



# ANNUAL INTERPRETIVE REPORT 2022

Newport State Park, Ellison Bay , WI

NARRATIVE: A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF  
NATURALIST

*By Beth Bartoli*

# Annual Interpretive Report – Narrative

Property: Newport State Park      Year: 2022

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## **Personal Services**

Rolling into my 9<sup>th</sup> year as Naturalist at Newport State Park, it felt good to have the Covid restrictions behind us and welcome visitors back for another busy season. Starting in the spring with wildflower, birding, tree and herb hikes is always a welcome sign. In June, we started our ever popular OutWlgo Challenge Hikes again, a bit later than normal as I recovered from knee replacement surgery.

Summer, the official start of the “busy” season, ushered in more visitors and more programs. Citizen Science programs start up, including our ever popular monarch programs. Our OutWlgo weekly Challenge Hikes were once again enthusiastically received and well attended. These hikes ran for 13 weeks, showcasing a different trail in the park each week. A potluck picnic was enjoyed by hikers at the end of the season.

Incorporation of some new drop in programs showcased geology, nature journaling, the Great Lakes and Leave No Trace initiative.

Ever growing in popularity, Newport’s International Dark Sky Park status is always a draw. It is a prime example of using a boon to tourism as an educational opportunity. Planned programs were star gazing, planets and constellations, how to read a star map, full moon hikes and Universe in the Park. Sponsored through Badger Talks from UW-Madison, Graduate astronomy students from Universe in the Park are involved twice a year with our astronomy programs. One of the greatest challenges with these programs is dealing with weather related issues.

Two of our biggest events happen to be at night: our candlelight ski in February and the Perseid Meteor Shower event in August. We have held both of these events for many years, and visitors ask about them months in advance. Each brings in hundreds of visitors. We are most fortunate to have such a strong and deeply involved friends group to support these special events.

Fall brought programs about mushrooms, herb hikes, wild edibles, campfire talks and our annual Wilderness Days over Labor Day weekend. This 2 day event, led by Newport Wilderness Society volunteers, showcases all that makes Newport unique, including habitats, history, flora and fauna.

The biggest challenge was a personal one, as recovering from major knee surgery was a long road. It set me back some, as I didn't start back to work, and then only part time, until the end of May. Also, the park was understaffed this past year, and it took its toll. This is certainly not a new problem for anyone trying to deal with staffing in a tourism driven economy.

### **Non-personal services**

- A. Interpretive Trails -New this year was a revamp of our Forest Heritage booklet for the Upland Trail. As the forest has evolved since its inception, the booklet was completely redone and sign posts were updated and/or moved to coincide with the new book. The park saw a huge project finally get off the ground with the rebuilding of our handicapped accessible Fern Trail boardwalk (Phase 1 of 3). As the old boardwalks were in extreme disrepair, our friends group, the Newport Wilderness Society, with grant money and matching funds, committed to fund and replace the board walks. Along the trail are 7 interactive multi-format signs for use with Discovery pens available at the park office. Visually and hearing impaired individuals are able to enjoy a forest experience. Newport also has a Poetry Trail, with poems from local writers and school groups (changed quarterly).
- B. Wayside Exhibits - NA
- C. Interpretive Center - Since our Nature Center is a multi-purpose room, exhibits are limited. This multi-use room is used daily, providing hands on exhibits as well as posters, displays and reading materials. Live monarch stations are in place (in season). Bird viewing area with binoculars to watch feeders, song bird garden and bird baths are available. There is a furs/mammal showcase area as well as a children's activity area. Seasonal displays are changed regularly. New for the upcoming season is a wall mural in the office to enhance our animal mounts area. Also being upgraded is our geology display.
- D. Audio-visual Programs - Our PowerPoint programs about the Dark Sky Park by far bring in the most visitors, with full media usage geared towards enhancing hikes and programs. "Our Night Sky" and other International Dark Sky Park PowerPoint presentations, including effects of light pollution and the use of good lighting practices are put to use. I designed and scripted a Mammal Tracking PowerPoint class.
- E. Wisconsin Explorer- Though not used as a formal program, the booklets are still popular with visitors and campers. The backpacks are not utilized as much. Visitors do ask if there will be new books soon, as their children have gone through the series of booklets we have.

- F. Interpretive Publications – Forest Heritage Trail (new), summer and winter maps/brochures revised, Our Dark Sky Park brochure, Newport history, geology, birds, mammals, and spring and summer/fall wildflowers brochures.
- G. On Property Investigation and Research - Citizen Science programs start up in the summer months, including bluebird box monitoring for BRAW, monarch monitoring for Monarch Larva Monitoring Project and bat roost monitoring for Wisconsin Bat Program. A few new additions to the park brought more citizen science opportunities. Working closely with the WI Master Naturalist program, 2 groups of recent graduates presented their capstone projects at Newport. Because of their efforts, we have a new songbird garden and an updated Forest Heritage guidebook for the Upland Trail.
- H. Resource management projects – Planted areas for pollinators. New pollinator garden was planted last year as part of a multi-year project. This was planned and planted by 2 volunteers from the WI Master Gardeners. Maintain bird feeder/viewing area established outside the Nature Center. Collaborative effort with DCIST to obtain new boot brushes to help control invasive species.

### **Objectives**

Per DNR mandates, the focus of interpretive services is on natural resources, cultural resources and promoting outdoor recreation, from property to district.

The wilderness aspect of Newport State Park plays so perfectly into the emphasis on the outdoors, nature programs and wilderness experiences. I am grateful to be able to play a part in our visitor's Wisconsin state park experience.

- A. Newport's Interpretive Plan was updated and completed in 2020.
- B. Our objectives as a wilderness park are to be that place where people can discover nature, experience a direct connection with the land, and develop knowledge and skills to become better caretakers of the environment. We strive to provide opportunities for park visitors and staff to understand, appreciate and actively protect Newport State Park's unique resources and the species found within them.

### **Comments, Concerns and Ideas**

Starting out 10 years ago as an inexperienced, seasonal LTE naturalist, I am proud of the interpretive programming that is offered and enjoyed at Newport. Over the years, both the programming as well as myself have been refined, as the line between student and teacher is always fluid. My primary role as a naturalist is to educate the public about the environment and maintain the natural resources, with responsibilities of preserving, restoring, maintaining, and protecting our natural habitats.

I am excited about the prospect of working with Krista Lutzke, the new LTE Natural Resources Educator at Peninsula State Park and our naturalist lead for Door County state park properties. I like the thought of implementing some of the ideas we talked about, such as consolidating and streamlining programs between the parks, sharing resources for drop in programs and possibly being guest presenters for each other. Our season is relatively short, but it takes many hours and much effort to make it all work. Instead of taking the brunt of busy season on individually, collaboration within our parks will keep us connected.

In that same vein, it is good to welcome our new state naturalist, Scott Johnson. New leadership brings new possibilities; always a good thing.

One of my concerns has been an ongoing one. Though it affects me personally, I think I speak for others who share the role I do, that of a year round, LTE naturalist. (I realize the nature of our job often has naturalist positions filled by seasonal staff.) There are times when information may be passed on to FTE naturalists or staff that is not passed on to LTE's. Having to rely on other sources for information, especially that which is time sensitive, is not always best case scenario. Especially at parks like Newport, which has a naturalist staff of one. If we truly are one DNR, I feel it is important to be on the same page with our peers.

Now more than ever, naturalists as educators play a crucial role in helping connect our instant gratification society with the natural world. We are the people on the front lines and are the faces of our parks. I feel being the ambassador of our Wisconsin state parks, Newport in particular, is a privilege afforded to a chosen few. I look forward to a new year, new possibilities and new adventures.

## A Year in Pictures



First Day Hike



A young visitor checking out a monarch egg during a monarch program.





OutWiGo Challenge Hikers.



Master Naturalist Mary O'Grady leading a hike and exploring a historic root cellar.



Universe in the Park, astronomy program.



Showcasing our beautiful park; Wilderness Days History Hike.