
Resilient Iowa Communities

2025 RIC-ognition Award Recipients



Center for Energy & Environmental Education (CEEE)
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0293
ceee.uni.edu/resilient-iowa-communities

The RIC-ognition Awards recognize communities that have taken meaningful action across the Resilient Iowa Communities (RIC) Best Practice Categories: Buildings & Energy, Land Use, Transportation, Environmental Management, Economics & Community Development, and Environmental Equity & Inclusion.

Communities earn Bronze, Silver, or Gold status based on the number and depth of completed actions.

This year, six organizations achieved RIC-ognition status across multiple categories:

- City of Bloomfield
- Iowa Lakeside Laboratory
- Linn County
- Mahaska County Partnership
- Polk County Conservation
- Whiterock Conservancy



RIC-ognition Awards Ceremony at the Iowa State Capitol, January 20th, 2025

City of Bloomfield

Gold Status | Buildings & Energy · Land Use · Transportation · Environmental Management · Economics & Community Development

In its second year participating in RIC, the City of Bloomfield is a rural community that has demonstrated strong leadership in advancing resilience through strategic planning, partnerships, and project implementation.

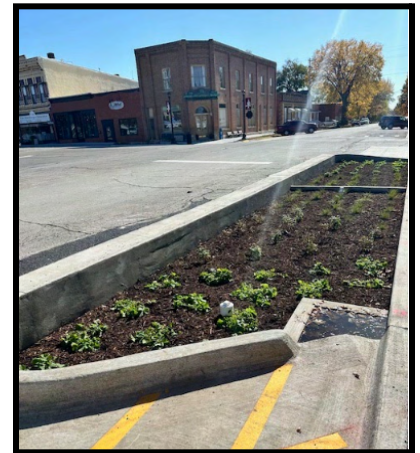
Buildings & Energy

Through targeted improvements to city-owned facilities and infrastructure, they have successfully reduced energy use while supporting long-term operational sustainability. The City has also expanded its focus on energy resilience beyond municipal operations. In partnership with Davis County Schools, Bloomfield was selected as one of only five communities statewide to participate in **Iowa State University's Powering Through: A Community Toolkit for Electrical Resilience**. This competitive, IEDA-funded initiative supports communities in identifying critical energy loads, assessing local resources, and planning future grid-resilience projects in collaboration with utility partners.



Land Use

Bloomfield has invested in land use and transportation projects that strengthen its historic downtown while improving stormwater management and mobility. Downtown sidewalk improvements incorporate **permeable paver filtration systems and bioretention cells**, reducing runoff and supporting water quality goals.



Transportation

The City has expanded **multi-use trail systems**, increasing access to alternative transportation and recreational opportunities.

Environmental Management

Through a partnership with the **University of Iowa College of Engineering**, the City completed a comprehensive recreational development plan for **Fisher Lake**, focused on enhancing camping, boating, fishing, and hiking amenities while prioritizing sustainable land use and ecological integrity.

Economics & Community Development

Bloomfield integrates sustainability into its community and economic development efforts through strategic reinvestment in its historic downtown. The City has secured **multiple façade improvement grants**, supporting energy-efficient renovations that preserve historic character while strengthening the local economy.



Iowa Lakeside Laboratory

Silver Status | Land Use · Environmental Management ·
Economics & Community Development

Iowa Lakeside Laboratory is a field research station and educational center located in the Iowa Great Lakes region. Through land stewardship, environmental monitoring, and education, the laboratory contributes to conservation and community engagement efforts across northwest Iowa.

Land Use

Land use at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory focuses on the **management and restoration of prairie, wetland, and aquatic environments**. The organization prioritizes native species and habitat protection through restoration projects and long-term land stewardship practices. Lakeside manages its land to support both ecological function and research activities, using field data and monitoring results to inform land use decisions and restoration strategies.



Environmental Management

The laboratory leads and supports **community-based water quality monitoring programs** that track lake health and watershed conditions throughout the region. In addition to water monitoring, Lakeside conducts regular assessments of aquatic and terrestrial vegetation, documenting conditions and management practices. Community volunteers, local officials, and partner organizations are engaged in monitoring and stewardship activities, expanding the reach and impact of these programs.

Economics & Community Development

Iowa Lakeside Laboratory supports community and economic development through education, training, and volunteer engagement. The laboratory hosts **students, interns, and AmeriCorps members** throughout the year and provides hands-on field and laboratory experience related to environmental science and natural resource management.



Linn County

Gold Status | Land Use · Economics & Community Development ·
Environmental Equity & Inclusion

Silver Status | Buildings & Energy · Transportation · Environmental Management

In its second year with RIC, Linn County advanced resilience efforts through investments in emergency preparedness, land and water conservation, and community-focused infrastructure.

Buildings & Energy

Linn County considers energy use as part of county operations and emergency planning. Facilities and programs focus on efficiency and maintaining essential services during severe weather and natural disasters.

Land Use

Land use planning in Linn County has focused on conservation, flood mitigation, and long-term protection of natural resources. In 2016, voters approved the **Linn County Water and Land Legacy Bond**, which has since been used to support targeted conservation projects across the county.

These projects include wetland restoration, conservation easements, and buffer areas designed to protect drinking water sources, preserve wildlife habitat, and provide natural floodwater storage. Land use investments also supported the development of **Morgan Creek County Park's trail network** and the creation of a paved trail connecting the park to the Cedar Rapids regional trail system.

Transportation

Transportation and mobility planning in Linn County includes investments that support access, connectivity, and emergency response. Trail development projects improve non-motorized transportation options while also enhancing recreational access across the county.

Environmental Management

Environmental management efforts in Linn County include restoration projects funded through the Water and Land Legacy Bond that contribute to improved watershed health and reduced flood impacts.

These efforts are implemented through partnerships and data-informed planning to ensure environmental benefits.

Economics & Community Development

A key component of Linn County's resilience work is the **Mobile Resiliency Unit program**, known as **R.A.P.I.D.** (**Recover, Assist, Prepare, Inform, and Distribute**). These mobile trailers provide essential services and resources during emergencies and are also used at community events to support preparedness education.



Environmental Equity & Inclusion

Funded through the **American Rescue Plan Act**, the R.A.P.I.D. units serve both urban and rural areas of the county, including communities that may be harder to reach during disaster response.



Mahaska County Partnership

Gold Status | Land Use · Environmental Management

Bronze Status | Buildings & Energy

Mahaska County Partnership has advanced resilience efforts through land use planning, environmental management, and community engagement initiatives that support conservation, education, and public access.

Buildings & Energy

Mahaska County Partnership has incorporated energy considerations into facilities associated with its conservation and education programming. These efforts support efficiency while aligning energy practices with broader environmental goals at Partnership-managed sites.

Land Use

The Partnership completed a **countywide comprehensive park plan** to guide land management decisions and prioritize future conservation investments.

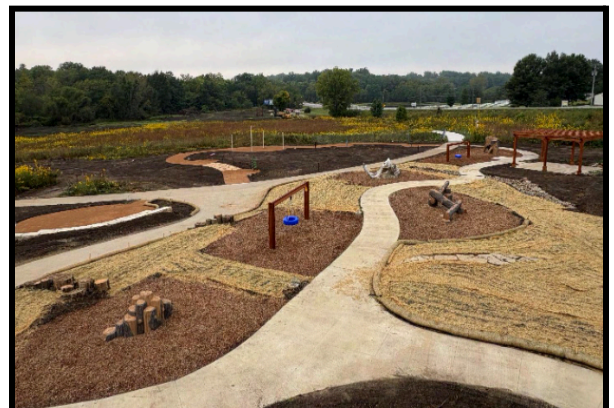
As part of this work, nearly **125 acres of diverse prairie** have been planted throughout the county. The Partnership also collaborates with a local friends group to grow approximately **11,000 prairie plants**, which are used in restoration projects and made available for community use.



Environmental Management

Environmental management efforts include both habitat restoration and stormwater management. The Partnership completed a **Nature Playscape** at the Environmental Learning Center, providing an inclusive outdoor space that integrates environmental education with recreation.

Additional projects include the construction of **oxbow wetlands and a sediment forebay**, designed to capture and manage site runoff while improving water quality.



The Mahaska County Partnership also operates a **volunteer and park stewardship program** that engages community members in conservation activities. The program has grown to include more than **100 volunteers**, supporting ongoing maintenance and educational efforts.



Polk County Conservation

Gold Status | Buildings & Energy · Land Use · Transportation ·
Environmental Management · Economics & Community Development ·
Environmental Equity & Inclusion

Polk County Conservation (PCC) is focused on managing conservation lands, environmental education programs, and large-scale restoration projects that support environmental stewardship across Polk County.

Buildings & Energy

Polk County Conservation incorporates energy efficiency and sustainability into the operation of its facilities and programs. Energy considerations are integrated into facility planning and land management practices.



Land Use

Land use planning at PCC emphasizes conservation, flood mitigation, and habitat connectivity. A major land use initiative is the **Fourmile Creek Greenway**, where PCC served as the lead agency in converting more than **150 flood-prone residential properties** into a **450-acre streambank woodland corridor** within the City of Des Moines.

Transportation

Trail systems and greenway corridors support non-motorized transportation while providing recreational opportunities and connections to surrounding communities.

Environmental Management

The agency operates a **countywide water quality monitoring program** that includes more than **70 monitoring sites** covering approximately **185 miles of waterways**. This program is supported by staff, partner agencies, and trained volunteers. PCC manages approximately **16,000 acres of land**, representing more than a **50 percent increase since 2012**. Annual management activities include prairie planting, woodland restoration, wetland restoration, and prescribed burning. PCC's prairies and woodlands capture an estimated **58 million pounds of carbon each year**, contributing to climate mitigation and ecosystem health.



Economics & Community Development

PCC delivers extensive **environmental education programming**, providing thousands of public programs annually that support environmental literacy and community engagement. The agency also convenes a **community advisory committee** that meets quarterly to provide feedback on agency initiatives and public priorities, supporting transparent decision-making and community involvement.

Environmental Equity & Inclusion

Environmental equity and inclusion are addressed through public access to conservation lands, education programming, and emergency resilience projects that serve diverse communities across Polk County. Conservation and restoration efforts are designed to provide benefits broadly while supporting underserved and flood-impacted areas.



Whiterock Conservancy

Gold Status | Land Use · Environmental Management

Silver Status | Buildings & Energy

Whiterock Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust managing approximately **5,500 acres** of conserved land in central Iowa. The organization integrates land stewardship, habitat restoration, and public access while operating conservation and agricultural landscapes.

Buildings & Energy

Whiterock Conservancy has implemented energy efficiency improvements across its rental facilities and program buildings. These upgrades include **energy-efficient windows**, improved **insulation for heating and cooling retention**, and comprehensive **lighting updates**.

Lighting improvements emphasize **low-wattage LED fixtures** and **dark-sky-friendly designs**, reducing energy use while limiting light pollution across the property.



Land Use

Land use planning is a core component of Whiterock Conservancy's work. In 2025, Whiterock completed its **first comprehensive strategic and master site plan**, establishing a long-term framework to guide land management decisions over the next 20 years.

The planning process focuses on identifying and prioritizing **ecologically sensitive areas** for protection and restoration. Whiterock uses **GIS mapping and field verification** to document remnant ecosystems and areas of high conservation value. These data inform land management strategies and effectiveness over time.

Whiterock's landscape lies at the intersection of the **Western Corn Belt Plains** and the **Southern Iowa Drift Plain**, creating a region with rare and diverse ecological features. The property includes wetland seeps, prairie potholes, sand prairie remnants, and Iowa's largest remaining expanse of **oak savanna**.



Environmental Management

Environmental management at Whiterock Conservancy emphasizes active restoration and long-term habitat maintenance. Management practices include **prescribed fire, brush management, and invasive species removal**, which support native plant communities and improve habitat resilience.

Prescribed fire is used extensively to maintain prairie, savanna, and woodland ecosystems, reduce invasive species pressure, and support biodiversity. These practices are carried out through coordinated efforts involving staff, volunteers, and partner organizations. Whiterock serves as a host site for **Green Iowa AmeriCorps**, engaging members alongside volunteers in land management and restoration activities. This support expands Whiterock's capacity to manage large-scale conservation work across its landscape.

