



LOWER CATO FALLS COUNTY PARK



Aerial Imagery Source: Manitowoc County, 2020.

Address

12700 County Rd JJ, Reedsville, WI 54230

Municipality

Town of Cato

Site Size

84 Acres

Amenities

Restrooms, Picnic Tables/Area, Grills, Dogs (leashed) Allowed, Pavilion, Playground Equipment, Parking Area, Hiking Trails, Disc Golf, Scenic Views, Fishing



Summary

Lower Cato Falls County Park was the second facility in the County Park System that was classified as a county park. This park is in the Town of Cato about one mile east of the unincorporated settlement of Clarks Mills near the geographic center of the county. This 84-acre park was purchased in two stages, the last acquisition of 50 acres occurred in 1974. The park is located between CTH "JJ" and the Manitowoc River. Playground equipment, picnic tables, grills, toilets, an 18-hole disc golf course, four (4) wooden staircases that lead to the lower levels of the park and hard surface driveway and parking area are provided in or near the picnic area.



An 18-hole disc golf course is the only disc golf course within the park system.

The park consists of scenic wooded hills, rock outcroppings, and a wide variety of vegetative cover. The river, at the point where the park is located, flows through a narrow gorge and cascades over a falls into a large pool to form a nice fishing hole as well as a very scenic river landscape. This park offers approximately 2,040 feet of river frontage.

Issues/Opportunities

The park's amenities draws in a high amount of visitors on an annual basis. Due to its popularity, there have been some wear and tear on the amenities that the county will need to keep maintaining on an annual basis. Trail erosion due to visitors as well as steep slope has been a particular concern in the past. Wet, worn trails are not usable at times and need boardwalks and proper signage.

Invasive species that have been identified at this park include houndstongue, autumn olive, orange hawkweed, oxeye daisy, water forget-me-not, and bittersweet nightshade.

There is a possibility to expand upon the current trail network within the park - in particular the eastern side of the park boundary. Increased signage throughout the park could increase awareness of park boundaries as visitors going onto private property has been a concern in the past.

The Ice Age Trail has an unconnected segment that passes directly south of the park along County Rd JJ. Future camping opportunities within the park would provide shelter and rest for those through travelers using the trail.

There is a possibility to allow bow hunting within certain areas of the park to help manage the deer population.

Recent Enhancements

A new pavilion was constructed in 2022. The new pavilion is equipped with restrooms, a water fountain, and a sheltered picnic area. The pavilion is available to rent for private gatherings and parties. New playground equipment was also purchased and installed on the east side of the park in 2022.



2022 park enhancements include a new pavilion and playground equipment

Future Enhancements

Future enhancements for Lower Cato Falls County park include replacing the asphalt on the parking lot, replacing the center and eastern staircases, replacing the playground equipment on the west side of the park and replacing the staircase on the west side of the park. All of these projects are planned to be completed from the years 2024 - 2027 according to the Capital Improvements Plan found on pages 55 and 56 of this plan.

With grant funding provided by the US Forest Service, the county and partners will mitigate EAB impacts by installing native trees within the park day-use areas in Fall 2023.



Aging playground on the west side of the park will be replaced in the coming years.

There has also been discussion about paving the western portion of the access road as this is currently gravel and can acquire damage due to heavy rains or heavy use of vehicles. A future pavilion with restrooms has also been discussed for the western portion of the park as well as the addition of camping facilities.