



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Lilly Endowment grants are helping local, state and national park systems invest in the variety of parks that improve quality of life

in communities across Indianapolis, the state of Indiana and the country. In addition, Endowment grants are supporting community foundations and their partner organizations throughout Indiana as they work to make their towns, cities, counties, and regions better places in which to live and work.

Wabash River in Warren County, Indiana



Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming

FINDING COMMON GROUND IN PARKS

Grants enable local, state and national parks to enhance the places that attract millions each year

Parks, whether in wilderness settings or urban neighborhoods, are vital resources supporting the well-being, health and quality of life of the hundreds of millions of individuals who visit them every year. They are places that help shape the identities of local communities and reflect their histories. The COVID-19 pandemic sent millions of Americans outdoors in search of solace and recreation: from massive wilderness parks to small urban ones, parks registered sharp spikes in visitation. That surge also underscored an array of needs in America's park systems, from maintenance and repair demands to the need for improved amenities.

With grants totaling \$260 million spread across national, state and local park systems, Lilly Endowment affirmed the value of parks as places that contribute to quality of life for a broad range of audiences. The grants are supporting an array of projects, ranging from upgrading playgrounds and expanding recreational amenities to enhancing educational programs and conserving wildlife habitat.

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike.”

—John Muir

NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION: \$100 MILLION

When renowned documentary filmmaker Ken Burns arrived at Yosemite National Park during the filming of his 2009 documentary series “The National Parks,” it was his first visit to America’s first national park. He was stunned by the grandeur of the place that wilderness champion John Muir willed into existence in 1890 through persistence and advocacy. The Yosemite Valley, Burns contends, is “the most magnificent spot on our planet.”


He isn’t alone in his appreciation for Yosemite or any of the other 432 wild landscapes and historic places comprising America’s National Park System. In 2024, 330 million visitors flocked to national parks, which collectively total 85 million acres of forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, valleys, prairies, deserts, swamps, and seashores, as well as historic monuments, battlefields, forts, and trails. The largest network of national parks in the world, it is governed and operated by the National Park Service (NPS). While NPS receives some direct funding from the federal government, it also receives support from its congressionally chartered nonprofit organization, the National Park Foundation (NPF).

With a donor base of two million individuals and support from 130 foundations and corporations, NPF is in the midst of a \$1 billion capital campaign, for which the Endowment approved a \$100 million grant in 2024. According to Will Shafroth, who stepped down from his position as NPF president and CEO in early 2025, “the Endowment’s grant—the largest grant in history in support of the national parks—is a game changer for the foundation. The Endowment’s grant goes a long way in helping NPF reach its campaign goal,” said Shafroth.

The four strategic objectives of NPF’s campaign are to inspire the next generation of park stewards through programs for youth; to conserve and preserve threatened parks and wildlife; to ensure world-class visitor experiences; and to tell a more complete story of America.

Foundation leaders are taking time to evaluate how the National Park System can address the strategic objectives with new creative approaches, according to Shafroth. “Just using the same techniques and ways we’ve done things in the past probably isn’t going to get it done,” he said.

Of the 330 million visitors to national parks annually, said Shafroth, about half are concentrated in 50 parks, including the iconic Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon and Great Smoky Mountains parks. NPF wants to encourage people to explore other parks too, such as Indiana Dunes National Park, said Shafroth. A portion of the Endowment grant will be invested there, directed at such projects as ridding the park of invasive plant species and cleaning up the shoreline. “We’ve got to do a better job of educating people about the range of other amazing parks to visit,” he added.

 Endowment grants are supporting parks, big and small, including the playground at Frederick Douglass Park in Indianapolis (below).





Asked about the significance of the Endowment’s grant to support national parks, Burns said it got him thinking again about the important role that the parks have played in the nation’s history and to the ongoing American story. Referencing his 2009 public television documentary, Burns said: “We called our film *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*. It’s not really America’s best idea—the best idea is the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But if you were trying to look for places in which the values of these foundational documents of our nation are made real in the vast American landscape, it would be in our national parks.”

INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES: \$50 MILLION

Northeast of Lafayette, Ind., at the confluence of the Tippecanoe and Wabash rivers, sit 900 acres of native prairie, looking much as it did in 1808 when Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa founded the village of Prophetstown. The village was named for Tenskwatawa, who was known as the Prophet, and its creation was an attempt to strengthen an intertribal alliance and curb the displacement of Indigenous tribes by white settlers. That attempt ultimately failed when a 1,000-man militia commanded by William Henry Harrison, governor of what was known then as the Indiana Territory, defeated Tenskwatawa and an estimated 500 warriors. Prophetstown, which the Native villagers had abandoned in the wake of the battle was destroyed. The location of Prophetstown remains both a significant historic site and a reminder of the origin of the state’s name—literally, “land of Indians.” Today, it’s home to Prophetstown State Park, one of the beneficiaries of a \$50 million grant the Endowment approved to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

“You can’t begin to describe the impact a gift of this magnitude—the largest grant in the history of Indiana state parks—will have on our [state park] system,” said Terry Coleman, Deputy

Director for Administration at Indiana State Parks. “I’ve worked here for over 40 years and never have I experienced anything like it.”

Half of the grant will be used for improvements at Prophetstown. Established in 2004, it’s Indiana’s newest state park and one of the most unique naturally and culturally. It’s the state’s only tallgrass prairie park and among the state’s premier birdwatching sites. In addition to its historical significance, Prophetstown remains important to contemporary Native people. DNR allocated \$8 million of the grant to the creation of the



**“(The parks) are rich storehouses of memories and reveries.
They are guides and counsels to the weary and faltering in spirit.
They are bearers of wonderful tales to him who will still listen;
a solace to the aged and an inspiration to the young.”**

—Richard Leiber, who helped establish Indiana’s state parks system in 1916

Prophetstown Heritage Area, which will include a new interpretive center, an outdoor plaza for exhibits and presentations, and a recreated Native village.

Given the region’s history, it was essential to include Native people in planning for these improvements at Prophetstown, said Angie Manuel. The first interpretive naturalist at the park when it opened, she has extensive experience telling stories about Prophetstown’s landscape, wildlife, and Native history. Now she is interpretive manager at Indiana State Parks. When planning for the park’s future began 12 years ago, said Manuel, the division reached out to 26 federally recognized tribes to invite their input.

“They’ve been really generous with their time and guidance,” said Manuel. “By being able to create these beautiful spaces and acknowledge that it’s the Indigenous people of today, the tribal citizens, who helped us build these spaces through their knowledge, (we) will help visitors understand that the tribal people are not just part of history. They’re still here and they’re vibrant.”

Among them is Logan York, the tribal historic preservation officer for the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma. The Miami populated much of north-central Indiana for centuries before most were forced westward in the 1840s. York, who has a degree in anthropology from Miami University in Ohio, is helping DNR develop new park signage, living history presentations and training for park interpreters to ensure the stories they tell are accurate and consistent.

“Prophetstown was one of the few places created on purpose by us for a purpose—to protect ourselves,” said York. “And the fact that the land has remained largely undeveloped is important

for education and connecting us to our past.”

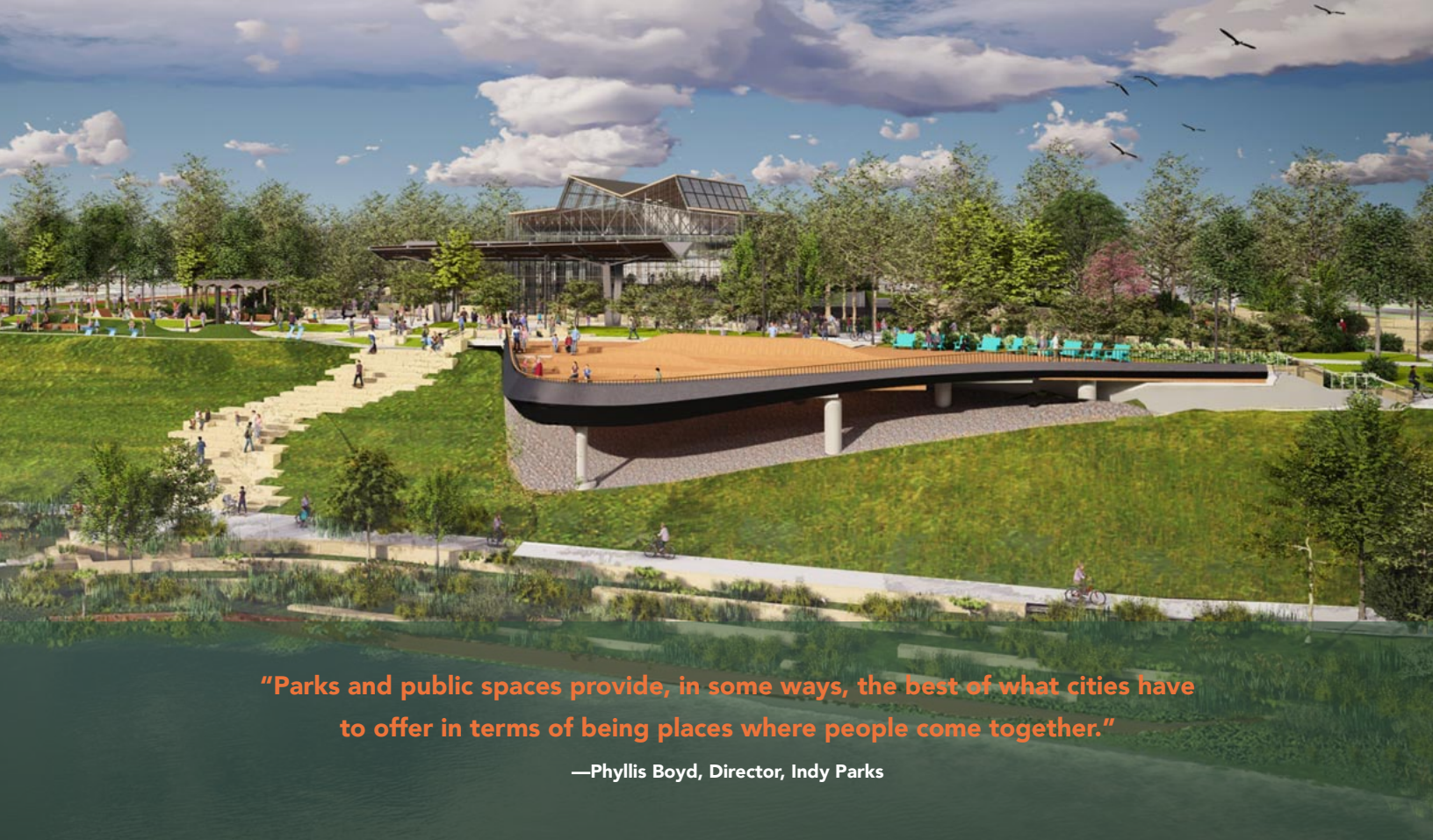
Other Prophetstown improvements will include new trails to make the park more accessible to visitors (\$1 million), improvements to the park’s aquatic center (\$1 million), and expansion of its campgrounds (\$15 million).

The remaining \$25 million of the Endowment’s grant will be allocated to projects at other parks throughout the state. Of that, \$11 million will go to upgrading playgrounds at several parks, \$10 million to improving campgrounds and \$3 million to repairing historic stone and log buildings, walls and staircases, with attention to accessibility. An additional \$1 million of the grant is being used to purchase a fleet of motorized wheelchairs to make trails and beaches accessible to all. “We want everyone to feel welcome,” said Terry Coleman, “to feel they can come and enjoy their state parks.”

Glacier National Park in Montana and Indiana Dunes National Park (opposite) are among the varied locations within the National Park System.

Prophetstown State Park (below) is located in West Lafayette, Ind.





“Parks and public spaces provide, in some ways, the best of what cities have to offer in terms of being places where people come together.”

—Phyllis Boyd, Director, Indy Parks


INDIANAPOLIS PARKS: \$80 MILLION

Tears of joy come to Don Colvin when he steps into the Frederick Douglass Park Family Center on the Indianapolis eastside and sees how many residents of the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood are using it. From its fitness center and gym to its spaces for classes, programs, community events and family celebrations, the place bustles with activity. For Colvin, the deputy director of parks planning for the Indianapolis Department of Parks & Recreation (Indy Parks), the new Douglass Park center represents the culmination of 20 years of planning that included extensive outreach to residents and many community meetings. Despite those efforts, some area residents grew skeptical when so many years passed without noticeable progress, according to Colvin, a 34-year veteran of the parks department. But the new center changed that perception, he said. It was made possible, in part, by \$80 million in grants the Endowment approved in 2022 to support parks across Indianapolis.

Grants were made to Indy Parks and to affiliate organizations that support Eagle Creek, Garfield and Holliday parks. Coupled with \$45 million for park improvements from the City of Indianapolis’s Circle City Forward initiative, the Endowment’s funds are supporting projects at 42 parks located throughout the city. At Douglass Park, for example, Endowment funds were used for furnishings and fixtures in the new center and for construction of a new playground, both dedicated in 2024. Funds are supporting the redevelopment of sports fields within the park, too.

“It’s a historic amount of investment that we have never seen before,” said Indy Parks director Phyllis Boyd. “We normally have \$5.8 million a year to spend on park improvements. With \$80 million we’re able to do 14 or 15 years’ worth of work in a much shorter period of time.”

Another focus is playgrounds—updating existing playgrounds and building new ones so

 Artist rendering of expansion plans for White River State Park in Indianapolis (above). Frederick Douglass Park in Indianapolis (below); the pool at Krannert Park in Indianapolis (opposite).



families can have access to healthy recreational activities for their children. By the end of 2025, Indy Parks will have completed work on 18 neighborhood park playgrounds. “Having equipment that’s in good condition, that’s well cared for, that’s bright and beautiful is another essential thing we have to offer as a parks department,” said Boyd.

Residents in Indianapolis play a key role in maintaining and stewarding local parks, and three parks have dedicated nonprofit organizations that raise funds to support them. Indy Parks helped these affiliate organizations that support Eagle Creek, Holliday and Garfield parks secure Endowment grants for special projects. Eagle Creek Foundation received a \$2.6 million grant for trail improvements, program expansion and development of a documentary. Holliday Park Foundation received \$3 million for playground and signage improvements, walkway upgrades, and gazebo maintenance. Friends of Garfield Park received \$2.5 million for the reconstruction of the historic fountains in its Sunken Gardens.



Improving the parks does more than benefit their visitors, said Colvin. It also benefits parks department employees. “I’ve had a lot of my staff tell me how much they’ve grown by working on our projects. I think that will bode well for Indianapolis parks because, as we move forward, having a more informed workforce will make us better park professionals overall.”

According to Boyd, the Endowment’s support helped Indy Parks turn a corner. “While in general there was a sense among community members that parks were important, what the Endowment’s grant did was put some resources behind that. It was a huge step.”

National Parks

In 2024, the Endowment made a \$100 million grant to the National Park Foundation (NPF) to support its multi-faceted \$1 billion capital campaign. The grant will support NPF’s efforts to conserve, preserve and steward for current and future generations more than 420 landscapes, battlefields, monuments, memorials, historical and cultural sites, trails, rivers, lakes, and seashores under the National Park Service’s purview.

State Parks in Indiana

In 2024, the Endowment approved a \$50 million grant to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to support improvements at Indiana state parks. Half of the grant will fund updates at Prophetstown State Park in Tippecanoe County. The remaining Twenty-five million dollars will support upgrades to historic structures at parks across the state and to the purchase of new wheelchairs that will improve the accessibility of parks statewide.

Also in 2024, the Endowment approved a \$30 million grant to the White River State Park Development Commission to support a 12-acre expansion of White River State Park along the west bank of the White River in downtown Indianapolis. Projects funded by the grant include the repurposing of the remnant of the General Motors Stamping Plant into an event and community center and the development of an extended promenade trail and other features to connect visitors to the river. See story on page 74.

Indianapolis Parks

In 2022, the Endowment approved grants totaling \$80 million to support capital improvements and programming throughout the Indianapolis Parks and Recreation system.

- Two grants to Indianapolis Parks and Recreation totaling \$71.9 million are helping to upgrade playgrounds, sports fields and courts, family centers, and pools and splash pads in parks within each of the city’s nine townships and bolstering outreach and programming efforts at city parks.
- A \$2.6 million grant to Eagle Creek Park Foundation is funding trail accessibility, including paving previously dirt trails, and program outreach efforts.
- A \$2.5 million grant to Friends of Garfield Park is supporting efforts to restore and repair historic fountains in the Sunken Gardens.
- A \$3 million grant to Friends of Holliday Park is supporting upgrades to playgrounds, walkways, shade structures, seating and signage, and repair of the gazebo.



Farmers Market in Logansport, Ind.

COLLABORATING TO ENRICH QUALITY OF LIFE

Public gathering spots, a social service center and outdoor recreation activities strengthen communities

In December 2024, Lilly Endowment awarded 30 grants totaling more than \$171 million to support community foundations and their partners throughout Indiana as they work to make their towns, cities, counties and regions better places in which to live and work. These large-scale competitive Community Leadership Grants were one component of the eighth phase of the Endowment's initiative, Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT VIII). Through all components of grantmaking in GIFT VIII, the Endowment has awarded a total of \$312 million to community foundations serving all 92 counties.

The competitive grants, which range from \$467,327 to \$20 million, fund a variety of projects and programs that address neighborhood and downtown revitalization projects, affordable housing, early childhood education, the development and enhancement of trails and other outdoor recreation amenities, and improved delivery of social services, including mental health and substance use disorder treatment options.

In soliciting proposals for this grant opportunity, the Endowment encouraged community foundations to engage a broad cross section of local stakeholders so they could work collaboratively to prioritize communities' needs and pursue opportunities that have great potential to enhance local quality of life.

Food brings community together


The Cass County Community Foundation was awarded \$5 million to construct a 16,000-square-foot, multi-use venue to serve as the permanent location for the Logansport Farmers Market. Plans call for a market pavilion to open by fall 2025 and an incubator kitchen to begin operating in January 2026. To complement this project, the city of Logansport intends to make public land downtown available for use as community gardens where residents can grow fresh produce to eat or sell at the farmers market.

The idea behind this venture is that food is a great unifier, and the farmers market is a gathering place that brings the community together, said Deanna Crispen, president and CEO of the community foundation. Logansport's population has become increasingly diverse in recent years, with students in Logansport schools representing 28 countries and roughly 18 percent of the city's residents hailing from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Haiti, as well as other countries in the Caribbean. Many new residents have come to Logansport to work in its meat processing plants and in the region's agricultural industries.

"We discovered through the planning grant process that people in our community truly value their farmers market," Crispen said. "And in a time when people can struggle with the issues that seem to divide them, there is something innately good about gathering around food and sharing

fellowship. The farmers market is a place where cultures come together, where you can experience world cuisine and where all belong. The incubator kitchen just adds another experience and opportunity to grow our economy and sense of place around food. After all, everybody eats."

Logansport's farmers market opened in 1988 and has been relocated within the city several times, according to Emily Klabunde, the market manager. She also has been a vendor at the market for eight years, selling produce, gamebirds and rabbits that she and her family raise. For the last four years she has served on the market's board of directors. Klabunde believes the market is both a hub for the community and a great business incubator. She tells stories of an 83-year-old local resident who comes to the market every week to sell apples from his orchard and of another man who opened his own butcher shop after a few years of selling at the farmers market.

 Cass County Community Foundation is supporting new amenities for the Logansport, Ind. Farmers Market (opposite and below).





Klabunde said the new farmers market facility will provide more than just a building. “This is the culmination of years of work and the community’s pulling together to prove that community matters,” she said. “A sheltered meeting place that provides permanence and functionality, such as electricity and restrooms, for our farmers market proves that people and the community come first; that people are at the heart of the community. When I go to other cities and towns and see that they have a well-maintained public area in their downtown, it signals to me that people are valued in that town. And I am proud that because of this grant, Logansport is moving in that direction, proving that our rich and diverse community is valued.”

Logansport Farmers Market (above).
In Shelbyville, Ind. (below and opposite), Blue River Community Foundation is leading efforts to develop the Nonprofit Center.



Centralized services make getting help easier

In Shelbyville, Blue River Foundation (BRF) was awarded a \$5 million grant through GIFT VIII to support the development of the Nonprofit Center, a new 31,000-square-foot community center intended to address residents' basic needs in a centralized location.

Approximately 6,700 households in Shelby County either fall below the federal poverty level or are classified as asset-limited and income-constrained, according to BRF. They often are unable to access organizations that address food insecurity and housing needs or provide parenting and education support due to transportation barriers and the decentralized locations of providers. The new center will provide space for the programs of various social service organizations—including Gleaners Food Bank, Firefly Children and Family Alliance, and



Community foundations serving Warren, Fountain and Vermillion counties in western Indiana are helping residents and visitors engage with the beauty of the Wabash River valley.



Women, Infants and Children, among others—and thereby more comprehensively address the needs of the county's most vulnerable residents.

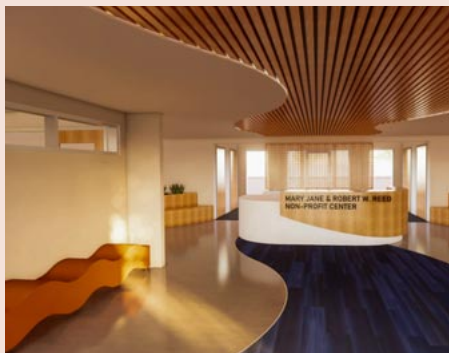
The Nonprofit Center will be housed in an existing building—a former nursing home—located on the south end of town within a block of Shelbyville High School and a couple of blocks from the Boys and Girls Club.

“This building isn’t just about these organizations colocating,” BRF executive director Jennifer Jones said. “It’s about them really collaborating with each other. Because they’re serving a lot of the same people, they can figure out how to serve people better and more efficiently. We’re excited to be able to support them in that way.”

Stephen Black, president of Healthy Shelby County, the nonprofit organization that owns and will manage the building, said the center will make life easier for people who need social services. Also, it will reduce the cost of overhead for nonprofit service providers, so they can then reinvest the saved funds for programming to meet the needs of the increasing number of people they are serving.

“Since COVID started, you would be shocked to learn the number of households in this community that need these services,” Black observed. “I have stood in the pantry lines on Saturday morning out at the fairgrounds and talked to more people than I can count who have said the phrase, ‘I never thought I would be in this line. I never thought I would need the services. I can’t believe I’m here.’ ”

Ultimately, the more people who are helped and “the healthier we are as a community, the more we help one another,” he added. “And the more we benefit the entire community—not just the individual that is being served—the more we create a healthier community across the board.”



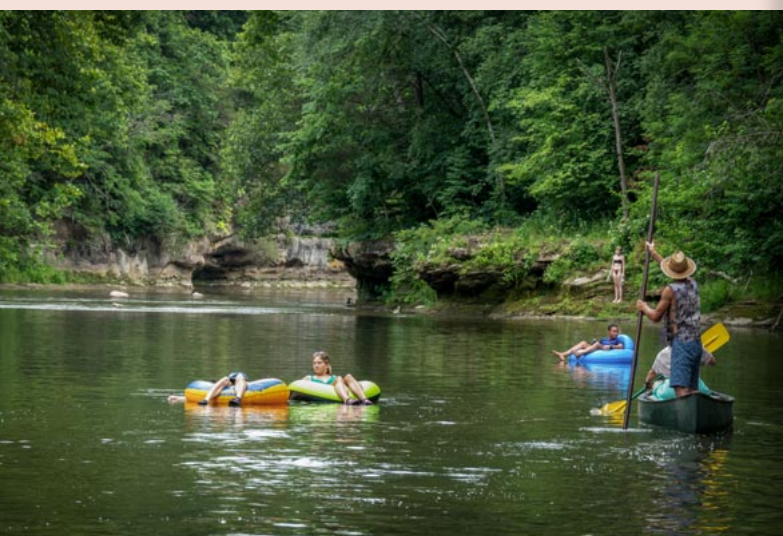
Making the outdoors user friendly

In west central Indiana, Warren County Community Foundation, in collaboration with the Western Indiana Community Foundation, was awarded a \$3 million GIFT VIII grant to develop outdoor amenities along the Wabash River in Fountain, Warren and Vermillion counties.

The grant will fund several kayak launches that will provide new public access points along the river; conversion of a decommissioned covered railroad bridge into a new pedestrian bridge that will complete a six-mile walking trail in Covington, Ind.; branded wayfinding and other signage; and public art, including murals. The grant also will support programs and activities to activate the outdoor amenities, including kayak and bikeshare rental programs and education programs focused on conservation, among others.

The history of this effort dates to 2019, when Wabash Heartland Innovation Network, an Endowment-funded regional development initiative, awarded \$1 million to the Wabash River Enhancement Corporation to develop a master plan for the Wabash River Greenway and Blueway network. The network is a 90-mile, multi-use trail corridor spanning five counties along the Wabash River in west central Indiana.

Known as the WRGB master plan, the plan details a 353-mile looped trail network—including both land-based “greenways” and water-based “blueways”—that connect eight towns and cities along the river, according to Michele Stucky, executive director of Warren County Community Foundation. The plan envisions that the Wabash River Greenway and Blueway network will become a significant outdoor attraction. More than \$65 million has already been secured to implement the WRGB master plan.



Recreation is being enhanced along the Wabash River in western Indiana (above).

The new outdoor activities that will emerge thanks to this grant have the potential to bring in visitors. Stucky, however, said the main benefit will be making residents’ lives better by giving them closer access to the area’s natural amenities and strengthening what it means to be community.

“We believe these projects will help residents see that the trails and waterways in their communities are beautiful,” Stucky said. “Working together on the proposal and now in getting to the work to make it a reality have strengthened connections among people in our area. And once the kayak launches and the trail and the bridge restoration are complete, we will be able to come together with pride to enjoy them and help future generations to come and do the same.”

GIFT VIII

In 1990, Lilly Endowment launched the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) initiative to help establish and further develop community foundations throughout Indiana. Through many phases of GIFT over the years, the Endowment has granted funds to Indiana community foundations in the hope that they could enhance quality of life in their communities by convening conversations among a broad range of people of various ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, occupations and cultural traditions about their communities’ most compelling needs and opportunities as well as the best ways to address them.

Since 1990, the Endowment has invested more than \$900 million in community foundations through the GIFT initiative, related programs and technical assistance for the field. Today, a community foundation or affiliate fund serves every county in Indiana, and combined assets for community foundations that have regularly participated in GIFT have grown to approximately \$4.1 billion as of the end of 2023. At the same time, community foundations have played increasingly important leadership roles across the state, working with local and regional partners to address community priorities.

In 2024, through the eighth phase of the initiative (GIFT VIII), the Endowment awarded 30 competitive Community Leadership Grants totaling more than \$171 million to support the efforts of community foundations and their partners throughout Indiana as they work to strengthen quality of life for the people in the towns, cities, counties and regions they serve. Competitive Leadership Grants make up only one component of GIFT VIII, however. Other components include matching grants designed to encourage donors to support their local community foundation, and board engagement grants meant to encourage community foundation board participation and engagement. In total, the Endowment has made grants totaling \$312 million across all components of GIFT VIII.

Through GIFT VIII, each community foundation could seek a Community Leadership Grant for projects and programs in their own county. They also had an option to collaborate with community foundations in other counties to address shared priorities by participating in one additional joint/regional proposal.

Community foundations that received funding for single-county proposals and multi-county proposals will be working in a total of 41 counties across Indiana. See the complete list of GIFT VIII grants on pages 48-50.



A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Expansion helps White River State Park embrace the river and welcome visitors with new ways to enjoy the park

One of the most prominent natural features of Central Indiana—the White River—has long been inaccessible to visitors to the urban park. The 250-acre White River State Park is home to an array of attractions, including the Indianapolis Zoo, the Eiteljorg Museum, the Indiana State Museum, Victory Field, the Canal Walk and Everwise Amphitheater. Yet the park has never fully embraced the river that is its namesake.

That's changing. Plans for a 12-acre, multi-million dollar expansion project calls for White River State Park to have a riverside promenade, a 150-seat outdoor theater overlooking the river and a large shade pavilion. In 2024, Lilly Endowment approved a \$30 million grant to the White River State Park Development Commission to help fund those features. Most of the grant is expected to support the re-purposing of the former General Motors Stamping Plant site into the Kahn Pavilion.

Designed by renowned industrial architect Albert Kahn, the stamping plant was a landmark in industrial design and housed the GM facility from 1930 through 2011. The factory played an important role during World War II and at its peak employed nearly 5,000 workers. Preserving this piece of Indianapolis manufacturing history was an important consideration for the commission and other stakeholders in developing plans for the park expansion.

Expected to be completed in 2027, the expansion is part of the 100-acre White River Innovation District, which will be anchored by the global headquarters of Elanco and Purdue University.

