



ANNUAL REPORT 2023

ILLINOIS River
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

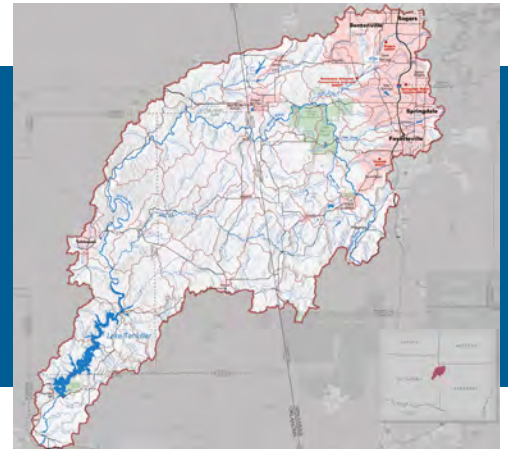




2024 marks 19 years of IRWP's work conserving and protecting natural resources to improve water quality. Our mission hasn't changed, but we continue to improve delivery of public education, community outreach, and implementation of technical and financial assistance programs that conserve and restore the watershed while meeting the needs of landowners. With increasing development and no signs of it slowing down, we have expanded our Low Impact Development and Green Infrastructure technical and financial support – we are working to reach more demographics with education and assistance on these topics. In 2023 we grew and expanded assistance in urban Green Infrastructure programming and through our Landowner Services program for farmers and ranchers. These programs represent the heart of our “boots on the ground” work which provides water quality services to urban and rural landowners to enhance water quality.

MISSION

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



“Partnerships are Achieving Water Quality Results”

Dear Watershed Partner,

We envision an Illinois River and its tributaries becoming a fully functional 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 your partnership this vision is being realized.

In 2023 we were in the classroom or delivering water quality education to 4,083 students. We repaired or replaced 26 septic systems and received \$100,000 grant to continue this program for another year. We restored 3.79 miles of riparian vegetation to enhance water quality in partnerships with landowners and received a \$156,849 grant to expand technical assistance and outreach through Landowner Services. These programs and results take collaboration and we are grateful for your partnership and investment in this watershed.

The year ahead is bright for Illinois River water quality and for the quality of life we all value from our region. We are working with partners like the Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division (NRD), Oklahoma Conservation Commission (OCC), and many others to finalize updates to the watershed management plans in 2024. We will release the Upper Illinois River Conservation-based Recreation Master Plan in partnership with stakeholders in 2024. These integrated plans will guide the work all of us must do to realize our goal of a fully functional watershed.

Thank you for all you do for Illinois River water quality and please join us in celebrating the progress and results from this past year!

Sincerely,



Leif Kindberg | Executive Director



“Resilience in Conservation Work”



More than 80 diverse participants at the Third Stakeholder Meeting for preparation of Integrated Illinois River Watershed Management Plans on August 10, 2023.



IRWP Board of Directors met at the Learning Center to plan out the next three-year Strategic Plan.



Partners visit a highly degraded site on Wildcat Creek in planning out restoration work.

Every year IRWP conducts an ecological assessment in the watershed to look at the diversity of macroinvertebrates and habitats along streams and creeks. Diversity in macroinvertebrate species and the vegetation along our stream banks are indicators of the overall health of our watershed and support its resilience in the face of increasing precipitation, pollutant loading, and flooding.

The IRWP Board of Directors is made up of diverse representatives from agriculture, business, conservation, construction, government, and technical research and education. These six stakeholder groups allow for opportunities for consensus-based decisions that yield water quality results. With 21 members representing such diverse interests, there is not always uniform agreement on the best approaches to addressing water quality challenges in the Illinois River watershed, but all these interests do agree that the river is important to the economy, quality of life, and natural environment that should be preserved and protected. Furthermore, involving diverse interests in this work supports a more resilient approach, one that engages everyone in the important decisions that are necessary, and one that acknowledges that we all have a personal responsibility for and role in preserving and protecting the functionality of the Illinois River and its tributaries.

At IRWP, our mission is clear and guides what we work on. We invest in education, science, and best management practices that support riparian communities of plants and animals for fishing, agriculture, stormwater conveyance, drinking water, as well as many other functions. Work gets done because partners are willing to sit down at the table and invest in the future of the Illinois River Watershed, building resilience through the preservation and protection of the watershed and its resources.

MEET OUR STAFF



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"Conservation-based Recreation Planning for the Upper Illinois River"



Volunteers cleaned up 4,260 lbs of trash from the Illinois River and tributaries in the upper Illinois River watershed in 2023.

Over two years ago IRWP and partners came together to discuss current and future use challenges on the upper Illinois River. Several opportunities were identified including need for more outreach to the public, protecting the rights and interests of landowners, creating economic opportunities, and planning for growth in use of the river. Substantial progress has been made on developing a conservation-based recreation master plan that will help partners effectively address these challenges while protecting and preserving the functionality of the river. Major accomplishments in 2023 included partnering with the City of Siloam Springs on management of the Kayak Park, volunteer trash cleanups which removed 4,260 pounds of litter from the watershed, and regular meetings with more than a dozen landowners, agency partners and others to identify opportunities to promote a responsible recreation culture on the river. IRWP is thankful to Benton County for recognizing the need for this work and making funding available through American Rescue Plan (ARP) as well as the support of other local and state agency partners.



WOKA whitewater park under construction in September 2022.



WOKA a year later expects to attract up to 90,000 visitors annually, September 2023.

YOUTH EDUCATION



The youth education program provided lessons to 4,083 students on water quality and watershed management in 2023. Mobile labs have grown in popularity among teachers and offer hands-on experiences designed to meet the needs of teachers who request them as well as state and federal standards. Lab topics include groundwater resources, water pollution, bio-indicators of aquatic health, resource simulation, erosion, water chemistry, and more.

Lab series were also introduced in 2023 when multiple labs were conducted as in-depth explorations of a topic. Fayetteville's alternative learning environment school, focused on surface water pollution from our urban footprint. The second day was a clean-up of nearby Owl Creek, and the third day was about pollution of groundwater and aquifers. These multi-day labs help students become progressively more astute as their understanding of the watershed is scaffolded. These incredible lab series will continue into next year.

IRWP also hosted six schools at the Learning Center and Sanctuary for field trips. The students love visiting the property to learn at the pavilion and explore the grounds. During these field trips students rotate through a selection of labs chosen based off grade level, class, and time available.



Mobile Learning Labs



Field Trip to the IRWP Sanctuary



Field Lab in Kansas, OK

LOOKING FORWARD ON URBAN STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

As more pastures are converted into lawns and roads and as more driveways get paved, we are looking toward how we can maintain and enhance rural and urban stormwater functionality through natural infrastructure. There were relatively few major floods in 2023 as compared to years of historical flooding, and we can easily forget about the ditches, creeks and the rivers and tributaries that carry all of that water. With



Scan QR to read the Flood Study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Arkansas Department of Agriculture

studies showing an overall increase in precipitation for the region, the next big flood may not be very far away. To help our region prepare, we are working with local businesses to install interlocking pavers through our Green Infrastructure Program, working with cities like Bentonville and Springdale to test retrofits on detention ponds to better manage stormwater flows and water quality, and working with homeowners to add native plants to their landscaping.

As we look to 2024 and beyond, we are moving forward with several important planning efforts. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Arkansas Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Division (NRD) are studying where in the watershed flooding is occurring and how this is impacting water quality downstream. Cities and Counties are asking the State to support water quality best management practices in the Illinois River watershed with Act 158 that can also address flooding in our communities. Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, Beaver Watershed Alliance, U of A Cooperative Extension Service, and IRWP are looking at ways to educate our communities about how stormwater impacts water quality at the local and regional levels. The connection between stormwater, flooding, and the ecological health of the Illinois River is important to our economy, quality of life, and our health. We continue to work towards preparing for the next 20 years of growth.



GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM



Those interested in integrating native plants into their landscaping to support stormwater management are encouraged to contact IRWP for valuable assistance and guidance. Together we can collaboratively enhance water quality in the Illinois River, while creating a more sustainable and vibrant community.

Using native plants for stormwater management provides numerous environmental advantages that contribute to resilient ecosystems. Native plants help improve stormwater infiltration and reduce runoff by establishing deep root systems that create permeable soils. This not only prevents flooding and erosion but also improves water quality in our springs, creeks, and aquifers. Native plants are adapted to local climates, making them more resilient to precipitation and temperature changes. Their use fosters biodiversity, supporting local wildlife and creating ecological communities that enhance overall watershed health. Additionally, incorporating native plants in stormwater projects has aesthetic benefits, improving the visual appeal of green spaces and fostering a sense of connection to nature.



Apply to the Green Infrastructure Program
Your Green Infrastructure Project could be funded up to 50%

In Northwest Arkansas, IRWP is actively addressing stormwater management by installing 30 Best Management Practices (BMPs) at twelve key sites. These projects exemplify the efficacy of using native plants to manage stormwater runoff, increase sense of community, and promote sustainability.

RIPARIAN RESTORATION PROGRAM



In 2023 IRWP partnered with multiple stakeholders including private landowners, municipalities, neighborhoods and property owners associations, and other non-profits to implement best management practices in priority areas of the watershed. Seven new landowner agreements were signed to implement with riparian practices to restore 3.79 miles of streambank for a total of 22.29 total miles for the program. The landowner agreements will also support rotational grazing and alternative water for livestock on 96 acres of productive pastureland to keep cattle out of the streams, for a total of 1,422 total acres so far. Fencing for livestock exclusion was included to keep cattle out of riparian areas, improve wildlife habitat along streams, and prevent streambank erosion during future flooding events, for a total of 101,729 linear feet. In 2024, you should notice new vegetation blooming at Blossom Way in Rogers – this came to fruition thanks to a partnership with the City of Rogers to restore 26.5 acres of native prairie along Blossom Way Creek, as well as establish a 100' native Riparian Forest Buffer (13.5 acres total).

One major issue we continue to see throughout the watershed is an increased intensity of localized flooding events which cause major instability in streambanks, accelerating the process of erosion within stream channels across the region. In many cases, sediment carries high amounts of nitrogen, phosphorus, bacteria, and other pollutants that contribute to poor water quality and impairment of streams. Practices such as Riparian Forest Buffers and native prairie restoration can not only reduce this erosion and transport of sediment, pathogens, chemicals, pesticides, and nutrients, but they also improve habitat for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and restore the overall natural plant diversity in these riparian areas.

WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



IRWP and Native Restoration and Management (NRM) plant Blossom Way in Rogers.



Over 50 local partners attended a field tour to learn about how wetlands can be constructed and restored in urban and rural areas.



Prescribed burns are an important management tool.



Volunteers help with Herbaceous Weed Control.



Over 800 trees and live stakes are planted to armor streambanks at this site in Springdale.

LANDOWNER SERVICES

In 2023 IRWP kicked off a new Landowner Services Program funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through this program we hope to reach at least 100 new landowners that are interested in installing water quality improving practices on their property over the three years of the program. Watch for opportunities to see these practices in action at pasture walks and field tours, you can find these announced on our Facebook and events pages.

 www.irwp.org/events

 www.facebook.com/IllinoisRiverWatershedPartnership

- Forest Management Plans
- Timber Stand Improvement
- Firebreaks
- Prescribed Burning
- Wildlife Habitat Planting
- Waste Storage Facility
- Animal Mortality Facility
- Prescribed Grazing
- Annual Forages For Grazing Systems
- Pasture and Hay Planting
- Herbaceous Weed Control
- Fence
- Livestock Pipeline
- Watering Facility
- Heavy Use Areas
- Riparian Forest Buffer
- Streambank Stabilization

SEPTIC TANK REMEDIATION PROGRAM



In 2023 IRWP installed 26 projects, investing \$351,871 which brings the Septic Tank Remediation Program to a total disbursement of \$839,290 over the past three years. The program has worked with 70 homeowners over the last 3 years to replace or repair their failing onsite wastewater systems.

IRWP was awarded \$100,000 in additional funding by the Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division from the Clean Water State Revolving funding to meet the needs of homeowners waiting to repair or replace their failing systems. This additional funding will carry the program through 2024.

UV & CHLORINATION AT MR. GARCIA'S

In December a project that was initiated in the first year of the program (2021) was finally completed. This was a challenging project due to the proximity of the well, and neither city water nor sewer was available nor feasible to install in this reach of Lowell. The solution was to chlorinate the well water to insure the family is protected from contamination and to install a Ultraviolet (UV) treatment system on the septic tank. The UV system works in combination with an aerated tank to further disinfect the effluent before being discharged and eventually infiltrating into the ground.

Kyle Krievans from the Arkansas Department of Health inspected this newly installed advanced treatment system for Mr. Garcia in Lowell. The effluent goes into a septic tank, an aerobic treatment tank, and then finally a UV treatment tank before it makes its way out into the ground.



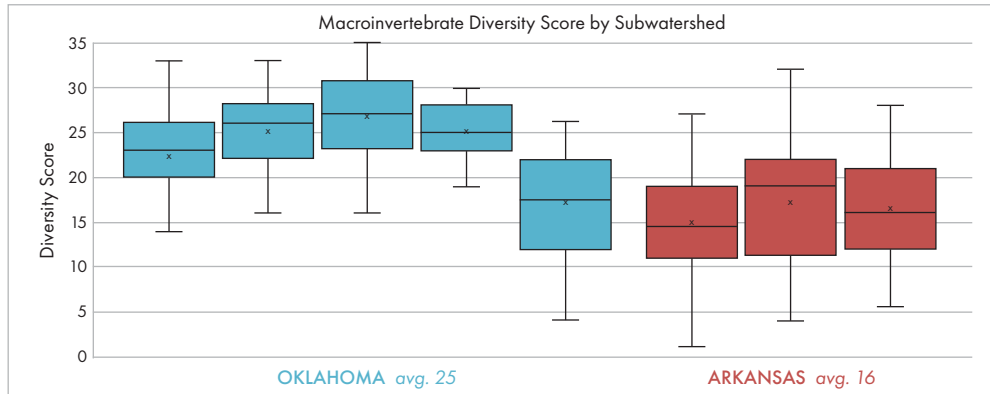
Pyle's Concrete sets a 1500 gallon tank in Lowell.



ECOASSESSMENT & WATER QUALITY MONITORING

Every year IRWP conducts water quality monitoring throughout the watershed. Many factors contribute to water quality in our streams and overall ecosystem health, so Ecoassessments consist of habitat assessments, a survey of bio-indicators like benthic macroinvertebrates, and water chemistry tests. Oklahoma was the focus of the Ecoassessment and 11 sites were visited in April, August, and November.

The 2023 Ecoassessment Report is scheduled to be released in March of 2024. As a sneak preview, here is a summary of the macroinvertebrate diversity scores. Overall, Oklahoma continues to have a higher average diversity score and the average increased from 24 in 2022 to 25 in 2023.



Read more about water quality monitoring at <https://www.irwp.org/water-quality-monitoring>

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Assets

Current Assets	\$ 1,129,442.56
Restricted Restoration Funding	\$ 1,243,207.35
Fixed and Other Assets	\$ 1,832,829.37
Total Assets	\$ 4,205,479.28

Liabilities

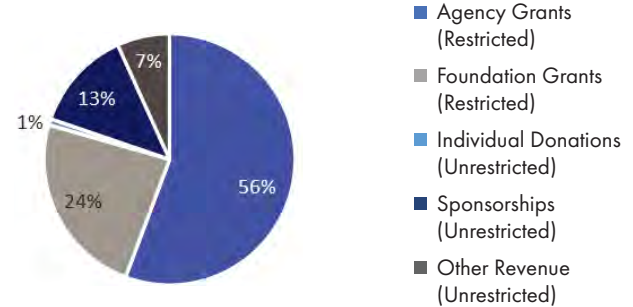
Accounts Payable	\$ 9,784.44
Deferred Grant Revenue	\$ 954,094.91
Total Liabilities	\$ 963,879.35

Net Assets

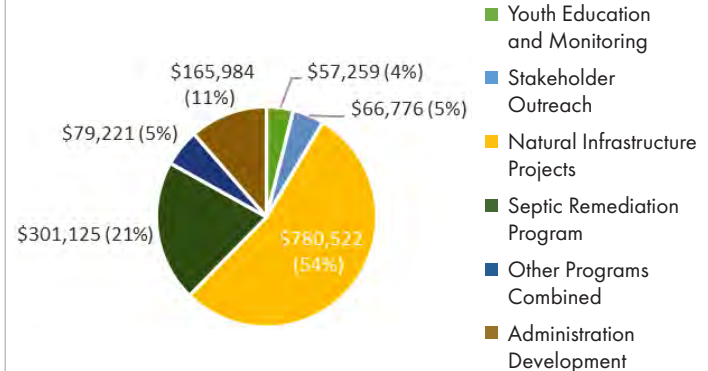
Beginning Net Assets	\$ 3,028,909.17
Change in Net Assets	\$ 212,690.76
Total Net Assets	\$ 3,241,599.93

Total Liabilities & Net Assets **\$ 4,205,479.28**

Revenue by Source



Expenses by Program



2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian Haggard, Arkansas Water Resources Center

Christina Justice, Cherokee Nation

Cliff Gibbs, At-large (Arvest)

Darrell Bowman, Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

Ed Fite, Grand River Dam Authority

Heath Ward, Springdale Water Utilities

Henderson Brown, Quantified Ventures

James Simpson, Benton County Producer

Steve Patrick, Tyson

Jimmy Mardis, At-large

Evan Teague, Arkansas Farm Bureau

Karen McCurdy, Crafton Tull

Kurt Price, Arvest Bank

Marla Peek, Oklahoma Farm Bureau

Ralph Weber, NWA Master Naturalists

Ryan Benefield, Arkansas Natural Resources Division

Scott Carney, At-large (Southwestern Electric Power Company)

Seth Walters, Simmons Foods

Shanon Phillips, Oklahoma Conservation Commission

Steven Beam, Burns & McDonnell

Tom Hopper, Developer

IRWP SPONSORS & GRANTORS

Thank You to Our Dedicated Partners in Illinois River Watershed Management

LEGACY and WATERSHED



WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION



RIVER and TRIBUTARY



Simmons

GEORGE'S



STREAM, CREEK, and SPRING



ARVEST

BURNS
MEDONNELL



CONSERVATION EDUCATION RECREATION

Thank you to all of the volunteers, in-kind contributors, individual donors, partners, and service providers that support our mission to improve the integrity of the Illinois River.



Your sponsorship is an investment in places like this one that preserves and protects the Illinois River and its streams as well as the natural heritage of our region.

A special thanks to the Northwest Arkansas chapter of the Arkansas Master Naturalists for their partnership.

**Consider becoming a Sponsor:
irwp.org/donate | contact@irwp.org**



2023 IMPACT SUMMARY

RIPARIAN RESTORATION

In partnership with the Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division, Walton Family Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and sponsors.

- 3.79 miles of riparian area restored
- 96 acres of productive pasture land provided with off-stream watering facilities
- 35,000 linear feet of fencing constructed for cattle exclusion and rotational grazing
- 7 new landowner agreements signed to implement conservation practices

YOUTH EDUCATION

In partnership with American Electric Power Foundation, and sponsors.

- 4,083 students educated on water quality
- 595 students participated in field trips
- 26 different schools located in Arkansas and Oklahoma participated in youth education programming

SEPTIC TANK REMEDIATION PROGRAM

In partnership with Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division.

- 26 systems repaired or replaced
- \$351,871 invested in septic projects installed for a total investment of \$839,290
- 425 homeowners received educational mailings

2023 IMPACT SUMMARY

LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT

In partnership with Arkansas Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Division, and sponsors.

- 3 urban or residential green infrastructure projects constructed
- 11 projects identified and scheduled for construction in 2024
- 4,075 people receiving educational information through newsletters

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

In partnership with the American Electric Power Foundation.

- 11 sites monitored for macroinvertebrate diversity, habitat, and water quality
- 217 volunteers involved in water quality related projects

CONSERVATION-BASED RECREATION STEWARDSHIP

In partnership with Benton County, and sponsors.

- 25 members of the recreation advisory committee
- 4,260 pounds of trash removed from the Illinois River and its tributaries
- 53 days free life jackets and staffing present at the Siloam Springs Kayak Park




ILLINOIS *River*
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP