



# The Jasper County Jewel

Jasper County Conservation Board Quarterly Newsletter

Fall 2023

## Park Projects in 2023

Many exciting things are happening in Jasper County parks! Here are updates on three of our major projects.

### Nature Center Project:

Jasper County Conservation is working to construct a state-of-the-art Environmental Education Center on approximately 40 acres of land located just southeast of Newton, Iowa, adjacent to I-80 on the old county care facility park land. The price of Phase 1 of the project is \$2,204,509. Phase 1 is the nature center itself, while Phases 2 and 3 are a maintenance building with outdoor restrooms and a three seasons pavilion for outdoor events and programming. Jasper County Conservation staff and volunteers have already secured the funding for Phase 1 of this project! This includes a recent appropriation of \$400,000 in Jasper County ARPA funding and a \$550,000 Destination Iowa Grant. Ground breaking is expected to begin in 2024!

The Environmental Education Center is not simply a building, but will create an extraordinary location for agricultural research, education, and family enjoyment. The building is approximately 7,200 square feet and features flexible spaces including a display area, laboratory, classrooms, storage, kitchen, outdoor viewing platform, and offices. The facility will also serve as a community venue, capable of holding events for 400 people utilizing the main and lower levels and outdoor spaces. The building has been designed with green energy in mind, with the installation of a photovoltaic array that could generate enough energy to essentially operate “off the grid”. Building mechanical, plumbing, and lighting systems will be extremely efficient and construction materials will be durable, low maintenance, and environmentally friendly. Local products will be utilized to the greatest extent possible.



*Above:* The architect’s rendition of the Environmental Education Center. Ground breaks for this project in 2024.

The facility itself will serve as an educational tool by demonstrating environmentally sustainable construction and operational practices that will reduce our carbon footprint and teach about the impact of green energy on climate change. The 40-Acre Site Plan for the area includes the construction of two ponds, a handicapped accessible paved sculpture walk, community gardens, natural playscape, wetland exploration and education area, amphitheater for outdoor education programming, shelterhouse, soft trail system, group camp area for scouts and other youth groups, and a prairie restoration. Many of these site developments are already completed with other grant funds and donations (these funds are in addition to the \$1,320,000 in donations mentioned previously), including the two ponds, soft trail system, shelterhouse, and pollinator prairie restoration.

We are still fundraising for Phases 2 and 3, so donations are very much welcomed!!

### Mariposa Park’s Bison Ridge Campground:

Bison Ridge Campground began construction during the spring of 2023. Fifteen campsites, with water and electric at each site, are being built, along with a shower house, dump station and

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overflow parking. In addition, a cottage is being built this fall and winter with a second to hopefully follow in 2024-2025. The new campground and the first cottage are all slated to open in 2024! Funding sources for the project include a Land and Water Conservation (LAWCON) grant of \$129,000, matching dollars from Jasper County Conservation, and \$400,000 in Jasper County ARPA money.



Above: The shower house walls are up at Mariposa Park's Bison Ridge Campground.

#### Chichaqua Valley Trail Repair:

The Chichaqua Valley Trail is undergoing some much needed repair work from approximately Indian Creek to W. 108<sup>th</sup> St N. This project includes 4603 SY full depth reclamation, excavation, subgrade prep, and then 4516 SY of 6" continuous reinforced PCC (concrete). This project started August 1st and will be done in mid-September 2023 and is fully funded by Jasper County ARPA dollars totaling \$425,000.

Right: Trail closure on Chichaqua Valley Trail for repairs.



#### New Bench at Ahrens Access

A stone memorial bench was donated by Kinetic Edge to honor our conservation friend, Jay Jensen. The bench is located at Ahrens Access of Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve.



#### A Summer of Fun!

Newton Noon Kiwanis continues to generously sponsor JCCB summer camps and the funding helps Conservation staff to create camps focusing on outdoor skills, wildlife identification, water-sports, art projects, and much more! All of the camps quickly overflowed with participants when the registration opened online in April. Over 150 campers, ages 5 to 16, have spent their summer with Conservation staff being "wild" in 19 different camps that spanned 27 days!

Some of the more popular activities included fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, racing down the giant slip-and-slide, creek stomping, pond netting, games, looking through microscopes, launching rockets, and so much more.

We all had so much fun this summer! A HUGE thank you to the Newton Noon Kiwanis from Jasper County Conservation and summer camp participants for this wonderful learning opportunity! Please contact naturalists Katie or Greg if you have any questions about our summer programming.



Thank you



**Kiwanis**  
Newton Noon

#### Uhlenhopp Cabin Rentals

The cabin located at the beautiful Uhlenhopp Arboretum in eastern Jasper County is available to rent all year long. In addition, the cabin will be decorated for Christmas all through the month of December!

The cabin has a full kitchen with limited pots/pans, cooking utensils, table service, and coffee pot. Kitchen and hand towels are provided, but all bedding and bath towels will need to be brought by the renter. There is one queen-sized bed in the loft and one queen-sized hideaway bed on the lower level. Pets are not allowed.

The cabin may be rented for a minimum of two nights on weekdays, Sunday-Thursday (\$130/night) and a minimum of two nights for weekends, Friday-Saturday (\$150/night). Full week reservations Friday-Friday are \$125/night. Three night stays are required for holiday weekends (\$150/night).

Reservations can be made at the Jasper County Conservation office in Newton, or by calling (641) 792-9780.

## Off the Beaten Path Trail Race

**Saturday, September 23, 9:00 AM**

**Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve**

Registration for the 19th annual trail race will begin at 8:00AM at Ahrens Access of the preserve. The 6K trail race will kick off at 9:00AM and the 3K fun run/walk will begin at 9:15AM.

Further information, including registration forms and directions to Jacob Krumm Nature Preserve, is at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com) and on Jasper County Conservation's Facebook page. All registered runners and walkers will receive a long-sleeve t-shirt. Proceeds from the trail race will benefit Jasper Conservation Connection.



## Older, Wiser, Livelier Seniors (OWLS)

**Jasper County Armory/Annex Building,  
1030 W. 2nd St. S., Newton**

Come for coffee and a short presentation. All programs are from 10:00-11:00 AM unless noted otherwise.

### **Sept. 13—Crisis Canines of the Midlands**

Captain Steve Ashing of the Newton Fire Department will be joined by his partner in training, K9 River, who is a certified Therapy Dog. They will present on how this new program is pairing First Responders with certified Therapy Dogs to provide Animal Assisted Crisis Response to those who respond to and are affected by critical incidents within their communities.

### **Oct. 11—Fall Coaster Craft**

Viann Clancy will bring a fun project to work on that will get us all in the fall spirit. She will show how to make seasonal coasters using stamps that participants will finish and take home, or may wish to give away as a great gift!

### **Nov. 8—Plaid Perch Farm**

Just in time for sweater weather, Greg Padgett will spin us a yarn—from his sustainable sheep farm to demonstrating how he uses natural dyes and spins his wool. Greg is the owner of "Plaid Perch," a farm focused on raising heritage livestock for food and fiber.

### **Dec. 13—Evergreen Centerpieces**

Make your own fresh evergreen centerpiece or swag to take home in this hands-on, holiday program! Pre-registration is required for this program by calling (641) 792-9780.

## Caring For Conservation

**Auction Benefitting Environmental  
Education Center**

**Saturday, December 2, 2023, 6:00pm**

**Sugar Grove Vineyards and Gathering Place  
6602 Ginger Ave., Newton**

Fundraising for the Environmental Education Learning Center continues, and money raised from the Caring for Conservation Auction on December 2 will go towards this state-of-the-art facility which will be located south of Newton.

The doors at Sugar Grove will open at 6:00pm, the silent auction begins at 6:30pm, followed by a live auction. There is no charge to get in, free appetizers and music are provided, along with a cash bar. Many items and experiences have already been donated for this great cause. There will be something for everyone!

We are still looking for donations and sponsorships. All donations are greatly appreciated and are tax deductible. Your donation can be something as simple as a gift certificate to your business, cash donation or an item to contribute to a gift basket. If you have a special skill to offer that could be shared with someone as an unique experience, please consider donating your time. Donations can be mailed or dropped off at the Jasper County Armory/Annex Building in Newton. Contact Jade Read at [jread@jasperia.org](mailto:jread@jasperia.org) for information about making auction donations.

More information about the project can be found at [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com). If you have questions please contact Keri Van Zante, Director, at [kvanzante@jasperia.org](mailto:kvanzante@jasperia.org) or call (641) 792-9780. We hope to see you at this exciting event!

## UTV Tours

**Wednesdays in September**

**9:00 AM-3:00 PM**

**Uhlenhopp Arboretum**

Jasper County Conservation continues to offer tours with our 6 passenger UTV for those who aren't able to hike and view the beauty of our natural areas. Several wonderful volunteers lead these tours.

UTV tours will be offered Wednesdays in September. Please call the JCCB office at (641) 792-9780 to check on availability and to make a reservation. Tours are 1 hour long and can accommodate up to 5 people.

Uhlenhopp Arboretum is located at 2706 E 146th St N, Grinnell, Iowa 50112.

## Halloween Hike

**Friday, October 27, 6:00 PM**

**Newton Izaak Walton League**

This is a fun and educational, *not* scary, event featuring musical skits performed by Newton Community Theatre actors and members of Jasper Conservation Connection. Hikers will meet fun characters along the trail, learn about nature and the environment, and listen to some familiar and fun songs!

Hour-long hikes will begin at 6:00 PM and will depart every 15 minutes. Each time slot can accommodate around 25 hikers. The last hike will begin at 8:00 PM. Families with young children are encouraged to come earlier in the evening.

The hikes will end with the very popular black-light animal tracking. The Emerson Hough Chapter of the Izaak Walton League will serve hotdogs and s'mores at the campfire. Popcorn and drinks will also be available.

Youth under age 12 must be accompanied by an adult. *Admission: free-will donation to JCCB.*



## Hunter's Breakfast

**Saturday, October 28, 6:00-8:00 AM**

**Newton Izaak Walton League**

The public is invited to eat breakfast with our friends at the Newton Izaak Walton League on Pheasant Season opener. The breakfast menu is biscuits and gravy, scrambled eggs, hash browns, sausage and toast for \$10. Jasper County Pheasants Forever is sponsoring some prize drawings and a longest pheasant tail competition.



## Programs at Ashton Observatory

The Ashton Observatory will be open for public programs through the end of October on Saturday nights at 8:00pm. There will be talks inside the building and telescopes will be outside for opening viewing.

The telescopes are operated by the Des Moines Astronomical Society (DMAS). For more information or to reserve a viewing time for a small group, check out their website at [www.dmastronomy.com](http://www.dmastronomy.com).

## Scavenger Hunt 2023

We had more people request another type of scavenger hunt and so here it is! We are challenging participants to solve riddles about something specific in Jasper County Conservation parks. You will have to find wherever the riddle takes you in the park to get the answer.

A riddle will be posted on our Facebook page, @jaspercountyconservation, the first Friday of every month. If you are not on Facebook, you can contact Naturalist Katie Cantu by email for the riddles at [kcantu@jasperia.org](mailto:kcantu@jasperia.org). You may view all posted riddles in the "Jasper County Scavenger Hunt" event link on our Facebook page and you have all year to collect the answers. Please do not share your answers on social media so that everyone has a chance to find them on their own!

Each of the twelve riddle answers will be used at the end of the year to solve one last puzzle. Once you've solved the puzzle, send or bring us your answer by December 31st and you'll be entered into a drawing for a free, one night stay at the Uhlenhopp Arboretum cabin! Good luck, and enjoy your county parks!



## 2023 Photo Contest

Jasper Conservation Connection is looking for your best nature photos! You don't need a fancy camera to participate! A cell phone will work fine. Eight photos will be selected by a JCC committee and featured on blank greeting cards that will be available for purchase. Photos must be taken in Jasper County and can be of wildlife, nature scenes, natural objects, or people in the outdoors. Please submit up to 3 digital photos by emailing them and the release form to [kcantu@jasperia.org](mailto:kcantu@jasperia.org) by **Monday, October 23, 2023**.

The signed release form allows JCC to use the photo and gives a description of where and when it was taken. Photos taken in Jasper County Conservation Board areas may also be used on our website and on [mycountyparks.com](http://mycountyparks.com).

Contest rules and forms can be found at: [www.jaspercountyconservation.com](http://www.jaspercountyconservation.com). For more information, call Jasper County Conservation, (641) 792-9780.



## 2023 Teacher Extern Experience

Jasper County Conservation was fortunate this summer to again have two teacher externs working with us on EE programming. Iowa STEM Teacher Externships, a program of the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council, is supported through state-appropriated funds and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP) Grant for Teacher Externships with Environmental and Conservation Professionals, along with investments by Iowa business and industry partners.

During the summer, educators work side-by-side with knowledgeable and skilled industry employees who help bring the classroom curriculum to life. Teacher Externships provide educators with the exposure to answer questions about real-world application, prepare students for careers they may have in the future, and improve educational experiences.

Our externs have been phenomenal and we really enjoy working with them! This year, our externs were Jarret Horn, Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor at Lynnville-Sully High School and Stacy DeCoster, Biology and General Science Teacher at Grinnell High School. They assisted naturalists with summer camps and public paddles, as well as working on various projects in the parks.

Here is a summary of the program by Jarret Horn: "A majority of my summer was spent assisting with the county's youth programming which was a blast. I particularly enjoyed watching students enjoy the outdoors and engage in critical thinking skills. My favorite camps this summer were the youth survival camp, watersports camp, and junior naturalist camp. In addition to helping with these programs, I also had the opportunity to work on a little bit of park maintenance and was



Above: Teacher Extern Jarret Horn demonstrates how to fillet a fish caught by summer campers before frying it up to eat at his fishing camp.

able to get a behind the scenes look into the work that goes into maintaining the prairies, woods, and waterways that make up the county parks. This was particularly useful in providing examples of real-life challenges that I plan to use in the units I teach on agriculture & natural resource management.

This school year I hope to put to work the experiences and connections that I have gained from my summer with JCCB to provide meaningful learning opportunities for my students. Some of these include designing an edible landscape/food forest project at Uhlenhopp Arboretum and attending a field day on bioreactors for farm field tile lines. I also look forward to also being able to utilize the learning resources that the new nature center will provide when it is built.

These experiences and the great folks I have had the privilege to work with have made it a great summer at Jasper County Conservation!"



Left: Teacher Extern Stacy DeCoster talks about different types of rocks at her Geology Camp.

Following is a summary from Stacy DeCoster:

"I really enjoyed working with Jasper County Conservation this summer! I had a fantastic time assisting at summer camps and being out in our county parks. I can't wait to bring my high school Environmental Science classes out to some of these local parks for education, hiking, and researching some of our native ecosystems.

A highlight of mine was definitely planning and instructing my own geology camp with the help of Ms. Katie Cantu. I don't normally get to teach a passion such as minerals and rocks, so getting a chance to share my collection and information was so much fun. Also, I absolutely loved getting to spend so much time outside with enthusiastic kids out in nature. The programs Jasper County provides to the community are absolutely vital for maintaining our local parks and community.

My hope is that our community becomes more aware of the opportunities county conservation provides and acts accordingly. Taking care of our parks and land is a passion that was only fueled by working with these county conservation employees. I had such a great experience and can't wait to work with them all again!"

Jasper County Conservation Board  
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Newton, IA 50208

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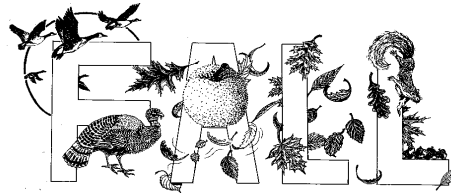
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**A Big Thank You To....**

Volunteer instructors who taught hunter education, the Newton Izaak Walton League for the use of their clubhouse and facilities for programs, Bill Yeager for mowing at Uhlenhopp Arboretum, Gary Morris for mowing at Ashton Park, Brad Van Zante and Kraig Holubar for driving UTV tours, Newton Noon Kiwanis for sponsoring our summer camp programs, Ina Heidemann for supporting our EE program and the Nature Playscape Trail! **Thank you!!**



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