

Belle Isle Conservancy

2021 Impact Report

With the support of dedicated donors, volunteers, event attendees, and partners, the Belle Isle Conservancy continues to make an impact on the nature, people, and places of Belle Isle. Below is a summary of the impact the Conservancy has made in 2021.

- Over 65,000 visitors experienced the Belle Isle Aquarium since it was reopened in July, after a 16-month closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 80 members joined or renewed their membership to the Belle Isle Giving Society by generously committing over \$200,000 annually to make a lasting impact on Belle Isle.
- 1,204 volunteers removed 8,491 pounds of litter from the land and canals of Belle Isle.
- 1,147 students from Detroit and the surrounding area learned about the fish and plant species that live in our Great Lakes ecosystem through Belle Isle Conservancy's field trip program.
- \$1.2 million was invested in the Belle Isle Aquarium for the historic preservation of the 116-year-old facility, modernization of the behind-the-scenes infrastructure, and upgrades to tank exhibits.
- \$50,000 was invested to install and operate a floating dock on the banks of Lake Tacoma, which will support educational programming at the Belle Isle Aquarium.



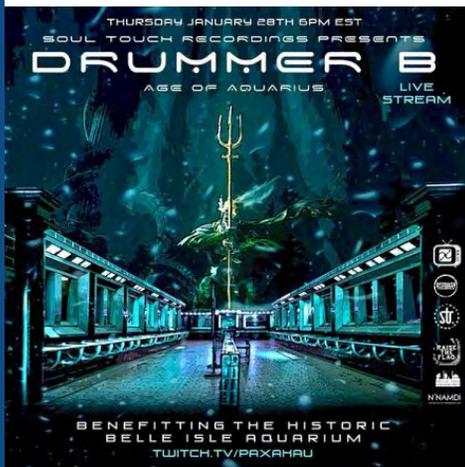
The mission of the Belle Isle Conservancy is to protect, preserve, restore and enhance the natural environment, historic structures and unique character of Belle Isle as a public park for the enjoyment of all – now and forever.

LOOKING BACK AT 2021: A YEAR IN REVIEW

JANUARY

DRUMMER B VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER

Detroit Techno producer Drummer B celebrated the release of his latest record "Age of Aquarius" in a special, once in a lifetime DJ set and fundraiser streamed live from the historic Belle Isle Aquarium. Electronic music fans and Aquarium enthusiasts came together on an online platform to enjoy an electronic music performance and raise over \$1,000 to support the Aquarium.



[VIEW Drummer B's Set](#)

FEBRUARY

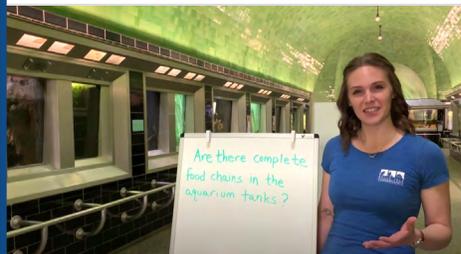
SIGNAGE UPGRADE

While the Aquarium was closed to the public, the team updated over 180 species information cards and added orienting and interpretive signage to improve the visitor experience and engagement with the exhibits.

FEBRUARY

VIRTUAL TOURS

Throughout the pandemic, BIC's educators hosted virtual tours and field trips for over 1,000 participants at the Belle Isle Aquarium and Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory. Prerecorded educational content reached nearly 6,000 people.



[TAKE a Virtual Field Trip](#)

STAYING CONNECTED

BIC staff reached over 380 volunteers on a weekly basis with emails and virtual activities during the pandemic while the facilities were closed to the public. The outreach helped to keep a very active volunteer base engaged and informed.

MARCH

GIVING SOCIETY RECEPTION

In its second year, the Giving Society continued to grow a membership base. To thank supporters, Belle Isle Conservancy hosted a virtual reception with a behind the scenes look at the Aquarium, remarks from leadership, and an interactive Q&A session.

[JOIN the Giving Society](#)

MARCH

DETROIT RIVER COALITION STRATEGIC PLANNING

As part of a two-year grant from the EPA, Belle Isle Conservancy led a strategic planning effort to provide direction for how the coalition will best collaborate as regional water stewards.

AXOLOTLS ARRIVE

The Belle Isle Aquarium added a new Axolotl exhibit to the collection. Originally from Mexico, Axolotl are a critically endangered species and face similar habitat challenges as the Detroit River's mud puppies.



[BROWSE the Belle Isle Aquarium's species collection](#)

APRIL

BINATIONAL EARTH WEEK

The Canadian and American organizations that represent the Detroit River Coalition celebrated Earth Day for an entire week! The coalition offered robust stewardship programs ranging from completely virtual to small in-person outdoor events.

APRIL

SPRING CLEANUP

Although the Annual Spring Cleanup event was more socially distant this year, the impact was one of the most successful yet. Volunteers removed nearly 4,000 pounds of litter from the park in just one day, which is more trash than has been collected in an entire "Keep Belle Isle Beautiful" stewardship season in the past.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A group of dynamic Detroiters answered the call to serve on a new Community Engagement Committee, which has a goal of ensuring Belle Isle Conservancy programs are co-created with the community it serves.

STEM STARS

For Career Day in Detroit public schools, Belle Isle Conservancy worked in partnership with DPSCD to deploy a "STEM Stars" book and video featuring scientists from Detroit working in various Science, Technology, Engineering and Math fields.

[MEET the Detroit STEM Stars](#)

MAY

ADOPT-A-KOI

To celebrate the Aquarium's Koi collection and tradition of hosting a Koi Festival, Belle Isle Conservancy created a symbolic Koi adoption kit including a certificate, species information, a pair of Koi fish lapel pins, and a souvenir Koinobori windsock. The limited edition Adopt-a-Koi kits sold out quickly!



JUNE

PwC GRAND PRIXMIERE PRESENTED BY CHEVROLET

Hosted outdoors in Cadillac Square as one of the first in-person events to come back on the scene, the PwC Grand Prixmiere, presented by Chevrolet gala raised over \$500,000 to support Belle Isle.



JUNE

VOLUNTEER RE-TRAINING

As facility closure restrictions lifted and the Aquarium and Conservancy's readied for reopening, over 80 volunteers attended trainings to welcome the public back safely and provide an engaging experience for visitors.



[VOLUNTEER on Belle Isle](#)

GREAT LAKES NOW WATCH PARTIES

Belle Isle Conservancy partnered with Detroit Public Television, Great Lakes Now, and WDET to co-host monthly watch parties on Facebook Live. June's episode celebrated the joy of nature through generations and featured Dr. Paul Shuert, Curator of the Belle Isle Aquarium, and his daughter who also pursued a career in marine biology.



JULY

AQUARIUM REOPENING

After 16 months of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Belle Isle Aquarium reopened to the public on July 16th. Belle Isle Conservancy used the closure as an opportunity to make renovations and invested \$1.2M in improvements including upgrading exhibits, stabilizing critical life support systems, modernizing behind the scenes infrastructure, and enhancing the visitor's experience.



[WATCH media coverage of Belle Isle Aquarium Reopening](#)

TEACHER EDUCATION

A partnership with Central Michigan University enabled a successful Teacher Summer Institute on Belle Isle. The Conservancy hosted 26 teachers over two sessions that use the Belle Isle as a "living laboratory" to reignite a passion for the natural sciences. The goal of the program is to arm teachers with tools and examples from Belle Isle to deploy in their classrooms to increase students' excitement and engagement in STEM fields.

AUGUST

FEEDBACK FORM

Over 250 people responded to a feedback form that was deployed in the summer months at the park with the help of two interns that engaged with the public. The form sought input to best align the Conservancy's work with community values for a desirable shared park experience.

[PROVIDE your feedback](#)

IN-PERSON PROGRAMS

Tours of the Aquarium, Conservatory, and Wet Mesic Forest resumed in-person schedules in August and welcomed a total of 190 guests for the year. Nearly 400 students attended in-person field trips on Belle Isle in the Fall season.

OBSERVATION DOCK

A new dock was installed on the canal leading to Lake Tacoma. The dock will be used to educate about water quality and connect the exhibits in the Aquarium to the Detroit River and Great Lakes ecosystems.



AUGUST

BELLE ISLE KAYAK CLUB

A new Kayak Club launched in 2021 as part of the "Keep Belle Isle Beautiful" anti-litter campaign and stewardship program. Volunteers are asked to bring their own kayaks to 'paddle against plastic pollution' along the canals of Belle Isle. Kayak Club is hosted twice a month throughout the cleanup season.



SEPTEMBER

THE GARDEN PARTY ON BELLE ISLE

The Garden Party hosted over 550 guests and raised about \$30,000 to support improvements at the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory.

UNIVERSITY PREP

A new partnership with University Prep Science and Math High School introduces 134 Detroit high school students to aquatic STEM topics and career possibilities through place-based education at the Belle Isle Aquarium.

OCTOBER

POLISH THE JEWEL

Over 400 Belle Isle supporters attended the Polish the Jewel luncheon, which raised over \$165,000. The event was hosted by honorary co-chairs Tom and Diane Schoenith at the Roostertail. Kudos to Belle Isle Conservancy Board Member, Dr. Shauna Diggs, for winning the "Best Hat" award!



[VIEW the Polish the Jewel Photo Album](#)

CULTURAL PASSPORT PROGRAM

The partnership with Detroit Public Schools Community District's Cultural Passport Field Trip Program was renewed for another year. Belle Isle Conservancy will lead field trips for 4,000 2nd graders at the Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory and 4,000 5th graders at the Belle Isle Aquarium for the 2021-2022 school year.

NOVEMBER

FAIRY DOORS

Fairies landed on Belle Isle! A socially distant outdoor installation invited families to search for fairy doors in an interactive scavenger hunt. Each fairy door uncovered a unique story related to the Belle Isle experience. The program engaged over 650 people during the park's off season.



SCOUT PROGRAM

Local boy scout and girl scout troops use Belle Isle activities for earning badges. In 2021, Belle Isle Conservancy hosted 262 scouts - 140 in a virtual setting, 122 in an in-person setting.

DECEMBER

ANNUAL VISITORS

Since reopening in mid-July, 65,324 people have visited America's oldest operating Aquarium. Prior to the pandemic, the peak annual attendance hovered near 175,000 people. The addition of a new donation box with a credit card reader has increased the average donation per visitor exponentially.

DECEMBER

STATE OF THE CONSERVANCY

Moderated by Andre Ash of the Michigan Chronicle, the virtual "State of the Conservancy" event featured an interactive conversation with President & CEO Michele Hodges and the attendees around the origin, mission, and role of the Conservancy on Belle Isle.



STATE OF THE CONSERVANCY

A VIRTUAL SPACE FOR CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

6:00 PM | WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2021



MICHELE HODGES
PRESIDENT & CEO
BELLE ISLE CONSERVANCY



ANDRE ASH
DIGITAL ANCHOR
MICHIGAN CHRONICLE



SHANI J. PENN.
BIC COMMITTEE CHAIR
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



SUBMIT WRITTEN QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2021.
EMAIL: COMMUNITY@BELLEISLECONSERVANCY.ORG SUBJECT LINE: SOTC AND YOUR NAME
WWW.BELLEISLECONSERVANCY.ORG

HOLIDAY HOURS

For the first time since reopening in 2012, the Belle Isle Aquarium is open during the week between the Christmas and New Year holidays.



[VISIT Belle Isle over the holidays](#)