

Views & News

BLACKWATER FALLS STATE PARK FOUNDATION

Preserve · Protect · Enhance

Fall 2026 · Issue No. 1



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

Welcome to our first issue of the Blackwater Falls State Park Foundation Newsletter! Blackwater Falls State Park Foundation began its development early in 2022 and was recognized in 2023 by the State of West Virginia as a charitable not-for-profit corporation and by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) organization. The mission of the BWFSP Foundation is to preserve, protect and enhance the Blackwater Falls State Park by providing leadership in public outreach, funding and advocacy. While the Foundation's Board of Directors and volunteers work closely with Blackwater Falls State Park's administration and staff, we are an independent organization.

KEY BWFSPF PROJECTS FOR 2026

Dark Sky Initiative

We're committed to seeking International Dark Sky Park certification for Blackwater Falls State Park. We are now in the 2nd Phase of the 3 phase process — this means we achieved the 66% Dark Sky lighting requirement! We plan to submit documentation for provisional certification by the end of this year. Special thanks to the BWFSP administration for their partnership, Matt Sherald (Pimby Energy) for his electrical work, Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation for grant funding, and friends of BWFSP and BWFSP Foundation for financial support and encouragement.

Trail Improvements

BWFSP staff member Roger Lilly and volunteers work to maintain and improve our almost 20 miles of trails. A map with descriptions of the 21 trails is available at the Lodge, Nature Center, and at wvstateparks.com/parks/blackwater-falls-state-park/trails. Highlights and updates of 4 trails are in this issue of the Newsletter.



Kenny Noland, Park Naturalist & Andrea Dalton, Board Member at Moonlight on the Falls Marathon

Playground Design

So far, the Blackwater Falls State Park leadership team and Board members met with three playground design vendors to learn about product materials, structures, design options, installation, maintenance, and cost. By the end of the year a proposal with playground design ideas, budget projections, and fund-raising plans will be finalized. Implementing the Playground Project will be a priority for 2027.

Educational and Community Outreach

Board members drafted a letter to leaders of the Davis and Thomas communities. The purpose was to inform and request support for the Dark Sky Project, request an opportunity to highlight the Project at a future Council meeting, and emphasize the benefits of the Dark Sky Project for the Towns of Davis and Thomas. Board members prepared two new pamphlets for Park visitors that provide information about the BWFSP Foundation and the Dark Sky Project. BWFSP Foundation is committed to promoting and supporting educational activities and programs offered by Blackwater Falls State Park. We also hope our website, Facebook page, and this Newsletter be a resource for information and learning.

Lois Reed

Four Part Harmony: Family, Faith, Music, and Memories

Lois is the Park Hospitality Manager at Blackwater Falls State Park. She has worked at BWFSF for 46 years! Lois agreed to an interview and here is some of her story. We'll begin by opening the front door to the Lodge.

As you enter, the Front Desk and The Smokehouse Restaurant catch your eye. When you walk to the left you enter the Shay Room. It's typically used for nature presentations and other meetings. When Lois entered the Lodge as a young, newly hired summer employee she walked back to that same Shay Room area. However, there was no carpet. The floor was made of black and white tiles. And, rather than being the Shay Room it was known as the Music Room. When seeing the black and white tiled floor she said a memory “popped into my head.” It surprised her.

When Lois was about 8 years old she and other children were playing a game in the Music Room. It included hopping only to the white squares while listening to music on a record player. In retrospect, Lois thinks Harold Walters, the Park Naturalist at the time, may have organized the activity. She also noted that he was the first Park Naturalist in the State.

Although Lois didn't grow up in Tucker County, coming to the Park was, as she described, “part of my growing up.” Our family “would come here for a picnic every Fourth of July.” Also, Virgil Spitzer, the Superintendent at that time, and his wife remained friends with Lois's parents since high school. Family connections to the Park existed before her first work experience.

But how did she become a summer employee? In high school Lois did some job shadowing for elementary education. “I really liked it and thought that was the route I was going.” Her oldest sister went to Potomac State and then to WVU. Lois decided to follow “in the footsteps” of her older sister and go to Shepherd College. It was closer to home and had a smaller campus. Freshman year she took the usual core classes. A new major, Parks and Recreation Management, was created and being promoted. In second semester of Sophomore year she started taking some of those classes. “I really found it intriguing.”

To graduate, an internship experience was required. Shepherd had partnerships with the surrounding national parks, but Lois preferred coming home. Her Dad suggested trying to do an internship at Blackwater Falls State Park.

The head of the College's Parks and Recreation Department and the BWFSF Superintendent at the time, Kenneth Kaplinger Sr., were both helpful. A Summer Internship at the Park was created and approved.

That summer Lois mostly worked the Front Desk. However, Mr. Kaplinger provided her opportunities to rotate to the Recreation Building and the Campground to meet internship requirements. A few days after graduating that following May she was hired to work three to four days a week at the Front Desk. Then, Mr. Kaplinger “approached me and really wanted me to be five days a week.” She still primarily worked at the Front Desk except for two weeks at the end of that summer. Lois shifted over to replace the Naturalist while he took on Lifeguard responsibilities until Pendleton Lake closed.

What were the steps on the way to her current position as the Park Hospitality Manager? In the 1980's the opportunity for the Park to host meetings and events increased and the responsibility for handling group reservations was initially added to Lois's Desk Clerk duties. The Superintendent realized that a person couldn't be a Desk Clerk and handle this important work. Lois said, "he kind of went to bat for me." Over time, the services and facilities expanded even more. In the mid 90's the Lodge became a destination for weddings and then, beginning in 2000, a destination for conferences.

Given her work ethic, effectiveness, and commitment to service, Lois moved up the steps from part-time Desk Clerk to highly valued administrator. (Lois was selected as the Tucker County Employee of the Year in 2019.)

It's clear. Her supervisors saw in her the qualities that fit the unfolding needs of the Park. How did they fit for her?

She said, "I didn't really think about it. I just started handling it. At that point in time, I didn't think whether or not I wanted to continue working." Lois and her husband had their first son and she previously thought about "staying home as a housewife." But bad news arrived- the mining company where her husband worked dissolved. They were without his income and the money he put into retirement. For a while they only had her income and insurance, so continuing to work at the State Park was important for the family. Lois added that her husband, James, was a very proficient bulldozer and heavy equipment operator. They started their own small company. They worked hard and things got better. James successfully subcontracted work at Mount Storm Power Plant, Fairfax Materials, and elsewhere. Lois said her work became "a part of my DNA." Around that time Lois and James also had their second son. The lessons her parents taught her applied: "I grew up with my parents learning to trust the Lord" and "to appreciate what God has given us."

Lois's history with music and singing is as interesting as her history at BWFSP. She grew up singing in her church choir and at home. "My Dad played piano and taught us three part harmony. He often sang with us, making it four parts."

At Shepherd College she didn't think it would be possible to sing in the Choir. Then she found out she didn't have to be a music major, but she did have to try out. She did, made it, and was a Choir member for seven semesters. How important was singing to her? Her department advisor warned her that she may not be able to graduate on time if she continued to schedule choir first every semester. She said to her advisor, "I have to sing every semester and so we'll figure this out."

Singing remains an important part of her. Lois, James, and another couple began singing together as a Southern Gospel quartet. Depending on the song, Lois sings alto, her husband sings bass, and the other couple sing soprano and baritone. The quartet sings at Church and performs quite a few concerts every year. Recently, they opened up at the Tri-County Fair in Petersburg. Lois is very thankful that all of her bosses have "appreciated that my family and my Church family come first."

While at work her Blackwater Falls families come first. “One of my Superintendents here said to me, do you know why you've lasted here so long and why you're able to do what you do? You don't put this job first, you put your families first and you put your faith first.”

Imagine what it takes to figure out arrangements and schedules for family reunions, weddings, and conferences. Lois emphasized the importance of coordinating with, and relying on, other employees - “so many things behind the scenes” show that “people who work here care.”

Families return for reunions and events, one family for 20-25 years. Important connections are also made with wedding parties. “I've enjoyed seeing married couples come and then they start bringing their families.” In some cases, she said, “there's been several generations I've worked with.”



Lois Reed

Yes, generations. Lois brings her grandsons up to see the Falls and Lindy Point. The family typically comes for the Mother's Day buffet. After eating, her grandsons usually ask, “can we go out to look at the Canyon?” Lois added, “This is becoming one of their places as well.” Lois remembered her Grandmother coming to those Fourth of July picnics at the Park when she was growing up. Five generations (Lois's grandmother to Lois, the grandmother) enjoying the Park!

Author's note: Sometimes deciding about a title is difficult. Not this time. “Four Part Harmony: Family, Faith, Music, and Memories” came quickly and seemed to hit the right key for me. I hope it does for you.)



Red Maple Tree at Pendleton Point

October Sky



Viewing Guide

OCTOBER 4

Saturn shines brightly at “opposition” which means the Earth lies directly between the Sun and Saturn. The appearance of Saturn will be near its maximum size making it ideal for visual telescopic viewing.

OCTOBER 7-9

Draconid Meteor Shower peak. Unlike most meteor showers, the Draconids (named for Draco, Greek mythological dragon) are best viewed shortly after dark. The shower originates from debris left behind by Comet Giacobini-Zinner. Best Time: Evening hours, shortly after sunset. Where to Look: Northern sky.

OCTOBER 10

New moon provides the darkest skies of the month.

OCTOBER 21-22

Orionid Meteor Shower peak during late-night hours. The Orionids are produced by debris (ice and rock) from Halley's Comet, the most famous comet in Western history whose orbit is about every 75-76 years. Mark Twain said, “Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.” Twain was born in November 30, 1835, the comet's closest approach to the sun. He died on April 21, 1910, one day after the Comet's closest approach to the Earth again. Fast-moving meteors frequently leave glowing trails visible to the naked eye. The Orionid Meteor Shower occurs each year. Best Time: After midnight until dawn. Where to Look: Southeast toward the constellation Orion.

OCTOBER 26

Hunter's Full Moon. Following the Harvest Moon, the Hunter's Moon traditionally helped hunters track game before winter.

Viewing guide and image of October Sky 2025 provided by Brent Maynard.

The Falls

The Blackwater River is about 30 miles long and winds its way slowly out of the Canaan Valley. (As you may know, the Blackwater River gets its amber color from the tannic acid released by fallen and decaying hemlock and red spruce trees.) Once in Blackwater Falls State Park the River's gradient increases dramatically. This is most apparent when viewing the 57 foot drop of the Falls from the Park's two observation platforms. After this drop the river winds its way through an eight-mile long gorge.

The Park has other overlooks providing wonderful above ground views of the Falls, the River, and the Gorge. What about the underground view? What's below the surface?



Blackwater Falls

Geologically, the foundation of the Falls is Connoquenessing sandstone of the Middle Pottsville Foundation. The name “Connoquenessing” derives the Delaware Indian language meaning, “a long way straight.” The Middle Pottsville Foundation is the stratigraphic unit designation. This designation refers to a volume of rock identifiable by origin, age range, and recognizable rock layer features coming from an easily mapped area. In this instance, the mapped area is regional and distributed across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, Alabama, and West Virginia. Connoquenessing sandstone is primarily quartz which is very hard, resistant to erosion, and frequently associated with structural ledges like the ones you see at the Falls. Below the sandstone geologists identified limestone and shale which erode more quickly. It's important to think of rock formation, natural weathering, and erosion in “geological” time. For instance, the Falls and the Canyon that extends below it, represent millions of years of formation and erosion.

Resources: The Geology of Canaan Valley Resort and Blackwater Falls State Parks by Ken Ashton, Lee Stocks and International Parks (International Parks.org)

Nature's Spa

Whether you prefer walking, hiking, running, or biking at Blackwater Falls State Park you will be treated to some of the most wonderful sights, sounds, and fragrances of life. Trail experiences here are like visiting Nature's Spa--invigorating and rejuvenating. We believe our trails also need care and rejuvenation.

Here are some highlights of four trails with recent updates and plans for care provided by Roger Lilly, the Park's Trail Coordinator.

Elakala Trail

Is about 1 mile roundtrip. It starts at the south end of the Lodge (looking at the Lodge the trail marker is on the left). Once on the trail you will soon cross a bridge followed by "great views of the Elakala Falls". The trail is beautiful and very popular. Roger's update: Because of very frequent use and other factors the trail is in poor condition and in need of improvement. Elakala Trail is one of Roger's priorities!

Gentle Trail

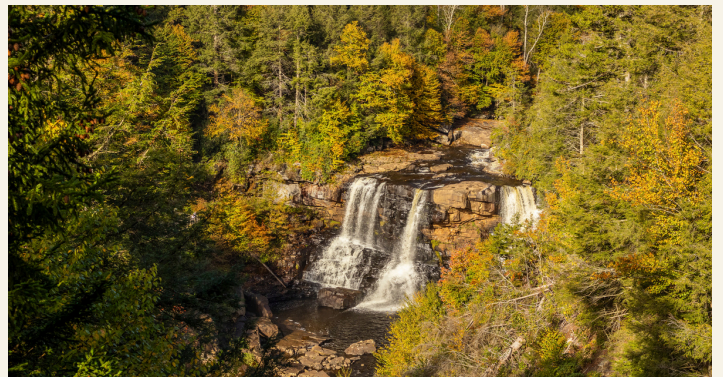
Is a short (1/4 mile) paved path to an observation deck. The Gentle Trail is convenient, handicapped accessible, and provides a stunning view of Blackwater Falls and surroundings. October is the prime time to catch the mix of fall colors, cascading amber-colored river, and blue skies. Roger's update: Recent news of a WDOH Grant awarded to the Park will be used to improve and repave the trail.

Yellow Birch Trail

Is about 3 1/2 miles round trip. It's a moderately difficult hike with, as one hiker wrote, "a back country feel." Large boulders, a meadow, hemlock and birch trees, rhododendron, wildflowers, and a cranberry bog are highlights along the way. Several hikers commented that "rock hopping" was necessary to cross the stream (Engine Run) near the former horse barn. Roger's update: Roger and the Park Superintendent talked about replacing the bridge that used to cross Engine Run. So, "rock hopping" may have to be practiced elsewhere.



Bridge Over Elakala Falls No. 1



Gentle Trail Overlook



Yellow Birch Trail



Lindy Point Overlook

Lindy Point Trail and Overlook

Has been described as, “an easy hike with epic views.” The distance round trip is less than a mile. It’s relatively flat and graced with hemlock and spruce trees, rhododendron and mountail laurel. There is an observation deck at the overlook so the panoramic views can be safely enjoyed and photographed. There is a boardwalk to the deck. Roger’s update: an extension of 150 feet was recently added to the boardwalk and an additional 100 feet of deck boards have been cut in preparation for more construction.



Lindy Point Trailhead

Note: Blackwater Falls State Park has 21 trails comprising almost 20 miles. The Park Trail Map including trail descriptions is available at the Lodge, Nature Center, and online by typing in Blackwater Falls State Park trail map



View From Pendleton Point

PARK HISTORY

Did you know?

Construction of the Pendleton Point Picnic Shelter began in 1955.

With 39 cabins, BWFSP has more cabins than any other state park in WV.

from Ben Leedom, Park Superintendent

WILDLIFE AND PLANT SIGHTINGS

Bald Eagle around Pendleton Lake seen twice a week. In the past, it remained all winter to fish for trout.

Classic Fall flowers, the Asters and Goldenrods, are out in full force.

Fall colors are beginning to tint earliest changing trees.

from Kenny Noland, Park Naturalist

UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

WonderFall Hike

Saturday, October 10th at 10:00 am. Meets at the Sled Run parking lot. Distance: 1.5 miles. Time: 90 minutes. Participants will receive a WV State Parks WonderFALL Walk patch.

Hunter's Moon Hike

Monday, October 26th at 7:00 pm. Meets at the Nature Center. Easy Walking. Time: 1 hr.

SUPERINTENDENT'S NEWS

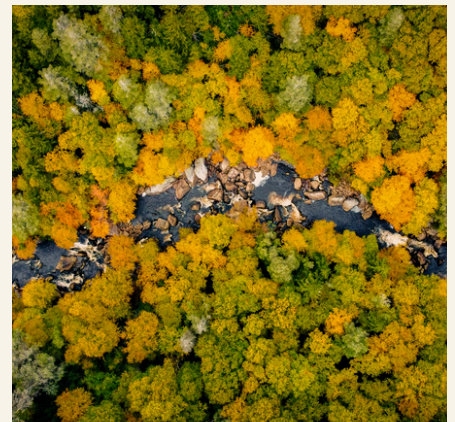
Internet upgrade at Nature Center

New Picnic area at the Trading Post

Improvements in boardwalk to Falls Overlook near Trading Post.

DEP installed an air quality monitor near Nature Center

A portable AED (automated external defibrillator) has been ordered.



Blackwater River

Consider contributing to Blackwater Falls State Park and BWFSP Foundation by volunteering your time, providing financial support, or sharing your experiences of this natural treasure.

New Good News! Travel + Leisure magazine (July 20, 2026 edition) highlighted Blackwater Falls State Park in an article written by Evie Carrick and titled, The Best State Park to Visit in Every U.S. State for Gorgeous Scenery and Outdoor Adventure. She wrote, "This state park, home to a picturesque gorge and waterfall, is not to be missed...."

BWFSP Foundation Officers

Blaine Steensland, President · Brent Maynard, Vice President · Judy Cronauer, Treasurer · Jonathan Moss, Secretary

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