



TURKEY RIVER RECREATIONAL CORRIDOR

2025 Annual Report

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Hanson attending the Road Trip Iowa: River Bluffs Scenic Byway Advance Screening at the Earthmoving Legacy Center in Elkader on April 8, 2025.

Dear Supporters and Friends,

On behalf of the Turkey River Recreational Corridor (TRRC) Board and our partner organizations, I am pleased to share our 2025 Annual Report. This report highlights another productive year of collaboration, strategic investment, and community pride across Clayton and Fayette Counties.

The Corridor's strength continues to lie in its partnerships. In 2025, we secured new grants, advanced trail and recreation projects, expanded public art initiatives, and strengthened our visibility as a regional destination. Together, these accomplishments represent the commitment of many individuals and organizations who understand that recreation and conservation are central to both economic growth and quality of life in Northeast Iowa.

As you read through this report, I encourage you to reflect on what our collective efforts have achieved: projects that connect people to the outdoors, bring communities together, and build a lasting foundation for future generations. The progress made this year is a direct reflection of the shared vision and cooperation that define the Corridor.

We look forward to carrying this momentum into 2026, as we continue to pursue trail connectivity, sustainable development, and creative community partnerships throughout the region. Thank you for your continued support of the Turkey River Recreational Corridor!

Warm Regards,

Mallory Hanson, TRRC Director

2025 ANNUAL OVERVIEW

The Turkey River Recreational Corridor (TRRC) experienced a year of meaningful progress and collaboration in 2025. Through strategic partnerships, focused grant writing, and dedicated community engagement, the Corridor continued to strengthen its role as a regional leader in recreation, conservation, and rural economic development.

Throughout the year, TRRC worked alongside community organizations, local governments, and conservation partners to move projects forward that both enhance quality of life and attract new visitors to Northeast Iowa. From trail expansions and infrastructure improvements to public art and tourism promotion, 2025 reflected the steady, purposeful growth that has come to define the Corridor's success.

Building Partnerships and Leveraging Grants

Grant support and facilitation remained central to TRRC's impact in 2025. The Flowers in the Corridor public art initiative expanded across multiple communities, supported by a \$10,000 Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation Grant and \$1,000 Foundation for Cornerstone Communities Grant.

Clayton County Conservation secured a \$50,000 Historic Resource Development Program grant for the Motor Mill foundation repair, while Fayette County Conservation received \$316,734 in Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funds to extend the Clermont-Calmar Great River Road Trail. Clayton County Conservation and the City of Elkader each received coordinating \$75,000 Resource Enhancement & Protection Grants for completion of the Pony Hollow Trail loop in Elkader. Together, these investments represent major progress toward a more connected and vibrant regional trail system.

Beyond large projects, TRRC also provided technical support to smaller community initiatives, helping local groups navigate funding applications, reporting, and project management that enhance recreation, heritage, and placemaking across the Corridor.

\$527,734+ in Grants Secured for Corridor Projects!

Marketing and Regional Visibility

TRRC's outreach and marketing efforts helped elevate the region's visibility at the state and regional levels. The Corridor was featured in the 2025 Travel Iowa Magazine, and staff represented the area at major events including the Iowa Bike Expo, Canoeconia, and the Iowa State Fair Travel Iowa booth.

TRRC also had the opportunity to share its collaborative model on a statewide stage, with a presentation at the Iowa Tourism Conference highlighting how rural partnerships can successfully drive recreation and economic vitality.



Iowa Tourism Conference



Iowa Bike Expo



Turkey River Safari

Programs, Events, and Community Engagement

The Turkey River Safari continued to serve as a signature program for the Corridor, encouraging families and visitors to explore local parks, trails, and landmarks. This year's Safari saw the most interest it has since it's first year!

Additional efforts supported events such as Clayton County Conservation's Motor Motor 5K/10K and early planning for an outdoor winter event with Fayette County Conservation in January, 2026. TRRC's involvement with partner events like The Century of Caterpillar in Elkader further demonstrated how recreation, history, and community spirit intersect throughout the Corridor.

Data, Impact, and Future Vision

Data collected from infrared trail counters reinforced the growing popularity of local trails, while a statewide economic impact study from the Iowa Bicycle Coalition estimated that cycling generates more than \$5.5 million annually in economic activity across Clayton and Fayette Counties.

Between March 26th and October 28th, nearly 90,000 users were counted (using infrared trail counting technology) on the Founders' Park Trail, Pony Hollow Trail, and Motor Mill Trail in Elkader and the Turkey River Recreational Corridor Trail in Clermont and Elgin. There has been a steady increase in overall land trail usage in the Corridor since infrared tracking began in 2020 (~10% increase from 2020-2025).

Board leadership, consistent administration, and regional coordination kept TRRC positioned for long-term success. As the organization looks toward 2026, its focus remains on enhancing connectivity, investing in sustainability, and supporting the communities that define the Corridor's shared identity.

Record Turkey River Safari Participation!

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS: 2010-2025



Since its formation in 2010, the TRRC has evolved from an ambitious vision into a nationally recognized model of rural collaboration, recreation, and community revitalization. The Corridor was established through a 28E agreement between Clayton and Fayette Counties and the cities of Clermont, Elgin, and Elkader, united by a shared goal: to connect communities, enhance natural resources, and use recreation as a catalyst for economic growth and quality of life. In 2010, the TRRC earned designation as Iowa's first river corridor recognized as an Iowa Great Place. That milestone set the stage for more than a decade of coordinated investment, planning, and partnership that has transformed the landscape of Northeast Iowa.

Transformative Projects and Partnerships

Over fifteen years, TRRC partners have leveraged more than \$9.5 million in grants and private funds, distributed almost equally between Clayton and Fayette Counties. These investments have supported over a dozen major projects and countless smaller initiatives that have improved access, conservation, tourism, and community pride. Key accomplishments include:

- **Trail and River Development:** Construction of the Elgin–Clermont Land Trail, Motor Mill Trail, and multiple park and access improvements along the 98-mile Turkey River Water Trail, which features interpretive signage and an online interactive digital map.
- **Historic Preservation:** Restoration of the Motor Mill complex, Elkader Courthouse Clock Tower, and Larrabee School, along with rehabilitation of the Motor Mill Inn and the Motor Mill Bridge, preserving critical links to local heritage.
- **Community Enhancements:** Downtown beautification, Elkader Riverfront improvements, Clermont park upgrades, and the Elgin Streetscape and Trail Bridge projects all contributed to revitalized public spaces and increased visitor appeal.
- **Marketing and Outreach:** Creation of a regional bike trail map, professional tourism videos, statewide promotions at major events like the Iowa State Fair and Canoecopia, and the development of a strong digital presence through the TRRC website and social media channels.
- **Public Art and Programming:** Support for projects like Art in the Alley and the Lighted Flowers in the Corridor initiative, as well as continued success with the Turkey River Safari, which has become a signature family-friendly adventure that brings visitors to key sites each summer.

Sustained Impact

The TRRC's success is grounded in its partnerships between local governments, conservation boards, economic development groups, and countless community volunteers. Through consistent collaboration, the Corridor has improved recreation access, strengthened tourism, and enhanced local economies while maintaining its focus on environmental stewardship and cultural heritage. As of 2025, the TRRC stands as both a thriving destination and a lasting example of what shared vision can achieve: connecting people, communities, and landscapes across Northeast Iowa.

LOOKING AHEAD: 2026 AND BEYOND

The Turkey River Recreational Corridor continues to evolve as a model of collaboration, innovation, and community pride. Building upon more than a decade of progress as an Iowa Great Place, TRRC's current Vision Plan reaffirms the organization's mission: to connect Clermont, Elgin, and Elkader through the enhancement of natural resources, recreation, and community development, using land and water trails as catalysts for economic growth and quality of life.

Strategic Priorities for the Future

As the organization moves into its next phase, the TRRC Vision Plan identifies several long-term priorities that guide annual planning and investment:

- **Recreational Opportunity Expansion:** Ongoing trail connectivity, signage, and infrastructure upgrades, ensuring safe and accessible recreation.
- **Economic Development and Tourism:** Encouraging new business ventures that complement recreation and conservation goals.
- **Natural Resource Conservation:** Collaboration with partners to protect and enhance natural assets.
- **Historic and Archaeological Preservation and Restoration:** Sustained support for restoration projects like Motor Mill and other historic and cultural landmarks.
- **TRRC Marketing and Promotion:** Continued development of tourism materials, statewide representation, and brand presence through both traditional and digital media.
- **Community and Regional Development:** Projects that strengthen population growth, leadership, and quality of life through education, signage, and infrastructure improvements.
- **Art and Cultural Support and Expansion:** Integrating public art and creative placemaking into trails and community spaces, connecting people to place through cultural expression.

Visioning Priorities and Upcoming Projects

During the 2025–2026 visioning process, the TRRC Board highlighted the Corridor's role in driving economic impact, strengthening partnerships, expanding recreation and tourism opportunities, and connecting people and projects across Northeast Iowa. Looking ahead, the following projects represent the most active areas of focus for 2026 and beyond:

- Expansion of the Pony Hollow Trail Loop and Clermont to Hwy 150 Trail connection.
- Facilitation of the Lighted Flowers in the Corridor art installations along trails in the Corridor.
- Continued marketing of land and water trails and recreational opportunities in the Corridor.
- Wayfinding signage and interpretive sign updates in key Corridor communities.
- Support of preservation and interpretation projects at partner sites such as Motor Mill.
- Ongoing development of TRRC's digital presence and expanded social media outreach.
- Seasonal promotions for recreation and annual community events such as the Motor Motor 5K/10K.

Continuing the Legacy

The TRRC Vision Plan reinforces that the Corridor's success depends on sustained collaboration, creative partnerships, and a shared commitment to enhancing both recreation and community life. As 2026 begins, TRRC remains focused on expanding access to the outdoors, preserving its cultural and historic assets, and promoting Northeast Iowa as a place where nature, community, and opportunity meet.

Over \$9.5 Million Leveraged Since 2010!

Board Leadership

Board members meet monthly to receive updates from the TRRC Director and to make decisions about funding priorities, programming, advertising, and partner support. Current 2025 representatives are included below. The TRRC Director also participates in other partner meetings, as appropriate.

At-Large Representation

Rod Marlatt (Fayette Co. Conservation) *Chair
Heather Gamm (Fayette Co. Conservation Alt.)
Kenneth Slocum (Clayton Co. Conservation)
Jenna Van Meeteren (Clayton Co. Conservation Alt.)
Troy Schott (Fayette County)
Kelly Shaffer (Clayton County)
Chris Schoen (Motor Mill Foundation) *Vice-Chair
Brian Balster (Motor Mill Foundation Alt.)

County Representation

Bruce Lehmann (Fayette Co. Supervisor)
Alex Popenhagen (Fayette Co. Supervisor Alt.)
Steve Doeppke (Clayton Co. Supervisor)
Ray Peterson (Clayton Co. Supervisor Alt.)

City Representation

Deb Schmidt (Elkader City Council)
Daryl Bruxvoort (Elkader City Council Alt.)
Kayleen Schrader (Clermont City Council)
Greg Larson (Clermont City Council Alternate)
Chris Wachal (Elgin City Council)
Barb Wenger (Elgin City Council Alternate)



Hanson, Van Meeteren, Marlatt, and Schoen accepting a \$1,000 Foundation for Cornerstone Communities Grant for the Lighted Flowers in the Corridor project.



The TRRC Board procures Mallory Hanson's coordination services
through an annual contract with Northeast Iowa RC&D