



A YEAR IN THE LIFE  
NATURALIST

*By Beth Barto*

# ANNUAL INTERPRETIVE REPORT 2025

Newport State Park, Ellison Bay, WI

# Annual Interpretive Report – Narrative

Property: Newport State Park      Year: 2025

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## Programs

As another year unfolds, I look back at the many programs and projects that took place here at our beautiful park. Our first event started us out with 90 people attending the First Day Hike in January. NWS gathered volunteers to lead hikes, get a warm fire going to great everyone at the end of the hike, and provided hot cocoa and cookies for all.

The seasons often dictate the programs set forth during the busy times, starting with wildflower and birding hikes in the spring. After our long winters, these are a much anticipated and welcome reminder of warmer days.

In May, we had the pleasure of welcoming 80 third graders from Sunrise School in Sturgeon Bay. The students hiked Fern Trail then joined Helen Kenny, Lynn Reuter and me to learn all about the importance of pollinators. The students got to assemble a bee house to take home with them. Many students had not visited Newport before, so it was a great introduction to our park. Our dark sky park status was talked about, stressing the importance of good lighting and protecting our dark skies.

Summer brings the bulk of our programming, with topic ranging from trees, natural herbs, orchids, fossils and geology, ferns, bats, pollinators, ticks, invasive species, park history, flora and fungi and of course, star gazing, just to name a few.

Wilderness Days held over Labor Day weekend brought in hundreds of visitors, as NWS volunteers and I offered 8 different programs and/or hikes. It was a beautiful weekend to showcase our park.

Fall brought more opportunities to talk about the changes in the trees and leaves, the autumn solstice, our cosmos and full moon hikes. In October, I had the opportunity to speak about our dark sky park at the Midwest Area Region Conference of Epsilon Sigma Alpha in Brookfield. This civic organization drew members from 13 states, many who had never heard of a dark sky park before. Some even made time to come up for a visit.

In total, there were 52 programs offered with about 2200 visitors in attendance. (This does not take into account the daily interactions with visitors either out in the park or in the office and Nature Center.)

**Other News:**

- A. Interpretive signs – The songbird garden just outside the office building is filling in nicely. Birds and pollinators enjoy the native plants, trees and shrubs. New this year was an addition of 10 interpretive signs along the garden area, talking about habitat, food, water, protection, nesting and other pertinent topics. Picnic tables in the area were added this year, thanks to NWS. Visitors enjoy sitting there and watching all the activity in the garden.
- B. Nature/Interpretive Center – Our Nature Center/multi-purpose room has interpretive displays being implemented and enhanced every year. There is a natural history area, a dark sky display and a fantastic Newport history area. There are hands on and visual displays throughout the Nature Center, with plans for the final phase of the geology wall going up in 2026.
- C. On Property Investigation and Research - Citizen Science programs start up in the spring and summer months, including bluebird box monitoring for BRAW, monarch monitoring for Monarch Larva Monitoring Project and bat roost monitoring for Wisconsin Bat Program.
- D. Resource management projects – Besides the songbird garden, a new native garden was planted in front of the office building. This was designed and planted by WI Master Naturalist and NWS volunteers and funded by NWS. Along with native species, rocks full of fossils were moved from another area of the park (thank you, Meissner Landscape) to be part of this living classroom.

Newport suffered major damage to the south end of the park after a strong downwind storm moved through the area on August 9<sup>th</sup>. With cleanup going on this winter, we hope to have everything open by summer. This area will be studied as a forest recovery area for years to come. Plans are in the works for summer programs as well as an ongoing Citizen Science project.

In summary, it is the hope of everyone involved with the naturalist programs that our visitors will love their experience at Newport and take it home with them; that curiosity and wonder are the takeaways that will also bring them back to our beautiful park. As I have said many times in my 12 years as the naturalist here, it is a rare privilege to be the ambassador of a park such as Newport, a privilege I do not take lightly.

## Photos from 2025



**First Day Hike**



**Master Naturalist Holly Smith, Fern program**



**Universe in the Park astronomy program**



**Halloween Hike with Charlotte Lukes**



**Songbird Garden**



**Maureen Flatley at the new table**



**Entryway native garden volunteers**



**Sunrise Elementary students; Lynn, Helen and Beth**



**Midwest Area Regional Conference of Epsilon Sigma Alpha**