FALL / WINTER 2026 - 2027

ELKHART Environmental CENTER





Visit Us!

Visitor's Cabin	Trails
Monday - Friday	Dawn - Dusk
8:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Every Day





1717 E Lusher Ave, Elkhart, IN 46516
574-293-5070
EECmail@cityofelkhartin.gov

Highlights from Spring/Summer 2026

Site Improvements

- Our Land Manager, Dalton, built a brand new staircase/deck to the Christner Trail.
- He also built a new boardwalk through the Christner pond.
- Volunteers from Crossroads United Way helped us plant 1,400 native plants along our trails.
- We conducted a controlled burn on our western prairie and spot-treated other areas to combat invasive species and promote the growth of native plants.
- We assisted the Parks Department with the pond restoration project at High Dive Park: placing natural boulders and planting native plants (with the help of volunteers) around the bank to prevent erosion.
- We leveled out the grassy area behind the parking lot to make it more accessible to visitors and vendors during events.
- With help from volunteers, we planted our “Dragonfly Daydream” quilt garden.



Programs & Events

- We have hosted and tabled at over 40 programs and events since March, and seen over 4,500 visitors!
- Popular programs, like our House Wren Box, Recycled Oriole Feeder, Hummingbird Yard Art, and Hummingbird Banding Workshops, made a reap-pearance.
- We hosted brand new programs, such as our Spring Foraging, A Walk in the Woods, and Weekly Bird Hike programs.
- Our most popular program this spring was our Spring Foraging Workshop--we had 28 foragers join us for back-to-back sessions!
- Our most popular program this summer was our Nature Play Day--over 57 kids and parents came out to play and explore at the EEC!
- We also hosted tree planting events for our Trees for the Hart Program. For details, check out page 4!

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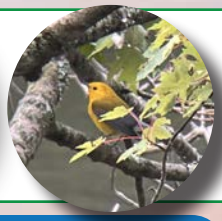
Spring Programs

Nature Story Hour for Littles Series

We hosted this fun, free program on the first Wednesday of every month from March to August. Each hour-long session included a nature-themed story and a related craft/activity.




Weekly Birding Hikes

House Wren Box Workshop



This popular program teaches visitors about the Northern House Wren, including tips on how to attract this (and other) songbirds. In addition to a ton of great info, participants also built their own nest box to take home.

Easter Egg Hunt

Our annual Easter Egg Hunt returned! This year, we tried a variety of easy- and hard-to-find hiding spots. All the easy eggs were found, as well as some of the hard eggs and 8 families took home prize bags with fun Easter-themed goodies!



Recycled Oriole Feeder Workshop

We hosted back-to-back sessions of this popular workshop and had a blast! Visitors learned about all about the lives and habits of the orioles that return to our area every spring and then built a bird feeder specifically designed to attract them using recycled materials.








A Walk in the Woods Series

Spring Foraging Workshop

Hoosier Forager, Tim Frost, stopped by to host back-to-back sessions of this new program! Visitors learned about common edible plants and mushrooms before heading out for a hike.



Hummingbird Yard Art Workshop

Another popular, back-to-back session program! Visitors created their own nature-themed mosaic stepping stones.





Rain Garden & Rain Barrel Workshop

Did you know the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District offers a rebate program for rain gardens and rain barrels? They came out to talk about their program before helping visitors assemble their own rain barrel.

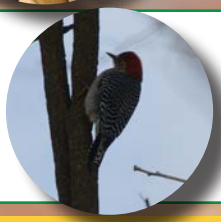
Summer Programs











This new series began in June, with weekly hikes on Thursday mornings. Binoculars and bird guides were available to borrow, and staff hit the trails with visitors to look for birds and other wildlife enjoying life at the EEC.



Nature Play Days

Our Nature Play Days returned! This program is always a huge hit. We hosted two free drop-in play days across June and July. Each session was full of trail exploration, nature crafts, scavenger hunts, and more!



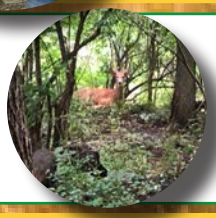


Junior Indiana Master Naturalist Day Camp

Our second Junior IMN Day Camp was a blast! Full of fantastic info from local experts, exploration, and so much fun! For more info about this program, check out page 5.



Another brand new series, these walks took place every morning on the first Wednesday of the month starting in April. Visitors were welcomed for a rain or shine hike on our trails (though the weather didn't always cooperate).

Hummingbird Banding Workshop



Allen Chartier returned for another exciting program all about our most beloved summertime visitors: hummingbirds!

Allen, the Project Director for the Great Lakes HummerNet, gave a presentation about the HummerNet research project, how to attract and feed hummingbirds, and how to make your garden hummingbird-friendly. He also did a LIVE banding demonstration and was able to catch a hummingbird during the program!

Trees for the Hart

Spring/Summer

The Elkhart Environmental Center and Elkhart Parks Department, with support from the Elkhart Forestry Division, kicked off the Trees for the Hart community tree planting events this spring and summer. We had a blast working with volunteers from the neighborhoods, partner organizations, and local companies to get trees in the ground. We planted a variety of mostly shade trees, which ranged from 15 - 25 gallons. Volunteers persevered through roots and gravel to dig out new homes for over 200 trees!

Community tree planting events will continue through the end of summer, as we work to reach our benchmark of 450 trees planted by September 1.











Next

But the fun doesn't end yet! Community tree planting events will continue through the fall until the end of the planting season. We will be working with volunteers to plant another 600 trees before the ground freezes--and we would love for you to join us!

Wednesday, September 9	**5:30 PM - 7:30 PM**
Saturday, September 19	**10:00 AM - 12:00 PM**
Thursday, October 1	**2:30 PM - 3:30 PM**
Friday, October 2	**5:30 PM - 7:30 PM**
Wednesday, October 28	**5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**
Saturday, November 7	**10:00 AM - 12:00 PM**
Sunday, November 15	**1:00 PM - 3:00 PM**

For details about planting locations, parking, etc. or to sign up to volunteer, please visit our Facebook page or www.CityofElkhartIN.gov/trees.

JUNIOR IMN DAY CAMP













This summer, we had our 2nd Junior IMN Day Camp!

For two weeks, six campers studied different facets of our environment and dedicated six hours of volunteer service to complete the program and earn their Junior IMN patches.

Local experts and educators from the Elkhart area lent a hand and taught the campers their field of expertise through informative presentations and fun activities. Campers explored the world of soil, the rocky scene of geology, the importance of water, fish of the Elkhart River, how awesome trees are, the beauty of flowers and edible plants, the expanse of the universe, and the diversity of wildlife that call Indiana home.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this an exciting and memorable camp!

We will be hosting another day camp in Summer 2027. Stay tuned for more info!

Upcoming Programs & Events

Details for upcoming programs & events can be found on our website (cityofelkhartin.gov/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 eventeny.com/company/ElkhartEnvironmentalCenter.

Spanish translations are available upon request!

September

Waggin' in the Woods

Sunday, September 27 | 11 AM - 3 PM

Join us for our 6th annual dog- and family-friendly event! Featuring a costume contest, dog-friendly vendors, food, $15 microchipping, puppy therapy, and so much more!

Visit wagginthewoods.com for more info!



Fall Leaves Program
with Elkhart Public Library
Wednesday, September 16
4:30 PM - 5:30 PM



Pedal into the Past
with Elkhart County Historical Museum
Wednesday, September 23
5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

TREES FOR THE HART PLANTINGS
Wednesday, September 9
Saturday, September 19

October



Pumpkin Hunt
Month-long



Bat House Workshop
at Woodlawn Nature Center
Wednesday, October 7
5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

TREES FOR THE HART PLANTINGS
Friday, October 2
Saturday, October 10
See page 8 for details.

HAUNTED WALK THROUGH THE WOODS

Thursday, October 22 | 5 PM - 8 PM
Friday, October 23 | 5 PM - 9 PM
Saturday, October 24 | 5 PM - 9 PM

Our 7th annual Haunted Walk event! Thursday is Kids Night with a costume parade. The full event opens Friday and Saturday with kid-friendly & scary trails, vendors, food vendors, and live music. Visit cityofelkhartin.gov/haunted-walk for details. Volunteers needed! See page 8 for more info.

November

Holiday Lights Recycling

November 15 -January 31

Recycle your old/broken holiday string lights! Drop them off in our collection bin on our front porch or take them directly to Schupan Recycling. The drop-off bin at the EEC accepts old/broken string lights 24/7.



DIY Lip Balm Workshop
Thursday, November 5
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM



Owl Prowl
Wednesday, November 18
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

TREES FOR THE HART PLANTINGS
Saturday, November 7
Sunday, November 15
See page 8 for details.

Upcoming Programs & Events

December

Holiday Hoorah!

Friday, December 11 | 5 PM - 8 PM

Kick off the holiday season with fun, winter-themed activities! Enjoy festive snacks and treats and explore wintry trails. Inside, you can dive into a craft and enjoy some hot cocoa!
This is an all-ages, family-friendly, drop-in event. Come whenever you like and leave whenever you need to!



January



Winter Nature Play Day
Saturday, January 2
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM



Winter Seed Sowing
Wednesday, January 27
6:00 PM - 7:00 PM



February



2025 Bluebird Box Workshop



2025 Upcycled Wind Chime Workshop



Bluebird Box Workshops
Friday, February 19
3:30 PM - 5:00 PM
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM



Upcycled Wind Chime Workshops
Friday, February 26
3:00 PM - 5:00 PM
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Volunteer Opportunities

Details for volunteer opportunities can be found on our website (cityofelkhartin.gov/eec) or our Facebook page. We're always adding more, so check online for updates! To sign up for volunteer opportunities, please visit elkhart.galaxydigital.com.

Fall

TREES FOR THE HART PLANTINGS

Locations Vary

Wednesday, September 9	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM
Saturday, September 19	10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Thursday, October 1	2:30 PM - 3:30 PM
Friday, October 2	5:30 PM - 7:30 PM
Saturday, October 28	5:00 PM - 7:00 PM
Saturday, November 7	10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Sunday, November 15	1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

What better way to wrap up the year than by planting trees in our community? Join us as we set out to plant 2,000 trees by 2028! Our next benchmark is to plant 600 trees this fall.

We'll be doing major tree planting events in neighborhoods all around Elkhart and we need your help!

Please stay tuned to our website and social media for updates on dates, times, and locations for future planting events as we work to reach each district in the city.

If you are interested in helping with a Tree Planting, sign up with our volunteer software, elkhart.galaxydigital.com.

EEC Ambassadors

We're looking for volunteers who can help us spread the word about our programs and events. Every year, we get more and more invitations to have a table at a community event and we need YOUR help!

If you're interested in traveling to community events to represent the EEC--spread the word about our trails, our programs, and all the fun we have out here, we would love your help! Fall is especially busy with Halloween-themed events looking for organizations to pass out candy and literature.

If you're interested in being an EEC Ambassador, contact EEC staff at EECmail@cityofelkhartin.gov for details about upcoming events!

October

HAUNTED WALK THROUGH THE WOODS

Thursday, October 22		5 PM - 8 PM
Friday, October 23		5 PM - 9 PM
Saturday, October 24		5 PM - 9 PM

Be a part of the spooktacular event of the season!

Setup/Decoration

Help us get the event started! Decorate the 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 cars to parking lots, help keep the drive clear for traffic, and 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 volunteers, 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 a 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 to store in the Visitor's Cabin.

Volunteers will receive a free t-shirt, and free snacks throughout the event and breaks to grab food from the food vendors/explore the trails, if they want. Volunteer with friends/family!

Volunteer Highlights: Spring/Summer

Spring

Wildflowers

This spring, volunteers from Crossroads United Way came out for a special Earth Day initiative to help us plant native wildflowers, ferns, and other spring ephemerals around our trails. Other volunteers from the community helped out throughout the month, as well. In total, we planted 1,400 plants!

This is part of our long-term goal to help reestablish native plants in our woodlands, wetlands, and prairies. We plan to continue these planting efforts every year.

This year we planted: Jack-in-the-pulpit, ginger root, lady fern, glade fern, royal fern, mayapple, golden poppy, hay scented fern, ostrich fern, Solomon's seal, and skunk cabbage.

If you'd like to come help plant native plants, we would love your help next spring! Keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates.

Quilt Garden

Planting our annual Quilt Garden design is a BIG project! It takes several hours to trace out the design, drill the holes, divide and plant the flowers, fertilize, and clean it all up.

This year, it took us about 2 days to fully install our dragonfly design, but it was worth it! We appreciated all the help from volunteers who came out to plant with us!

We're looking forward to planting another fun design next year and we would LOVE your help! We expect to plant around May 20, 2027. Keep an eye on our Facebook for updates!



Tree Prep

The most popular part of our Earth Day event, the free tree giveaway, is also the one that takes the most prep work! This year, we partnered with the Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District and Michiana Master Gardeners' Association to combine our tree prep days. They were prepping for their annual spring tree sale, we were prepping for our Earth Day tree giveaway, and the City of Goshen also came by to prep trees for their Arbor Day celebration.

We prepared trees at the Elkhart County 4H Fairgrounds from 8 AM - 4 PM and, with some help from volunteers, were able to get all of our trees prepped well ahead of the event.

Next year, we plan to return to our usual tree prep day in the evening, back at the Elkhart Environmental Center. We hope to see you there!

Rods & Reels

One of the extra special pieces of our Kids Free Fishing Clinic is being able to give away free rods and reels to kids who complete the clinic. We ended up not being able to host the clinic this year due to weather, but before we knew that, volunteers came out to help us prep 300 rods and reels for the event.

Two days before the Fishing Clinic, volunteers gathered at High Dive Pavilion to assemble the rods and reels. They ran the fishing line and knotted hooks on each one and carefully stacked them for transport to the event. Together with city staff from the EEC and Elkhart Public Works Aquatic Department, volunteers prepped 300 reels in under 3 hours!

We are looking forward to hosting our next Kids Free Fishing Clinic on Saturday, May 22, 2027. While we won't need help prepping rods and reels next year, we are always looking for volunteers to help with the clinic.

If you would like to help teach kids how to fish or help give away free rods and reels, check out cityofelkhartin.gov/fishing-clinic.

Earth Day

Our annual Earth Day event saw blue skies, sunshine, and seasonably warm weather all at once for perhaps the first time in its history this year!

The event also saw more vendors and exhibitors than ever--it was great to see our community partners come out to share info and resources with visitors! One of the booths was Elkhart's beloved Aquatic Biology Department, who showed off live fish from the Elkhart River.

In addition to the booths, the event featured kids activities, the Spring Seeds & Starters Plant Exchange, a FREE bluebird box workshop, and a Weed Wrangle. We also gave away over 330 trees (14 different kinds of shrubs, ornamental, and shade trees)!

Check out cityofelkhartin.gov/earth-day to see a map of where all these trees are planted.

This event, like all our events, would not be possible without the support of volunteers. Volunteers direct parking, lead the tree giveaway, assist with the workshop and kids activities, take photos of the event, and staff our EEC/Event Info booth in addition to helping with setup and cleanup. Some volunteers help all day! We are very grateful for the invaluable support our wonderful volunteers continue to give year after year.

If you would like to help out with future Earth Day events, sign up for notifications on our volunteer site at elkhart.galaxydigital.com.



Photos by Beth Kane











Help pick trees for 2027!

We want to give away trees YOU want! We are focused on native trees (and will not order any invasive species). Submit your picks for our free tree giveaway to our online survey at the QR code to the right.







Pollinator Promenade

Our second annual Pollinator Promenade event was a ton of fun--with much better weather!

The featured fun competitions around our 4 acre wildflower prairie were back, as well as exhibitor and vendor booths, and kids activities and games.

The competitions saw a bunch of new--and enthusiastic--racers! Many competed in all 3 races: speed walking, scavenger hunt, and costume contest. Our volunteer judges were especially put to the test to determine 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners of the costume contest--this year's competitors came prepared with a variety of pollinator-themed costumes!

We had a slight change in our venue this year. While we were working to level out the grassy area behind our parking lot where the event took place last year, we had to relocate. The event was staged on a hill next to the prairie loop, which gave our booths a better view of the action!

One thing that did not change from last year is the enthusiasm of our volunteers. Volunteers signed up to help with this event as soon as registration was available! We had additional volunteers show to help, as well, which made this our best-staffed event yet! We especially appreciated the surprise extra hands for setup and cleanup. Those shifts have the most work to do, and usually we don't get many takers. This year, setup was done about a half hour before the event even started!

We could not host events without the support of volunteers, but we are so thrilled to have an event that volunteers seem to enjoy just as much--if not more--than the visitors. We look forward to hosting our third annual Pollinator Promenade next year, and we hope to see you there!

If you have feedback from this event, or ideas you'd like to share with us for next year, let us know! We are always looking for input and would love to work with volunteers to grow and improve this event! Contact staff at EECmail@cityofelkhartin.gov.



35 Years of the EEC

Celebrating Together



This year, the Elkhart Environmental Center celebrated our 35th Anniversary! In honor of the occasion, we hosted a free movie night with a Spanish and English showing of the movie *Hoppers* along with free cake, popcorn, and face painting. The movie was shown next to our wildflower prairie and during the Spanish screening a fawn galloped through the viewing area.

We have had a blast serving the community through public programs and events, improving and maintaining our site and trails, being a resource for residents and visitors, and partnering with volunteers. Thank you to everyone who came out to celebrate with us! We can't wait to celebrate the next big milestone together!

High Dive Restoration



We worked with the Parks Department and volunteers on a natural restoration of one of the ponds at High Dive Park.

Starting this spring, natural rocks and boulders were placed around the edge of the pond. Afterward, EEC Director, Jeff, spent time herbiciding the weeds along the shore and tilling the ground to prepare it for planting.

With the help of volunteers, we were able to roll out thick coir mats to cover wetland and prairie plant seeds. The biodegradable coir helps keep the seeds safe from wildlife and from any erosion by rain events.

Volunteers will help roll out the remainder of the coir and finish up the project by planting native plants along the water's edge. Annual flowers will bloom until the native wildflowers are fully established (around their third year).

Fall Bird Feeding

As summer fades into fall, now is a wonderful time to enjoy nature and the birds that are migrating through. Birds use a lot of energy flying south for the winter (or north to their wintering grounds). They bulk up and burn through fat reserves in their bodies to fly thousands of miles!



To help birds on their journey, you can provide bird seed high in fat to help fuel birds on their long journeys.

Black-oil sunflower seeds are beloved by most songbird species. They have a thin shell, which is easy for most birds to crack open.

Peanuts are another option. Jays, crows, chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers, and many other species, love to eat peanuts with and without the shell. Squirrels also enjoy peanuts.



Suet is also an option during the cooler fall months and winter. Suet is rendered and refined beef fat that is usually mixed with bird seed and molded into a variety of shapes. Make sure to use a suet feeder or holder to keep your suet contained and to make sure birds cannot get any suet on their feathers.

A Special Note on Hummingbirds: It is recommended to leave your hummingbird feeder up for two weeks after you see your last hummingbird. Make sure to still maintain your feeder and change out old sugar water with fresh as it gets cloudy or spoils.

For more information of bird feeding, check out https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/browse/topic/feeding-birds/


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