

Lost and Found



**LOST
RIVER
CAVE**
NATURE CENTER

A CASE FOR THE NATURE CENTER AT LOST RIVER CAVE



Lost

There's something about unplugging from stress and worry, stepping outside, and entering nature.

There, we *find* ourselves.

There, we begin to think and feel differently about ourselves and others. We become connected, inspired, hopeful, and engaged.

Be that as it may, today's children are growing up indoors in spite of evidence that shows outdoor play ignites the mind, body, and spirit.

Our culture has shifted from healthy daily interaction with the outdoors to a lifestyle that is sedentary and disconnected from the simple joy of being in nature. Children and their parents are unsure of what to do in an unstructured outdoor setting. Busy parents do not have the time to learn how to provide nature-centered activities for their children.

Lost River Cave provides an alternative to sitting indoors—a place where the whole family can enjoy the physical and mental health benefits of time spent outside, in nature, discovering what's been lost.

Found

Lost River Cave serves as a place of inspiration for thousands, as well as a haven of biodiversity—preserving 70 acres of woods and wetland, meadow and prairie, river and cave. Each year more than 60,000 visitors, including **more than 20,000 children, make their own discoveries and find themselves at Lost River Cave.**

Now, after a quarter century of cultivating, maintaining and sharing this wonder of nature with others, **Lost River Cave is undertaking a comprehensive campaign to create a Nature Center campus with classroom and exhibit spaces, an amphitheater, and a pavilion** to host new programs of personal, educational, and environmental discovery.

There is no other full-scale nature center with a professional staff and educational programs within a 21-county area of South Central Kentucky. With the addition of new indoor and outdoor learning opportunities at Lost River Cave, visitors of all ages will learn to experience nature with appreciation and understanding.

At the new Nature Center, visitors will have greater opportunities to *find* answers to their questions through examination and experimentation. Children's curiosity will be kindled and families will be better equipped to explore and learn about the natural world around them through creative programming, interactive exhibits, and hands-on classroom activities.

Nature and place-based educational programs build environmental literacy and connect young people to the outdoors. Lost River Cave's programs inspire thousands of students to develop a personal connection to the natural world and encourage responsible actions to sustain it.

“Nature is the foundation on which we live, dream, and play. Without it, we have nothing. Having nature nearby keeps us connected with our inner Self, our reason for being ... our hopes and dreams.”

Dorian and Elaine Walker

These programs focus on scientific principles, critical-thinking skills, hands-on research, and inquiry-based learning.

With a focus on the STEAM disciplines—Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics—Lost River Cave programs help students develop a greater awareness of complex environmental issues through hands-on field experiences using the latest tools and technology.

The new Nature Center campus will offer visitors a mix of naturalist/field science equipment, taxidermy, and interactive displays. Each display will showcase the flora, fauna, geological, and cultural history unique to this area's terrain.

A Campaign for *Lost and Found*

Just as social skills are not found on social media, an understanding of nature is not found on a screen. In his book, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv sounds an alarm regarding the rise in attention disorders and depression among children, and its corollary connection: a serious “outdoor” deficiency.

“Time in nature is not leisure time,” Louv writes. “It is an essential investment in our children’s health (and also, by the way, in our own).”

This is why it is so important for Lost River Cave staff and volunteers to leverage their expertise and help launch a movement for experiencing nature ... unplugged.

Lost River Cave’s 70 acres contain seven unique microclimates. It is a premier outdoor learning destination for all of South Central Kentucky, providing a safe space to relax outdoors, a go-to place for urban families and a community gathering venue for visitors of all ages.

The good news: Lost River Cave is in high demand. The bad news: due to the limitations of its existing facilities, some school field trips and groups are turned away because Lost River Cave cannot accommodate them all at once. With the addition of the Nature Center campus, capacity will double to serve more visitors and provide more community programming.

The need is evident. Yet, current revenue streams cannot create the new Nature Center campus or support the associated program expenses.

The major goals of a campaign for *Lost and Found* are capital construction and renovations; program and staff support; and a sustainability fund.

“Every child needs at least one adult in their lives to teach them to observe and appreciate the wonder of nature. I had such an adult. The Lost River Cave Nature Center will provide not only the place for observation and discovery, but guidance that teaches children to be careful observers of the natural world around us. In addition, the adults involved in this effort will find their interests rekindled. The children benefit, the adults benefit, the community benefits, and above all the planet benefits.”

Karen Henrickson, Lost River Cave Volunteer

Capital: Construction and Renovations

At the Nature Center, visitors will be greeted by trained volunteers. Information on where to go and what to do will be made readily available. Visitors may view the large map to become oriented; wander through the dioramas describing various habitats found nearby; review the geology and history of the land; or begin their own personal discoveries.



Discovery drawers and changeable graphic panels will complement each diorama. Staff will be on hand to present educational programs. Throughout the space, specially designed crates will provide materials for hands-on learning experiences such as bird watching with binoculars and field guidebooks. Themed reader rails near spacious windows will showcase the various views of the park and allow visitors to enjoy the view year-round. Comfortable seating will encourage visitors to linger and recharge as others in their party experience Lost River Cave in their own ways.

Additionally, Lost River Cave will create an outdoor amphitheater and beautiful pavilion on nearby grounds to increase capacity and expand opportunities for public and private use of the Nature Center campus. Everything about the Nature Center, amphitheater, and pavilion will draw visitors into their own transformational discoveries.

Program and Staff Support

With the addition of the Nature Center campus, it is important to secure supplementary funding to support expanded programming and staff needed to

lay the foundation for success going forward. Three years' support will help fund three full time positions: the Nature Center Director, a Volunteer Coordinator, and a Development Coordinator. It will also provide funds for program marketing and outreach; staff and training for nature-centered and place-based educational programs; volunteer training; community education events; and a wide variety of activities such as workshops, field research, classroom activities, guided hikes, and day camps.

Sustainability Fund

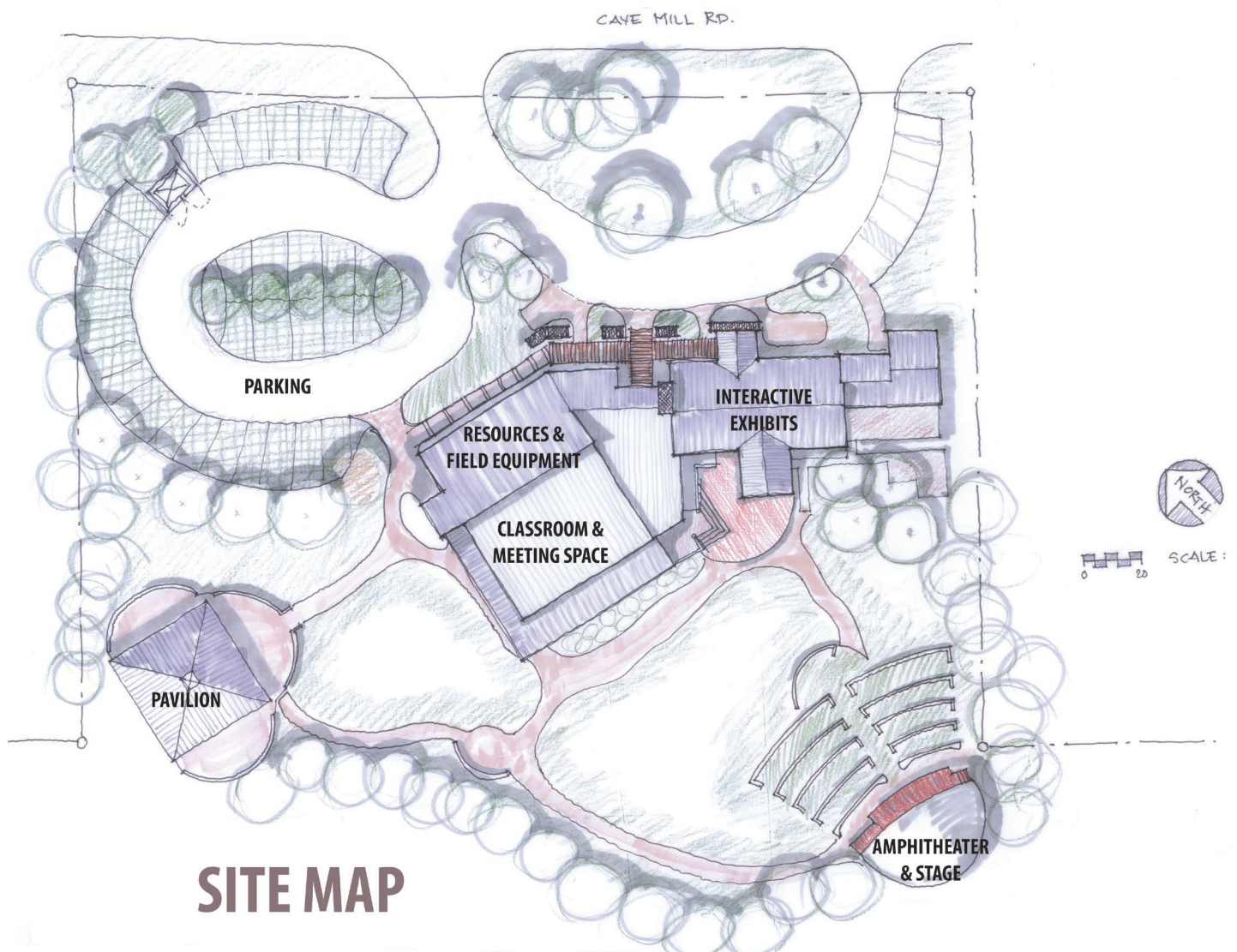
Whenever an organization makes capital additions and renovations, it is wise to provide corresponding support for ongoing maintenance of its newly created facilities as well as the assets it already manages. Therefore, a campaign for *Lost and Found* will provide a Sustainability Fund to support overhead and operating costs for the new Nature Center campus facilities and the 70-acre park that is the foundation for this expansion. It will help provide maintenance funding for areas of the park to be utilized in expanded educational programming such as the prairie, wetland, trails, and cave ecosystem.

Impact: Educational and Economic

Lost River Cave provides educational and economic benefits to the region and state. In addition to serving thousands of visitors, Lost River Cave participates with Western Kentucky University (WKU) and others on projects of shared interest, such as the 2011 project: *An Online Geotour-based Forum for Promoting Communication, Sustainability, and Outreach in Iconic Karst Landscapes*.

WKU students often find a springboard into their careers through professional training and experiences at Lost River Cave. Jobs and internships support a variety of WKU majors including Geology, Forestry, Biology, Non-Profit Management, Hospitality, and Recreation Administration. Students also regularly volunteer at Lost River Cave to remove invasive plants on park grounds.

With the addition of a Nature Center campus and support for programs and operations, Lost River Cave will be in an even better position to serve as an educational venue and economic driver for the wider community.



Campaign Goals for *Lost and Found*

We welcome the financial transparency and accountability that come with inviting donors to be part of Lost River Cave. Our mission is *to provide outdoor experiences that nurture a connection to nature and stewardship of the Karst environment; and to foster an appreciation of Lost River Cave’s cultural history and geologic significance.* With your generous support, more visitors will be able to experience this natural treasure in a more meaningful way.

They may come to see what was lost, but it is our hope that in coming, they will *find* themselves.

Construction and Renovations \$2,840,000

Nature Center Campus (Nature Center, Amphitheater, Pavilion), \$2,000,000

Exhibits, Interpretive Signage, Furniture, Fixtures, Equipment, \$440,000

Property Improvements, \$200,000

Debt Service (mortgage) on Nature Center Property, \$200,000

Program and Staff Support \$ 860,000

Sustainability Fund \$ 550,000

Total Goal \$4,250,000



FRONT ELEVATION



SIDE ELEVATION



“I wanted to know the name of
every stone and flower and insect
and bird and beast. I wanted to know where
it got its color, where it got its life -
but there was no one there to tell me.”

- George Washington Carver

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