



FAIRMONT STATE  
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Office of Sponsored Programs

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## SPECIAL FEATURE

### Fairmont State's Falcon Park & Trail Offers Serenity at School

Nature is no secret in wild and wonderful West Virginia, but sometimes it can get lost between busy buildings on Fairmont State's campus. To highlight some of the natural landscape of our University, OSP's final Special Feature of this academic year is going to focus on Falcon Park & Trail.

Beginning as a class project in 2019, Falcon Park was realized in 2021 as a 7.9-acre green space offering various opportunities for individuals to engage with nature. Designed spaces within Falcon Park include an open-air community space, a hammock hangout area, a sensory garden, a bird-watching area, a yurt, citizen science stations, and a trail system. This trail system, called Falcon Trail, is

an approximately mile-long trail weaving through a wooded section of the campus' green space with an east and west trailhead.

"Falcon Park is an oasis nestled in Fairmont State's campus. Visitors can enjoy a winding single-track trail that weaves through the woods with gentle elevation changes, creating a pleasant and accessible walk. Whether you are seeking solitude, connection with nature, or a quiet place to relax, Falcon Park provides a welcoming outdoor escape right here on campus," stated Jan Kiger, Associate Professor of Outdoor Recreation Leadership, Falcon Park & Trail Coordinator, and force behind the creation of Falcon Park & Trail.

Beyond outdoor recreation, Falcon Park & Trail also offers educational engagement in outdoor leadership, tourism, agriculture, and more. Similarly, the yurt, which was funded by a grant from Equitrans Midstream, provides various classes and programming through an indoor setting in an outdoor space. Students have been able to camp out overnight in the yurt, which is in the process of getting solar power.

Additional funding to establish and develop Falcon Park & Trail was secured from the Carl Del Signore Foundation as well as the FirstEnergy Foundation.

Kiger shared, "The Equitrans Midstream grant enabled us to create an indoor/outdoor classroom. This allows us to schedule outdoor experiences and have a weather-safe location nearby. It is multipurpose and it has added a great feature to the outdoor academic experience on campus."

Students who study Outdoor Leadership can gain experience in trail management through Falcon Park & Trail activities such as trail planning, building and improvement, evaluation, and park development. Additionally, volunteer opportunities are available in trail monitor, trail maintenance crew, and trail guide positions. Fairmont State students can even sign up for *RECR 1154: Recreation Field Work I* to get credit for these activities.

In 2024, the National Wildlife Federation named Falcon Park a certified Wildlife Habitat, which is a designation given to natural areas that provide essential resources to support wildlife. Through sustainable practices, Falcon Park currently provides an abundant habitat for birds, butterflies, chipmunks, turtles, and other native wildlife.

Falcon Park & Trail also promotes the values of Leave No Trace, a set of ethics meant to help people protect and conserve the natural world around them. Leave No Trace visitor expectations include (1) Be prepared, (2) Stay on the trail, (3) Carry your trash out, (4) Enjoy the wonders of nature, (5) "Only you can prevent forest fires," (6) Respect wildlife, and (7) Be considerate of others.

"Leave no trace ethics are important to apply not just in the woods, but in everyday life, because they promote responsibility, respect,

and sustainability in how we interact with our surroundings and other people," said Kiger.

Ultimately, Falcon Park & Trail emphasizes a full range of physical, mental, and cognitive engagement by promoting long-term relationships between humans and nature. The diverse programming opportunities, such as applied math, art, nature therapy, environmental stewardship, and citizen science, promote healthier social behavior, connect participants to the environment, and educate the population about sustainable practices. As Falcon Park & Trail continues to expand with the development of additional infrastructure, programming, events, and the creation of the new Outdoor Leadership degree program, Fairmont State hopes to encourage more members of the Falcon community to engage with the outdoors.

Faculty, staff, students, and community members who would like to access Falcon Trail can enter the trailheads at the top of Squibb Wilson Boulevard or by Fairmont State's tennis courts. Anyone interested in volunteering with or learning more about Falcon Park & Trail can reach out to [falconpark@fairmontstate.edu](mailto:falconpark@fairmontstate.edu).



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