

# Elkhart Environmental Center

*Fall/Winter 2023-2024*







The first 3 Fishing Clinic participants

# Fishing Clinic

This summer, as part of the annual FishFest event, we hosted a free fishing clinic for kids! FishFest takes place on the first Saturday in June, during the free fishing weekend (when fishing is allowed without an official permit). This year, we put together a 5 station clinic, led by volunteers: basic tackle, knot tying, conservation, stewardship, and safety & casting. Around 143 kids and parents came out to learn how to fish, and the first 100 kids got to take home a free fishing pole!





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## Highlights from Spring/Summer 2023

### Earth Day & Renewable Energy Ribbon Cutting

This spring, we moved our annual Earth Day celebration to be held ON Earth Day! Despite the occasional drizzle, we saw some sunshine--just in time for the ribbon cutting of our new solar panels and wind turbine! Visitors celebrated with free cake and many took home a free tree (volunteers gave away 269 trees during the event). We want to extend a big THANK YOU to our volunteers for making the event possible, the Freshieez for providing some delicious pizzas for the volunteer lunch, and all of our vendors and exhibitors for making the event fun!



### River Greenway Ribbon Cutting

We couldn't get enough of ribbon cuttings this year! In May, we celebrated the renovation of the River Greenway Trail. The River Greenway Trail was newly paved to make it more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians. The trail also now connects to the MapleHeart Trail and has a new trailhead here at the EEC. The trailhead features a small parking lot (with the ability to expand for some of our larger events), bike racks, and will have vault toilets installed within the next year.



### AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps is back! The EEC once again has an AmeriCorps team working onsite, and this time they're local! Thanks to help from MACOG, the EEC has 3 AmeriCorps members working throughout the summer on environmental projects. A key project for our team is removing the invasive honeysuckle shrubs that plague the property--not just cutting down the large plants, but also treating them with herbicide to keep them from coming back. The team has also been helpful with our summer programs and events. Don't be afraid to say "hi" if you see them out working on the trails!

### Education

We've had a great time working with groups from Foundations Childcare, Summerscape, Growing Kids, and the Elkhart Parks' Summer Camps! Over 130 kids have explored the EEC on guided hikes, made crafts to take home, and played some of our favorite games this summer. On our hikes kids have seen an abundance of frogs and turtles in our ponds and they've even spied the muskrats living there! We've also seen deer, turkeys, and a variety of songbirds. We're gearing up for field trip season and we can't wait to see what the next group of kids finds on their hike!



# Spring/Summer Programs



## Natural Egg Dyeing

Gearing up for Easter celebrations, participants learned how to dye eggs the natural way! We used onion skins, cabbage leaves, turmeric, and a variety of other natural sources to dye the eggs so they can still be eaten afterwards.

## Easter Egg Hunt

We once again partnered with the Elkhart Parks & Recreation Department to host a city-wide Easter egg hunt across 6 parks and the EEC. It was an odd year for the hunt: not all of the eggs were found, and some of the eggs that were found have still not been returned. But some observant visitors did get to take home a nice gift basket for their efforts!



## Bluebird Box Workshop

A workshop so popular we had to hold it twice! Before building a lovely new abode for our migratory friends, participants learned all about bluebirds, their life cycles, and their preferences. Several new homes were built and we hope they saw some happy residents this year!

## Beeswax Wrap Workshop

Toss the plastic Tupperware, there's a more sustainable option in town! In this workshop, participants got to make their own beeswax wraps from organic cotton swatches and natural beeswax. These wraps are a great, reusable way to keep food stored fresh.



## Oriole Feeder Workshop

Back by popular demand! Participants got to learn about orioles and the best ways to attract them to a feeder before building and painting their own feeder to take home. The feeder at the EEC has seen almost constant action since going up this spring!

## Seed Bomb Workshop

A great workshop for rogue planters! Using clay, potting soil, water, and native seeds we made little seed balls. Once the clay dries out, these balls can be tossed onto bare ground or boring grass to spread out some well-prepared native seeds for the new growing season.



# Spring/Summer Programs

## Rain Garden Rain Barrel Workshop

Another workshop so popular we had to hold it twice! In partnership with Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District, the EEC taught participants about how to design and build their own rain garden and rain barrels. Residents of Elkhart County who participated in this workshop are eligible for a rebate program with ECSWCD.

## Build-A-Barrel Workshop

As an extension of the Rain Garden Rain Barrel Workshop, we worked with Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District to help participants build their very own rain barrel to take home with them. Now they can collect the rain water from their rooftop and use it to water their gardens! They'll not only save on their water bill, but they'll help prevent erosion from stormwater.



(Nature Story Hour)



## Birds of Prey Workshop

Return of the raptors! We once again invited Soarin' Hawk Raptor Rehabilitation to come out with their raptors to talk about the different types of birds of prey in Indiana and the work they do at the center to take care of sick and injured raptors and return them to the wild (or teach them to be education ambassadors, like the raptors who came out to visit).



## Nature Play Days

This turned out to be a very popular series, with an average of over 40 participants each time! On Tuesdays in June, the EEC had a variety of materials and activities set up in our pavilion for visitors to explore and enjoy in their own time. One of our Nature Play Days partnered with the Indiana Children & Nature Network. Dr. Carla Gull came out to lead some activities and lend some fun supplies!





# Volunteer Highlights

## Volunteer Day: Installing Nest Boxes and Bat Houses

This spring volunteers helped replace and add new homey spots for our wild friends! Several broken and rotting bluebird houses were removed and replaced with new or donated bird houses. Brand new mounts were constructed for some new and donated bat houses. Volunteers did a wonderful job tracking down the posts around the property and building completely new ones. We hope our wild friends are enjoying their new homes! If you have any photos of our winged pals using their new perches, please share them with us!



## Tree Transplanting Day

Our annual Tree Transplanting Day was another roaring success! We had even more trees this year (about 400 total) and 25 volunteers got them all potted, marked, and ready to give away in 1 hour! This hot, sunny spring day called for a popsicle celebration! Over half of these trees (269) were give away at our Earth Day event. The remainder were given away after the event or planted on site at the EEC to help restore our native tree canopy.



## Pinewood Park Cleanup

This year we traveled up to the north side of town to give Pinewood Park some TLC. Volunteers helped as we worked to remove invasive honeysuckle shrubs by cutting down larger plants and pulling out young sprouts. EEC staff painted the cut honeysuckle stumps with herbicide to prevent them from growing back in full force. The Buildings & Grounds Department was also onsite to toss the removed shrubs into the wood chipper and keep the path clear for visitors. We were excited to see so many volunteers come out to help and dive right in! Pinewood Park now has many more open spaces in the woods to help get sunlight to our native spring wildflowers and sapling trees--making the forest much more healthy.





# Upcoming Programs & Events

Details for upcoming programs & events can be found on our website ([elkhartindiana.org/eec](http://elkhartindiana.org/eec)) or our Facebook page. We're always adding more, so check online for updates! To register or purchase tickets for upcoming programs & events, please visit [elkhart-environmental-center.ticketleap.com](http://elkhart-environmental-center.ticketleap.com).



## September

### Elkhart River Cleanup

Saturday, September 9  
8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

### How Native Plants Bring Your Garden to Life

Thursday, September 14  
5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

### Monarch Tagging & Migration

Sunday, September 17  
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM



Sunday, September 26 | 11 AM - 3 PM | Elkhart Environmental Center

Celebrating all dogs! Bring your four-legged friend out to enjoy dog-friendly vendors, explore natural trails, an off-leash agility run, local food vendors, and so much more! And don't forget to show off your best bud in the Pooch Parade (costumes encouraged).

This event also helps support a local rescue, Tracking in the Shadows, so donations are appreciated! Check out the Facebook event page for a full list of needed items such as high-quality dog food, pet beds, leashes, crates, treats, gift cards, etc.



## HAUNTED WALK THROUGH THE WOODS

Thursday, October 26 | 5 PM - 8 PM | Elkhart Environmental Center

Friday, October 27 | 5 PM - 9 PM | Elkhart Environmental Center

Feeling spooky? Come check out our 4th annual Haunted Walk Through the Woods! Enjoy a kid-friendly decorated trail or make your way through the more frightening parts of the forest. Don't forget to grab some grub from local food vendors!

This year, we'll be hosting the event over TWO DAYS. Tickets are \$10 per car at the gate, \$5 per car if you buy your ticket online. Spots are limited, so reserve yours now!

Want to be a part of the event? We always need volunteers. Check out details on page 4

## October

### Pumpkin Hunt

October 1 - 31  
Dawn - Dusk Daily

### Bat House Workshops

Thursday, October 5  
Friday, October 6  
5:30 PM - 7:00 PM

### Wood Duck House Workshop

Friday, October 13  
5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

## December

### Holiday Hoorah

Saturday, December 9  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

### Winter Wildlife

Saturday, December 16  
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

## November

### America Recycles Day

Wednesday, November 15  
5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

### Holiday Lights Recycling (drop off)

November 15 - January 31



# Volunteer Opportunities

Details for volunteer opportunities can be found on our website ([elkhartindiana.org/eec](http://elkhartindiana.org/eec)) or our Facebook page. We're always adding more, so check online for updates! To sign up for volunteer opportunities, please visit [signup.com/go/aMFHGWP](http://signup.com/go/aMFHGWP).



## September

### Elkhart River Cleanup

Saturday, September 9

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Join us for our annual Elkhart River Cleanup! Bags, trash pickers, and canoes will be provided. Cleanup crews will meet at the EEC and head out along the river at 8 AM. Please dress appropriately for the activities and the weather (we recommend closed-toed shoes, and for those on land: long pants/sleeves).

Canoe spots go quickly, so don't forget to register! You are welcome to bring your own canoe/kayak, but the EEC cannot provide transportation.

## This Fall

### Quilt Garden (end of fall)

Help us remove the dead plants from this year's quilt garden after they've passed their prime.

### Adopt-A-Trail (Year-round)

Great for groups or individuals! Pick a trail, walk it regularly (on your own schedule), and let us know if it needs anything.

## Special Projects

Our to-do list is a little long this year, so we could use some extra help! If you're interested in helping with any of these projects, email [EECmail@coei.org](mailto:EECmail@coei.org) so we can keep you updated on the schedule.



### Pond Renovation

Our Upper Wetland Pond has a leak! We'll be redoing the clay lining and need help clearing the banks, raking the clay, and building a stone dam for the re-routed water source.



### Piers (3)

We're adding 2 floating piers to the Christner area and 1 regular pier in our Upper Wetland and need extra hands carrying/placing them.



### Bridges (3)

We're replacing 3 bridges on our trails this year and will need help taking down the old ones, constructing the new ones, and installing them.



## HAUNTED WALK THROUGH THE WOODS

Be a part of the spooktacular event of the season!

### Setup/Decoration

Help us get the event started! Decorate a family-friendly and/or scary trail, hang lights, set up fog machines, and get the EEC looking Halloween-ready.

### Parking

Help direct parking--one of the most important jobs of the day! Check tickets, direct to parking lots and help keep the drive clear for traffic, direct safe pedestrian crossing.

### Photographer

Help us get candid shots of the event! Snap photos of the different booths and activities and get some great pics of families and volunteers. We use these photos every year to promote the event, send special thank-yous to our sponsors and community partners, and to celebrate our accomplishments at the end of the year. Volunteers will need to provide their own camera.

### Scarers

Feeling extra spooky? Sign up to be scarer! Dress up in your spooky best and help make the scary trail a frightening experience for everyone.

### Cleanup

Help us wrap the event up! Grab decorations, lights, and all the bits and pieces and store them in the Visitor's Cabin.

Volunteers will receive free snacks throughout the event and breaks to grab food from the food vendors/explore the trails, if they want. Feel free to volunteer with friends and family!





# Special Projects

## Quilt Garden

The EEC partnered with the Elkhart County Visitor's Bureau for the fourth year in a row to participate in their regional quilt gardens! This year, we custom-designed a frog and lily pads design to complement our Upper Wetland trail that loops just behind our quilt garden display (the frogs have a loud chorus in spring and summer throughout the duration of the garden).

Our quilt gardens have endured much from our wildlife friends over the years, and this year was no different. We've established a tradition of using parsley in our quilt garden to help support swallow-tail butterflies, but this year it has been munched down to nubs (likely by our resident turtles and muskrats). Last year, much of the garden was flooded from a leak in the pond caused by tree roots and muskrats. Previous years saw the garden used as nesting spots for rabbits and deer. We can't wait to see what our wildlife friends have in store for next year's design!

The quilt garden season officially comes to an end on September 15, but we'll be keeping our plants in as long as possible, so don't forget to stop by and check it out!



*It really pops in person, so come visit and see for yourself!*



## Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations

Did you know that there are now TWO public electric vehicle charging stations in Elkhart? The official ribbon cutting took place on June 28. These ChargePoint stations, paid for by the EEC's donation fund and a grant from the Volkswagen Settlement Fund are centrally located near food and entertainment by Main Street and NIBCO Park. One charger is located in the NIBCO parking lot and the other is in the Gause lot in downtown Elkhart. Each charging station can service two vehicles at a time. As part of the grant funding, the first 2 hours of charging will be free for the first 2 years. The ChargePoint stations also come with a five-year maintenance agreement that guarantees at least 98% runtime, so they should see almost constant use!

These initial EV chargers are the first of more to come as part of the international shift away from fossil fuels towards hybrid and electric vehicles.





# Special Species

## Native Species Highlight: Skunk Cabbage

This time of year is an excellent time to admire an interesting native plant: skunk cabbage. As its name implies, it is definitely on the smelly side. The odor (as unpleasant as it is to humans) helps attract pollinators, like flies and beetles, that are attracted to rotting meat. The scent is particularly noticeable when the plant is injured.

Even though we're highlighting skunk cabbage in fall and winter, this flowering perennial is one of the first plants to emerge in the spring. But, during the colder parts of the year, skunk cabbage produces its own heat--often melting any snow around it, which can make it easier to spot. It is typically found in woodlands, wetlands, and near streams. It can live up to 20 years!

Skunk cabbage is poisonous to people (unless prepared properly), but is eaten by deer, black bears, and snapping turtles. The seeds are eaten by wood ducks, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasants and bobwhite quail.



Photos from <https://blogs.illinois.edu/view/7362/779706>

## Invasive Species Highlight: Honeysuckle

The scourge of the EEC, this invasive shrub has been giving us trouble for years. Asian bush honeysuckle is native to Eurasia. It was brought over as an ornamental, for wildlife cover, and for soil erosion control. And to be fair, it is pretty, it creates a dense middle layer in a forest, and it establishes easily in bare areas. The problem is that it is very aggressive. If left alone, it will take over completely, creating a monoculture that would starve out our native wildlife who depend on a varied and balanced diet.

What makes it such an aggressive grower? It is one of the first plants to leaf out in the spring--long before other shrubs and trees. This means that the forest floor, where wildflowers and tree saplings are growing, are shaded out. Without that early spring sun, those plants will die. Honeysuckle is also hydrophilic (aka it really loves water) and tends to dry out the soil around it, which is something our native plants are not used to. In addition, it is a dense and tenacious grower. Even if you cut it back, it will continue sprouting unless you either remove the entire plant (including the root system) or use chemical controls.

As beautiful as honeysuckle is, and as successful as it is at attracting birds, the berries it produces do not provide the nutrients they need to survive (like berries from native plants such as hackberry and pokeberry).

Cutting back large honeysuckle plants helps sunlight reach the forest floor, giving other plants a chance to grow in. Chemical controls kill the plant and keep it from resprouting. We've used both methods around the EEC in our efforts to eradicate this invasive menace.



Photo from <https://hikersnotebook.blog/flora/berry-plants-and-fruit-trees/honeysuckle/>



These wide growth rings show how much honeysuckle grows in one season







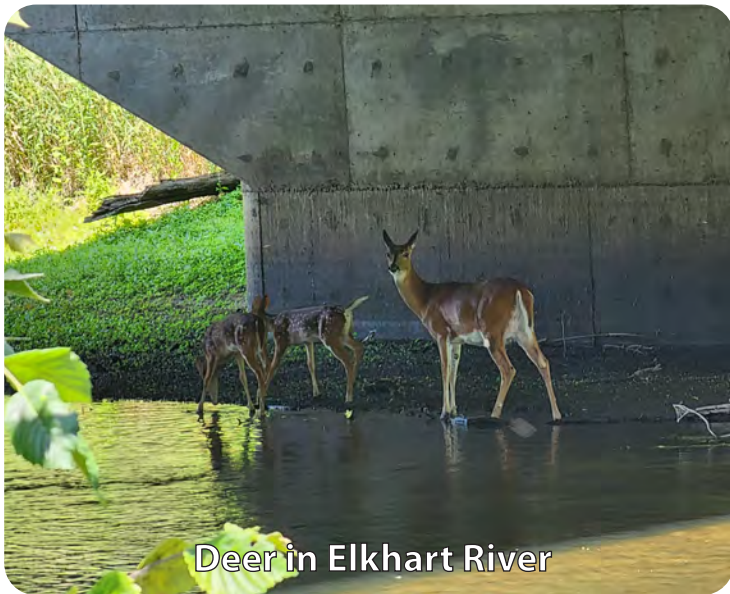
New Barred Owl Boxes around the EEC



Squirrel at Bird Feeder



AmeriCorps planting Quilt Garden



Deer in Elkhart River



Black Swallowtail Butterfly



Muskrat in Upper Wetland



Tree Frog in Rain Garden



Monarch Butterfly in Rain Garden



Bee on Bee Balm





Build -a-Barrel Workshop



Eco Valentine's Day



Lip Balm Workshop



Soap Tablet Workshop



Worm Bin Building Workshop



Soap Tablet Workshop



Nature Play Day



Cat Tower Building Workshop



Nature Story Hour-Owl Adaptations

# Share with us!

Is there a program you loved and want to do again? Or something you haven't seen offered, but would love to try? Let us know! We're always looking to offer new programs, activities, events, and site features. Send us a message on where you'd like a nice bench, or what else we should have at Earth Day. We want to hear from you!

- ✉ Email [EECmail@coei.org](mailto:EECmail@coei.org)
- ☎ Call (574)-293-5070
- 💬 Message us on Facebook
- 👤 Stop by during office hours (M-F 8 AM - 5 PM)
- ✉ Mail a letter to 1717 E Lusher Ave, Elkhart, IN 46516



Package-Free Pretzel Workshop