

Conservation Connection

Johnson County Conservation Newsletter

Conservation Bond on the Ballot

This November, Johnson County voters will decide on whether to pass a new \$30 million conservation bond. The new bond will be used to protect local water quality, wildlife habitat, and forests, and to acquire land for parks and trails.

The bond language is as follows: *Shall the County of Johnson, State of Iowa, issue its general obligation bonds in the amount not exceeding the amount of \$30,000,000 for the purpose of acquiring and developing lands with public access provided, in order to protect the water quality in rivers, lakes and streams; protect forests to improve air quality; protect natural areas and wildlife habitat from development; and provide for parks and trails; to be managed by the Johnson County Conservation Board. All expenditures will be subject to an annual independent audit. It is estimated the annual increase in property taxes*

on a residential property with an actual valuation of one hundred thousand dollars resulting from issuing the bonds will be \$7.09. However, the Board of Supervisors may determine in any fiscal year the debt is outstanding to alternatively budget from any other available revenues for the payment of principal, interest, and premium, if any, pursuant to the terms of the bonds.

This bond is considered a continuation of a similar \$20 million bond passed in 2008. Since 2008, funds from that bond were used to acquire 1,167 acres of land open for public access, created 9.2 miles of hard-surfaced trail, and contributed to 15 conservation-related projects across the county. Funds from the 2008 bond were also used to leverage \$17.1 million in additional money through grants, donations and revenues. *For more details about how the 2008 bond was used, see page 4.*



Malinda Reif Reilly Fen and Prairie is a 100-acre JCC property north of Solon that was purchased using funds from the 2008 bond. This property features 53 acres of relic prairie, fen, and wetland. An additional 47 acres will be restored to prairie in coming years.

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JCC Project Updates

The Summer 2024 edition of the Conservation Connection shared information on multiple projects the Johnson County Conservation Board has underway. This edition we will provide readers updates on those projects and some photos from the great progress we've made this summer.

Kent Park Campground:

Phase 1 of the Kent Park Campground Showerhouse project created a mix of confusion and excitement for campers this summer. Contractors began to install the new asphalt road system at the entrance of the campground. Installing the new road and removing the old chip seal roadway created some confusion at times, but park rangers and contractors utilized temporary signs to keep construction on pace and the campground open. Campground visitors said the campground shower house project will be worth these inconveniences when the project is complete.



Kent Park Solar Array:

Contractors were also able to complete the installation the 112.84 kW ground-mounted solar array east of the main roadway. This array, in addition to a 17.8 kW ground-mount solar array at the Conservation Education Center and the 36.96 kW roof-mounted solar array at the Kent Park Headquarters and Maintenance Facility, helps off-set energy costs and demand for energy from our electricity provider. Green energy produced by these solar arrays enters the electrical grid in Kent Park and is available for use throughout the park. Any energy not used in the park is sent out into the energy providers electrical grid and reduces the amount of energy the JCCB's needs to purchase. Solar arrays installed by the Conservation Department are designed and installed with the intent of reducing energy costs, not eliminating them, and showcasing the Conservation Board's support for and use of green energy production.

Clear Creek Trail:

Phase 1 of the Clear Creek Trail Extension to Kent Park is scheduled to go to bid through the Iowa DOT this November. Construction is expected to begin in spring 2025 and will include all of the trail construction, including paving, north of the railroad tracks on Half Moon Avenue and continuing through the driveways of the Oak Hill Cemetery south of Highway 6. This initial phase will also include the construction of an underpass on Highway 6 near Kent Park that will allow trail users to safely cross from the south side of Highway 6 to Kent Park on the north side. Retaining walls, drainage systems, utility relocates, and driveways are numerous in this first phase of the project. The trail will be constructed in the right-of-way of Half Moon Avenue and it is important that design and construction of the trail accommodates the original intent of the right-of-way; to provide drainage and serve as a location for snow storage.

Pechman Creek Delta Restoration:

Hikers at Pechman Creek Delta may have noticed white PVC pipes sticking out of the ground along the path and in the fields. These are hydrology wells and they are being used to study the water table depth throughout the landscape.

JCC staff placed ten of these wells in March of 2023. This summer, ecologists with Resource Environmental Solutions placed an additional five wells at Pechman. The wells are sunk over five feet below the surface and are outfitted with solar-powered data loggers that can track the water table depths automatically and continuously. These wells will be instrumental in planning for the upcoming wetland and prairie restoration at this property, which is anticipated to begin in the next couple years.

Prairie Seeding and Seed Harvests:

Finally, next year, the JCC Natural Resources crew will start the process to restore an additional 50 acres of land at Cedar River Crossing that is currently in row-crop production to prairie. This will make 610 contiguous acres of natural habitat at the property. They will also be reseeding a section of wetland in the northern half of the property that has struggled over the previous two years of drought. To help supply seeds for these restoration projects, our staff is hosting several volunteer prairie seed harvests this fall, with a focus on harvesting wetland species for this project. You can get involved with these projects as a volunteer. For more information, see these events on page 11.



Left: The new 112.84 kW solar array at Kent Park more than doubles the energy-producing capacity of the two other arrays already in the park. Energy produced will supply park operations and park users and also enter back into the electrical grid. **Right:** One of the hydrology wells at Pechman Creek Delta that is being used to study ground water depth throughout the property.

2008 Conservation Bond

Accomplishments

About the 2008 Bond: In 2008, 61% of Johnson County voters approved a \$20 million bond for the Johnson County Conservation Board, the first of its kind in the state of Iowa. This bond authorized JCCB to acquire lands for public access in order to protect the water quality in rivers, lakes, and streams; protect forests; protect wildlife habitat from development; and provide for parks and trails. To date, the bond helped leverage more than \$17.1 million in grants, donations, and revenues. 1,176.7 acres of land (most marginal agriculturally) has been acquired for public use. 9.2 miles of hard-surface trails have been built so far. The following projects are some of the accomplishments from this bond. Four additional projects were accomplished that are not featured here. These projects include the Iowa River Trail Mehaffey Bridge, the Hoover Trail, the Kent Park showerhouse and campground planning and design, and the access at Sutliff Bridge.



Clear Creek Conservation Area and Trail

In 2009, JCCB acquired 87 acres to create this conservation area. 69% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This area protects bottomland forest along Clear Creek and creates a protected habitat corridor for wildlife. In 2010, JCCB constructed 1.3 miles of hard-surfaced trail here. 15% of the cost for this trail development came from the Conservation Bond.



Ciha Fen Preserve

In 2011, JCCB acquired the 80 acres that makes up Ciha Fen Preserve. 40% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. Ciha Fen Preserve features a sand prairie/oak savanna complex. It contains the Ciha Fen, which is one of the only two documented remaining nutrient-poor fens known in the state of Iowa.



Cedar River Crossing

In 2014, JCCB acquired 173.5 acres in the northern half of Cedar River Crossing. 72% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This land has since been restored from row crop production and pasture to a 144-acre wetland complex surrounded by restored prairie and oak savanna.



Pechman Creek Delta

In 2016, JCCB acquired the 380 acres that makes up Pechman Creek Delta. 40% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This property features a large bottomland forest along the Iowa River and Pechman Creek and Slough run through the property. Row-crop land will soon be restored to prairie and wetland.



Kent Park Lake Restoration

Between 2015 and 2019, JCCB led a large process to restore water quality in Kent Park Lake. 45% of the cost of this project came from the Conservation Bond. Some highlights from this project include: 100,000 cubic yards of silt were dredged, six new ponds were created in the watershed, two bioswales were created in parking areas by the lake, and 50 acres of prairie were restored.



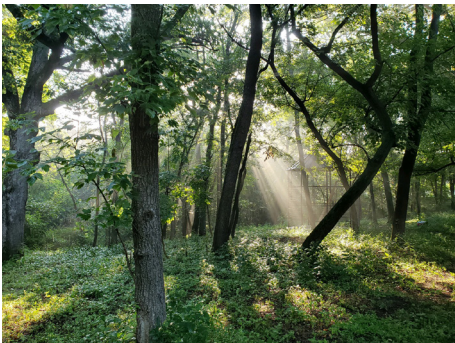
Cangleska Wakan

In 2019, JCCB acquired the 132 acres that makes up Cangleska Wakan. 100% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This property features high quality oak forest and hiking trails. The property is adjacent to Big Grove Preserve, and the connected land creates an important wildlife corridor.



Malinda Reif Reilly Fen and Prairie

In 2020, JCCB acquired the 100 acres that makes up Malinda Reif Reilly Fen and Prairie. 57% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This land features 53 acres of relic prairie, fen, and wetland habitats. An adjacent 47 acres currently in organic hay production will be restored to prairie in coming years.



Two Horse Farm

In 2022, JCCB acquired the 83 acres that make up Two Horse Farm. 49% of the cost came from the Conservation Bond. This property features restored prairie and high quality oak-hickory forest. A portion of land was transferred to Iowa Tribe of Kansas & Nebraska and the JCCB entered into a management agreement with them to assist with the management of the land.

REFLECTIONS ON A WILDERNESS TREK

Makayla Keller - Solon High School Senior and 2024 Idaho Wilderness Trek Participant

I continue to find it hard to explain the experiences I had, things I learned, and friendships I made along this ten-day journey. I tell my friends and family stories of trekking through the trees - some flourishing with leaves providing nice shade for us to rest under and some charred to nothing but the ashy bones of what once had been left behind. Usually I get responses of "Yeah but..." followed by comments of the inability to shower, change clothes, use deodorant, the need to poop in the woods or anything else you can imagine would be "unpleasant" on a backpacking trip. But the funny thing about the "yeah buts" of other people is that they were framed in a negative light, when in the mind of me and my peers, they were just another layer to our stories. I can't tell you how much fun we had swimming in the freezing lakes trying to wash the dirt off us, journeying off the trail searching for a giant rock to pee behind, or the sometimes humorous, sometimes deep conversations surrounding the lake while we filtered water for the next morning's hike.

We spent most of our days in Idaho doing trail work, a task (to my surprise) I thoroughly enjoyed. There's something to be said about my experience with trail work - something I never thought I would have fallen in love with so easily. In the designated Wilderness Areas, motorized tools are not allowed, so we did our work with handsaws, axes, cross-cuts, and katanaboyes. Cutting the trees that obstructed our paths is very hard to describe to others who haven't done this labor. It was more of a feeling than an action. The feeling when you hear the wood cracking at the seams, and every saw stroke gets easier and closer to the end goal. It was a new type of fulfillment: to do something hard, that you've never done before, and the only reward was the fact you actually did it (and the wonderful smell of fresh cut pine of course).

While most of our days were filled with hikes, trailwork, and other miscellaneous tasks, there were times set aside for us to have an opportunity to reflect on our experiences. I kept a journal throughout the ten days and wrote



Above: The crew conducted trailwork in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Selway-Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation. They learned how to use saws and axes to clear fallen trees from the trail.



in it every single day. I've gone back to the journal countless times in the weeks since Idaho. I smile at the dirt smeared pages, seeing my fingerprints embedded onto the paper from a cutting a burnt tree earlier that day. I wrote about my experiences throughout the day, the activities I'd done, the conversations I had; but the most cherished things for me to read were the emotions and peace the wilderness brought to me. Being in the wilderness makes you realize how small our lives are back home - and how we create ourselves to be a "big deal". We (humans) are the center of the universe in our day-to-day lives. We are constantly surrounded by others whether it be at school, work, or home. It is easy to forget there is a world outside of us. But in the wilderness, as I watched the hoverflies buzz, flowers bloom, and water run, I came to understand that all of this continues whether humans are there to see it or not. There's a peace in realizing you are small and insignificant to nature -the true universe- around you.

I'm so thankful for the opportunity to be able to have all these experiences, friendships, and gained knowledge from this trip. Not only am I equipped with new knowledge of the outdoor world, topography, trail work, and basic camping skills, but I've also developed an enthusiasm for backpacking, new friendships, and an "I'm not a quitter!" mindset. I discovered many different flora and fauna in Idaho, but the best thing I discovered was a true love and respect for the wilderness. Not a day goes by where I don't think about the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and the ways it changed my life. The only grief this trip brought to me was that I couldn't do it a thousand times over again.

Banner: Friday Pass dotted in thousands of yellow Glacier Lily. **Top:** The crew pauses to rest while climbing the steep final ascent to Grave Peak. **Middle:** A favorite tradition is "cowboy camping" or sleeping under the stars without a tent. **Bottom:** A trekker climbs the trail up Friday Pass amidst a field of Glacier Lily.





JCC Partners with Project Wingspan

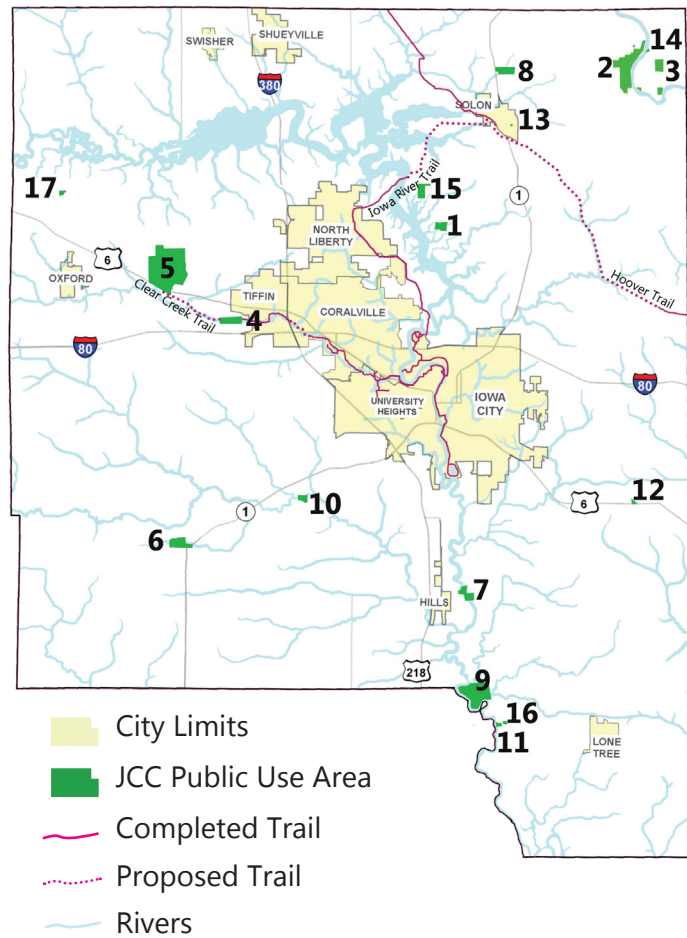
This fall, JCC will partner with Pollinator Partnership to lead special seed harvest events for Project Wingspan. Project Wingspan is a Pollinator Partnership program and is a multi-year landscape scale effort to increase the quality, quantity, and connectivity of pollinator habitat across the Midwest and Great Lakes Region. Their overall goal is to work with volunteers and partners to enhance and secure over 18,000 acres of high-quality habitat that will support pollinators and other wildlife. Get involved by attending any of JCC's Project Wingspan Seed Harvests. These harvests are separate from our

general seed harvest events and require virtual trainings to be completed ahead of time. Scan or click the QR code to head to the training page (<https://www.pollinator.org/wingspan/seed-collection>), watch the video series, sign the waiver, and complete the sign up form to complete training and be certified to collect native seed at these events.



JCC Public Use Areas

1. Cangleska Wakan	132 acres
2. Cedar River Crossing	560 acres
3. Ciha Fen Preserve	81 acres
4. Clear Creek Conservation Area	87 acres
5. F.W. Kent Park	1,062 acres
6. Frytown Conservation Area	94 acres
7. Hills Access	40 acres
8. Malinda Reif Reilly Fen & Prairie	100 acres
9. Pechman Creek Delta	380 acres
10. Phebe Timber	27 acre
11. River Junction Access	12 acres
12. Scott Church Park	5 acres
13. Solon Prairie	3 acres
14. Sutliff Bridge & Access	1/2 acre
15. Two Horse Farm	83 acres
16. Walker Park	3 acres
17. Williams Prairie Preserve	21 acres



Paved Trail Segments Managed by JCC

Clear Creek Trail	1.3 miles
Hoover Trail	6 miles
Iowa River Trail	3.5 miles

More information about JCC public use areas can be found through our website: www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation

Program/Event Guide

How to Sign Up:

Programs are free unless a fee is listed. Sign up for all programs is online at the link below, unless stated otherwise. To sign up, **click or scan** the QR code to the right or go to: <https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/conservation/events>. For questions or sign-up help, call **319-645-1011**.



*Do you require any specific accessibility measures in order to comfortably participate in these programs? Reach out to us at 319-645-1011 for special accommodations.

September

Native Plant Speaker Series & Plant Sale

Sunday, September 8

Speakers from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Plant sale from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Learn to incorporate native plants at home during our 3rd native plant speaker series event. Each event showcases two regional native plant experts and hosts a native plant sale. Troutleaf Native Plants will be the plant vendor for this event.

Explorers: Monarch Migration

Thursday, September 12, 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, Kent Park

Learn about the amazing journey monarch butterflies complete every fall! We will also try to catch and tag monarch butterflies for citizen science. The Explorers series is a program designed for kids K-6 with an accompanying adult.

Autumnal Equinox Walk

Sunday, September 22, 6:00 - 8:00 a.m.

Cedar River Crossing

Join us for a sunrise walk to the astronomical clock at Cedar River Crossing. Reach for equilibrium and celebrate day and night being equal in length. Dogs are welcome, but must remain on a leash.

Sunset Paddle

Tuesday, September 24, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.

Kent Park Lake

Enjoy a sunset paddle with us! This event is designed for beginner paddlers and is open to adults only. Kayaks and PFDs provided.

Nature Buds - Monarchs

Wednesday, September 25, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Nature Buds is a program for kids three to five years old accompanied by a parent. The program includes storytime and a follow-up themed activity.

Fall Foraging for Beginners and Families

Wednesday, September 25, 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.

Cangleska Wakan

Learn the rules for safe foraging, then head out on a naturalist-guided hike, tasting and learning about wild edibles along the way.

October

Wings & Wild Things Festival

Sunday, October 6, 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Celebrate Iowa's natural world with this new hands-on festival featuring live raptor meet & greets, a native plant sale, education stations, guided bird walks, knowledgeable speakers, fishing, a hawk

watch, reptile demonstrations, and more. Grab food from local food trucks, and enjoy a day spent exploring Johnson County's Kent Park.

Native Plant Speaker Series & Plant Sale

Sunday, October 6

Speakers from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Plant sale from 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Learn to incorporate native plants at home during our 4th native plant speaker series event. Each event features two regional native plant experts and hosts a native plant sale. Troutleaf Native Plants will be the plant vendor for this event. The plant sale will happen during the Wings & Wild Things Festival.

Nature Buds - Leaves

Wednesday, October 16, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Fireside Crafts: Foraged Fall Wreaths

Tuesday, October 22, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Youth Group Camp Lodge, F.W. Kent Park

Grab a friend and join us for our fall fireside craft programs! In October, create a fall wreath using natural materials collected from JCC sites.

November

Fall Seed Bouquets

Saturday, November 2, 9:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come build some beautiful fall arrangements using plants from Kent Park's prairies. There will be some guidance on how to make a good arrangement. We will harvest native plants that have gone to seed, so after you are done with your fall decor, sprinkle the seeds into an area where they can grow!

Coiled Basketry

Friday, November 15, 9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Fee: \$10

Learn a technique to make coiled baskets from natural materials (harvested locally) and how to preserve them. Each participant will be given all of the supplies required to create a small decorative basket we will make during class.

Fireside Crafts: Bookbinding w/ Pressed Flowers

Tuesday, November 19, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Youth Group Camp Lodge, F.W. Kent Park

Cost: \$15

Grab a friend and join us for our fall fireside craft programs! In November, create a coptic stitch book that will be great for nature journaling. Participants may choose to include pressed flowers collected from JCC sites on their covers. Many materials used will be low-impact and upcycled.

Nature Buds - Spiders

Wednesday, November 20, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

December

Soil Painting

Thursday, December 5, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Come have a relaxing evening painting with a naturalist, using only different colored soils collected locally. December 5th is World Soil Day, a day to raise awareness of the importance of healthy soil and soil sustainability.

Nature Buds - Beavers

Wednesday, December 11, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Explorers: Paper Making with Foraged Plants

Thursday, December 12, 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Create your own homemade paper with foraged plants from Kent Park! Participants will learn the process of papermaking and can add native flower seeds so the paper can even be planted. Explorers is a series designed for kids K-6 with an adult.

Volunteer Events

Volunteer Monarch Tagging

We need volunteers to help us catch wild monarch butterflies for tagging! Tagged butterflies will journey 2,000 miles to their winter home in Mexico. Events are dependent on weather conditions and location may be changed depending on monarch activity. Updates will be shared via email with all registered participants.

Wednesday, August 28, 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Cedar River Crossing

Wednesday, Sept 4, 9:00-11:00 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, Sept 11, 9:00-11:00 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Prairie Seed Harvests

Helping to harvest prairie seeds allows volunteers to take up an active role in the restoration of our native ecosystems. This year, volunteers will have the opportunity to help with three different kinds of harvests, our standard JCC seed harvests, Senior Seed Harvests, and Project Wingspan, a program in collaboration with Pollinator Partnership. To attend a standard JCC Harvest or a Senior Seed Harvest, volunteers need only register and show up. Instruction will be provided at the start of the event. Standard JCC Harvests often involve hiking up to one mile one direction, and involve trekking into the prairie vegetation to harvest. The Senior Seed Harvests are open to all people, but are designed to be more accessible. These will be close to parking areas and target species can be harvested from paved surfaces. To attend a Project Wingspan event, volunteers will need to complete simple online training, sign up through Project Wingspan and sign a waiver, and register for the event through our MyCountyParks event page. For more Project Wingspan info and the link, see page 8. All locations are subject to change based on seed conditions. Updates will be shared via email with all registered participants. Events are dependent on weather and dry seed conditions.

General JCC Prairie Seed Harvests:

Wednesday, September 25, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, October 9, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Pechman Creek Delta – seed harvest by kayak!

Wednesday, October 16, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Knight Prairie Pavilion, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, October 30, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
William's Prairie State Preserve

Sunday, November 3, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
High Point Overlook, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, November 13, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Williams Prairie State Preserve

Senior Seed Harvests:

Wednesday, October 16, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Dam Parking Area, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, October 23, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Red Haw Shelter, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, October 30, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Project Wingspan Seed Harvests

(These events require online training, see page 8.)

Wednesday, September 18, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Cedar River Crossing, North Entrance

Wednesday, October 2, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
Conservation Education Center, F.W. Kent Park

Wednesday, October 23, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Cedar River Crossing, North Entrance

Wednesday, November 6, 4:00 - 5:30 p.m.
Knight Prairie Pavilion, F.W. Kent Park

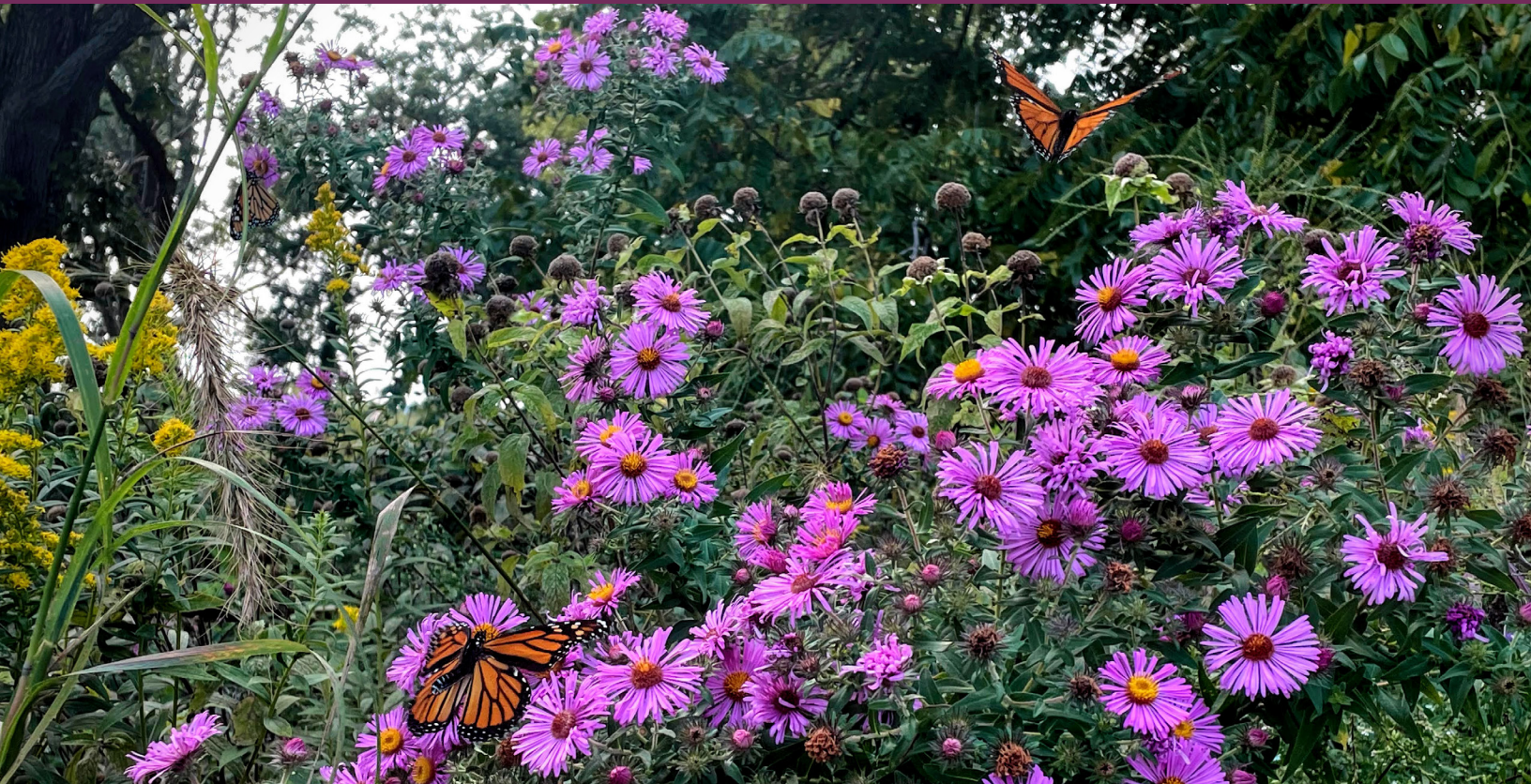


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Monarch butterflies nectar from New England Aster blooms at Cedar River Crossing.