



# ECOLOGY

ACTION CENTER



## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

# ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER

The Ecology Action Center is a not-for-profit environmental agency with a mission to inspire and assist our community in creating, strengthening, and preserving a healthy environment. The EAC acts as a central resource for environmental education, information, outreach, and technical assistance in McLean County.

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# A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Helen Keller once said, "Alone, we can do so little; together we can do so much." I have long argued that partnerships between organizations are where we can truly leverage the greatest impact. Much of the success of the Ecology Action Center can be attributed to successful partnerships. In 2023 we found this to be especially true as it was a year of tremendous growth, largely due to strong collaborations in our community.

As detailed elsewhere in this report, we have recently been successful in applying for our first-ever federal grants. In fact, of three federal grant applications submitted, we were fully funded for two of those requests! However, these were not due to EAC's solo efforts, but rather the teams that have come together to support these projects.

Our new air quality monitoring project funded by the USEPA is a collaboration between the Ecology Action Center, Illinois State University Department of Health Sciences, Bloomington - Normal NAACP, Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District, McLean County, Town of Normal, City of Bloomington, and many other area organizations. It is exciting to see so many groups and individuals supporting efforts to better understand, and eventually address, air quality issues in our community!

Our second successful USEPA grant is for a project to assess climate change related threats and vulnerabilities to residents in environmental justice areas in our community and create a corresponding adaptation plan to address these threats. This grant will also provide funding for significant tree equity plantings in environmental justice areas. This successful application was created by a collaboration between the Ecology Action Center, Illinois State University, McLean County Health Department, United Way of McLean County, University of Illinois

Extension, West Bloomington Revitalization Project, and other groups. Finding our common ground on public health and environmental issues is allowing us to all have a much greater impact than any of us can do individually!

In addition to expanding our Tree Corps program due to a grant from Nicor Gas, we were also able to create our first full time Tree Coordinator position in 2023 due to support from the Town of Normal, City of Bloomington, McLean County, and Bloomington - Normal Water Reclamation District. The Tree Corps initiative will not only help sequester carbon emissions, but also cool temperatures in urban areas, and improve air quality, helping our community avoid negative public health impacts of air pollution. Simultaneously, we hope to avoid costly ramifications of "non-attainment" for National Ambient Air Quality Standards including barriers to further economic development.

In short, due to the broad base of support for the Ecology Action Center — from partner organizations, donors, grantors, volunteers, and local government — we are NOT the same Ecology Action Center we were twenty-five years ago. We are increasingly becoming a very responsive nonprofit environmental sustainability agency, growing and adapting to meet the changing needs of our community. We've been at it now for 52 years since our first recycling drive in 1971.

The Ecology Action Center is primed and ready to face the challenges of today and tomorrow, for a healthier environment for current and future generations.



**Michael Brown**  
Executive Director





# EDUCATION & OUTREACH

## The Ecology Action Center provides:

Recycling and waste education to fulfill the Illinois Solid Waste Planning and Recycling Act requirements for McLean County, Bloomington, and Normal;

Storm water education to meet the public education requirements of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Phase II Storm Water Management Plans for Bloomington, Normal, McLean County, and the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District;

Energy efficiency and renewable energy education

and outreach for Bloomington and Normal, including residential and small business energy assessments;

Air quality data through our greenhouse gas emissions inventory process and the development of a Community Energy Strategic Plan to reduce emissions; and

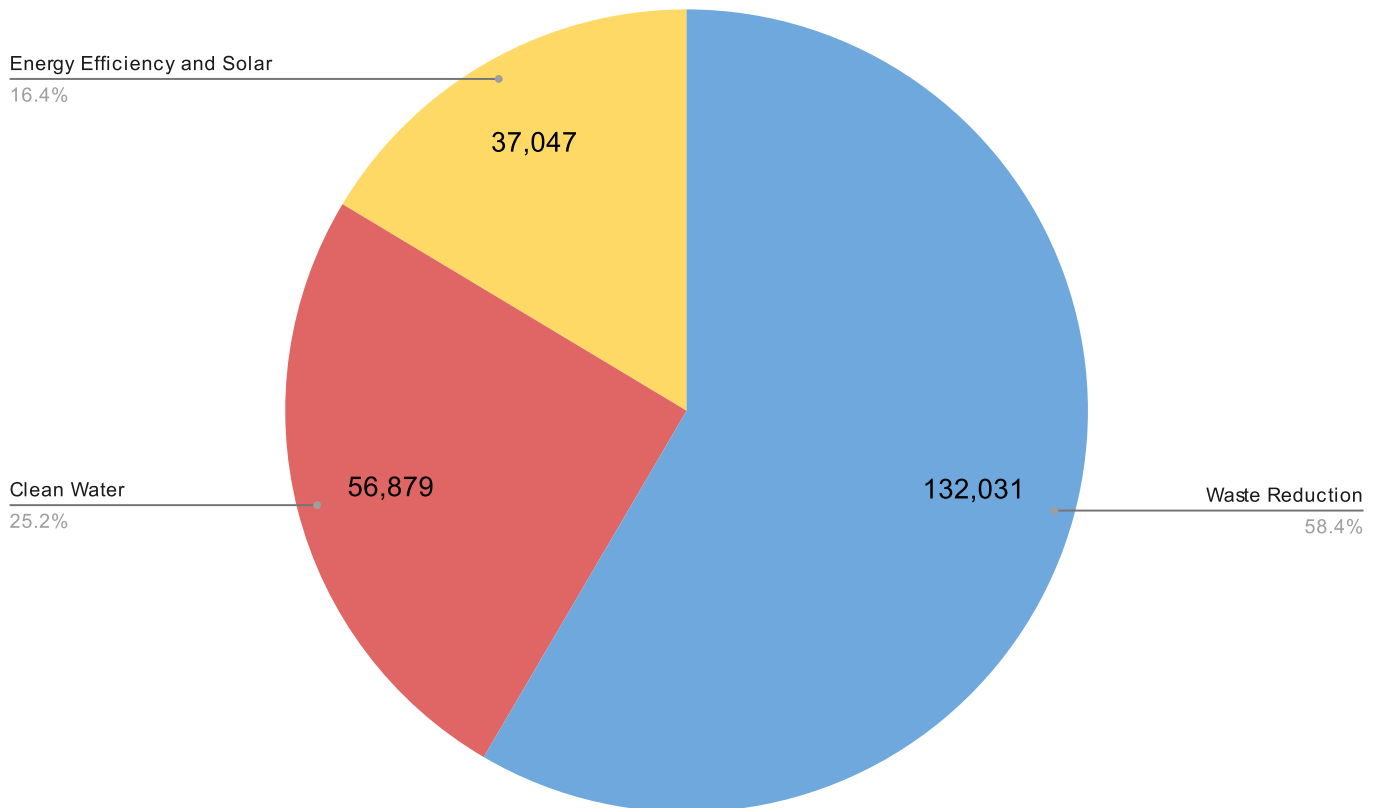
Distribution of resources on numerous sustainability topics for a more healthy and sustainable community.

# 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

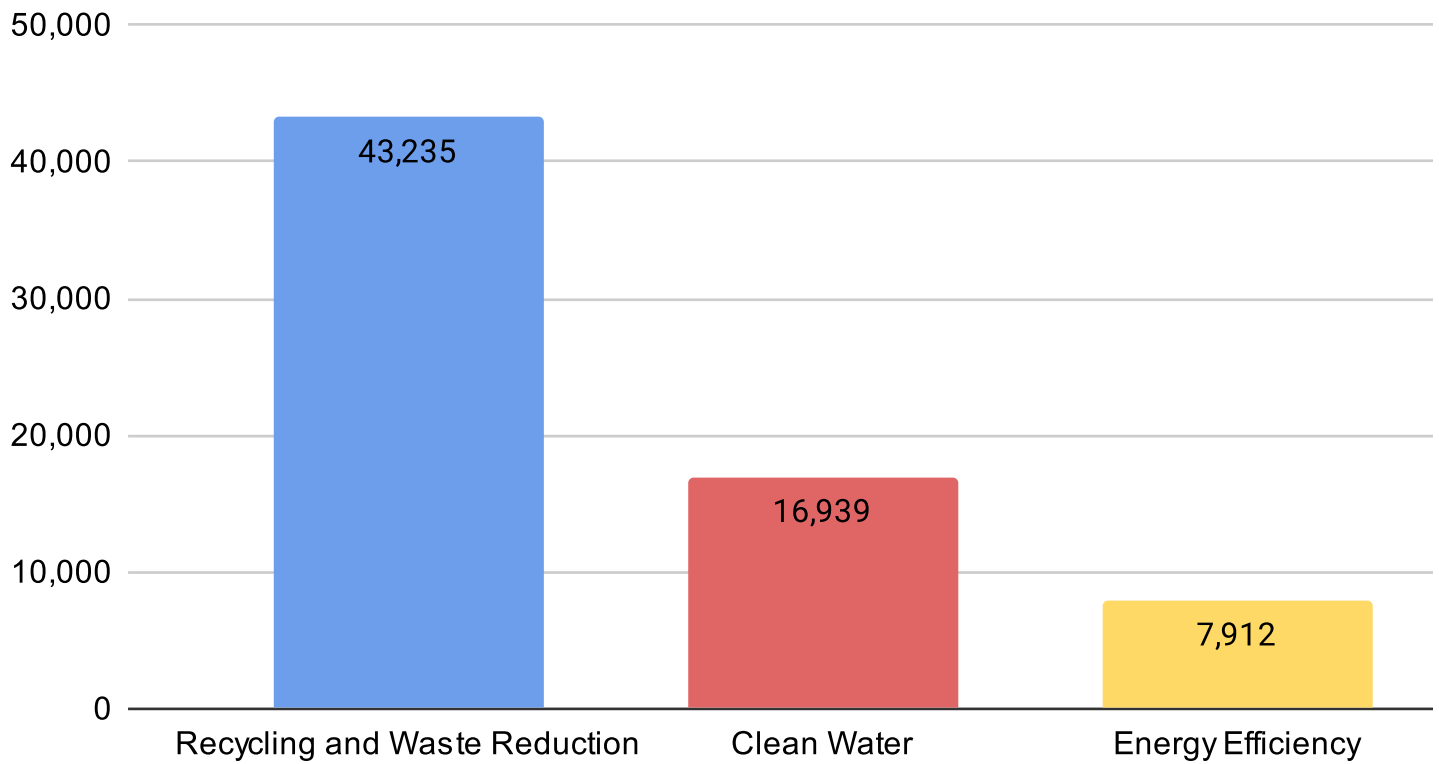
**255,957**  
**TOTAL MEDIA**  
**IMPRESSIONS**

The Ecology Action Center does extensive media outreach to share information, help spread awareness, and to promote upcoming events or initiatives. Information is shared through newspaper ads, radio commercials, and through direct newspaper and radio interviews.

## Social Media Impressions (Facebook and X)



# EAC Website Visits



**1,908  
HOUSEHOLDS**



Received a monthly e-newsletter covering a variety of environmental topics.

Learned about waste reduction, clean water, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and clean air topics at 33 different presentations and outreach events.



**6,644  
RESIDENTS**

# IN THE COMMUNITY: A SNAPSHOT



10

carts worth of compost were filled at the Sweet Corn Circus

1,289

households served by the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event

700

pounds of trash were collected along the Constitution Trail from the Chateau to Audubon Gardens by 20 volunteers



1,090

students participated in the Clean Water program



26

energy consultations were performed



1,124

students participated in the Recycling and Waste Reduction program



# 430

storm drains labeled  
"Drains to Stream, Keep it Clean."



# 27

Tree Corps tree prep and  
planting days

# 286

households participating in  
Community Composting



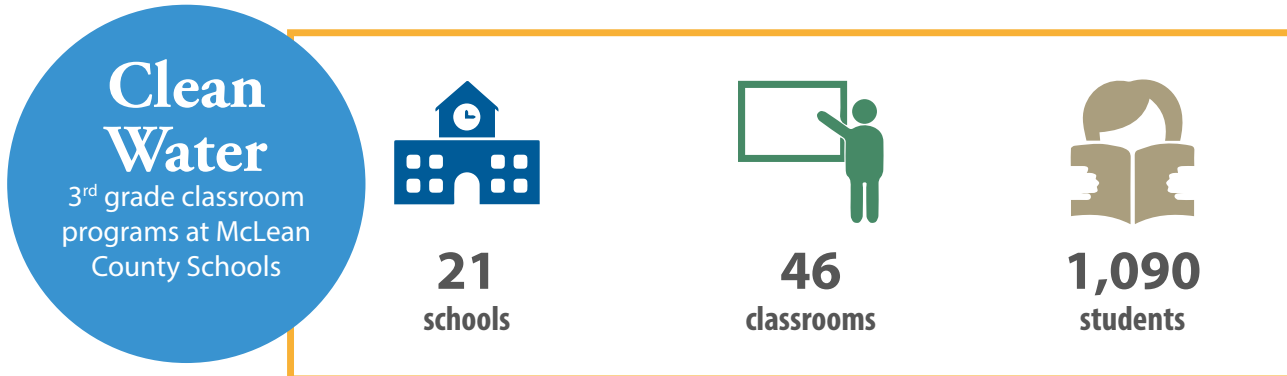
# 7,032

native trees planted in April, May, and October of 2023



# ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS

The Ecology Action Center provides educational programs for third and fourth grade classrooms in McLean County.



Third grade students learn about the water cycle and storm water runoff pollution. Staff uses an enviroscape watershed model to provide an interactive demonstration of the sources and effects of water pollution. The tool allows the EAC to easily demonstrate how storm water runoff carries pollutants through the watershed to streams, rivers and lakes, and teaches students about methods to reduce storm water runoff pollution.

## Bloomington

- 26 classrooms, 536 students 10 schools

## Normal

- 20 classrooms, 424 students, 9 schools

## McLean County

- 130 students 2 schools



# Recycling and Waste Reduction

4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom programs at McLean County Schools



23 schools



55 classrooms



1,124 students

Fourth grade students learn about the amount of waste sent to the landfill. Students then participate in an interactive sorting activity and engage in a discussion about materials that are regularly disposed of in their homes, and different options for that waste, including reducing consumption, reusing items, proper recycling, and composting.

## Normal

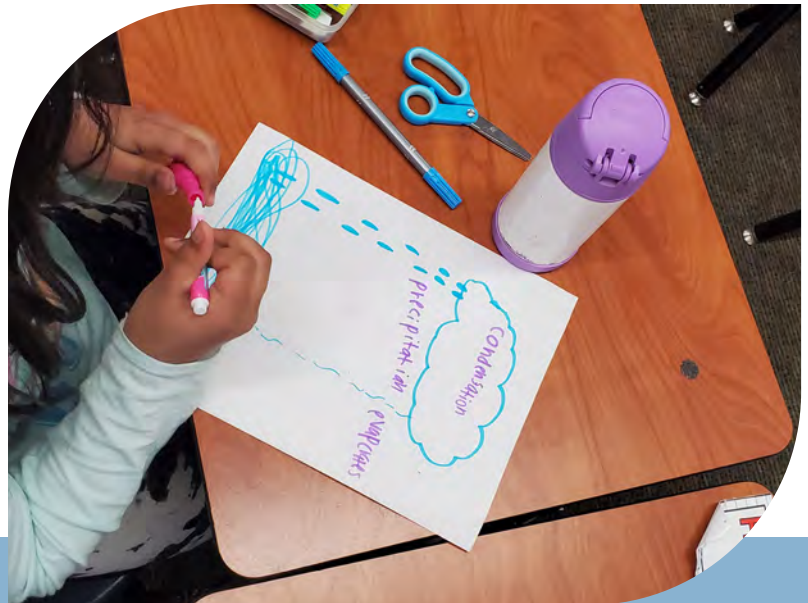
- 23 classrooms, 477 students, 10 schools

## Bloomington

- 22 classrooms, 480 students, 9 schools

## McLean County

- 10 classrooms, 167 students, 4 schools



## We could not do this work without the generous support of our community members

A total of 671 volunteers helped with 69 Ecology Action Center activities and put in a total of 1439 volunteer hours. According to Independent Sector, one hour of volunteer labor is worth \$31.80, which means our generous volunteers worked an equivalent of \$45,760.20 for the EAC! Volunteer activities included:

- 41 volunteers working 15 different shifts of recycling at the McLean County Fair
- 23 volunteers worked at the Earth Day Constitution Trail and Sugar Creek Clean-Up
- 41 volunteers worked at our Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event
- 83 volunteers volunteered at 7 different Storm Drain Stenciling Events
- 121 volunteers helped at 11 Sugar Creek Steward Workdays
- 27 volunteers helped collect data at 5 shifts conducting a Recycling Dropbox Survey
- 328 volunteers helped at 27 Tree Planting events
- 2 volunteers assisted staff at the Yard Smart Garden Walk
- 5 volunteers assisted staff in collecting food waste for compost at the Sweet Corn Circus



# RECYCLING & WASTE REDUCTION

The Ecology Action Center is the Solid Waste Agency for McLean County, the City of Bloomington, and the Town of Normal.

In this role, the EAC helps residents and businesses in McLean County reduce waste, increase recycling, and properly dispose of hazardous materials through numerous educational and outreach programs including

our Recycle Coach app and our 4th grade recycling classroom programs, and at local events like our Household Hazardous Waste Collection. We continue to provide education on backyard composting, and in late 2020 we launched the subscription based BN Community Composting program.

# COUNTY WIDE RECYCLING RATE

The EAC annually collects waste and recycling data to calculate the recycling rate of the community. The EAC surveys local waste haulers, recyclers, institutions, corporations, businesses, and municipalities to calculate the type of waste they generate and recycle. This rate helps us track our waste amounts and recycling progress and allows us to gauge how well our outreach and education efforts are working.

While the waste generated in McLean County in 2022 grew, the amount recycled grew even more to a total of 46.85%. The county is still making progress towards its recycling rate goal of 50% set in the 20-Year Solid Waste Management Plan. Although this goal has yet to be met, McLean County is well ahead of the 32.1% national recycling average.

Contributors to the county’s recycling rate include successful recycling and waste diversion goals by large corporations, and through residential recycling accessibility. The EAC recognizes that large waste generators make significant efforts to recycle which helps keep the recycle rate steady and indicates deliberate efforts to address recycling on their part. Some materials that saw a significant increase in 2022 include lithium-ion batteries and lumber and pallets. Other items with large increases that were

not previously reported include tempered glass and rigid plastics. Along with curbside recycling offered in both Bloomington and Normal and some other smaller municipalities in the county, there are four community recycling drop off locations open to anyone and available 24 hours a day. These locations include; Heartland Community College, the Jewel Osco on Cottage, the Walmart on Greenbriar, and a relocation of the Chiddix Jr High drop off to the Crossroads Center in Bloomington. The amount of single stream recycling collected in McLean County in 2022 rose by 14.7%.

Some areas that saw a decrease in recycling were organics, such as brush collected by the town and city, and tube fluorescent light bulbs. The large ice storm of 2021 caused a huge fluctuation in the amount of brush recycled due to downed trees and limbs during that year so as a result, the number has significantly decreased in 2022. Linear or tube fluorescent and compact fluorescent (CFL) light bulbs contain a small amount of mercury and need to be recycled rather than thrown away. The recycling of these bulbs decreased 34% in 2022 compared to 2021. This is likely due to the increased conversion to LED bulbs or failing to recycle.

## MCLEAN COUNTY WASTE GENERATION AND RECYCLING RATES: 2017 - 2022

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Total MSW Recycled (tons)</b>	88,459	94,804	88,330	76,487	82,182	97,643
<b>Total MSW Landfilled (tons)</b>	124,364	109,467	104,772	104,919	105,442	112,264
<b>Total Municipal Solid Waste Generated (tons)</b>	211,230	204,271	193,102	181,406	187,624	209,907
<b>Recycling Rate</b>	41.9%	46.4%	45.7%	42.2%	43.8%	46.9%

# COMPOSTING WORKSHOPS

The EAC's backyard composting workshops cover the basics and benefits of backyard composting. After the presentation, participants take home a custom-built 55-gallon compost bin made from a repurposed food-grade barrel, and participants can purchase a compost aerator and thermometer too. During the workshop participants learn what materials to include in their compost bin and what to do with compostable materials that cannot be composted in a backyard setting. The workshop explains proper compost pile monitoring and maintenance, how to know when compost is ready to use, and how to know it is safe to use! The workshop also focuses on the importance of diverting waste out of landfills in order to reduce climate-changing methane gas generation.

EAC educators provide resources to help participants identify jumping worms, and to know proper compost methods to keep them at bay. Participants leave the workshop with the confidence to set up and monitor compost in their own backyard compost pile, while keeping invasive jumping worms out of the garden.

The EAC held four backyard-composting workshops with 11 participants.



# COMMUNITY COMPOSTING

The BN Community Composting program is a unique drop-off composting program where participants collect their food scraps at home and then drop them off at one of two kiosk locations. This program allows users to easily divert all of their food waste from the landfill. The collected material is composted in an industrial composting environment which means additional items that cannot be broken down in a backyard compost pile can be collected. For example, items like meat, bones, dairy products, paper towels and napkins, greasy pizza boxes and any Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) certified compostable products are all accepted.

Participation in the program is simple and begins with purchasing a starter kit that includes a 5-gallon bucket, a roll of compostable bags, instructions, and

a key card to access the kiosks. Material is collected at home in the compostable bags and stored in the 5-gallon bucket until it's ready for drop-off. Once the

bucket is emptied at the kiosk you simply start again. After the initial starter kit purchase, the cost of participation is just purchasing additional compostable bags from the EAC; all service and disposal costs are built into the price of the bags.

The BN Community Composting program began in November of 2020 and a second kiosk was added in 2022. During 2023 the program had 44 new users bringing the total to 286 and a total of 46.8 tons of food waste and other compostable items were collected.

More information about the program, starter kit purchases, or details on sponsorship can be found at [BNCommunityComposting.org](https://BNCommunityComposting.org).



**BNCOMMUNITY  
COMPOSTING.ORG**



# VERMICOMPOSTING

The EAC's vermicomposting (composting with worms) workshops cover the basics of vermicomposting, what worms can be used for vermicomposting, what can be added to the bin, how to discourage pests for entering the bin, and how to maintain a proper environment for the worms. The workshop explains how to know when compost is ready and safe to use, how to harvest the compost, and how to use the finished compost! The workshop also focuses on the importance of diverting waste out of landfills in order to reduce the amount of climate- changing methane gas released. Participants leave the workshop with a sound understanding of the individual and community benefits of vermicomposting, a ready to use vermicompost bin with red wiggler worms, and the confidence to maintain their own vermicompost bin.

The EAC held three vermicomposting workshops with 10 participants.



# RECYCLE COACH

Recycle Coach is an essential recycling education platform that helps the community become more knowledgeable and confident about recycling. This extensive mobile and web-based app provides residents with local recycling options or proper disposal information for nearly any item you can think of. The app also provides personalized collection schedules, notification reminders, sorting guides, and other features to simplify recycling. The free mobile app is available for download on Android or Apple smartphones and the web-based version can be found online at [RecycleBN.org](https://RecycleBN.org). The Ecology Action Center routinely updates the information provided in the app including geographical based collection and recycling options.

recyclecoach™



**RECYCLEBN.ORG**

## During 2023 Recycle Coach Had:

- 464 new subscribers
- 6,143 total material searches
- 419,515 total user interactions

**[Learn more at RecycleBN.org.](https://RecycleBN.org)**

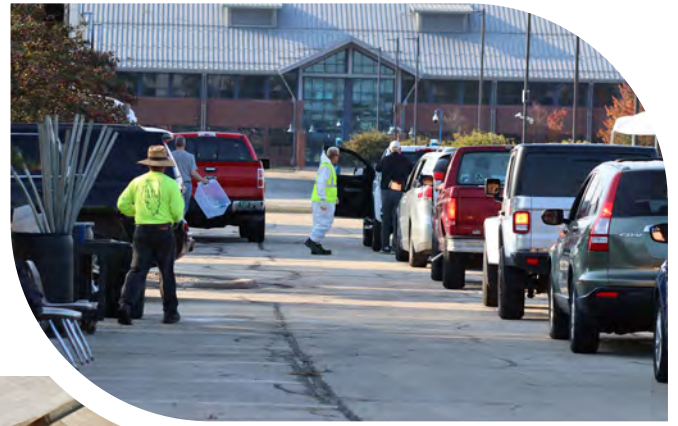


# HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION

The September 23, 2023 McLean County Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collection ran seamlessly, with no significant backups or delays, and no issues with commercial or unaccepted wastes. Over 99% of those participating made an appointment, a requirement to participate in the event. The Ecology Action Center is the solid waste agency for the City of Bloomington, Town of Normal, and McLean County. In this role, the EAC coordinates community-wide solid waste planning, performs education and outreach to increase recycling, offers comprehensive recycling and waste information for area residents and businesses, provides a free smart phone or browser app for 24-hour access to recycling information, and coordinates HHW services for the McLean County area.

## 1,106 Appointments Made

1,106 total appointments were made. 1,038 appointments were made online. 68 appointments were made by phone.



## 917 Cars in Attendance

917 cars in attendance. 1.4 households per car with households per car ranging from 1 to 20.



## 1,289 Households Served

917 cars carrying materials from 1,289 total estimated households came through the collection event.



## 116 Volunteer Hours

26 volunteers put in 116 hours of work stuffing pamphlets and directing traffic. Volunteers put in \$3,688.80 worth of work.\*

\*Source: <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time>



# CLEAN AIR

Air pollution is one of the greatest environmental risks to public health and a stable environment. Poor air quality can exacerbate health conditions such as asthma, COPD, and heart disease and is estimated to be responsible for more than 100,000 premature deaths in the United States each year. Excessive greenhouse gas pollution, such as carbon dioxide, cause temperatures to rise resulting in extreme weather conditions.

The National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) regulate the amount of six harmful air pollutants that are in the air. The Bloomington-Normal community is currently an attainment area for all six categories of air pollutants, meaning current concentrations of pollutants are below the limits established by the NAAQS. However, past ozone measurements have exceeded the current standard five times, and could fail NAAQS requirements in the future. The financial cost of non-attainment is significant and can include

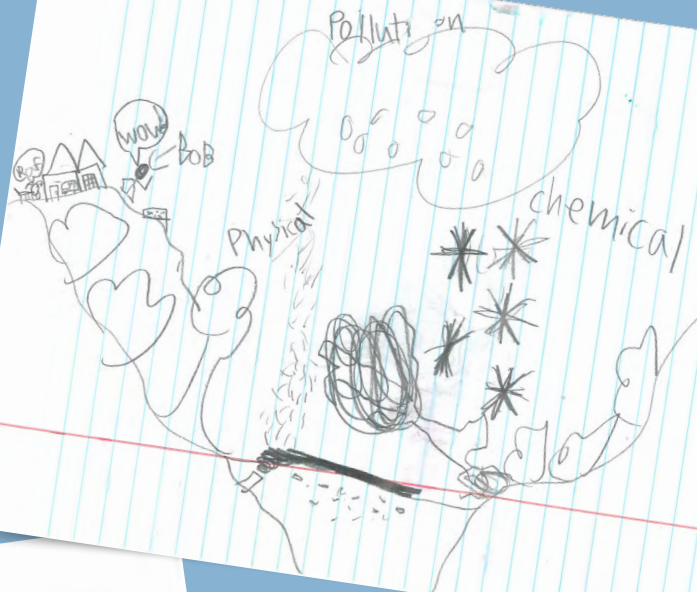
loss of federal transportation funding and other ramifications.

In order to improve the overall air quality in our community, the EAC is working on numerous projects including the Tree Corps program, the new Bloomington Normal Clean Air Research and Education (BN-CARE) project, and climate action planning. Tree Corps is an initiative to improve future air quality by planting 10,000 trees a year in McLean County. BN-CARE is a federal grant funded project that aims to increase the understanding and awareness of the relationship between local air quality and public health using air quality monitors. Climate action planning includes using greenhouse gas inventory updates to develop a Bloomington-Normal Community Energy Strategic Plan (BN-CESP) that will contain strategies for emissions reduction and air quality improvements.

Be nice Be healthier.



cooper



Dear Katie,  
Thank you so much  
for your presentation  
at Mercy Circle, Normal  
First United Methodist  
Church.

Your enthusiasm  
is infectious and  
we all learned some-  
thing new.

Best wishes as you  
continue to impact  
change and help  
our planet. Aunt  
Bar



Harper

Lois  
Walter  
Ivy  
Ella  
Sofia

Miss Katie + The Ecology Action Center,  
The Zebra Room at Little  
Jewels Learning Center

Aliza Thanks You!!!

Miss Teaghan

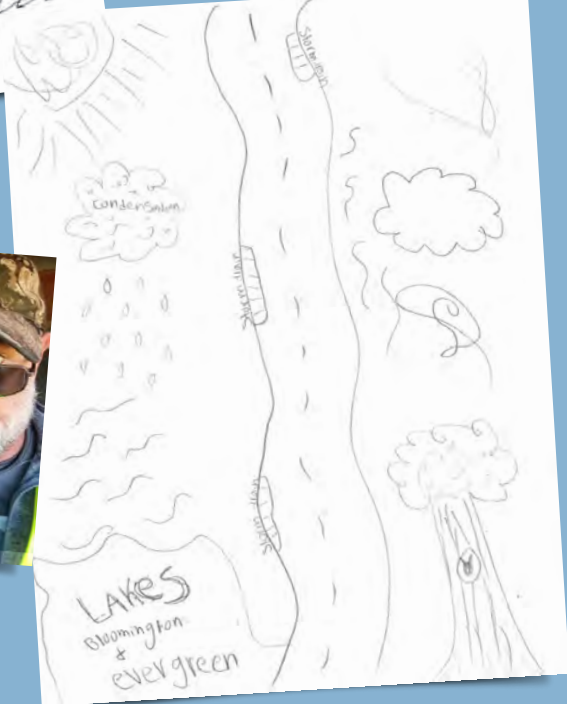
Ms. Mady

Kira

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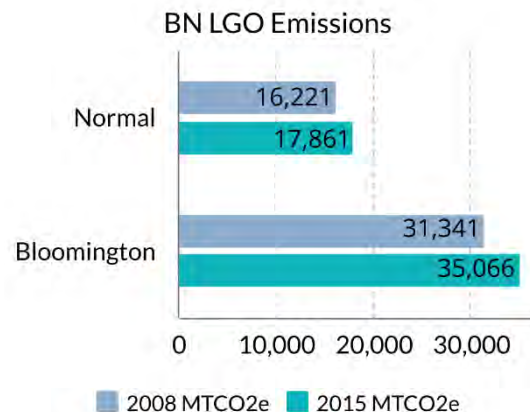
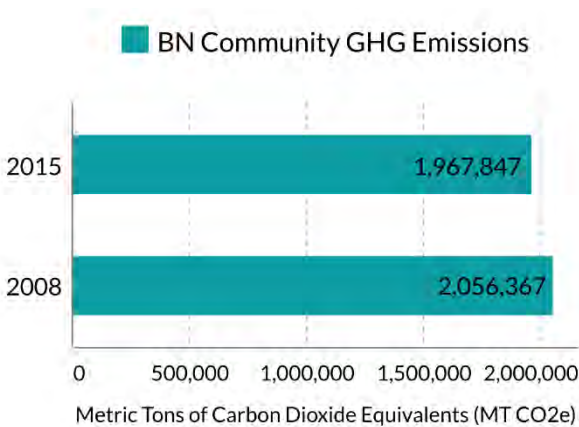
Kedrick



# GREENHOUSE GAS INVENTORY UPDATE

In 2023, the EAC finalized a greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory update, comparing 2008 baseline data to new data collected from 2015. This update assesses changes in GHG emissions that have occurred over time in our community and examines emissions from two different perspectives:

1. Community Emissions - all sectors of the Bloomington-Normal community including residential, commercial and industrial.
2. Local Government Operations or LGO - the municipal government sector of Bloomington and Normal, which includes all municipal building facilities, public transit and wastewater treatment services.




Between 2008 and 2015, the Town of Normal LGO emissions increased by 10% and the City of Bloomington LGO emissions increased by 12%. Community emissions fell by 4% however; this was likely due to the widespread fracking of natural gas, which resulted in reduced electricity emissions. This was driven by the economic advantage of cost effective and abundant natural gas that increasingly replaced the use of coal.

## Percent Change in 2008 and 2015 Community Emissions

	B-N Electricity and Natural Gas	-6.70%
	B-N Solid Waste	-0.95%
	B-N On-Road Transportation	+5.30%

## Percent Change in 2008 and 2015 LGO Emissions

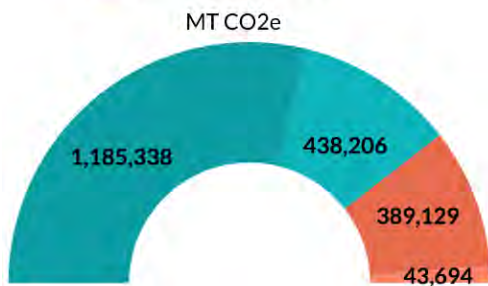
	Town of Normal LGO Emission	+10.11%
	City of Bloomington LGO Emissions	+11.89%
	Combined LGO Public Transit Emissions	+3.46%
	Combined LGO Wastewater Treatment Emissions	+8.67%

The leading source of GHG emissions in Bloomington-Normal in 2015 was stationary energy use, which includes electricity and natural gas used for cooling, heating, and other needs in homes and businesses. The next leading source of emissions is on-road vehicular transportation that includes all gasoline and diesel usage in local transportation.

# SOURCES OF BLOOMINGTON - NORMAL COMMUNITY GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

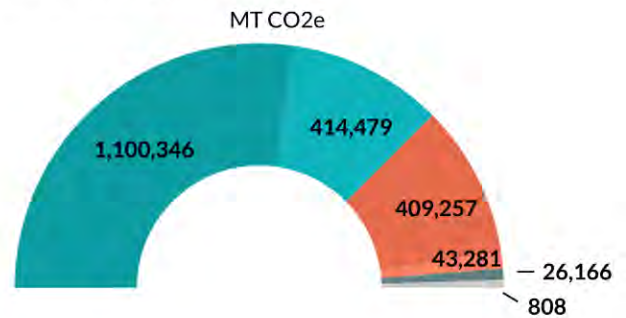
2008 Community Emissions

- Electricity (57.64%)
- Natural Gas (21.31%)
- Vehicle Transport (18.92%)
- Solid Waste (2.12%)

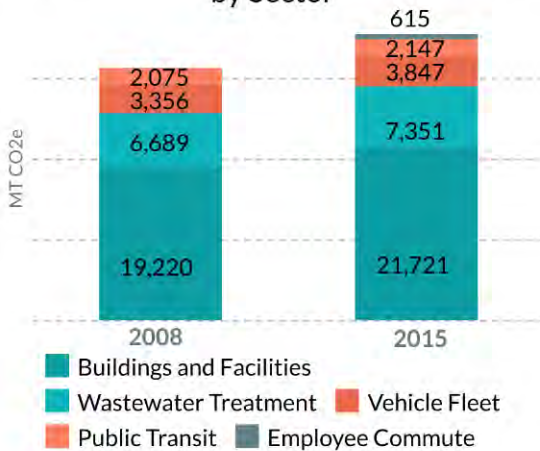


2015 Community Emissions

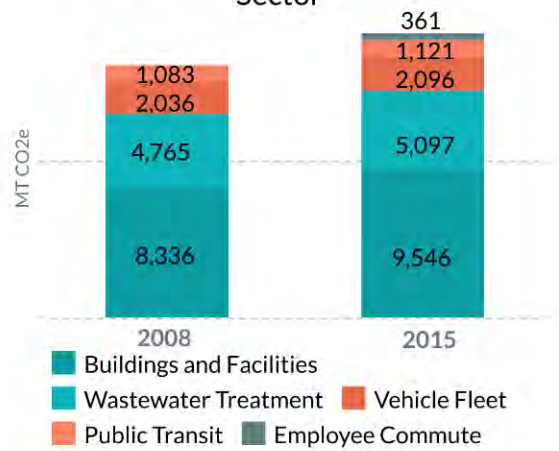
- Electricity (54.54%)
- Natural Gas (20.55%)
- Vehicle Transport (20.29%)
- Solid Waste (2.15%)
- Air Travel (1.49%)
- Rail Travel (0.99%)



Bloomington LGO Total GHG Emissions by Sector



Normal LGO Total GHG Emissions by Sector



Conducting regular GHG emission inventories allows our community to be better informed about its energy use and resulting impact on air quality. They can also serve as a guide to cost-effective strategies for reducing climate-changing greenhouse gases, conserving energy, and creating a healthier, more resilient environment.

Both emissions inventories can be found at [ecologyactioncenter.org/climate](http://ecologyactioncenter.org/climate).

# TREE CORPS

In late 2020, the Ecology Action Center launched Tree Corps, an initiative with a goal to plant at least 100,000 new trees in Bloomington, Normal, and McLean County over the next ten years.

## Why trees?

- Trees help improve air quality. Our community is close to exceeding National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone, an air quality pollutant that contributes to asthma and other respiratory diseases, negatively impacting public health.
- Trees are one of the most cost-effective strategies for carbon sequestration to help address greenhouse gas emissions that cannot easily be addressed by other means.
- Trees help provide watershed protection, increase wildlife habitat, and offer opportunities for recreation areas, as demonstrated by the McLean County Greenways Plan. All trees planted through the Tree Corps are Illinois native species in order to maximize suitability for local environmental conditions and to support native pollinators and other species dependent upon native primary trophic level food supplies.
- Back in the early days of the Ecology Action Center in the 1970's and 1980's, when the organization was known as Operation Recycle, profits from recycling drives were utilized for tree planting efforts including helping to plant at Comlara Park on Evergreen Lake.

To make Tree Corps a success the EAC is building upon new and existing partnerships with local nonprofits, businesses, faith-based organizations, and governmental entities, to seek out opportunities



**TREE CORPS**  
TREE-CORPS.ORG

and funding to increase tree plantings significantly in our community.

In 2023, with the help of generous donations from individuals and organizations, the hard work of our many volunteers and with the support of our major partner organizations we successfully planted over 7,032 native trees in McLean County in April, May, and October of 2023.

**We successfully planted over 7,032 native trees in McLean County in April, May, and October of 2023.**

This year the EAC also launched our West Bloomington Free Tree program, providing free native tree saplings to income-qualifying residents of West Bloomington.

- Heartland Community College – planted 1,000 bare root native trees.
- Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District – planted 700 bare root native trees.
- Parklands Foundation – planted 4,500 bare root native trees.
- The Constitution Trail – planted 58 sapling trees.
- Normal Community High School – 110 sapling trees
- Village of McLean – 20 sapling trees
- West Bloomington Free Trees - 23 native saplings in West Bloomington



**58**  
 sapling trees planted near  
 the Constitution Trail



**1,000**  
 bare root native trees planted by  
 Heartland Community College

**700**  
 trees planted at the  
 Bloomington Normal Water  
 Reclamation District



**110**  
 sapling trees planted near  
 Normal Community  
 High School



**4,500**  
 bare root native trees planted at properties owned by  
 the ParkLands Foundation

**20**  
 sapling trees planted by the  
 Village of McLean





# CLEAN WATER

The Ecology Action Center educates the community about the negative impacts of stormwater runoff pollution and provides information and resources to help people reduce their contributions to water pollution.

The EAC promotes clean water protection and watershed awareness through education and outreach programs including programs for all

the third grade classrooms in McLean County, the Yard Smart program, storm drain stenciling, the mCLEANwater.org watershed clearinghouse website, rain barrel workshops, an annual creek and trail clean-up event, the Sugar Creek Stewards, septic system maintenance messaging, and reminding our community to curb their leaves in the fall!



## Ecology Action Center

hosted weekly Facebook Live EAQs chats on varying topics, including clean water



# YARD SMART GARDEN WALK

Yard Smart is part of the Ecology Action Center's clean water programming. Yard Smart encourages residents to voluntarily protect our watersheds and the environment by using environmentally friendly gardening practices. Yard Smart Yards are safe for all living things, conserve natural resources like water and fossil fuels, support diversity in plants and wildlife, do not pollute the air/soil/water, work with nature, and avoid or minimize the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and high-nitrogen fertilizer.

use of native plants in the landscaping, and spaces for wildlife, particularly birds. The EAC worked with the Grand Prairie Bird Alliance to feature gardens that provide refuge for birds. The garden walk ended at One Normal Plaza with lunch from Under the Ground BloNo and a presentation on creating space for birds by Bill Davison, an avid birder and Grand Prairie Bird Alliance.



Wendy Gochenaur and Sage Abels of west Bloomington said the goal of their landscaping was "both selfish and benevolent. Selfish because



The EAC's Annual Yard Smart Garden Walk was held on Saturday, July 8 with 52 attendees. The walk visited 3 homes in west Bloomington, and 2 homes in Normal. All of the yards featured a wide

we wanted to have a show-stopping garden, and benevolent because we wanted to create an urban oasis for wildlife". Over the past 5 years they continue to remove more grass, and plant more native plants. They have over 100 different native plants in their garden. They try to utilize organic practices in their garden, they use a rain barrel to capture water, and keep hummingbird nectar and other bird feeders filled. They received a Beautification Award from the City of Bloomington in 2022.

Barb Maxwell and Joan Brehm both have houses in the South Hill neighborhood just east of Miller Park Zoo. They are both avid gardeners who continue to convert yard space into gardens that are ever changing. They both have a wide variety of native plants and welcome wildlife in their gardens.





Sheri Glowinski of Normal bought her home in 2020, and has already turned the entire front yard and a large portion of the back yard into a beautiful prairie garden filled with native forbs, sedges, shrubs, and trees. She currently has over 150 species of native plants in her garden and she loves noting the insect, invertebrate, bird, and small mammals that come to visit.

Bill and Mercy Davison of Normal have created a bird paradise in their yard, where spring and fall migrants find safe resting places and nutrition. Breeding birds can raise multiple successful broods in their yard every summer, and year-round resident birds find suitable cold-weather habitat. The yard includes more than 30 varieties of fruit-bearing plants, native grasses and flower, and two water features. No synthetic chemicals are used. In the past three years, Bill has counted 117 bird species from his patio door.

## CONSTITUTION TRAIL AND SUGAR CREEK CLEAN UP DAY

At the Ecology Action Center's annual Earth Day Trail and Creek Clean-up Event, seventeen volunteers cleaned up the Constitution Trail from the Chateau to the Audubon Gardens collected 30 bags of trash.



# SUGAR CREEK STEWARDS

Sugar Creek Stewards raises awareness about Sugar Creek as an important community stormwater system and ecosystem. The EAC works with volunteers at designated sites to improve the overall health and aesthetics of stream banks through invasive species control and removal, allowing native species to thrive and increasing the filtration of storm water pollutants.

## Bloomington

- In January, five volunteers worked to clear and treat large swaths of invasive honeysuckle at Ewing Park II in Bloomington.
- In March, fourteen volunteers worked at Ewing Park II in Bloomington removing invasive honeysuckle.
- In May, eight volunteers worked to clear honeysuckle at Ewing Park II in Bloomington.
- In September, twenty-one volunteers worked at Ewing Park II in Bloomington removing invasive honeysuckle.
- In November, twelve volunteers worked to clear and treat large swaths of invasive

honeysuckle at Ewing Park II in Bloomington.

## Normal

- In February, fifteen volunteers worked at Fairview Park in Normal removing and treating invasive plants such as honeysuckle.
- In April, twelve volunteers worked at Fairview Park in Normal removing invasive plants such as honeysuckle.
- In June, three volunteers worked at Fairview Park in Normal removing invasive honeysuckle.
- In August, nine volunteers worked to clear and treat large swaths of invasive honeysuckle at Fairview in Normal.
- In October, eighteen volunteers worked at Fairview park in Normal removing invasive honeysuckle.
- In December, four volunteers removing invasive plants such as honeysuckle at Fairview Park in Normal.



# RAIN BARRELS

The EAC's rain barrel workshops teach attendees about the importance of rain water harvesting in preventing stormwater runoff pollution. Workshop attendees learn how to properly install, use, and maintain their rain barrels made from repurposed food grade 55-gallon drums. The EAC also provides tips to transition downspouts for rain barrel usage, gives insights on the pros and cons of different diverter systems available for purchase, and information on proper winter storage to ensure that rain harvesting systems are long-lasting.

- The EAC held 9 rain barrel workshops with 40 participants where the EAC provided rain barrel best practices and participants took home custom built 55-gallon rain barrels.
- The EAC sold 16 ready-to-use 55-gallon rain barrels through the EAC store.
- The EAC sold 4 ready-to-use 275-gallon mega rain harvesters through the EAC store.



# STORM DRAIN STENCILING

The Ecology Action Center welcomes groups of volunteers to participate in storm drain stenciling in the community. Volunteers spray paint messages next to storm drains that say “Drains to Stream, Keep it Clean”, in order to raise awareness of storm water runoff pollution and ways households can reduce their contributions to it.

## Bloomington

- 4 volunteers stenciled 38 storm drains and distributed 112 door hangers around Sheridan Elementary School.
- 11 volunteers stenciled 86 storm drains and passed out 218 door hangers around Walt Bittner Park.
- 10 volunteer stenciled around Clearwater Park in Bloomington. They stenciled 58 drains and distributed 157 door hangers.
- 13 Boy Scouts stenciled near Benjamin Elementary School in Bloomington, handing out 195 flyers and stenciling 63 storm drains.

## Normal

- 13 Illinois State University students stenciled 85 storm drains and distributed 169 door hangers from Linden to Beech street near campus as part of the Bring It Back to Normal volunteer day.
- 12 Boy Scouts stenciled 47 storm drains and handed out 283 door hangers near Colleen Hoose Elementary School.
- 9 community members and Boy Scouts handed out 194 door hangers and stenciled 53 drains between East College Avenue and East Vernon Avenue.





# ENERGY

BN Energy Bright is a community energy program designed to increase energy efficiency for homes and businesses in Bloomington-Normal through professional low-cost energy assessments, personalized assessment reports for participants, and through a variety of educational information in the form of presentations, outreach events and a comprehensive website.

BN Energy Bright is in partnership with the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington, in conjunction with their municipal aggregation programs, to help further reduce the community's overall energy demand.

In 2023, EAC staff completed 26 home energy consultations, 14 in Normal and 12 in Bloomington. Conducted 2 energy audits for small businesses; Normandy Village and the Illinois Art Station.



[BNenergyBright.org](http://BNenergyBright.org)

The EAC also provided detailed energy efficiency and solar consultations via phone and email to an additional 101 Bloomington-Normal residents.

### Community Impact

- Based on figures from the Department of Energy, if residents implement the majority of the easier to accomplish efficiency recommendations (sealing air leaks, adding insulation to the attic and basement, using programmable thermostats, installing LED fixtures, sealing



**26**  
home energy  
consultations



**\$16,940**  
total estimated  
energy savings  
of participating  
households in the first  
year



**101**  
people reached through  
presentations, events,  
and phone inquiries



**37,047**  
interactions through  
media coverage, ads,  
social media and the  
EAC website

**BN Energy Bright is a community energy program designed to increase energy efficiency for homes and businesses in Bloomington-Normal.**

ductwork, etc.) they can save a low estimate of \$605 annually on energy costs. Using these figures, participating households will cumulatively save at least \$16,940 in the first year after implementing recommended energy saving measures.

- According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Illinois households use an average of 99.3 million BTUs of energy each per year, with an average total cost of \$1,720 per household. Based on the energy equivalents of the monetary savings estimates above, implementing the basic efficiency recommendations means a savings of 34.8 million BTU per household.

- This is the equivalent to avoiding 7.2 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions per household.
- Last year, staff conducted an energy audit for a Bloomington resident living in a mobile home that had essentially no insulation. There were no existing utility or state/federally funded programs available to assist the resident, so the Ecology Action Center reached out to the community Interfaith Green Team and raised funds to use for emergency weatherization projects. In November, EAC staff, with the help of a volunteer from Faith in Action, used the funds raised to purchase and install insulated trailer skirting on the resident's home.

# ILLINOIS SOLAR FOR ALL

## Illinois Solar for All Grassroots Education (ILSFA)

- In 2023, the Ecology Action Center finished the second half of its fourth year as a grassroots educator for the program and in August was awarded a contract to begin a fifth year. The Ecology Action Center is one of ten non-profits in the state to serve as grassroots educators for the Illinois Solar for All (ILSFA) program. ILSFA is part of the state's Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) designed to increase access to solar energy for income-qualifying residents, environmental justice communities, and non-profits and public facilities that serve low-income communities.
- The EAC reached 186 residents through 11 informational presentations about ILSFA to Habitat residents, for people served by the Immigration Project, for residents of the Bloomington Housing Authority, to residents at



the Normal Township Activity and Recreation Center, to the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District, to the Bloomington Public Library, and had 52 individual conversations with residents interested in the program.

# AMEREN-NICOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY PILOT PROGRAM

EAC continued to provide community outreach to promote the Ameren-Nicor energy efficiency program, which provides energy efficiency and weatherization upgrades to low-income (80% AMI) households in Bloomington-Normal.

- During 2023, the EAC connected 93 residents to this program.
- According to program managers, the EAC is the leading pipeline for this program.





# 2071 ENDOWMENT FUND

The Ecology Action Center was founded over 50 years ago in 1971 as a one-day, one-time recycling drive. Looking forward to the next 50 years and the growing list of current environmental challenges, we have created a new endowment fund to help provide for greater financial stability – the 2071 Fund. The Ecology Action Center has created this endowment fund with the objective of generating annual interest to supplement other funding sources. A well managed endowment reflects our prioritization of long-term stability and financial viability. In addition to reducing dependence on public funding from local governments, this endowment fund will serve as a safety net for unanticipated economic downturns.

## 2071 Fund Donors:

- Country Financial
- Heartland Bank and Trust
- Wayne Aldrich
- Vince Allen
- Nancy Armstrong
- Charles Bristow
- Michael Brown and Beverly Beyer
- Joan Brehm
- Kevin Callis
- Jason Comfort
- Hannah Eisner
- John and Marilyn Freese
- Goverdhan Galpalli
- George Gordon
- Myra Gordon
- Sandra Groves
- Lisa Huson
- Jay Ivers
- Ray Johnson
- Kevin Kothe
- Steve Kowalski
- Gretchen Monti
- Mike O'Grady
- Paul and Kathy Packard
- Jade Rosenberry and Jeremy Schoenherr
- Elisabeth Reed
- Ben Ryburn
- Kari Sandhaas
- Carl Teichman
- Laurie Wollrab
- Drake Zimmerman and Jan Elflin
- Anonymous (2 donors)



*Legacy Giving*

is about contributing to the future and enjoying the knowledge that one is making a lasting impact and leaving a gift for generations to come.

# 2023 GRANTS RECEIVED

In 2023 the Ecology Action Center was awarded four grants totaling \$950,485!

## **United States Environmental Protection Agency - Enhanced Air Quality Monitoring Competitive Grant - \$440,485**

This project, titled Bloomington-Normal Community Air Research and Education (BN-CARE), will bring 3 stationary air quality monitors to environmental justice (EJ) areas of the community. These areas typically experience a disproportionate impact of pollution and other environmental hazards.

The EAC, in partnership with ISU, will monitor 4 common air pollutants and provide the data in real-time via an online dashboard. In order to increase the understanding of the relationship between local air quality and public health, various community engagement projects will take place including monitoring activities with portable handheld monitors, workshops, tree planting projects, and educational programs. The EAC will also be building a clean air coalition where local groups, businesses, or individuals can get involved.

## **United States Environmental Protection Agency - Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Cooperative Agreement Program - \$500,000**

The BNCRC or Bloomington-Normal Climate Responsive Community will identify and develop mitigation strategies for disproportionate climate impacts within environmental justice areas of the community. The McLean County Health Department, Illinois State University, United Way of McLean County, and other local organizations will collect data on vulnerabilities and specific threats to EJ area populations including a special focus on precariously housed populations, which are

normally unmeasured. Using this data, the EAC with Bloomington Normal Chapter of the NAACP and the West Bloomington Revitalization Project will lead a collaborative community stakeholder planning process to develop strategies to address these vulnerabilities and threats, resulting in a Climate Adaptation Plan.

The EAC, NAACP, ISU Horticulture and Landscape program, U of I Extension Office, and other partners will coordinate an annual tree equity initiative to provide resilient, high quality native tree saplings free of charge for residents and other private property owners in EJ areas. Increasing tree equity in urban areas will help reduce temperatures during extreme heat events, increase filtration of air pollutants, and sequester carbon emissions in a cost-effective manner.

## **Council of the Great Lakes Region - Stormwater Filtration System Grant - \$5,000**

Funding from this opportunity will allow the EAC to purchase four stormwater filters that will be placed inside storm

drains located throughout the community. These filters will allow us to monitor pollutants entering the stormwater system and in turn, will help us to better direct waste reduction and anti-littering efforts and will contribute to our existing stormwater education programs. The EAC also sees a potential for public workshops surrounding the filter use as the pollutants are collected and audited.

## **Nicor Gas - Environmental Stewardship Grant - \$5,000**

As part of the Tree Corps Initiative this Tree Equity project will identify suitable tree species for Environmental Justice neighborhoods on the west side of Bloomington and north side of Normal and plant them on residential property. Trees will be

**In 2023 the Ecology Action Center was awarded four grants totaling \$950,485!**

available at no cost to program applicants living or working in the environmental justice areas but all participants will be required to assist with planting their tree and learning about proper care and maintenance. Approximately 75 trees will be planted each year of the program, starting Fall 2023, for a total of up to 225 new trees over the next 3 years.

This project is in accord with Nicor's Environmental Stewardship pillar by providing Environmental Justice (EJ) areas with Illinois native tree species that will establish green space, increase air quality, reduce utility usage, and sequester carbon.



## 2023 FUNDERS & SPONSORS

### PUBLIC AGENCIES

- Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District
- City of Bloomington
- McLean County
- Town of Normal
- Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
- United States Environmental Protection Agency

### BUSINESS & PRIVATE SUPPORTERS

- AB Hatchery
- StraightUp Solar
- Normandy Village
- Zimmerman & Armstrong Investment Advisors
- Resource Innovations
- Better Earth Logistics
- State Farm Foundation
- Country Financial
- Republic Services
- Busey Bank

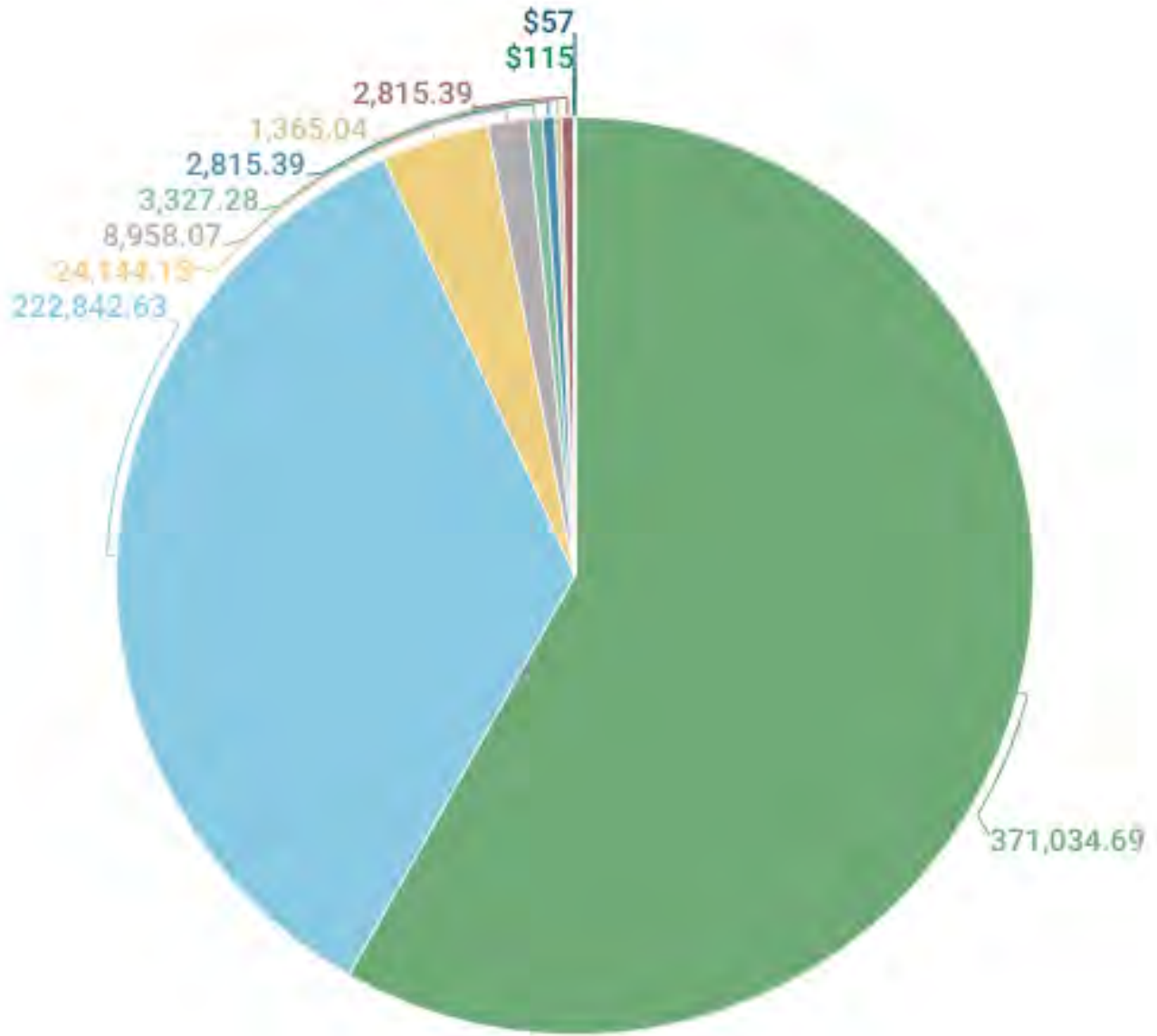
### NON-PROFIT SPONSORS & PARTNERS

- Bloomington-Normal NAACP
- Habitat for Humanity
- West Bloomington Revitalization Project
- ParkLands Foundation
- Midwest Renewable Energy Association
- Illinois Prairie Wild Ones
- The Nature Conservancy
- Elevate
- YWCA McLean County
- Friends of the Constitution Trail
- U of I Extension Master Naturalists and Master Gardeners
- Trees Forever
- Living Lands and Waters
- Illinois Prairie Community Foundation

### 2023 TREE TEAMS

- Normal First United Methodist Green Team
- Sunday Night Faith Community
- New Covenant Community
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington-Normal
- Normal Future Farmers of America
- Liz Harris

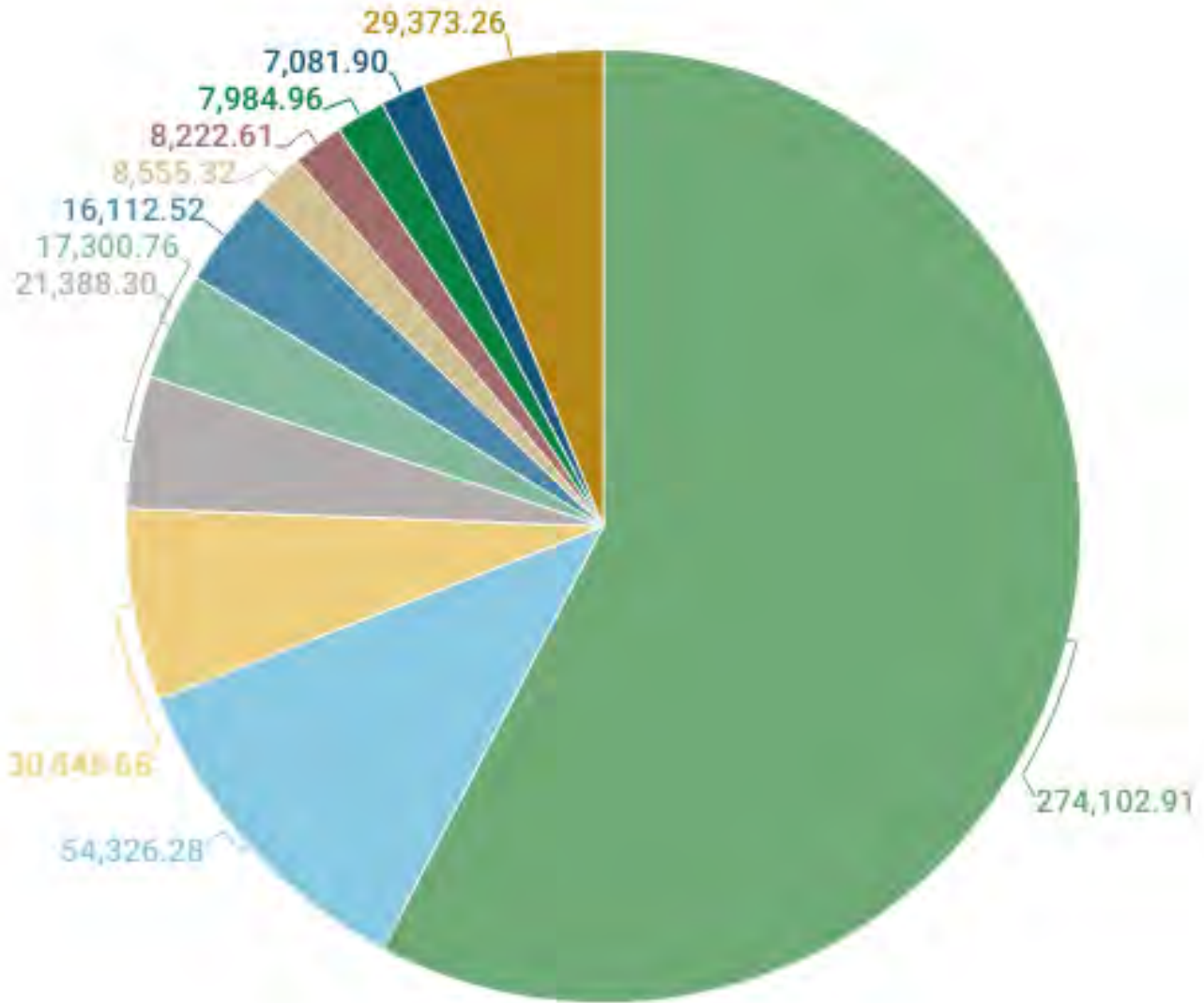
# 2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY: REVENUE



- Program Fees
- Contributions Income
- Annual Giving
- Merchandise Sales
- Reimbursement Income
- Interest Income
- Sponsorships
- Other
- Interest
- Other

**Total revenue for 2023**  
**\$637,302.62**

# 2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY: EXPENSES



- Payroll Expense
- Professional Fees
- Supplies
- Capital Expenditures
- Insurance
- Marketing
- Merchandise
- Web/IT services
- Utilities
- Printing and Reproduction
- Other

**Total expenses for 2023**  
**\$475,295.50**

# ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER STAFF



**Michael Brown**  
Executive Director



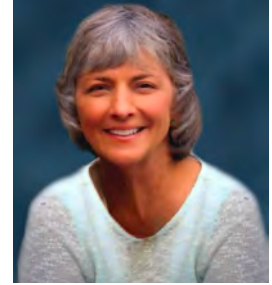
**Larissa Armstrong**  
Assistant Director



**Katie Vogler**  
Education Coordinator



**Eric Marshall**  
Program Assistant



**Deborah Pitcher**  
Development Coordinator



**Gary Kamplain**  
Program Assistant



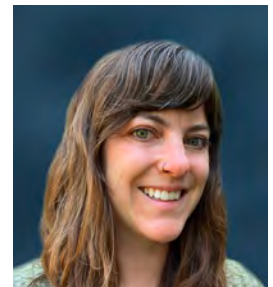
**Riley Francis**  
Program Assistant



**Peg Mercer**  
Administrative  
Assistant



**Nate Bair**  
Sugar Creek  
Stewardship Coordinator



**Kelsey Bremmer**  
Program Technician

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Hannah Eisner

Kevin Callis



**ECOLOGY**  
ACTION CENTER

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**Mailing address:** PO Box 97, Normal, Illinois 61761

**Phone:** 309-454-3169 **Website:** [ecologyactioncenter.org](http://ecologyactioncenter.org)

**Office Hours:** Monday - Friday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

BUILDING CLOSED WEDNESDAY for remote work