



**River Bend**  
NATURE CENTER

**2023 Annual Report**

**Inspiring curiosity, respect  
and care for nature.**



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# 2023 Report

Dear Friends of River Bend Nature Center,

We are pleased to provide you with an update on our work in the following pages of our 2023 annual report.

By virtually every measure, 2023 has been an amazing year for River Bend Nature Center. Together, we put behind much of the remaining uncertainties that so many non-profits like River Bend faced through the pandemic, set a new strategic course for the next generation, secured financial resources necessary to do our work, and positioned ourselves to step onto the national stage as leaders at building connections between people and nature.

All of the hard work of staff, board members, volunteers, and donors have placed River Bend on the verge of a new era. In 2023, we secured many of the resources needed to expand our work into new and traditionally excluded communities, address aging infrastructure, and plan new investments that make everyone feel welcome at River Bend.

In the following pages, you'll read in more detail about our work as one of the most important environmental stewards in Southern Minnesota. We're so proud to have made positive impacts in the lives of thousands of people in and around Faribault hailing from all walks of life and all corners of the globe as we protected our natural resources and worked to achieve our new mission of inspiring curiosity, respect, and care for nature.

**Thank you for the incredible work of River Bend staff, board members, funders, and volunteers who made 2023 an amazing success.**

*Dustin Dienst*  
*Board Chair*

*Brad Bourn*  
*Executive Director*



# Programs & Engagement



“In 2023, we helped educate approximately 10,000 environmental learners from across Minnesota and the region through field trips, classes, demonstration projects and more. In the next section you’ll see just some of the many highlights of our work.”



## **Volunteer Hours**

**94 volunteers gave 5,989 hours!**

From helping with our events, teaching school programs to stewarding the land.



## **Program Attendees**

**Over 2,000 Community Members**

Participated in over 130 public community programs. Our program offerings are available for all ages and abilities and are free or low cost to attend.



## **Environmental Education**

**6,709 students from all over Southern MN**

School groups traveled further than ever before this year (from Blue Earth County) and larger groups are coming out 130+students in a single day.



## **Partnerships**

**Building partnerships with organizations**

River Bend staff work hard to bring you new opportunities. This past year we have partnered with Somali Community Resettlement Services, St. Olaf College, Carleton College, Rice County Environmental Services, Clean River Partners, Community Action Center, Faribault Public Schools



# Programs & Engagement



## Program Grants

### Grants helping to fund our program initiatives

Thanks to amazing funders like The Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation, the State of Minnesota, Children and Nature Network, Xcel Energy, Union Pacific, just to name a few, we were able to begin initiatives to improve visitor experiences at River Bend including implementing improved early childhood programs, providing better resources for aging Minnesotans, create new programs for underrepresented communities, and begin developing the first comprehensive interpretive plan for the nature center in more than a generation.



## Professional Development

### Youth Mental Health & First Aid Certified

We're proud to continue investing in the professional development of staff at River Bend to ensure we can best serve all our visitors, guests, and environmental learners. With mental health awareness on the rise, our staff was trained in youth mental health to better support youth participating in our programs. In addition, all of our staff have been trained and certified in CPR and First Aid and have had introductory training in American Sign Language thanks to students at the Minnesota Academies for the Deaf and Blind.



# Historic Investments

Raising the funds necessary to operate a non-profit nature center is hard work. For forty five years, River Bend leaders have been asking everyone who enjoys the nature center to pitch in \$5 here and \$10 there. Day after day and year after year, that's how we've done it and that's how we'll continue to do it in the future. That said, 2023 was a very heartening year. Together, our partners and friends brought in over \$700,000 to the table in new, one-time, funds for River Bend beyond our normal fundraising activities. Two of the major contributors to our success this year were:

- We negotiated a new operating agreement between River Bend Nature Center and the City of Faribault to provide \$300,000 over five years beginning in 2024 towards River Bend's ongoing maintenance and capital needs. This investment comes at a strategic time for River Bend as we have been garnering regional and national attention as a welcoming, public green space that helps people from all walks of life and all corners of the globe make meaningful and lifelong connections with nature.
- Multiple individuals and families chose to leave legacy, estate, and memorial gifts to River Bend in 2023 totaling more than \$400,000. These gifts are bitter-sweet and in many ways, hard to celebrate. In 2023, several members of our beloved community left us or lost people that were dear to them. River Bend Nature Center is deeply honored to be the beneficiary of estate and memorial gifts and will make sure these gifts bring joy to a new generation of nature center visitors in memory of those we lost in 2023.

Thank you.







# Deep Levels of Community Engagement

Often, we're so focused on teaching students who come to the nature center or caring for the natural resources within the boundaries of River Bend that we forget to go into the community and ask how you're doing and how you'd like to experience nature with us. That's why in 2023, we took a step back from our daily work to engage with community members on how to best serve you.

With support from a grant from the State of Minnesota, River Bend worked with several community partners to survey members of our region's aging community to identify their barriers to engaging in the outdoors and nature. Simultaneously, we invited the entire community to engage in a series of listening sessions and surveys to identify broader priorities for River Bend through a new strategic plan.

As a result of this work, received direct input from approximately 700 individuals. We used the information gathered from your to create a new strategic plan for River Bend to outline our priorities for the next 3-5 years and to complete a region-wide report on Outdoor Interests and Barriers Faced by People with Challenges to Independence or Social Isolation to be used by local decision makers at River Bend, surrounding park systems, and human service providers.

You can read both our new strategic plan and Outdoor Interest Report at <https://rbnc.org/river-bend-home-page/get-involved/strategic-planning>



# Environmental ▶ Stewardship



“Thousands of hands, volunteers, and funders came together in 2023 to help steward the critical natural resources at River Bend. In the next section you’ll see just some of the many highlights of our work.”



## AmeriCorps Service

### 5 members served at River Bend in 2023

We were selected to host 5 full-time AmeriCorps members through the Climate Impact Corps. These members served full-time at River Bend completing 1700 hours each per their service year. They have been invaluable in helping with land stewardship and environmental education programs. Thank you Randy, Julia, Caitlin, Dan, and Dennis for your service!



## Grant Funding

### Secured over \$172,000 in State grants

These funds will be spent over three years. River Bend was also a recipient of smaller grants by local funders, Conservation Partners Legacy Funds, Carl and Verna Schmidt Foundation, Conservation Reserves Programs, Xcel Energy Foundation, & the Henkel Foundation



## Acres in Active Restoration

### Over 140 acres are actively being managed

In 2023, River Bend was able to begin conservation activities on an additional 30 acres, bringing the total acres in active management to 146 acres to help preserve habitat for rare and endangered species of plants and animals.



## Partnerships

### Multiple partners care for our natural resources

River Bend partners with organizations to help restore our habitats. They include the MN Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service, MN Zoo and the AmeriCorps-Ampact services.



# Nature Everywhere **Community Designation**

River Bend Nature Center led a community wide initiative between the City of Faribault Parks Department, State Academies for the Deaf and Blind, Somali Community Resettlement Services, and River Bend to have Faribault receive a designation from the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network as one of 19 “Nature Everywhere” Communities.

This designation serves both as recognition of our community’s work to ensure that everyone has access and opportunities to build meaningful connections with nature while it simultaneously provides our project team with resources to plan and execute more ways to create those opportunities. Over the next two years, the project team will be leading community-wide efforts to create an outdoor inclusion plan that provides guidance for River Bend and surrounding green space providers on how to best include people from all backgrounds and abilities.

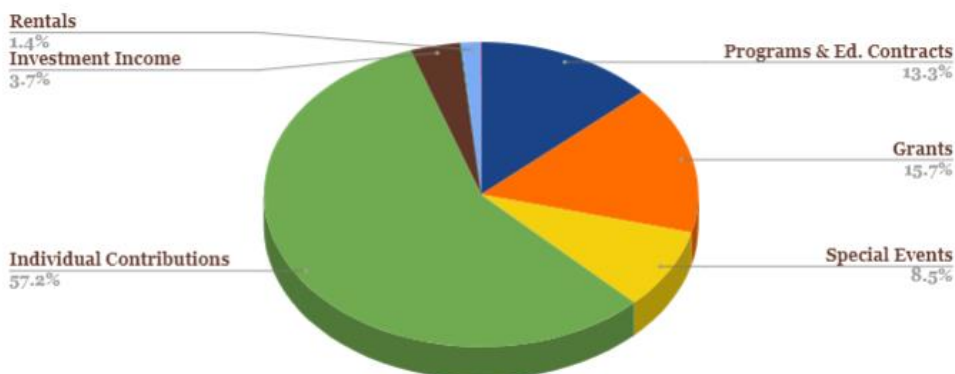


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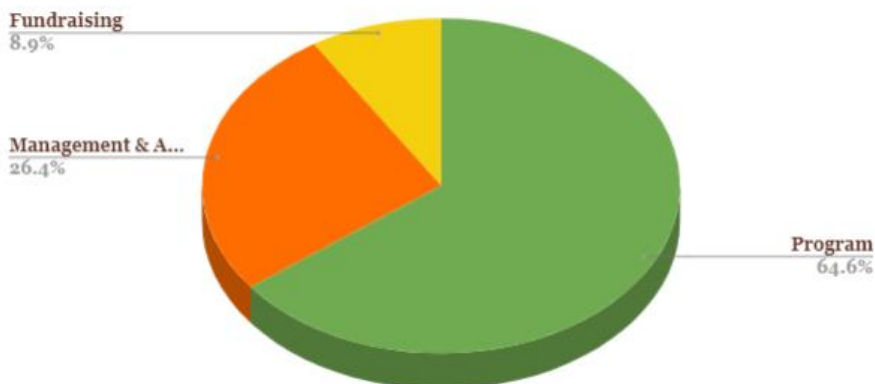




## Ordinary Income \$848,047



## Ordinary Expenses \$556,452



### Revenue 2023

Total Revenue and Support	\$848,047
Total Endowment (unrealized) gains	\$73,598
<b>Total Revenue, Support, and gains</b>	<b>\$921,645</b>

### Expenses 2023

Program	\$359,740
Management and Admin	\$146,985
Fundraising	\$49,727
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$556,452</b>

**Total Net Revenue** **\$365,193**

**Total Assets Jan 1, 2023** **\$1,295,069**

**Total Assets Dec 31, 2023** **\$1,660,262**

## **Board of Directors**

Dustin Dienst, *President*  
Patrick Mader, *Vice-President*  
Karen Zeller, *Treasurer*  
Tom DeMatteo, *Secretary*  
Tom Spooner, *City Council Liaison*  
Jessica Kinser, *City Administrator*  
Cindy DeSormeau  
Sarah Hammer  
Erica Jakes  
Nort Johnson  
Abby Malmanger  
Patrick Schaefer  
Greg Simons

## **Former Staff & Board Members Serving in 2023**

Erin Tone, Sydney Monge,  
Mary Lu Kavanagh-Beltman,  
Zach McCarty, Erin Liu,  
Derek Haars, Tim Murray - City  
Administrator

## **Staff**

*Executive Director*  
Brad Bourn  
  
*Associate Directors*  
Katy Anderegg, Administration  
Molly Dulka, Programs & Engagement  
Brittany Smith, Env. Stewardship  
  
*Program Coordinators*  
Matt Johnson & Morgan Heier  
  
*Naturalists*  
Kate Ford, Leah Inman  
  
*AmeriCorps Members*  
Randall McMeekin, Dennis Wilcox,  
Caitlin Juvland, Julia Gates,  
Dan Heinen, Andrew Flicek,  
Io Harris, Lucy Paschke

Many of the photos featured in the 2023 annual report were winning submissions to our 2023 River Bend Photo Contest.

**Thank you for supporting River Bend Nature Center**