

Pathfinders Resource Conservation & Development, Inc.



FY 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

Our Values

Natural resource conservation and protection, entrepreneurship, prospering communities, recreational opportunities.

Our Vision

Healthy land, prosperous communities.

Our Mission

To be a spark plug for economic development, natural resource conservation and recreational projects in our six county area.

Program Goals

- Promote Economic Development in Our Six-County Area
- Protect and Conserve Natural Resources in Our Six-County Area
- Develop Recreational Opportunities in Our Six-County Area

History

Local efforts to organize the Pathfinders Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Area were initiated in the early 1970's. A formal application for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) RC&D program assistance was submitted in 1976. In January 1980, the Pathfinders RC&D area was authorized for program assistance by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Pathfinders RC&D Area received USDA staff assistance and opened its first office in March of 1980.

Organizational structure

The Pathfinders RC&D Area, Inc. is an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides leadership, coordination and technical assistance on projects in Keokuk, Mahaska, Jefferson, Wapello, Davis and Van Buren Counties. Pathfinders RC&D is part of the national RC&D program, sponsored and partially-funded by the USDA.

Sponsors of the Pathfinders RC&D Area are the County Board of Supervisors and Soil and Water Districts in the above six counties. The Board of Directors consist of up to 18 members—three from each county. One county member is nominated by the Soil and Water District, one member is a County Supervisor and one member is nominated at-large in each county.

The Pathfinders RC&D Area provides a wide variety of rural development assistance and strives to maintain positive working relationships with local, regional, state, and federal agencies and development organizations.

Board of Directors

Davis County

Dale Taylor, County Supervisor
John Schroeder, Soil and Water
Conservation District

Van Buren County

Marvin Philips, County Supervisor
(Chairman)
Dennis Gratz, Soil and Water Conservation
District
Kim Steele-Blair, At-Large

Keokuk County

Ernie Greiner, County Supervisor
Gary Bates, Soil and Water Conservation
District/At-Large
Richard Swanson, Soil and Water
Conservation District/At-Large

Jefferson County

Steve Burgmeier, County Supervisor
(Secretary-Treasurer)
Jeff Fritz, Soil and Water Conservation
District
Ron Blair, At-Large

Mahaska County

Willie Van Weelden, County Supervisor
(Vice-Chairman)
Joe Blunk, Soil and Water Conservation
District

Wapello County

Steve Siegel, County Supervisor
Bob Helgerson, At-Large

Pathfinders RC&D Staff

Nicole Annis, Project Assistant
Jeanette Beasley, Bookkeeper
Richard Daugherty, Forester
Elisabet Humble, Local Food Coordinator

Pathfinders RC&D Committees

Budget and Insurance

Steve Burgmeier, Chair
John Schroeder

Forestry Program

Bob Helgerson
John Schroeder
Joe Blunk
Ernie Greiner

Local Food

Kim Steele-Blair
Steve Siegel
Willie Van Weelden

Nominating Committee

Ernie Greiner
Willie Van Weelden

Personnel

Ernie Greiner, Chair
Steve Burgmeier
Bob Helgerson
Dale Taylor
John Schroeder

Planning

Ron Blair
John Schroeder

Revolving Loan Committee

John Schroeder
Bob Helgerson
Ron Robinson
Marsha Laux

Tracht Farm

Steve Burgmeier
Jeff Fritz
Dick Swanson
Dale Taylor

RC&D Area of Operation

Pathfinders RC&D serves the counties of Keokuk, Mahaska, Jefferson, Wapello, Davis and Van Buren Counties. The area has a total population of 102,000 residents including 7,800 in Van Buren County, 8,500 in Davis County, 11,400 in Keokuk County, 16,000 in Jefferson County, 22,300 in Mahaska and 36,000 in Wapello.

This region exhibits a fair amount of cultural and racial diversity. Both Van Buren and Davis County have a growing number of Amish residents. Wapello County has the highest percentage of Hispanics in the region at 6.6% of the population. Jefferson County has racial diversity because of the numerous students from abroad attending Maharishi University of Management, as well as people coming to the community to practice Transcendental Meditation.

Economic development

Economic development continues to be a high priority for our six-county area. After this years recession there is greater lack of high paying jobs to attract younger families to the area. An area that can be developed is to work with youth to develop the entrepreneurial spirit

Conventional agriculture remains a challenge for young farmers to get started in. There are emerging opportunities for farmers to look at niche markets and there is a trend of consumers requesting locally grown products (even surpassing the demand for organic produce in some areas.) The expanding group of Amish farmers presents new opportunities for local food production.

Renewable energy is another trend nationwide and in Iowa. There is growing interest in small scale wind and solar production. Pathfinders had an area wind study completed in 2005 which could be further utilized. We also have landfills that may be suitable for methane production.

Tourism continues to be a strong player in this area, especially in Van Buren County. There could more of a focus on regional tourism to encompass larger areas and try to entice visitors to spend more time and more money in SE Iowa. Specific tourist sites in the area include Belva Deer Recreation Area in Keokuk County, American Gothic Visitor Center in Wapello County, Villages Folk School in Van Buren County and Maasdam Barns in Jefferson County.

Natural resource conservation

There continues to be demand for forestry services. The Total Forestry Program strives to fill that need by providing services for tree planting, timber stand improvement and timber sale coordination. We have an opportunity to expand the educational focus by hosting forestry field days targeting adults across the area. The need for youth education relating to natural resources is typically filled by county naturalists, although Pathfinders can assist and collaborate with efforts. Other potential education partnerships include working with FFAs or 4H members.

Water quality continues to be an issue. Lick Creek is a high priority project in Van Buren and Jefferson Counties. Compentine Creek is a local priority watershed in Wapello County. Mahaksa County is one of two counties in Iowa that contains 80% of the unreclaimed abandoned coal mines in the state. Pathfinders can partner with SWCDs to access funds to reclaim abandoned mine sites and reduce acid mine drainage runoff.

The Tracht Conservation Farm is a resource that needs a plan and purpose. It could be utilized for field days or for educational field trips for youth.

Recreational opportunities

Developing recreational opportunities in communities will enhance the quality of life for its citizens as well as attract new residents to the area. Bike trail development continues to be an interest in all counties served. As trails are developed there needs to be coordination to link to other trails in the area.

Other recreational needs can be filled through the development of lakes, similar to that at Belva Deer Recreational Area. Smaller improvements to communities may include the development of playgrounds for youth.

Types of Assistance from Pathfinders RC&D

In FY 2009, Pathfinders focused their efforts in three major areas: economic development, natural resource conservation and recreation. Pathfinders promotes economic development by helping support renewable energy opportunities in the region, developing local specialty products and value-added markets, developing new tourist destinations and assisting with the development of necessary community facilities or services.

Pathfinders works to improve natural resources in the six-county area by improving wildlife habitat on private ground and working with partners to improve water quality.

Pathfinders expands recreational opportunities through trail development and provides outreach to underserved audiences through programs targeting women landowners.

Council Activities

Pathfinders grant writing services continues to be one of the most requested services from our organization. In FY 2009 Pathfinders wrote 26 grants requesting \$1.53 million in funds, leveraged against an additional \$3.75 million dollars. Of these, 23 applications for \$1.34 million were successfully funded, allowing for \$5.5 million of project activities to be completed in the region.

Pathfinders is also seeing increased interest in grant administration services. In FY 2009, Pathfinders administered ten grants totaling more than \$1 million. In addition Pathfinders is helping build capacity of locally organized efforts by providing grant research and assisting with business plan development.

Overall, in 2009 Pathfinders activities created 2 area-wide plans, benefitted 379 acres of land and water resources and created 1 new business.

Major Projects and Activities

Economic Development

Pathfinders has become a recognized leader in the state in **local food**. In 2009 Pathfinders continued to foster the development of the **Hometown Harvest local food initiative**. Grant support was secured from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture to develop a new website (www.HometownHarvestSEIowa) and design a new logo for the group to strengthen public relations. In addition, an economic impact study relating to local food production was completed for the region.

Pathfinders continued to sponsor and administer the Hometown Harvest **Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign**. We helped secure two grants to support the production of the local food guide and worked with a graphic artist to develop an expanded food guide publication. There were 6,000

copies of the local food guide produced and distributed. The Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign included 45 members including individual food producers, wineries, meat lockers, grocery stores and restaurants. A total of 13 farm tours were organized and promoted by Pathfinders, giving the public an opportunity to meet local farmers at their farms.

Pathfinders also planned the **Tri State Local Food Conference** held in Fairfield on September 4, 2009. Keynote speakers and concurrent sessions focused on farm to institution programs, producer innovation and food system development. Over 130 participants attended.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishments relating to local food was obtaining a Wellmark Foundation grant to support the development of **farm-to-school programs** in six public schools and a Specialty Crop Grant to develop **farm-to-institution** buying programs.

In FY 2009, Pathfinders worked on four projects related to promoting **renewable energy opportunities** to stimulate economic development. Pathfinders provided assistance to Pekin Community Schools to investigate the feasibility of installing a wind turbine for electrical generation at the site. Assistance including researching other Iowa schools that have investigated wind energy, securing a cost-estimate from a wind energy consultant to provide a feasibility study and communications with the utility provider and Pekin school board.

A second renewable energy project was participation in the development of the **Fairfield Go Green Strategic Plan**. Pathfinders assisted in the development of the plan, communication with stakeholders and continues to serve on the Green Commission which is implementing the plan and overseeing the activities of the newly hired Sustainability Coordinator. The plan impacts areas of energy, transportation, infrastructure, agriculture and municipal services.

A third project involved training two Pathfinders staff members in **farm energy audit data collection**. Pathfinders plans to provide energy audit assistance to producers that are interested in improving the energy efficiency of their farming operations. USDA Rural Development grants for energy efficiency require agricultural producers to complete an energy audit before applying for funds.

Lastly, Pathfinders was a sponsor of a **regional wind conference** held in Fairfield on March 20, 2009. The conference presented information on both small scale and large scale wind generation. Over 200 people attended the conference.

In 2009, Pathfinders was involved in the development of three **tourist destinations** to create economic development. Pathfinders secured \$20,000 in grant funds for exhibit development at the historic **Maasdam Farmstead** located at the junction of Highway 1 and Highway 34 just south of Fairfield. When complete, the farmstead will be a welcome center and trail head for the Fairfield Loop Trail.

A second tourism project Pathfinders assisted was the **Villages Folk School**. Located in Van Buren County, this effort focuses on development a program that offers weekend classes in

skills and crafts such as blacksmithing, painting, artisan bread baking, photography and writing. The classes will be held throughout the various villages frequently utilizing one of many historic buildings in the county. Pathfinders assisted Villages Folk School by facilitating the development of their business plan, completing the paperwork to obtain their 501c3 status and assistance with the development of their logo.

The last tourism project involved acquiring \$25,000 in grant funds to develop a modern **cabin at Pioneer Ridge** in Wapello County. The cabin includes a geothermal system and will sleep six.

Also related to economic development, Pathfinders continued to administer their **small business revolving loan** program. In 2009, Pathfinders administered four loans to small businesses including three in Van Buren County and one in Jefferson County.

Pathfinders assisted with the development of **community facilities and services**. Pathfinders completed grant administration for a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant for the **Jordan Well** project in Sigourney.

In addition, Pathfinders provided the grant administration for **Harkin Healthy Communities Grant** for Jefferson County. The purpose of the grant is to development a Jefferson Wellness Action Coalition to develop strategies to increase health and wellness of the Jefferson County population.

Natural resource conservation

Pathfinders provides improvements on private land through its **Total Forestry Program**. In 2009 there were 230 acres of trees planted and 28 acres of Timber Stand Improvement completed in 11 counties across southeast Iowa.

Pathfinders also focuses their efforts on water resources. In 2009, Pathfinders helped the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District secure \$7,790 in grant funds to complete a watershed assessment for the **Indian Creek Watershed** in Jefferson County. Pathfinders administered the grant and provided oversight for the urban assessment completed by the Iowa Conservation Corps as well as prepared the final watershed report.

Pathfinders also partnered to reduce acid mine drainage in Mahaska County by partnering on two new **mine reclamation projects** and securing \$100,000 for each project. Overall in 2009, Pathfinders was involved in five projects to reclaim 275.5 acres for a total cost of \$4.36 million.

Recreational opportunities

Pathfinders continues to play a key role in securing funds for trail development in the region. In 2009, Pathfinders secured \$285,000 in grant funds to develop the final 3.3 miles of the **Fairfield Loop Trail** in Jefferson County. When complete, the trail will be 16 miles long and encircle the entire city of Fairfield.

In addition, Pathfinders secured \$84,000 in grant funds for the **Wild Rose Trail** located in Van Buren County in the community of Farmington. This trail will be a paved trail that encircles Wild Rose Park. The park is city green space that was created after the 1993 floods.

Outreach

Pathfinders partnered with the Van Buren County Hospital and Van Buren Farm Service Agency in taking part at the Women's Health Fair held in October. In addition, Pathfinders has arranged for a translator to assist Spanish speaking clients with their communication to Pathfinders RC&D. Also, newly developed in 2009 was a brochure in Spanish that highlights Pathfinders services.

Pathfinders also promotes their programs and services on their website www.PathfindersRCD.org.

Pathfinders Impact

Pathfinders continues to help groups in the region secure funding for projects related to natural resource conservation, economic development and recreation. Pathfinders ability to provide grant administration helps small grassroots organizations tap into the benefits and opportunities of grant resources offer even if they don't have the capacity for the fiscal management and reporting obligations.

Furthermore, Pathfinders is a recognized leader in the local food movement in the state and has put southeast Iowa on the map for regional food system initiatives. Through Pathfinders efforts, local food producers are expanding production and finding new markets for their product while more consumers are gaining access to fresh, local food.

Perhaps one of Pathfinders greatest strengths, however, is partnership building. Partners are key to the success of most locally led projects. In 2009 Pathfinders partnered with City of Fairfield, Fairfield Entrepreneurs Association, Fairfield Farmers Market, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (Mines and Minerals Bureau and Water Resources Bureau), Iowa State University Extension, Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District, Jefferson County Board of Health, Jefferson County Trails Council, City of Sigourney, Maasdam Barns Preservation Committee, Mahaska County Soil and Water Conservation District, Pekin Community Schools, Van Buren County Hospital, Van Buren Farm Services Agency, Villages Folk School, Wapello County Conservation Board and the Wild Rose Trail Committee.

FY 2009 Budget and Expenditures

Income		
Administration and Operation	\$	27,257
Buy Fresh Buy Local	\$	8,140
Community Development Block Grant	\$	4,167
Tracht Conservation Farm	\$	6,526
Fairfield Farmers Market	\$	4,857
Indian Creek Watershed Project	\$	7,815
Jefferson County Wellness Grant	\$	62,371
Hometown Harvest of SE Iowa	\$	5,393
Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation	\$	25,461
Revolving Loan Program	\$	15,005
Tri State Local Food Conference	\$	6,374
Total Forestry Program	\$	140,655
Farm to School	\$	55,085
Total	\$	369,106

Expense		
Administration and Operation	\$	63,674
Buy Fresh Buy Local	\$	9,536
Community Development Block Grant	\$	12,500
Tracht Conservation Farm	\$	5,404
Fairfield Farmers Market	\$	8,358
Indian Creek Watershed Project	\$	3,686
Jefferson County Wellness Grant	\$	52,172
Hometown Harvest of SE Iowa	\$	1,612
Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation	\$	462
Revolving Loan Program	\$	2,823
Tri State Local Food Conference	\$	7,029
Total Forestry Program	\$	147,387
Farm to School	\$	319
Total	\$	314,961

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