 10 inches in length. Despite their size, their shell is relatively thin and inflated, which allows them to "float" in soft sediments at the bottom of lakes and rivers.



#### SEEKING More Volunteers

#### Discovering Mussels

Waukesha County Park System staff and volunteers have been participating in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Mussel Monitoring Program (WMMP) surveying for freshwater mussels in the parks and greenways since 2022!

#### Join us in 2025!

Help Waukesha County continue the program! Get into local rivers and streams and document the mussel populations to help their populations.



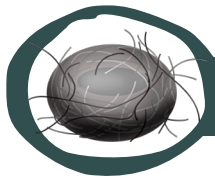




# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMS

## BIRD CONSERVATION



### NEST BOX MONITORING

- 10 Volunteers
- 268 Hours Donated
- 9 Park Sites
- 5 Bird Species Recorded

**SEEKING**  
More Volunteers

#### Join us in 2025!

Love birds? Enjoy peaceful walks in the park or along scenic trails? We're looking for volunteers to help monitor nest boxes in natural areas throughout the County.

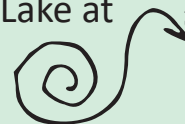


## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT


### Duck House Installations

Park staff have been diligently adding waterfowl nesting structures to our core park locations.

Park staff installed new mallard houses along Grass Lake at Nashotah Park!







# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

## CITIZEN SCIENCE PROGRAMS

### SHARING KNOWLEDGE

Waukesha County's iNaturalist project page, '*Wild in Waukesha*', continues to grow. The community contributed over 33,943 observations in 2024. This is a **38.6% growth!**

iNaturalist is one of the most popular nature apps that can connect you with a community of more than 400,000 scientists and naturalists who can help teach more about nature. Contributing your own observations helps contribute to biodiversity. Findings are shared with scientific data repositories to help scientists find and use your data.

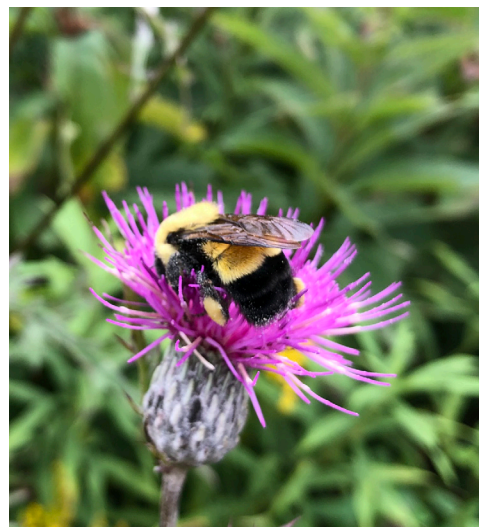
Check out the project and submit your observations online.

**[WWW.INATURALIST.ORG/PROJECTS/WILD-IN-WAUKESHA](http://WWW.INATURALIST.ORG/PROJECTS/WILD-IN-WAUKESHA)**



The number of users, species, and observations on Waukesha County's iNaturalist project page increased again in 2024. Thanks for submitting!

Category	2021	2022	2023	2024
Users	1,972	2,453	2,906	3,425
Species	3,400	4,109	4,866	5,662
Observations	41,088	60,173	87,759	121,702





# VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT

DIANNE WILKE-ZEMANOVIC

400  
HOURS  
ANNUALLY



## Dianne Wilke-Zemanovic

Dianne has been an invaluable volunteer at Retzer Nature Center for many years, starting with the Apple Harvest Fest and gradually deepening her commitment to the Nature Center. From removing invasive garlic mustard along the trails to cleaning up around the pond, Dianne's dedication has helped preserve the natural beauty. She made Tuesdays her dedicated day for volunteering and furthered her knowledge by becoming a certified Wisconsin Master Gardener and Naturalist, which has enabled her to share her expertise with visitors and fellow volunteers.

As part of a small team, Dianne helps with the planning, planting, weeding, and mulching in the planting beds around the Environmental Learning Center, the Discovery Trail, the Children's Garden, the Retzer Homestead, and trails. She also plays a key role in organizing historical displays, supporting programming, and helping with special events, enriching the experience of school groups and first-time visitors. Dianne's work goes far beyond just maintaining the Nature Center—it is a heartfelt gift to the community and to future generations. One of her most memorable moments was watching turtles hatch in the Children's Garden. Just recently, Dianne started the Retzer Book Club, leading discussions on relevant nature-related books for other volunteers and staff.

Dianne, and her husband, Dave, volunteer approximately 400 hours each year, and both have been long-standing members of the Friends of Retzer Nature Center. Together their passion, dedication, and positive impact are deeply appreciated by both the staff and the visitors they so generously serve. Their contributions ensure that Retzer remains a treasured resource for years to come.



# WISCONSIN MASTER NATURALIST

## 2024 TRAINING



### ***Learn and Serve in Nature***

Supported through the University of Wisconsin—Madison Division of Extension, the Master Naturalist program promotes awareness, understanding, and stewardship of the natural environment by developing a network of well-informed volunteers dedicated to conservation service within their communities.

To become a Master Naturalist, individuals complete 40 hours of expert-led training at locations across the state. Equipped with new knowledge, experiences, and connections, Master Naturalists then go on to serve stewardship, citizen science, and education efforts in Wisconsin and continue their learning through advanced trainings.

In 2024, Waukesha County Parks and Friends of Retzer Nature Center hosted a week-long training at Retzer Nature Center and throughout the County.

Graduates from the program are now volunteering in the parks as Teaching Naturalists, citizen scientists, and land stewards.

Find a Master Naturalist training:

**WIMASTERNATURALIST.ORG**



WISCONSIN  
Master Naturalist





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS



## NATURAL LAND MANAGEMENT



## INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL

- **38** Species Controlled
- **3,270** Staff Hours Spent Controlling
- **430** Volunteer Hours Spent Controlling



### ***Waukesha County Parks Receives Invasive Species Action Award***

Our work in invasive species control, prevention, and education earned statewide recognition when the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council (WDNR) awarded us with the Invasive Species Action Award in June 2024.



# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS



## NATURAL LAND MANAGEMENT



### PRESCRIBED BURNING



#### ***Did You Know?***

In 2024, Waukesha County Parks conducted controlled burns at six sites to manage invasive species and improve habitat. Led by trained County staff, these burns are an efficient and cost-effective method that reduces the need for pesticides and mechanical equipment. Controlled burns help control brush, boost native plant growth, and create better habitat for grassland-dependent species. Fire stimulates new plant growth, warms the soil to encourage germination, and enriches the soil by returning essential nutrients.





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS



## STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS

### NASHOTAH PARK GRASS LAKE SHORELINE RESTORATION

The Waukesha County Parks Natural Land Management Team has been hard at work restoring the shoreline of Grass Lake at Nashotah Park. By removing invasive species through cutting, burning, and targeted stump treatments, they've successfully reopened the area—bringing sunlight back to the forest floor and creating space for native plants and wildlife to thrive once again.



### BROWN'S FEN RESTORATION

In 2024, restoration work at Brown's Fen progressed significantly, enhancing its hydrological function and increasing species diversity. Classified as an NA-3 natural area, the project will help restore this vital habitat, making it easier for staff and volunteers to maintain.





# VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHT



## THANK YOU METRO MOUNTAIN BIKERS!

Minooka Park's mountain bike trails are a rider favorite—and it's no accident! Thanks to the ongoing support and stewardship of Metro Mountain Bikers, the trails are thoughtfully maintained, improved, and expanded for all skill levels. From routine maintenance to trail enhancements and community rides, Metro volunteers play a key role in making Minooka a premier destination for mountain bikers across the region.

Whether you're just starting out on the 1.5-mile Green Loop—with its mellow climbs, flowing prairie sections, and a fun woody berm finish—or pushing your limits on the 4.5-mile Blue Loop—with its bigger features and fast descents—there's something here for everyone. Technical sections through tight trees challenge even seasoned riders, while loop combinations offer flexibility and fun. With Metro Mountain Bikers behind the scenes, Minooka continues to thrive as a welcoming and exciting spot for both new riders and seasoned racers alike.

Special thanks to Metro Mountain Bikers for their volunteer efforts help keep Minooka's trails safe, fun, and accessible for all riders. We couldn't do it without them!

## VOLUNTEERS AT WORK



OVER 900  
HOURS  
SINCE 2015





# CONSERVATION IN THE PARKS

## STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

### VOLUNTEER SPECIAL EVENTS



## MONCHES PROPERTY REFORESTATION PROJECT

**Thursday, October 25, 2024**  
**Volunteer Tree Planting**



- 1,068 trees and shrubs were planted in 2024, a record breaking year!
- This important work completed Phase IV of the Monches Reforestation Project!

## THANK YOU!

Special thanks to the volunteers from **Target-Delafield, InPro, ProHealth Care, Kohl's, Generac, Milwaukee Tool, Baird, Regal Rexnord and Tim O'Brien Homes** for their help planting at various park locations in 2024!

[WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/PARKLANDCONSERVATION](http://WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/PARKLANDCONSERVATION)



## ARBOR DAY VOLUNTEER TREE PLANTING

**Friday, April 26, 2024**  
**Fox Brook Park**

- 80 Volunteers
- 300+ Native Trees and Shrubs Planted
- Sponsored by Johnson's Nursery



**THANK YOU!** Thanks to **Johnson's Nursery** for their donation of trees and shrubs!



## WAUKESHA COUNTY PARKLAND CONSERVATION FUND

The Parkland Conservation Fund helps protect, restore, and enhance greenspaces throughout the Waukesha County Park System.

This stewardship fund focuses on wildlife habitat restoration and improvements to natural areas. Donations are an investment in local natural resources, public lands, and parks for generations to come.

### **PROJECT IN NEED!**

#### **Support a WisCorps Crew at Nashotah Park!**

We're launching a vital restoration project at Nashotah Park focused on two key goals: removing invasive brush along the ecologically sensitive shoreline of Grass Lake and creating a conservation-focused workforce development opportunity for WisCorps members in Waukesha County.

A 2020 plant survey identified 205 native species in the park, including the state-threatened Kittentails and 16 uncommon plants. The area also supports the federally endangered rusty-patched bumble bee—clear evidence of the park's exceptional ecological value.

With donor support, this project will help restore oak woodland, expanding habitat for over 500 insect species and a wide variety of migratory birds. ***Help us reach our goal!***



**DONATE NOW:**  
[WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/PARKLANDCONSERVATION](http://WWW.WAUKESHACOUNTY.GOV/PARKLANDCONSERVATION)



# URBAN FORESTRY GRANT

## Muskego Park - Picnic Area 1



## WAUKESHA COUNTY PARKS RECEIVES URBAN FORESTRY GRANT

In 2024, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources awarded a \$25,000 Urban Forestry Grant to the Waukesha County Department of Parks and Land Use. This funding supported Phase 1 of a comprehensive tree inventory across the County's core parks, golf courses, regional trails, and campus grounds. More than 6,000 trees were assessed to help guide long-term planning for tree care, including pruning, planting, and removals. The initiative comes at a critical time, as local tree canopy continues to decline due to invasive pests like the emerald ash borer and diseases such as oak wilt and bur oak blight.

This proactive inventory is a vital step toward sustaining healthy, resilient urban forests throughout Waukesha County. By identifying species composition, tree condition, and potential risks, the County can prioritize maintenance efforts, enhance biodiversity, and plan for future plantings that are better adapted to climate change and pest pressures. The data collected will also support grant applications, public engagement, and educational outreach—reinforcing the County's commitment to environmental stewardship and long-term urban forest management. Waukesha County has already received an additional Urban Forestry Grant to implement Phase 2 in fall 2025.

## GRANT IMPACT AND ALLOCATION

PHASE 1



TREE INVENTORY



# Testimonials

*“It was so nice to work alongside coworkers as well as the wonderful people from the Parks that I’ve come to know while volunteering over the years. It is evident that everyone enjoys the work and that our help is appreciated. It’s truly a highlight of my year to come out to Retzer.”*



*“I appreciate how the supervisors took the time to educate my students on the invasive species we were looking for, why we need to help rid the land of invasive species, and we also learned some of the history around the invasive species.”*



**Waukesha County  
Park System**