

Proposal for CAS support for the Boone County Nature School

Background. Columbia Audubon Society has long supported nature-based education, particularly as a Partner in Education with the Columbia Public Schools. Our program of nature education includes the Band with Nature 2nd grade field trips, scholarships for teacher training at the National Audubon Society Hog Island facility in Maine, and financial support for students participating in the Teton Science School in Wyoming and at the Great Smoky Mountains Adventure in Tennessee.

Historically, the CAS Board and Membership have also supported the concept of a nature school for multi-day immersion of older (fifth-grade) students in a nature-oriented curriculum at a natural setting. CAS supported the previous unsuccessful attempt to establish a nature school at Rock Bridge State Park.

The current Boone County Nature School project has several attractive features:

1. Property: Land for the school has already been donated to the Missouri Department of Conservation and subsequently been leased to the Columbia Public schools for a period of 40 years. The initial development of the nature school will take place on 118 acres, with 99 additional acres available in future years. This property is adjacent to the 1500-acre Three Creeks Conservation Area, a high-quality natural area available for use by the students.
2. Classroom Building: The core of the nature school project will be a simple school building with four classrooms designed for 25 students each, plus a wet lab/multipurpose room available for projects. The wet lab will serve as an interface between student activities in the classroom and in the field. The planners intend that the design of the building will be environmentally friendly and able to accommodate hands-on nature-education activities.
3. Other structures. Current plans call for several additional amenities to allow activities to occur away from the school building. In addition to hiking trails and modular toilets, plans call for two additional structures:
 - a. Pavilion. A large, open-air educational pavilion with modern amenities (electrical supply, lights, and ceiling fans) would serve as an outdoor classroom. The design of this structure is modeled after a structure at Prairie Forks Conservation Area (estimated cost \$50,000).
 - b. Council House. The other freestanding structure was inspired by the 'Council House' at the Great Smoky Mountains Adventure science camp. This will be a rustic, wood-frame structure with tiers of bench seating around an open-air fire pit (see photos). This structure would be designed to seat all 100+ students for assemblies or special presentations. (estimated cost \$30,000).

The CAS board met with the Nature School planning and fund-raising team (Roger Still, Mike Szydowski (CPS) and Bryan Flowers (MDC) on Dec 18, 2019. The architectural design process is underway, with interested parties providing input and financial support. The curriculum for the nature school will evolve over time, even beyond the planned fall 2021 grand opening. However, Columbia Public Schools wants

to start using the facility as early as fall 2020. The planning team has set a date of March 31, 2020 for a ceremonial ground-breaking, at which time they intend to announce plans for the immediate construction of the Pavilion and Council House projects.

Proposal: We propose that CAS donate \$30,000 to the Nature School Project, dedicated to the construction of the Council House.

Costs: A donation of \$30,000 would cover the cost of the Council House and provide CAS the opportunity to name the facility. This would be a substantial donation, but CAS is in good financial shape. In 2011, CAS received a large bequest from the estate of Joseph 'Bo' Koster, a native of Mexico MO who was a research scientist at Washington University in St. Louis. This donation was the core endowment for establishment of the Columbia Audubon Society Foundation, managed by the Community Foundation of Central Missouri. Since the establishment of the foundation, our portfolio has grown substantially, such that a donation of \$30,000 would not reduce the principal of the Koster bequest.

Benefits: The proposed donation would support a project that aligns closely with the CAS mission of nature education, and our support for this project would have multiple long-term benefits for our organization. The society and our benefactor would be honored by having our names associated with an important and highly visible part of the Nature School facility, the "Koster-Columbia Audubon Council House". We would be collaborating with the Columbia Public Schools and Missouri Department of Conservation, both of whom bring extensive expertise in nature education. Cohorts of 100 students would spend a week at the Nature School during their 5th-grade year – more than a thousand kids over an academic year. This program would reach more kids and give them a more in-depth nature experience than Audubon could attempt on our own. CAS would also benefit in the short term from the positive recognition as an early supporter of the Nature School project.

Approval process. The CAS by-laws require that both the board and the membership consider the appropriateness of any large expenditures or land transactions. According to Article VI, Second 5: "Substantial gifts to the Society, substantial expenditures, or the undertaking of major projects by the Society must be discussed with the general membership of the Society, either at a regular meeting or at a special meeting called for the specific purpose to consider such gifts, expenditures or projects, prior to final acceptance or approval by the Board of Directors." We will discuss this proposal with the membership at a special General Membership meeting at 6 p.m. on February 19, 2020, at the Unitarian Universalist Church, 2615 Shepard Blvd. Members who cannot attend the meeting are invited to submit written comments on the proposed Nature School donation by February 19; send comments to Columbia Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1331, Columbia, MO 65205. With membership input, the board plans to hold a final vote on the proposal before March 1.