

Iron County Land & Water Conservation Department

2024 Annual Report



This year the Iron County LWCD and HWY Depts installed two Aluminum Box Culverts. One in the town of Kimball and another in the town of Anderson. The two towns worked together to build the structures.



Iron County
Land & Water
Conservation
Department

The mission of the Iron County Land Conservation Department is to provide leadership and promote sound land and water stewardship through education, technical support and consistent program delivery.

2024 Year in Review

Iron County Land & Water Conservation Department

Greetings,

2024 was a year of major challenges, starting the year off with major budget cuts. The Land & Water Conservation Department is heavily grant-funded, however, we cut our county levy support by 31% in order to help the county balance the budget. These cuts caused us to relook at some of our programming and restrict some of the outreach we were able to provide to the public.

In addition to those challenges, we lost Zach Wilson, Conservation Specialist, after 9 years of service. Zach left the department at the end of August for another position. The position was vacant for the remainder of the year to help save the county money.

Despite these challenges, I am proud to say we still accomplished some big accomplishments in 2024! With additional grant funding, we were able to finish the Kaari Creek Watershed project. One final culvert was installed in 2024, the final crossing in the watershed. This crossing consisted of replacing 2 48" culverts with one aluminum box culvert 18'7"x5'4"x50' and would be the first of its kind installed in the county. We were also working with the Town of Anderson on the Tyler Forks River to address a long-awaited project of theirs. Their crossing was too short, causing severe erosion on their roadway along with a one-lane crossing. We received a grant to replace that structure with an aluminum box culvert 20'11"x6'1"x45' complete with headwall and wingwalls on the inlet end of the pipe.

As I've mentioned before, we're a small county, and partnerships are vital to get things done. Whether it's funding sources or manpower, we look for help where we can. These aluminum box culverts would be a big task as they required assembly before installation. You have to build the structure. I started conversations with both towns to help each other build these structures and help each other get the job done. It worked well. It saved both of the towns money and was another great example of Iron County getting big things done!

Both of these projects had several funding sources, multiple partners, and were both a success. I am so grateful to all of those involved in these projects. Iron County HWY Dept, Iron County Forestry, WDNR Fisheries, DATCP, Town of Anderson, and Kimball all worked hard to complete these projects. Working together, we can accomplish big things!

Sincerely dedicated to conservation,

Heather Palmquist
County Conservationist/ Department Head

Iron County Land & Water Conservation

The mission of the Iron County Land & Water Conservation Department is to provide leadership and promote sound land and water stewardship through education, technical support, and consistent program delivery.

<u>LCC Committee</u>		<u>LWCD Staff & Support</u>	
Roy Haeger	Chairman	Heather Palmquist	Conservationist/Dept Head
Karl Krall	Vice-Chairman	Zach Wilson	Conservation Specialist
William Thomas		Matthew Bolen	Wildlife Damage/Ag Tech
Roxanne Lutgen		<u>Natural Resource Conservation Service</u>	
Dale Wehmas*	Citizen Representative	Michael Blount	District Conservationist
		Todd Norwood	Soil Conservationist
		Jill Malecki	Soil Conservation Tech

* Denotes Non-County Board Member

Land Conservation Committees were created under Chapter 92.06(1)(a), Wis. Stats. and have local responsibility for natural resource issues related to erosion control, sedimentation and nonpoint source pollution, and other duties as directed by the county board.

Administrative Activities

- Administered **\$126,647** in DATCP staff and support funding for the department in 2024.
- Administered **\$52,210** of DATCP conservation project cost-share funding.
- Administered **\$33,268** in funds for the Wildlife Damage Program.
- Administered \$in funds for the Kaari Creek Watershed Project and coordinated project.
- Coordinated the Native plant sale including **\$5,180** in sales.
- Administered a **\$16,267** DNR Surface Water LMPN Grant.
- Developed & administered the department's budget.
- Filed all reimbursement requests and grant reports.
- Served on Youth Education Committee.
- Served on Great Lakes Committee.
- Served on the Legislation and Administration Committee.
- Served as the NW Land & Water Conservation Association Coordinator.
- Served on the Area Interagency Training Committee (AITCOM).
- Assisted in coordinating wetland training for natural resource staff.
- Assisted in coordinating a Culvert Tour for town and county road crews.
- Attended the WI Land+Water Conservation Association annual conference.
- Attended County Conservationist meetings.
- Provide conservation technical planning for IC Forestry, 3 townships, and 2 private landowners.
- Projects designed totaled **\$262,160** for the year.
- Attended Wisconsin Lakes Convention.
- Conducted **19** site visits for landowners.
- Designed, administered, and served as project manager for Kaari Creek Watershed Project.
- Completed **6** past project checks.
- Supervised staff.

Budget Summary *(includes actual expenses & approximate revenues)*

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
DATCP Salary Grant	\$126,647	\$133,256	\$128,565	\$111,729	\$108,529
DATCP Cost-Share	\$52,583	\$19,884 ((\$29,326 extended))	\$46,642	\$76,305	\$55,215
Wildlife Damage	\$33,268	\$29,542	\$28,721	\$20,688	\$18,528
Native Plant Sale	\$5,180	\$14,539	\$9,478	\$3,472	\$4,886
Marten Project	----	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Natural Resource Found.	----	----	----	----	\$5,000
U.S. Fish & Wildlife	----	----	----	----	\$30,500
DNR AIS Grant & Xcel	\$25,780	\$25,523	\$25,087	\$24,597	\$8,232
DNR Lake Grants/Misc.	----	----	----	\$27,557	----
Enbridge Ecofootprint Grant	\$89,000	----	----	----	----
Trout Stamp Kaari Creek Project	\$69,701	\$328,369 ((\$69,701 extended))	----	----	----
Other	\$11,580	\$4,085	\$7,001	\$2,641	\$3,140
TOTAL Revenue:	\$413,739	\$563,198	\$253,494	\$274,987	\$242,030
Dept Expenses:	\$448,266	\$588,582	\$272,062	\$325,796	\$269,543
County Cost:	\$34,527	\$25,384	\$18,568	\$50,809	\$27,513

The County Cost line in this chart shows the total amount the county contributed to the department's budget.

*****In 2024, the county's cost was approximately 7.5% of the total LWCD's operating budget.**

Water Resource Management (LWRM) Plan

Chapter 92 of the Wisconsin Statutes grants authority to Land Conservation Committees (LCC) to set policies for local soil & water resource management. Their policies are administered through the LWCD.

The purpose of the Land & Water Resource Management Plans is for the counties to assess their individual resources, concerns, and plans for addressing concerns. These plans are approved for a 10-year period, with a review 5 years into the plan. These mandatory plans are reviewed by the WI Land & Water Board in order for counties to receive their funding from DATCP.

Implementation of the plan is driven by the annual work plan, which includes goals and activities identified by the LCC and the public.

Agricultural practices, streambank stabilization, riparian habitat restoration, and technical assistance to Towns continue to drive the conservation practice workload of the department. In 2024, we fielded more than 19 site visits and numerous responses to technical requests.

The LWCD works cooperatively with agencies and county departments as opportunities arise, including the Forestry, Highway, and Zoning Departments. The department is committed to a strong partnership with youth and adults through lake groups, Hurley & Mercer Schools, Fe University, and more.

The table below summarizes the projects funded in 2024 through the Cost-Share Program.

Completed LWRM Cost Share Projects – 2024 (pictures start on page 5)						
Project Type	Name	Total Cost	DATCP CS \$	Other \$	Source	Landowner
Stream Crossing	Kaari Creek Watershed	\$86,665.93	\$8,482.18	\$76,825.82	Trout Stamp & Trout Unlimited	\$1,358.93
Stream Crossing	Town of Anderson	\$119,590.21	\$30,590.21	\$89,000.00	Enbridge Ecofootprint	\$0.00
Stream Crossing	Town of Sherman	\$21,992.00	\$10,996.00	\$5,498.00	County Contribution	\$5,498.00
Shoreline Stabilization	Iron County Forestry	\$4,283.00	\$2,141.50	NA	NA	\$2,141.50
TOTAL:		\$232,531.14	\$52,209.89	\$171,323.82		\$8,998.43

2024 DATCP Funded Conservation Practices



This was the final culvert replacement in the Kaari Creek Watershed. The two 48" culverts were replaced with an Aluminum Box Culvert 18'7"x5'4" to ensure better stream flow in high water events.

Stream Crossing Kimball – Riverside Dr

DATCP CS:	\$8,482.18
Trout Stamp:	\$69,701.57
Trout Unlimited:	\$7,123.25
<u>Landowner:</u>	<u>\$1,358.93</u>
Total:	\$86,665.93



Stream Crossing Anderson – Caroline Lake Rd



This culvert was too short, causing the roadside to erode in high water events. The old culvert was replaced with an Aluminum Box Culvert 20'11"x6'1" which will pass more water, reduce flooding, and is longer to accommodate 2 lanes of traffic and reduce sediment loads to the stream.



DATCP CS:	\$30,590.21
EcoFootprint:	\$89,000.00
<u>Landowner:</u>	<u>\$0.00</u>
Total:	\$119,590.21

2024 DATCP Funded Conservation Practices (cont.)

Stream Crossing Sherman – Murray's Landing Rd



This culvert was undersized and would wash out in high-water events, depositing gravel in the stream.

DATCP CS:	\$10,996.00
County Contribution:	\$5,498.00
Landowner:	\$5,498.00
Total:	\$21,992.00



Shoreland Stabilization Iron Co Forestry – Lake of the Falls



The bank at this campsite had severely eroded. Rip rap was placed at the toe of the bank to stabilize the bottom of the slope. Planted geobag walls were installed to stabilize the bank and protect it from further erosion.

DATCP CS:	\$2,141.50
Landowner:	\$2,141.50
Total:	\$4,283.00



Land & Water Resource Management (LWRM) Plan

Promoting land and water conservation through education and outreach is a priority of Iron County's LWCD. The department dedicates a vast amount of time, energy, and funding to promote stewardship and resource protection to students, farmers, municipalities, elected officials, landowners, and the general public. This is the only department in the county that fills that niche.

Iron County participates in the state and regional Conservation Poster & Speaking Contest sponsored through the WI Land & Water Conservation Association. The 2024 theme was **"May the Forest Be With You, Always"**. There were 74 participants from Hurley and Mercer's Art, Science, and English classes. The elementary and middle division speech winners, from Mercer, moved on to the area speech competition along with the first-place posters. Mercer's 6th-grade student Zoie Babcock and Mercer's 8th-grade student Ariella Perez both received 3rd place at the NW Area (regional) speaking contest. Hurley's 5th-grade student Jayce Lardinois received a second-place award for his conservation poster. Zoie Babcock was invited to give her speech, "Climate Change in Wisconsin" to over 200 attendees of the Northwest Lakes Conference held in June.



Hurley 5th grade-Conservation posters.

Wisconsin Conservation Camp

June 17th -20th, 2024, 16 students participated in the Wisconsin Land+Water Conservation Camp for high school students. Campers came from across the state to enjoy learning about conservation and careers. Activities included, canoe lessons and a canoe trip down the Trout River, a presentation about pollinators from one of Iron County's great native plant advocates Mary Nelson, a field trip to Saxon Harbor with a presentation by Tara Krall on the Iron County Park, and guest presenters from the Trout Lake Limnology Center and the Northern Highlands State Forest.



Campers enjoyed a presentation about pollinators.



Conservation Building Project- campers built mason bee houses to take home.

Land & Water Resource Management (LWRM) Plan (cont.)

Total Outreach & Education:

Field days, workshops, education programs: 62 programs

Student & adult program attendees: 292 youth and 465 adults

Native Plant Sale brochures distributed: 400

Total Participants: 757

Misc. Education Activities - (number of events); # participants

- Woods & Water (20); 63 students
- School programs (1); 150 students
- Lake Association talks (9); 126 participants
- AIS education programs (13); 155 attendees
- CLMN Water Quality (8); 52 participants
- Terrestrial Invasive (11); 132 participants
- Conservation poster contest; 47 students
- Conservation speaking contest; 27 students



Curly leaf pondweed hand pulling - Rice Lake boat landing.



Hurley 7th grade students once again helped pull garlic mustard at a private landowner's property along the Montreal River. Students pulled over 850 lbs.

Invasive Species Program

Iron County's Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) program is now in its 17th year. The program has proven to be important in educating the public, providing resources, and helping fight invasives throughout Iron County. This year, we hired 3 summer interns/LTE, through the Xcel FERC licensing agreement, and the DNR - Lake Monitoring and Protection Network grant. The positions were designed as conservation field technicians to work with the Conservation Specialist. Together, the crew conducted surveys, created education fliers, controlled, and managed both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, and conducted the Clean Boats Clean Waters watercraft inspections program.

In addition, the LTEs helped the department improve education and outreach materials, developed educational flyers, and worked on additional invasive species projects. AIS monitoring surveys were done on the following lakes (9 lakes): Turtle Flambeau and Gile Flowage, Saxon Harbor, Island Lake, Lake Michelle, Upper and Lower Springstead Lakes, Spider, and Pike Lake.

Purple loosestrife and Eurasian watermilfoil continue to be a focus on the Turtle Flambeau Flowage with increased monitoring by LWCD staff, volunteers from the Lake Association, and the WDNR. Continued monitoring and management are advised. There were two new lakes verified with AIS in 2024. Curly Leaf Pondweed was found and verified in Upper and Lower Springstead and Lake of the Falls.



Clean Boats Clean Waters training

Education Accomplishments

- Assisted the Turtle Flambeau Flowage Trude Lake Property Owners Association in developing a partnership with Northland College for AIS monitoring surveys through the Early Detection and Response Grant.
- Trained & organized volunteers to hand pull invasives on the Turtle River, Pike, Lake of the Falls, Pine, and Spider Lakes.
- Conducted educational trainings, workshops, and field trips.
- Increased online presence via educational pamphlets, flyers, and social media.
- Attended large educational events: Earth Day and Loon Days.

Technical Assistance / Management/ Monitoring

- Treatment of Japanese knotweed, Purple loosestrife, Wild parsnip, Giant hogweed, Garlic mustard, European marsh thistle, Eurasian watermilfoil, Yellow iris & Curly leaf pondweed.
- Coordinate water quality monitoring volunteers on 37 lakes in Iron County.

Woods & Waters Project

Since 1999, Hurley and Mercer students have gained first-hand experience conducting field research by studying the link between Iron County Forest types, soils, wildlife, and water quality through the Woods & Waters Project. This unique program takes students into the field to study water quality and loons during the summer and the American marten and the Iron County Forest in the fall/winter.

In April, Hurley and Mercer students participated in the Loon Project. A total of 28 students assisted in placing nesting platforms on Hewitt, Echo, and Fox Lakes. These students learned how to test water quality, conduct biotic index surveys, learn about loon ecology, and how shoreline development can impact water quality and loon reproduction.



Students learn about loon and lake ecology prior to going into the field.



Native Plant Sale



The 2024 Native Plant Sale was successful once again. This sale provides an opportunity for landowners to purchase small quantities of native seedlings, grasses, and wildflowers at a low cost. All the plants in the sale are native to northern Wisconsin!

There are many environmental and social values in promoting native species. This supports local nurseries and ensures greater survival because the plants are adapted to northern Wisconsin's climate. Once established, they require less maintenance because they do not need water, fertilizer, or pesticides.

Multiple layers of native plants (groundcovers, shrubs, and trees) provide the essential food, shelter, and space for a diversity of wildlife. These plants have broad and often deep roots, thus reducing soil erosion and promoting water percolation into the soil. As water percolates into the ground, nutrients are absorbed that would otherwise run off into nearby lakes or streams.

The benefits and uses of these seedlings include wildlife value, timber, windbreaks, shoreland habitat restoration, and more.

Proceeds from the Native Plant Sale funded scholarships for Iron County students to attend Youth Conservation Camps, conservation education for teachers, and community conservation projects.

2024 Native Plant Sale:

- ❖ 595 trees & shrubs
- ❖ 18 ferns
- ❖ 603 grasses/wildflowers

❖ **1,216** Total Plants Distributed

2023 Native Plant Sale:

- ❖ 825 trees & shrubs
- ❖ 32 ferns
- ❖ 3,632 grasses/wildflowers

❖ **4,489** Total Plants Distributed

Wildlife Damage Abatement Program

The Wildlife Damage Abatement & Claims Program (WDACP) was created by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1983 and has been implemented in Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, and Iron Counties since 1987. In 2024, the WDACP program was contracted out to USDA – APHIS to implement the entire program from claims to trapping to reimbursements.

The emphasis of the WDACP is on abatement (alleviation) of damage from deer, bear, turkey, and geese through techniques such as modification of agricultural practices, fencing, live trapping and relocation of bear, repellents, scare devices, and wildlife population control through managed hunting. In the 4-county area, there are a variety of commercial crops being damaged by wildlife, including corn, sunflowers, soybeans, buckwheat, forage, apples, cherries, plums, strawberries, blueberries, carrots, beets, beans, and other garden vegetables, cut flowers, honey, and livestock.

ABATEMENT: The wildlife damage program responds to dozens of program inquiries and damage complaints annually. For those people who meet program eligibility requirements, some choose to enroll and implement abatement measures when damage is first reported.

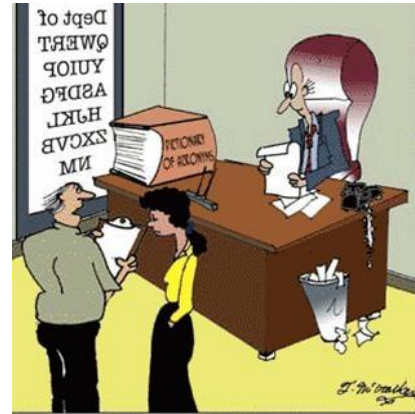
CLAIMS: Ethan Rossing, Wildlife Specialist with USDA-APHIS implements Iron County's WDACP program. Program participants must call for damage appraisals at least 10 days prior to harvest to remain eligible for damage reimbursements. They must comply with program requirements and have properly implemented the recommended abatement measures to have their claims approved by the Land Conservation Committees and the WDNR. Iron County had one bear trapping and relocation program participant in 2024, in which 37 bear were trapped and relocated. In addition, there were 16 additional bears listed as harvested. The 695.2 acres appraised had a determined loss of 425.62 bushels of corn.

Agriculture Technician Program

In 2024, the Agriculture Technician Program became a stand-alone position held by Matt Bolen. In the past, Matt had been doing both the Wildlife Damage and Agricultural Technician programs, which proved to be too much. Through a NACD Grant, Matt was able to fully dedicate his time and energy to promoting education and outreach to our agricultural producers. Matt focused on trying to get farmers to do nutrient management plans on their farms, with one successful NM plan completed in 2024. In addition, he organized an Iron County Farmer Dinner in Saxon, where 7 participants came to learn about programming available to them to assist in soil and water quality. In addition to Matt discussing NM planning, Michael Blount, District Conservationist, NRCS was there to discuss programming available through them, and the County Conservationist discussed LWCD programming.

List of Acronyms

APHIS	Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (part of USDA)
BMP	Best Management Practice
CSA	Cost Share Agreement
DATCP	Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection
FPP	Farmland Preservation Plan
FSA	Farm Service Agency
GIS	Geographical Information System
GLIFWC	Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Service
LCC	Land Conservation Committee
LWCB	Land & Water Conservation Board
LWCD	Land & Water Conservation Department
LWRM	Land & Water Resource Management
NCWMA	Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area
NRCS	Natural Resource Conservation Service (part of USDA)
NWLWCA	Northwest Wisconsin Land & Water Conservation Association
SRWA	Superior Rivers Watershed Association
USFWS	United States Fish & Wildlife Service
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
UWEX	University of Wisconsin Extension
WDACP	Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program
WDNR	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
WI Land+Water	Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association



"It's time for McWit to leave.
He's learned all the acronyms we use."

Cooperating Agencies

This Department extends an appreciative Thank You for your contributions in our outstanding accomplishments and success in soil & water conservation.

Federal

United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

- Ted Koehler, Wildlife Biologist

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Michel Blount, District Conservationist
- Todd Norwood, Soil Conservationist
- Jill Malecki, Soil Conservation Technician

State

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)

- Kim Carlson, County Liaison
- Stacy Dehne, Engineer

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

- Zach Lawson, Fisheries Biologist
- Jenna Malinowski, Wildlife Biologist
- Casey Baye, TFF Property Manager
- Nichole Hays, Water Management Specialist
- Jon Simonsen, DOT Liaison

County

Iron County Board & Board Chairman

Iron County Forestry Department

- Eric Peterson, County Forestry Administrator

Iron County Zoning Department

- Erika Roeder, Zoning Administrator

Iron County Highway Department

- Kasey Krall, Highway Commissioner