



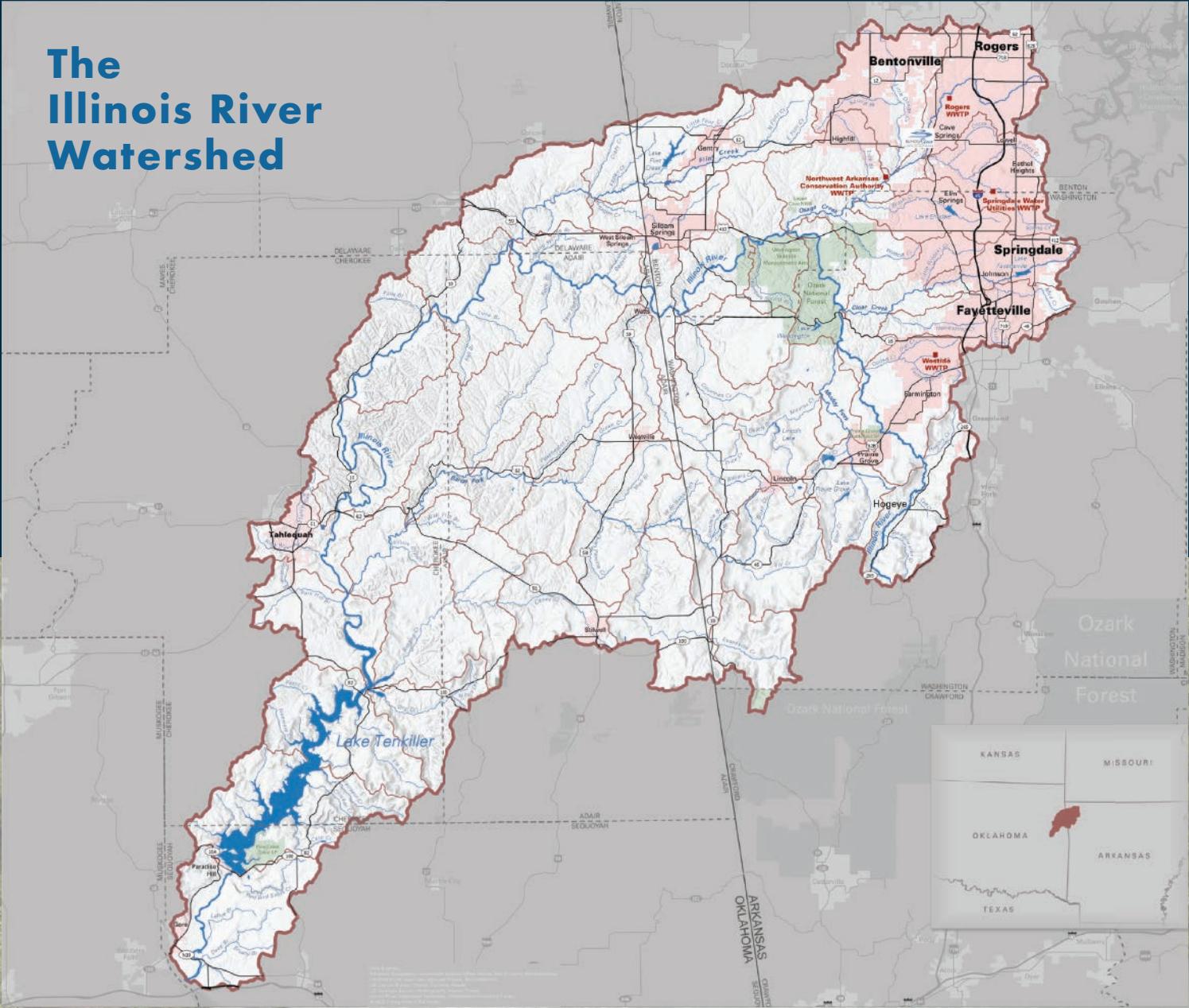
ANNUAL REPORT 2020

ILLINOIS *River*
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

MAKING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS AND CITIES BLUER

THE ILLINOIS RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP
works to improve the integrity of the Illinois River Watershed through public education, outreach, and implementation of conservation and restoration practices throughout the watershed.

The Illinois River Watershed



OUR VISION

THE ILLINOIS RIVER AND IT'S TRIBUTARIES
will be a fully functioning ecosystem, where ecological protection, conservation, and economically productive uses support diverse aquatic and riparian communities, meet all state and federal water quality standards, promote economic sustainability, and provide recreational opportunities.

“With Gratitude...”

A Letter from Nicole Hardiman, Executive Director

With 2020 being a year of uncertainty and a constant churn of not-so-great news, we here at IRWP try to begin each week in 2021 with a “Moment of Gratitude”. These moments can recognize a colleague, give thanks for a personal blessing, or celebrate a positive water quality moment. Here is my IRWP gratitude list:

- Our Board of Directors is engaged and responsive,
- Our stakeholders and sponsors are passionate about the Illinois River,
- Our agency and foundation partners are flexible and understanding, and
- Our staff are hard-working, smart, and forward-thinking.

Despite the cancellation or postponement of our in-person programming last year, (we miss y’all so much!) we transitioned to online learning, continued or embarked upon several monitoring projects, and worked full steam ahead on the Riparian Restoration Program. A review and update to our internal policies and processes also took place (this exciting work will not, unfortunately, be in the annual report).

A FEW EXCITING PLANS FOR 2021:

Launch of the Septic Tank Remediation Program

This program, which is being supported by the Natural Resources Division of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, will provide financing to replace or repair failing septic systems for homeowners throughout the watershed. Financing will take the form of grants or 0% interest loans, based on the income of the homeowner. Our partner, Ozarks Water Watch, will be managing the program for the Beaver Lake/White River watershed and this program is particularly exciting because it will address nutrient and bacterial concerns within both watersheds. Watch out for the program launch in early March!

Launch of the Blue Initiatives

To address increased flow and flooding from urban areas (which are in the headwaters of the watershed), as well as address massive streambank erosion in downstream areas, we are strategically turning our outreach efforts to the cities. The Blue Cities program will work to educate elected officials, planning commission members, and relevant staff about the watershed and impacts to it from poorly managed high-flow events. The Blue Neighborhoods program will work to identify areas that generate large quantities of stormwater, then implement a targeted education campaign to encourage the use of low impact development. Northwest Arkansas is estimated to almost double in population over the next twenty years...and most of that development will occur in the Illinois River Watershed. If we are to protect the River, measures must be put in place now to address and prevent downstream erosion.

With thanks and gratitude, the IRWP staff and I share with you our activities of 2020 and plans for 2021. We look forward to seeing you in-person at an IRWP event soon!

Warmly,



Nicole Hardiman, Ph.D.
Executive Director

IRWP STAFF



Dr. Nicole Hardiman
Executive Director



Travis Chaney
Restoration Specialist



Desiree Main
Administrative Specialist



Morgan Keeling
Community Relations Manager



Matt Taylor
Septic Remediation
Program Manager



Kim Main
Facilities Manager

2020 IMPACT SUMMARY

Landowner Services

Focused on six "suites" of water quality improving practices:

- Rotational grazing
- Riparian forests
- Streambank restoration
- Residential low impact development
- Commercial low impact development
- Land conservation

2,077 ONLINE LEARNING CENTER PAGE VIEWS

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS

15,515

Plus:
8 Original Videos - 858 Views
4 874 Newsletters Mailed
24,501 E-Newsletter Opens

Riparian Restoration Program

59% OF THE 20 MILE GOAL RESTORED
as of 12/31/2020

**ROTATIONAL GRAZING
34,577 FEET OF FENCE**

82% Project Completion

CONSERVATION PLANS FOR 882 ACRES

Water Quality Monitoring

12 OK SITES SURVEYED THREE TIMES EACH

for the Eco-Assessment Project

CLOSED A THREE YEAR STUDY

Monitoring Streambank Erosion across **15** locations



Important Partnerships with:
Oklahoma Blue Thumb
NWA Regional Planning Commission
Arkansas Water Resources Center

As Northwest Arkansas develops, impervious surfaces (such as parking lots, roofs, and roads) are added. These surfaces do not allow for the infiltration of stormwater into the ground, leaving our drainage infrastructure to carry the bulk of the water away from our homes and businesses. Along the way, it picks up pollution, nutrients, and sediment, causing impairments and downstream erosion. Additionally, a discrepancy between the acceptable phosphorous levels between Arkansas and Oklahoma has long been an issue. It is our goal for the entire watershed to meet Oklahoma's phosphorus standard.

IMPAIRMENTS OF THE ILLINOIS RIVER



The Illinois River Watershed has many designated (or beneficial) uses as determined by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality and the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. In Arkansas, those uses include propagation of fish and wildlife, water supply for domestic, agricultural, and industrial uses, and primary contact recreation. In Oklahoma, the Watershed has the same uses plus an additional aesthetic provision.

According to the 2018 impairment listing created by Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, there are eight stream reaches currently considered impaired; the 2018 impairment listing created by Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality lists 20 stream reaches that are currently considered impaired. To see the full list of impaired streams and their respective impairment levels, scan the QR code or visit irwp.org/water-quality-monitoring/designated-use-impairments.



SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

The Ozarks and the Illinois River Watershed are blessed with a wide variety of habitats and abundant floral and faunal biodiversity. From cave ecosystems to prairies and deciduous forests, the Illinois River Watershed has those and many different ecosystems in between.

Due to this diversity of habitats, a large diversity of species has been historically present within the watershed. According to the Arkansas Natural History Commission, six species that reside within the watershed are considered endangered and four species are considered threatened at the federal level.

At the state level in Arkansas, twelve species are considered endangered and five are threatened. All of the species are either dependent on aquatic habitat or on healthy oak-hickory riparian forests that surround them.



Ozark Cavefish, Springfield News-Leader

This is one of many ways IRWP's Riparian Restoration program is helping the watershed.

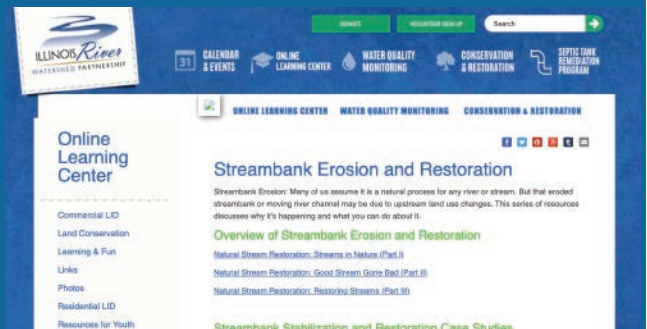
ADAPTING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Every organization across the world faced a new challenge in 2020: Adjusting programming to fit the Center of Disease Control guidelines for Covid-19. Without in-person events, IRWP moved to virtual programming and meetings.

One benefit of the requirement to produce digital assets was the opportunity to build the online database. With added video content being created, as well as the need to continually inform the public, the Online Learning Center was launched in April.

Over the course of 2020, IRWP:

- Launched the Online Learning Center
- Hosted a multi-media campaign and celebration of Water Quality Month in August
- Placed educational signage along the Razorback Greenway
- Conceptualized "Pick Up Where You Play" a COVID-friendly litter cleanup with Fossil Cove Brewing and Black Apple Crossing
- Produced videos for everyone from students at virtual school to farmers and ranchers



STAKEHOLDER EDUCATION



IRWP hosted two webinars, focused as "virtual field tours," in 2020:

ROTATIONAL GRAZING

The target audience for the rotational grazing field tours were local farmers and ranchers.

Goal # of attendees: 15

Actual attendees: 22



STREAMBANK EROSION AND RESTORATION

This field tour focused on outreach to city staff, municipal workers, and the interested public.

Goal # of attendees: 15

Actual attendees: 27

2021 MVPs MOST VALUED PARTNERSHIPS

- NWA Master Naturalists
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission
- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission
- The Nature Conservancy
- Arkansas Water Resources Center
- Watershed Conservation Resource Center
- U of A Cooperative Extension
- Benton County Roads Department

To align with other organizational efforts and the adaptation to Covid times, these webinars have been made permanently available on the YouTube channel, providing continuous educational value to our stakeholders.

To watch these webinars and other IRWP-produced video content, scan the QR code!



Last year IRWP continued to implement best management practices for water quality and build relationships with stakeholders throughout the watershed as a part of our Riparian Restoration Program.

In 2020, we reached agreements with landowners to:

- Implement BMPs for water quality along 4 miles of headwaters streams.
- Install off-stream livestock watering facilities on 460 acres of pasture.
- Construct over 26,000 feet of fence to improve rotational grazing opportunities.

Additionally, IRWP provided assistance to a neighborhood along a particularly degraded stretch of Clear Creek by facilitating virtual meetings and funding the development of a Master Plan for stream-bank restoration in partnership with Watershed Conservation Resource Center (WCRC).



One of the most exciting projects to come out of 2020 is a partnership with the City of Siloam Springs at a nine-hole golf course called The Course at Sager's Crossing. Sager Creek has been the defining natural feature of Siloam Springs since its founding, and the headwaters of the creek are at "Box Spring", just off one of the fairways at the golf course. Over the years, removal of riparian vegetation has led to erosion, which is now affecting playability and threatening bridges, greens, and tee boxes. IRWP is contracting with Natural

State Streams to reinforce critical banks with stone and wood structures, replant 4,000 feet of riparian vegetation, and create almost 9 acres of additional floodplain and upland prairie habitat.

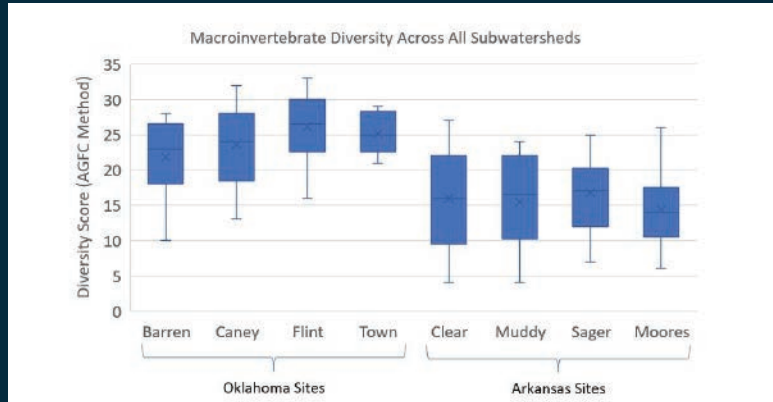


Contact: Travis Chaney
travis@irwp.org
or visit our site >>>>



IRWP's Eco-Assessment Project

Year 3 of our Eco-Assessment Project took us to Oklahoma, where we assessed twelve sites across four subwatersheds! This year we were lucky to partner with Oklahoma Conservation Commission's Blue Thumb program to assess macroinvertebrate diversity, stream habitat condition, and water quality and chemistry parameters. This project enables IRWP to observe year-over-year trends, identify subwatersheds with high and low quality indicators, and maximize efficiency in management recommendations and education and outreach efforts. A complete report of results will be available early in 2021, but "water bug" diversity was higher in Oklahoma subwatersheds versus Arkansas subwatersheds. Based on initial analysis, this appears to be due to the presence of higher quality stream-bottom habitat (i.e. a greater diversity of sand, gravel, and rocks and lack of mud, clay, or silt) across the Oklahoma portion of the watershed. In 2021, we are excited to partner again with Blue Thumb to collect a second year of data in Oklahoma.



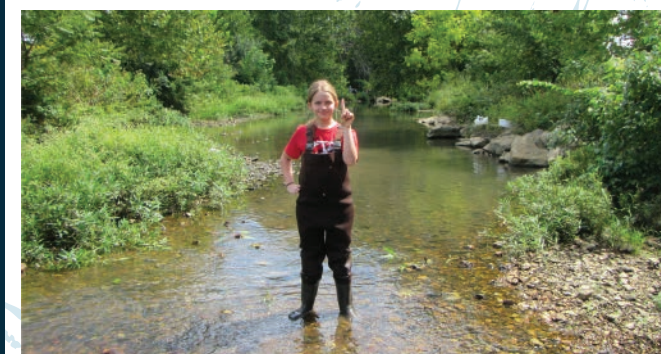
Streambank Erosion Monitoring Project

2020 marked the final year of data collection for the Streambank Erosion Monitoring Project. The purpose of this project is to quantify rates of erosion across the watershed, which will enable us to



estimate sediment and nutrient loading as a result of erosion. Additionally, we can identify areas with extreme erosion that would be high priority candidates for restoration practices, as well as areas with stable streambanks that we would work to conserve and/or protect. Initial estimates from across the 45 mile study area indicate 38% of lands are losing at least one foot of bank laterally per year. This equates to just over 37,500 tons of sediment washed down the river every year. Additionally, an estimated 56,000 pounds of phosphorus is washed down the river with it. To put that number into perspective, just over 24,000 pounds of phosphorus are contributed annually by the five largest wastewater treatment facilities in the watershed. Our final report will be

released in mid-2021, but initial results indicate that current rates of streambank erosion indicate massive, system-wide change in the watershed. Whether this be due to changes in land use or precipitation patterns (or both), this problem must be addressed to reduce additional stress to the Illinois River.



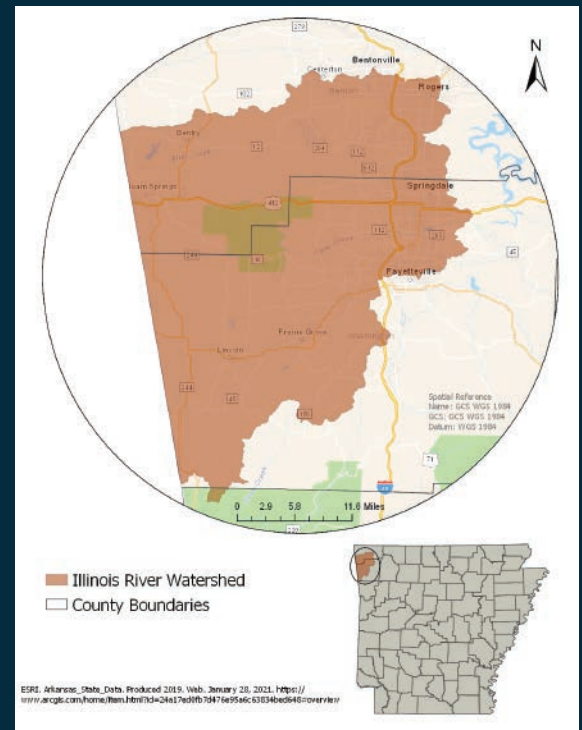


IRWP is pleased to announce the launch of its Septic Tank Remediation Program. Funded through Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) dollars awarded by the Arkansas Natural Resources Division (ANRD), this program is the first of its kind in the state. Partnership staff began working on program parameters for this initiative with ANRD during Spring of 2020 and the initial grant period began January 1, 2021.

The purpose of this program is to improve and protect water quality by assisting residents in the remediation their failing on-site septic systems. When functioning properly, residential septic systems are a safe and effective way of treating wastewater. When they fail, however, they can contribute substantial amounts of nutrients, pathogens, harmful coliform bacteria and other contaminants to both surface and groundwater resources. This type of contamination is often associated with detrimental environmental impacts, tainted drinking water sources, public health emergencies, and negatively affected home aesthetics (and property value). Resolving these problems unfortunately is often prohibitively expensive and presents a challenge for many homeowners.

By offering financial assistance, the goal is to alleviate that cost burden and encourage corrective action in order to prevent further contamination of the watershed. Funding up to \$30,000 per project is available for septic repair or replacement and is provided as a combination of grant (no repayment required) and zero-interest loan funds. Residents are eligible to participate if they own a home located in the Illinois River watershed and they have an on-site septic system that is failing. There is no income cap for participation but there is an income tier table used to delineate the funding sources. Funds will be provided as grant vs. loan; lower income households receive more of their funding as grant dollars than higher income households.

For more information, please email septic@irwp.org or visit <http://irwp.org/septic>. This site will provide eligibility requirements, application materials, and resources along with septic system education and maintenance guidelines.



IR Watershed Program Area

BLUE CITIES, BLUE NEIGHBORHOODS PROGRAMS

Our Blue initiative programs are aimed at getting ahead of development and mitigating impact from stormwater by educating two major players in stormwater management in NWA– the citizens and the cities– on how our urbanizing/changing land use is affecting the water, and what can be done to prepare for the future, and combat existing stormwater-related problems.



The Blue Initiative is a targeted approach to stormwater management. By addressing each city and each neighborhood’s individual challenges, we are able to direct our efforts to achieve the most impact, promoting low-impact practices to offset the addition of impervious surfaces. LID practices will reduce flooding, promote community green spaces, reduce pollution, erosion, and promote ecologically diverse habitats as we develop our region.

Blue Neighborhoods

The Blue Neighborhoods program will identify the key challenges on a neighborhood scale and then promote low impact practices that best solve the problem(s). The result will be more green spaces in neighborhoods, less flooding, and an open channel to address runoff issues.

Blue Cities

The Blue Cities program will tailor education to help elected officials and staff understand how humans impact the land, how the land impacts the water, and what are the recommended best practices to neutralize the addition of impervious surfaces as we develop our region.



Timeline

In 2021, IRWP will assess the watershed to identify target neighborhoods. The Blue Cities initiative will be led by developing an Illinois River Watershed Toolkit and connecting with the cities to teach it to required personnel.

In 2022, targeted neighborhood meetings will be scheduled, as will follow up with city staff to promote ongoing stormwater education.



Branding Re-Design

With more eyes on IRWP's digital presence than ever, the logo and brand guides recieved updates to conform with modern graphic design needs.

Educational Mailings

Six newsletters, one for each suite of Best Management Practices, were mailed in 2020 to a total of 4,874 landowners in the Illinois River Watershed. Utilizing newsletter mailings as introductions to the practices, IRWP followed up with postcards to offer field tour events for anyone interested. 2021 mailings will serve as a continuation of promotion for these practices.

Conservation Plans

In addition to the virtual field tours and workshops that IRWP hosted in 2020, we continued serving stakeholders in the watershed by providing technical assistance and conservation planning for 17 watershed landowners.

For example, at the request of the City of Siloam Springs, IRWP produced a Conservation Plan for revegetation critical for streambanks at the Siloam Springs Kayak Park. The plan was officially adopted into the City's park maintenance plan with money budgeted for riparian improvements.



Kayak Park, Siloam Springs, AR

FINANCIALS

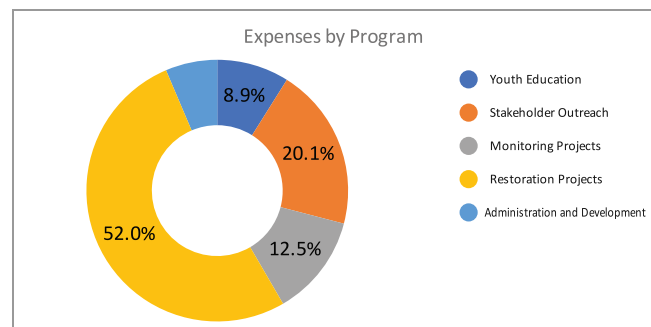
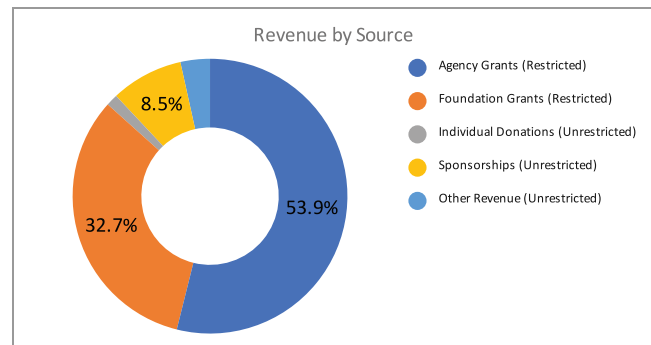
**ILLINOIS RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP
Statement of Activities and Budget Report
For the Year Ended December 31, 2020**

Assets	
Cash	\$ 1,071,911.21
Restricted Restoration Funding	\$ 2,662,091.25
Fixed and Other Assets	\$ 1,731,917.57
Total Assets	\$ 5,465,920.03

Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$ 8,036.31
Deferred Grant Revenue	\$ 2,674,046.95
Total Liabilities	\$ 2,682,083.26

Net Assets	
Beginning Net Assets	2,360,491.00
Change in Net Assets	423,345.77
Total Net Assets	2,783,836.77

Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 5,465,920.03
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2020 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Arkansas Farm Bureau

James Simpson
Benton County Producer

Steven Beam
Burns & McDonnell

Brian Haggard
Arkansas Water Resources Center

Tim Snell
The Nature Conservancy

Scott Carney
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Simmons Foods

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Grand River Dam Authority

Marla Peek
Oklahoma Farm Bureau

Heath Ward
Springdale Water Utilities

Kurt Price
Arvest Bank

Dr. Ralph Weber
NWA Master Naturalists

SPONSORS

Legacy:

Walton Family Foundation
Arkansas Natural Resources Division
American Electric Power - SWEPCO

Watershed:

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

River:

George's Inc.
Simmons Foods
Arvest Bank

Tributary:

Benton County, Arkansas
City of Fayetteville
Coca-Cola
Springdale Water Utilities
Cherokee Nation
Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

Stream:

Washington County, Arkansas
Farm Bureau, Arkansas
City of Bentonville, Arkansas
City of Springdale, Arkansas
Grand River Dam Authority
National Center for Appropriate
Technology

Creek:

City of Tahlequah

Spring:
Jacobs

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Alisha Ross
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IN-KIND DONORS

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Cherokee Nation
Lewis & Clark
Lowe's (Rogers)
Lowe's (Zion Rd)
Macadoodles
Natural State Streams

Black Apple
Fossil Cove Brewery
Home Depot
Keep Arkansas Beautiful
Lake Fayetteville Marina
NWA Master Naturalists
Southtown Sporting Goods
Tractor Supply (Springdale)
Young Men's
Service League (YMSL)

Judy Ball
John Bass
Hannah Caldwell
Sarah Diffin
Anthony Flores
Chailey Hanna
Semyon Lison
Casey Rector
Ed Romero

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

NWA Master Naturalists

Arkansas Natural Heritage
Commission

EAST Initiative

Arkansas Game and Fish
Commission

The Nature Conservancy

Arkansas Water Resources Center

U of A Cooperative Extension Service