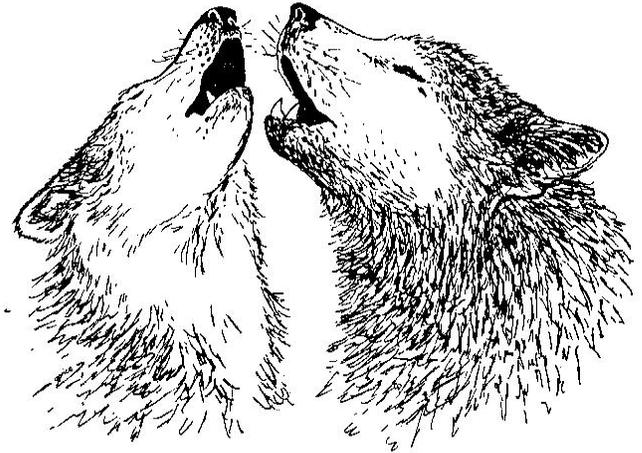


Osborne Oracle



Spring 2026

Clayton County Conservation

Vol. 49 No.1

Cultivating Accountability, Growing Economic Opportunity by Jenna K. Van Meeteren, Executive Director

Over the past decade, I've had the privilege of watching Clayton County grow—not just in its natural beauty and recreational opportunities, but in the strength of the people who call it home. When I began serving as Executive Director in 2015, Clayton County's Conservation Department faced both structural limitations and public misconceptions about its financial footprint.

Yet behind those early pressures was an opportunity—to rethink how conservation could not only enrich lives but also responsibly contribute to the county's long-term economic vitality. Over the last ten years, that opportunity has shaped every major decision, every project pursued, and every effort to demonstrate both value and accountability to the people we serve.

There were existing plans, a master plan, a visioning plan for Motor Mill, and eventually a five-year plan for the Conservation Board that were informed by public feedback on what the local cohort wanted to see developed and implemented by the Conservation Department.

Not surprising, almost every "project" came with a big price tag, but perhaps an even more crucial component was the pattern of each project coming with an anticipated revenue stream. Project development was juxtaposed with a financial return, and that ended up being the guiding beacon over the last ten-years of project planning within the Conservation Department.

When I reflect on my time as Director, the board and staff have checked off several large development projects that will and have provided additional revenues for the county (both directly and indirectly). These development projects

are two-fold as they draw in revenue, they also draw more people to our county. Most of these projects were in the planning phase long before I accepted the Director role, and managing these projects through their first few years of operations will continue after I'm officially done working for Clayton County.

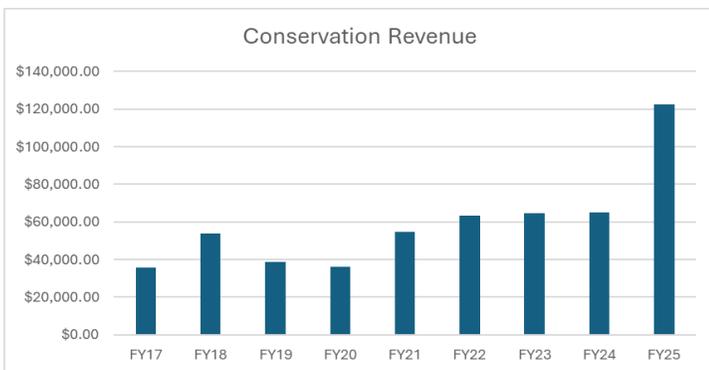
It will take time before we can draw any strong conclusions on the return on investment. I can say with confidence, these projects were supported by competitive grants that could've gone anywhere else in the region, state, or even nation (depending on the grant source), but we made it a priority to bring those dollars to Clayton County for development. These projects were heavily supported by local fundraising efforts as well, which reinforced our desire to move forward with the project and have the matching dollars in hand to compete for the grants that tipped the scales in our favor.

I have to walk a fine line here, as I think every County Department in Clayton works to find cost savings for the county. Does every department work to find additional revenue streams? It varies and opportunities vary. If Covid-19 and the relief funds that followed taught us anything, it's that opportunities come along rarely and seizing on those opportunities makes the difference between getting ahead and falling behind.

All that said, I think the Conservation Department has made every effort to increase our revenue, and offset our county expenses in the last decade, and we've surpassed every department in that effort.

Continued on Page 2...

Listening to the Trees ...continued from page 1



What does it matter?

While fiscal constraint was bludgeoned into my brain from day one of serving in this role, so was the value I prize above all- accountability. To me that means you practice what you preach, and that's the second overarching goal I feel the Conservation Board and Staff have achieved over the last ten-years and will continue to work towards for years to come.

It was so important at some of our earliest meetings, that we made sure to include it in our mission statement.

*"The mission of the Clayton County Conservation Board is to promote the health and general welfare of the people; and to **model** and encourage preservation, conservation, education and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage."*

Early on we tweaked the Conservation Board mission statement ever so slightly to incorporate the word "model" in our mission.

It is the Conservation Board's responsibility to practice what we preach, which is why there's been a pretty big shift in our land management practices over the last decade. It's tough to win at that without expanding department personnel, and especially challenging when staff must know a little about every topic rather than have the luxury to be the poster child of knowledge on one topic, but we continue to seek learning opportunities and growing support to meet those needs.

Are we being successful?

The Conservation Board and Staff know that I'm constantly seeking input (perhaps too much). I need feedback to guide my actions forward and motivate me to improve on a personal and professional level, and if that feedback isn't there.... I make other opportunities.

I'm thankful that the county posted a strategic planning survey to round-out 2025, and I'm even more thankful that

I had a first-row seat, or rather inbox, to peruse those results as they came in because it was eye opening. It also reinforces the ideas I've shared above.

Not surprisingly, Conservation is one department that respondents say they engage with on a regular basis. Again, when opportunity knocks, public programming is being offered by our department, perhaps we have an advantage to provide county services (they may not be considered essential, but they're heavily utilized).

The survey results also heavily stressed a desire to see accountability at the county-level. Perhaps most informative of all was the feedback on the type of programming and information the public wants to consume, as there seems to be an increased need for more information on the health statistics playing out in Northeast Iowa.

As I reflect on these last ten years, I'm grateful for the people, partnerships, and shared vision that made this progress possible. The work of conservation is never finished, and the next decade will bring new opportunities—some planned, others unexpected—to continue strengthening our county's natural, cultural, and economic resilience.

What matters most is that we remain committed to accountability, thoughtful stewardship, and modeling the values we ask others to embrace. Clayton County has an exciting future ahead, and I am confident the Conservation Board and staff will continue to lead with integrity, creativity, and a deep respect for the land and community we serve.



The author laughing her way up the hill, making sure everyone survives the Motor Motor Trail Run.

Clayton County Conservation Board's Upcoming Events & Programs

Motor Motor 5K/10K Trail Run

Saturday, March 21 9:00 AM

Motor Mill Historic Site

Celebrating 10 years! Come and tackle the hills surrounding the beautiful Turkey River Valley with this amazing start to the racing season in Northeast Iowa. Prizes for first overall male & female in both races, along with age group winner trophies!

Pasque Flower Hike

Friday, April 10 5:00 PM

Motor Mill Historic Site

Lace up the hiking shoes for a rugged hike to find the elusive Pasque Flower, one of the first blooms of spring, on an off-trail prairie and savanna restoration at the Motor Mill Historic Site!

Lessons from the Lorax

Wednesday, April 22 4:00-5:00 PM

Osborne Center

This afterschool program celebrates Earth Day with a reading of *The Lorax*, followed by an exploration of the lessons in the story through an interactive presentation and crafts.

Bloody Run Burn Hike

Friday, May 15 5:00

Bloody Run County Park

Join a naturalist for a “fire effects” hike exploring the results of a successful prescribed burn performed last fall at Bloody Run County Park. The site harbors rare plants, birds, and insects, and is a must-see for any nature lovers with the fortitude to hike the rugged bluffs overlooking one of northeast Iowa’s most fabled trout streams. Be advised: the park can get buggy in the spring. Bug spray recommended.

Backbone Fishing Clinic

Saturday, June 6

Backbone State Park

Take advantage of free fishing weekend with a day at Backbone Lake! Naturalists will be on site offering demonstrations and live critters to view between casts.

Almost-Solstice Prairie Hike

Friday, June 19, 5:00 PM

Becker East Wildlife Area

Join a naturalist for a “status check” on the CCCB’s newest prairie planting. We will compare species to the seed list, and discuss the art and science of prairie management, with the luxury of extra daylight to observe the transition from day to night amongst the local fauna.

America 250: America’s Potluck

Saturday, July 4 12:00 PM

Motor Mill Historic Site

Celebrate America’s 250th birthday with a potluck at the Motor Mill Historic Site! Additional events will highlight the history of the site, public lands in America, and the changes that have shaped conservation ethics and our relationship with the land over the last two and a half centuries.

Project A.W.A.R.E.

July 12–17

Turkey River

After 15 years, the fabled Project A.W.A.R.E. will return to the Turkey and Little Turkey rivers! This amazing volunteer effort paddles for a week along one of Iowa’s waterways, hauling out literal tons of trash and cleaning up some of the most popular paddling routes in the state. Camps in the evening feature bonfires, speakers, and extensive camaraderie. Registration fills fast, so check out the [program on their website](#) to stay up to date and secure your spot.

Iowa Prairie Conference

August 7-9

University of Dubuque

The Iowa Prairie Conference is coming to northeast Iowa! This amazing event is put on by the Iowa Prairie Network and features keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and an entire day of field trips hosted by local prairie experts. This year’s theme is “Prairie in the land of Trees and Karst,” focusing on the unique ecology of the driftless area and the rugged goat prairies endemic to only this part of the world. Registration is capped at 250 participants, so sign up today [at the IPN website!](#)

Motor Mill 2026 Season

Open Memorial Day through Labor Day

Motor Mill Historic Site

10:00-5:00 PM

Additional tours available upon request, pending staff and volunteer availability.

For more information on any of these programs, call 563-245-1516, or visit www.claytoncountyconservation.org

Clayton County Day Camps



Register now for Summer 2025! [Click here for registration](#)

Day Camps

June 11—Osborne Outdoors Made Easy
8-12 years old 9:00-2:00

July 25—Motor Mill History Camp
6-12 years old 9:00-3:00

July 09—Living Like an Animal
8-12 years old 9:00-2:00

July 30—Motor Mill S.T.E.A.M. Day
6*12 years old 9:00-3:00

Nature Kids (10 AM)
For children ages 3-6

June 12 — Seeds to Plants

June 26 — Reptiles

July 24 — Rocks & Fossils

July 24 —Caterpillars to Butterflies

July 26th—Woodland Friends



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

Hunter Education Coming This Summer

Internet Field Day: Saturday, June 6 8:00-12:00PM

Full Classroom Course:

August 10, 12, 14: 6:00—9:00PM

August 15: 7:30 AM—12:00 PM (Field Day)



O.W.L.S.

Older, Wiser, Livelier Souls

Looking for an excuse to get out of the house, meet new friends, and enjoy a good meal while exploring our area? The 2026 theme will be “O.W.L.S. Member Requests.” Join us the 3rd Thursday of each month March through November.

March 19 - Effigy Mounds NM - Early Pottery

April 16 - Seed Savers Exchange

May 21 - Matchstick Museum

June 18 - Maiden Voyage River Excursion

Jul 17 - Bily Clocks Museum

Aug 20 - Bixby State Preserve

Sept 17- Dubuque Arboretum & Wanderwood

Oct 15 - Clinton’s Dambo Trolls Adventure

Nov 19 - Following the Old Military Road

Reservations are required for both program and lunch

Call with questions on cost or time



Osborne Nature Center

Phone: 563-245-1516

www.ClaytonCountyConservation.org

Celebrating “America’s 250th” in Clayton County - by Abbey Harkrader

This year the United States is celebrating “America 250” to commemorate the anniversary of our independence. So, I thought we should step back and look at what Iowa was like 250 years ago. Back then, Iowa was a very wild, mostly uncharted territory.

The British had just lost control of their lands in 1776 east of the Mississippi River. That side had finally become American Territory after the Declaration of Independence was signed. Now the Iowa side of the river was still foreign land, Spanish Territory to be exact. Lands west of the Mississippi belonged to Spain after they won it from France at the end of the French & Indian War and we remained Spanish territory from 1763-1800.

Though the Iowa side was Spanish territory, it was just as much American Indian territory. More and more pressure was being put on the indigenous tribes and expansion was pushing eastern tribal groups into Iowa and places west of the Mississippi.

This immediate area of Northeast Iowa had historically been the lands of the Ioway, Ho-chunk and Dakota but the movement of the Sauk and Meskwaki into Iowa had displaced many of these earlier groups and created a lot of tension between the tribes themselves as well as with the early Europeans coming in.

Each year there was an important event across the river at the Prairie of the Dog. The tribes from up and down the river and its tributaries would gather, lay down their weapons, and trade each spring there. This historic “Rendezvous” had been practiced by the indigenous people well before the Europeans arrived but continued and became an important part of the fur trade era as well.

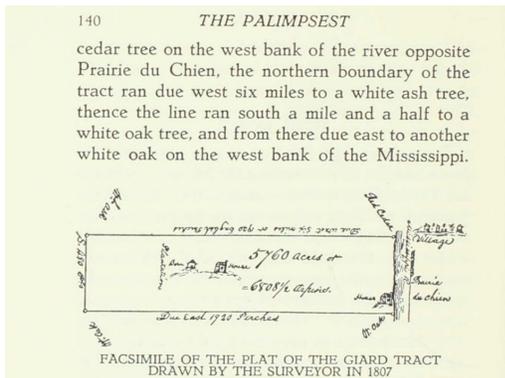
Just 3 years before America’s independence, in 1773, the trader Peter Pond wrote: the following (spelling as written)

“Here we come to the Planes of the Dogs..Hear we meat a larg number of French and Indans making out thare arrangements for the insewing winter and sending of thare canoes to different parts-Likewise giving creadets to the indans who were all to Rondoveuse thare in the Spring. All the trader that uses that part of the Countrey and all the Indans of several tribes meat Fall and Spring whare the Grateist Games are plaid both by the French and the Indans, Here the Botes from New Orleans come navigated by thirty-six oars. Those boats from Orleans and Ilenoa and other Parts were Numeres”

Much of the trade goods for this event came from the wild lands here, on the west side of the Mississippi. Native Americans and Europeans took advantage of these lands abundant with furs and raw materials to trade at the Rendezvous. European trappers and traders technically needed permission from the Spanish governor at Saint Louis to enter the Spanish Territory here, though how much this was enforced is hard to say.

Early trading posts on the Iowa side were often short term. The earliest documented was in 1738-Pierre Paul Sineur Marin built a fort at the mouth of Sny Magill Creek and traded with the Sauk, Meskwaki and Ho-Chunk Indians. The stream was named later, around 1814, when

Scotsman Donald Magill ran another trading post in that area for a few years....Sny Magill is short for what the French called it meaning Magill’s Slough.



The original survey boundary of the Giard Tract

The first official land grant in Clayton County was given to Basil Giard by the Spanish. Basil Giard, a trader in Prairie du Chien, petitioned the Spanish in 1800 for a grant of 5760 acres of land across the Mississippi from Prairie du Chien at present-day Marquette, Iowa.

He had built several cabins and had been cultivating the ground since at least 1796 but his petition puts him here in Clayton County as early as 1785. In 1800, Lieutenant Governor Don Charles Dehault Delassus signed Giard’s land grant.

Over time more Europeans were venturing over the Mississippi to the Iowa side, some on official business. In 1823 Lieutenant Martin Scott was sent from Fort Crawford across the river to supervise the Iowa outpost at the old Giard farm site. Lt. Scott had gotten quite a reputation as an unparalleled marksman.

Continued on page 6...

LEAVE A LEGACY

“To know even one other life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
of Clayton County

The Osborne Partners for Education Endowment Fund was started by Susi Nehls and Roy Blair in memory of Susi’s father, Dr. Joe Hickey. Dr. Hickey’s research led to the legislation that protected birds of prey like the bald eagle. Dr. Hickey’s passion for teaching others about the natural world was sparked early by adults who introduced him to the wonders of nature.

<https://www.dbqfoundation.org/donors/giving-center/osborne-partners-education-endowment>

America's 250th (continued from page 5)

He was known to take his hunting dogs by canoe to his favorite hunting grounds up the valley that would become known as Bloody Run. It was said that he would boast about the stream running red as he field dressed the many animals he killed, affectionately naming it Bloody Run. (Lockwood, James H. "Early Times and Events in Wisconsin." 1855)

Tensions continued to rise with the tribes in this area until it was necessary to create a neutral zone in 1830. The Neutral Zone stretched from Allamakee and Clayton County past Fort Atkinson, all the way to Fort Dodge at the Des Moines River.



Location of the Sodom and Gomorrah roadhouses

This created a buffer between the Dakota to the north and the Sauk and Mesquaki to the south. Later in 1940, the Government moved the Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) to this neutral zone between the 2 other tribal groups.

By this point the Military Road from Fort Crawford to Fort Atkinson along the northern border of the county was becoming a very busy road. The military was busy trying to keep order in this new territory, both in the neutral zone and outside it.

About 1840, two log cabin roadhouses were built along the Military Road. Considered nefarious whiskey holes, their rowdy reputations earned the roadhouses colorful names. The cabin owned by Taft Jones, a boxer, was named Sodom. The other cabin, owned by a former Fort Crawford soldier named Graham Thorne, was called Gomorrah.

They were located 1/8th mile apart and within sight of each other near present day Luana along the southern border of the Neutral Zone off the Military Road.

Their rivalry included contention over water rights and it's

said that the teamsters preferred the spring at Gomorrah for their horses.

The roadhouses were frequented by fort dragoons, teamsters, traders, and Native Americans. Neither lasted long due to their rowdy history and one or both were burned down by the late 1840's leaving very little trace of their exact location. (Note: This information comes from an account from Capt. John Tapper of Monona, an old government teamster who drove some iron pegs to designate the respective spots as he remembered them. - Monona Leader, July, 1907)



Iowa Territory. Willard Barrows, "A New Map of Iowa." 1845. Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress.

Settlement of Clayton County officially had begun in 1833, the year after the Louisiana Purchase was signed as well as the Black Hawk Purchase. Only the area outside the neutral zone could be settled until 1846. Quickly towns began to spring up across the rest of Clayton County.

After 1833, the Iowa we know finally begins to take shape.

Within just a few years Iowa was moving forward and changing at a very rapid pace. When Iowa opened for settlement, this side of the river went from completely wild territory to an almost unrecognizable county full of pioneers chasing their dreams of progress.

Little did they know they had chosen the most fertile land in the country, ripe with opportunity.

Other Sources

- *Effigy Mounds - An Administrative History of Effigy Mounds National Monument -1989*
- *History of Clayton County, Iowa 1882*
- *History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties Iowa, 1882*

Clayton County Forests Get A Facelift by Kenny Slocum

In 2018 when I first began doing forestry for Clayton County Conservation, I had to lean heavily on other people for help. For starters, we have a small staff, so a lot of the work fell to me and me alone unless I could pull someone else away from their own busy schedules.

On top of that, it was tough to know where to begin. We manage nearly 1500 acres of land, with more than half of that acreage forested.

On top of *that*, I had to approach the work with humility. I had enthusiasm, the capacity to run a chainsaw, and an eagerness to learn, but I had a lot to *learn* about forest ecology. I still do, I always will—even if I had gotten a degree in conservation, the science and best practices move fast enough that I would have had to do a lot of the extra homework anyway.

Those first years I spent a good amount of time simply figuring out where to put my time. It took trial and error to learn where to focus, what sorts of endeavors could reasonably be done in-house and what made the most sense with our limited capacity.

Over time I learned what we could do—how many burns could reasonably be accomplished, how many days it would take us to do timber stand improvement on X acres, etc.

I also began to learn how to leverage the assistance available. The Iowa DNR has a wildlife diversity program, and a wildlife habitat stamp program (WHSG), the latter of which goes towards projects only on lands open for hunting.

I had a pretty good track record with the WHSG program, so it stung a little when two years ago I applied to hire contract labor for 35 acres of timber stand improvement at the Pleasant Ridge Wildlife Area. Our application scored dead last. What had I done wrong?

Darin Voss called up right after the scoring meeting to let me know that the project looked good to him, but that there “might be something coming down the pipe from the DNR for projects exactly like that.”

Sure enough, a few months later we were notified of a request for proposals for the Forest Resiliency Partnership Program.

This funding opportunity asked County Conservation Boards to find \$100,000 worth of forestry work to be completed on public land. Suddenly, we had the chance to go way above and beyond my meager asks for a few acres here, a few acres there.

I don't know exactly how I came to know Dave Ashe, our

district forester, but I know my life professionally and personally would be a lot different if I had not. Dave has been an incredible mentor to me personally, helping completely restructure the way I look at Clayton County's forests.

He also became a conservation board member two years ago, and now the entire organization gets to benefit from his particular set of skills.

When the FRPP applications came up, Dave jumped on it right away, going to bat for us at state meetings to try to squeeze as much juice out of the program as he could for northeast Iowa.

He and I got together for a total inventory of the potential projects we could stack together with our friends in Allamakee County to get \$100,000 of forestry work done on the ground in bluff country.

His hard work, and ours, found our application successful among a litany of worthy projects vying for the limited funding.

And so, just like that, we have gone from Kenny et al chopping a few ironwoods here and there to a major, ten-toes-in commitment to get decades worth of forestry taken care of in three years, beginning in the fall of 2026 and completed by 2028.

The project list includes

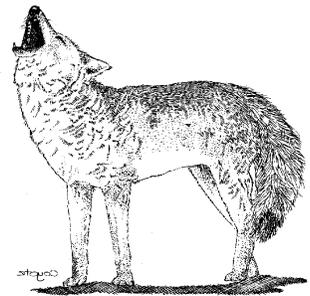
- 6 acres of new forest plantings at Osborne Park
- 14 acres of thinning & replanting at Osborne Park in the pine stand near the new campground
- 14 acres of timber stand improvement at Osborne Park near the archery range
- 88.5 acres of timber stand improvement at the Becker West Wildlife Area
- 900 new trees planted & tubed across 14 acres of the Becker West Wildlife Area
- 19.5 acres of timber stand improvement at the Pleasant Ridge Wildlife Area
- 800 new trees planted & tubed across 4.5 acres of the Pleasant Ridge Wildlife Area
- 20 acres of timber stand improvement at the Volga Pines preserve

When all is said and done this project will represent arguably the most significant impact to the overall health of public forests in Clayton County in the organization's history.

We can't wait to see what comes next. Don't worry, there's still plenty of work to keep us busy. Our thanks to the DNR staff both in the administrative office and right here at home who have helped make this possible.

Clayton County Conservation
Osborne Conservation Center
29862 Osborne Rd, Elkader, IA 52043
(563) 245-1516

Osborne Public Programs
listed inside!



The Clayton County Conservation Board does not discriminate against anyone on the basis of race, color, sex, creed, national origin, age or handicap. If anyone believes he or she has been subjected to such discrimination, he or she may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Clayton County Conservation Board or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240

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Daryl Landsgard, St. Olaf.....Chair
Gary Kregel, Garber.....Vice Chair
Larry Stone, Elkader.....Secretary
Kris Lau, Guttenberg.....Member
Dave Asche, Monona.....Member

Staff

Jenna Van Meeteren.....Director
Ean Popenhagen.....Deputy Director
Zach Dingbaum.....Park Ranger
Nick Moser.....Operations Supervisor
Hunter Jensen.....Operations/Maintenance
Abbey Harkrader.....Naturalist
Kenny Slocum...Naturalist/Resource Manager
Molly Scherf.....Office Manager
Kelsi Davis.....Clayton County Energy
District Coordinator

Website: www.claytoncountyconservation.org
Facebook: [Clayton County Conservation](#)
Instagram: [@ClaytonCountyConservation](#)

**Osborne Nature Center &
Gift shop Hours**

Monday-Friday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Weekend Hours

(Starting April 1)

Saturday

8:00am - 4:00pm

Sunday

Noon-4:00pm



Clayton County Conservation Board meetings are the second Tuesday of every month. Meetings are open to the public. See website for details, locations, and past meeting minutes.

The mission of the Clayton County Conservation Board is to promote the health and general welfare of the people and to encourage and model preservation, conservation, education, and recreation through responsible use and appreciation of our natural resources and cultural heritage.