



In this quarterly newsletter edition:

- COG Focus Area: **Parks, Recreation & Natural Resources**
- Impact Map
- Award Recognitions
- Employment Opportunities
- Partnership Program Members

View this newsletter and prior newsletters on the [ICOG website](#).

COG FOCUS AREA: Parks, Recreation & Natural Resources

The Council of Governments (COGs) plays a vital role in building stronger, healthier communities through strategic investments in parks, recreation, and natural resource conservation. By expanding access to green spaces and championing environmental stewardship, COGs help create places where people can thrive—whether they're living, working, or simply enjoying the outdoors.

Below, you'll find a selection of projects that highlight our commitment to enhancing quality of life across our regions.

Bi-State Regional Commission

Bi-State Regional Commission collaborates with member communities to advance parks, recreation, and natural resource planning. In 2022, the West Liberty Parks and Recreation Plan was

completed, establishing a shared vision, assessing existing facilities, and identifying future needs to strengthen community connections. In 2024, Bi-State supported Bettendorf's Parks and Recreation Plan update, working with city staff, a steering committee, and the City Council. Bettendorf's vision emphasizes livability through educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities across its riverfront and 613 acres of parkland. In 2025, Bi-State assisted with the Scott County REAP Plan update, helping secure grants for recreation and conservation improvements.

Additionally, the 2025 update of the [Regional Conservation Directory](#) offers a valuable tool for environmental reviews and outreach, providing contacts across federal, Iowa/Illinois, and local agencies.



West Liberty, IA

Photo source: West Liberty Parks & Recreation



Bettendorf, IA

Photo source: Bettendorf Parks & Recreation

Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission

Last October, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission's Safe Routes to School program teamed up with Winneshiek County Conservation and the Decorah Public Library to host a "Tree Planting Bike Ride" along the scenic [Trout Run Trail](#). Funded by a \$7,500 DNR

Trees for Kids grant, 54 trees were planted across three sites, including the hilly, non-motorized section of the trail.

To make the event accessible and engaging for youth, UERPC promoted the ride, led participants along the trail, and provided a meal afterward—turning the day into a fun, hands-on learning experience. The event celebrated environmental stewardship, encouraged active transportation, and showcased the power of community collaboration.



Tree Planting Bike Ride

Photo source: UERPC



Tree Planting Bike Ride

Photo source: UERPC

Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council

This summer, the Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO) launched the Trailblazer Challenge, a virtual scavenger hunt encouraging residents to explore local parks and attractions via the trail system. Participants earned points and prizes by uploading selfies at designated locations using the GooseChase app, funded with \$1,250 from SIMPCO's Bicycle Pedestrian Roundtable.

The event brought fresh air and fun to the community, supported by local businesses

and organizations that donated prizes and helped spread the word. Key partners included Palmer Candy, Downtown Partners, Siouxland District Health, Buffalo Alice, ACX Cinema Sioux City, SoHo Kitchen and Bar, and Sioux City Parks and Recreation.



East Central Intergovernmental Association

Thanks to a \$1.5 million EDA COVID Disaster Recovery grant written and secured by ECIA staff, the City of Dyersville successfully extended wastewater infrastructure to the iconic Field of Dreams site. This critical improvement paved the way for expanded year-round use and large-scale events.

Most recently, the site hosted the Velocity Music Festival, drawing tens of thousands of visitors over Labor Day weekend. Saturday's lineup featured country star Tim McGraw, while Sunday brought rock band Nickelback to the stage, along with performances by Brantley Gilbert, Buckcherry, and others. Attendance far exceeded previous MLB games held at the site, which drew around 8,000 fans each.

With the Field of Dreams now fully equipped to host major events, the momentum continues—MLB is expected to return in August 2026 with a tentative matchup between the Minnesota Twins and the Philadelphia Phillies.

The [Field of Dreams Movie Site](#) remains open year-round to visitors.

Region XII Council of Governments

In 2019, the Maple River Area Park Committee in Carroll County reached out to Region XII COG with ideas for small improvements to the town's only park and public shelter house. At the time, rentals were limited and income was minimal. Since then, Region XII COG has helped secure over \$55,000 in grants from sources including the Union Pacific Foundation, Community Foundation of Carroll County, Warren H. Timmerman Charitable Trust, and the Barbara & Gilbert Renze Charitable Foundation.

These funds supported upgrades such as air conditioning and heating, electrical improvements, new countertops and cabinets, playground equipment, and more. As a result, shelter rentals have increased, creating a steady revenue stream. This income now enables the organization to provide local match funds and pursue larger grant opportunities for future park improvements.



Maple River Area Park

Photo source: Region XII COG

Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments

Over the past decade, Bunker Park and Mayors Park have undergone major upgrades thanks to support from INRCOG, the Black Hawk County MPO, and various funding sources including TAP, REAP, LWCF, and the Black Hawk County Gaming Association. Enhancements include creek restoration, a connecting bridge and trail, seating areas,

a shelter and restroom, native flower plantings with signage, and repurposed tennis courts for pickleball.

In 2023, Evansdale received a grant to help build a dog park, joining forces with Elk Run Heights and the Willow Run Dog Park Committee. After four years of fundraising, the Willow Creek Dog Park opened in 2024, adding another recreational asset to the community.



Bridge Traversing Both Parks

Photo source: INRCOG



Mayor's Park

Photo source: INRCOG

Southwest Iowa Planning Council

A dedicated group of citizens formed a committee in 2023 to raise funds for the construction of a splash pad in Atlantic, Iowa. Numerous fundraisers were held, and donations from private entities helped push the project toward reality, but additional funding was needed. Southwest Iowa Planning Council stepped in early in 2024 to help the effort by writing a Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) grant through Enhance Iowa. The project was ultimately awarded a \$102,047 CAT grant toward construction.

The 4,500-square-foot splash pad includes a variety of features such as fountains, spray pad, dump buckets, and water cannons. The total project cost was \$690,000. The splash pad was completed in November of 2024 and officially opened to the public on Memorial Day of 2025. SWIPCO is proud to partner with member communities to make great recreation projects like this come to life.



Construction Phase

Photo source: SWIPCO



Ribbon Cutting Event

Photo source: SWIPCO

East Central Iowa Council of Governments

Established in 2024 by the Springville Hometown Pride Committee—alongside the City of Springville and Linn County Master Gardeners—the Springville Community Garden offers residents a shared space to grow fresh produce and build neighborly connections. As part of ECICOG's Hometown Pride Program, the garden features 12 rental plots (20' x 30') available for personal use.

In just two seasons, the garden has seen full participation, encouraging healthy living, collaboration, and hands-on learning. Supported by volunteers and local partners, the project continues to strengthen community pride while promoting access to fresh food and sustainable gardening practices.

IMPACT MAP

Check out our impressive
impact map!

This map illustrates the significant influence of COGs across Iowa, showcasing the

diverse range of projects in which we actively participate.



Due to the condensed size of the image, not all COGs are shown.

These initiatives not only enhance the well-being of residents but also contribute to economic growth.

Our efforts hold particular importance for Iowa's rural regions, where the shortage of personnel for economic and community development is a prevalent challenge.

[LEARN MORE](#)

AWARD RECOGNITION

Homes for Iowa Best Single-Family Development Honor

Homes for Iowa has been awarded the Best Single-Family Development honor by the Iowa Finance Authority — a powerful affirmation of its mission to build quality homes for Iowans while providing state-of-the-art training and re-entry



employment opportunities for incarcerated men.

Photo source: Homes for Iowa

ICOG was a key contributor to the program's launch and growth. In just six years, Homes for Iowa has evolved from a bold idea into a statewide solution that strengthens communities and changes lives.

Learn more about Homes for Iowa [here](#).

Nichole Moore Recognized by Marquis Who's Who

Nichole Moore, Executive Director of the Chariton Valley Planning & Development Council of Governments, has been honored by Marquis Who's Who for her outstanding contributions to local government.

Since 2006, Nichole has played a vital role in regional planning, transportation, and community development across Appanoose, Lucas, Monroe, and Wayne counties. Her leadership has led to the creation of a regional housing trust, recreational programs, and a nonprofit transit service for veterans. She also serves as transportation planner for CVTPA-RPA17 and chairs the Iowa Association of Councils of Governments. Her dedication, shaped by strong family values, continues to make a lasting impact on the communities she serves.



Nichole Moore

Photo Source: ICOG

View the press release [here](#).

MAPA and SWIPCO Host NADO Emerging Leaders

While not a formal award, we would like to extend special recognition to the **Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA)** and the **Southwest Iowa Planning Council (SWIPCO)** for hosting the NADO Emerging Leaders group this September. The current cohort of the **EDA Denver Region Emerging Leaders** conducted a site visit to the Central Region, where these two NADO-member organizations graciously hosted them. SWIPCO made the experience especially memorable by organizing a guided bus tour through Southwest Iowa, offering participants valuable insights into the region's development initiatives.

You can read more about the visit and see highlights from the tour [here](#).

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

COGs are hiring! Check out the new employment opportunity!

- **Transportation/Regional Planner at SICOG**

COGs offer dynamic roles where professionals engage in hands-on planning, make meaningful community impacts, and collaborate directly with city and county leaders.



Want to post an employment opportunity with us? Contact us [here](#).

[EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES](#)

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM MEMBERS

We are incredibly grateful for the invaluable contributions of our Partnership Program members!

Thanks to their support, we've been able to strengthen our collaborations with a diverse range of agencies, creating a dynamic network that drives innovation and growth.

Together, we're making an impact in Iowa communities!



[LEARN MORE](#)

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