



Usage of BBNC Property for Members' Only Events

PLEASE READ & SAVE THIS - it is important. Version 1.2* - 7/13/2025

(Summary: See Section C below)

The Westminster Astronomical Society has a great relationship with the folks at Bear Branch Nature Center (BBNC) based on mutual respect for each organization's needs and concerns. Two of the benefits WASI members enjoy are access to Bear Branch's dark site for observing, and the use of our observatory. These are located on Carroll County's Bear Branch Nature Center property. It's important to follow a few rules to nurture our relationship with the County and remain in compliance with current written agreements.

The park is officially closed at dusk. If you would like access to it for the use of the observatory, or just to enjoy the dark skies, perhaps with your own equipment, please adhere to these procedures.

A. Requesting Usage (*not yet reserved date(s)*)

If you want to use the site after dark, you must request permission first.

1. Send a request to Jeff Burns (jburns@curtisswright.com) and Laurie Ansorge (treasurer@westminsterastro.org) at least 48 hours in advance. It's OK to ask for access for several nights.
2. Jeff or Laurie will contact Bear Branch's staff (cc'ing the other) and collect any additional information (e.g., if others are using the property and will communicate with them as well).
3. Only after an affirmative answer are we allowed on the site after dark. The police enforce this for all of the County's parks.
4. If you are requesting use of the observatory, and wish to share your time with others, you will be the main responsible party.
5. Members appreciate getting a message when the site is open for viewing!
6. Please *don't* contact BBNC about WASI activities. We work through agreed upon designated contacts.

B. Scheduled Reservation for use of Property (*dates(s) already on the calendar*)

Sometimes WASI will send an email to the membership letting us know we have access on a particular night. Please feel free to come following these procedures:

1. First, email Jeff jburns@curtisswright.com and Laurie treasurer@westminsterastro.org. WASI and County insurance requires that we know who is there after dark - the email is our form of documentation, and for reporting.

EXCEPTION: When we have advertised public star parties (for example, the standing one on the second Saturday of every month in conjunction with the Planetarium show), there is no need to ask for permission or to notify Jeff and Laurie that you will be coming. *RSVP for outreach events is always helpful for planning.*

2. Do note that at times there are some scheduling conflicts with BBNC's activities. They may even have the parking lights on. *Do not ask for them to be turned off*, as we are their guests and the lights will be turned off at the end of the function. Our agreement acknowledges the need to preserve dark skies so they understand our needs.

3. Recognize that we do not have permission to use the Nature Center's building unless there is a public event going on, like a planetarium show. (*If additional facilities are needed, see section "A" above to request them.*)
4. We go to a dark site for, well, darkness! **It is best if you can arrive while it's still light outside.** Otherwise, please be respectful of observers who may be there and follow these safe observing practices:
 - a) Please drive carefully as there may be people milling around. Try to use MINIMAL or no headlights, or park further away from viewing area(s).
 - b) Please turn off your interior lights to minimize white light in the observing area and preserve night vision.
 - c) Please turn off all lights as soon as you park. Use red or amber flashlights as you exit your vehicle, unload your car, and during observation sessions.
 - d) If you are already there observing, recognize that some lights on approaching cars are inevitable, so maintain a sense of humor and decorum. Some stray photons won't kill anyone, and those approaching may not be able to fully control the situation. You can preserve your night vision by looking away.
5. The police do patrol the site and are aware of our activities. Per our agreement with the County, **members must carry and be prepared to present a current membership card.** Cards and replacements can be requested from: treasurer@westminsterastro.org.
6. Please don't leave anything behind when you leave. If you find something that may belong to someone else, a message to our main@westminsterastro.groups.io is appreciated as is packing out trash.
7. This is a wilderness area. Try not to do anything that will attract wildlife for their safety and yours.
8. Use of the observatory is only for those of us who have been **certified to operate it by the Observatory Director (Jeff Burns)**. He conducts training sessions from time to time and welcomes requests from any WASI member who wishes to become certified. It's a pretty easy process! And we'd very much like to have more members using that big telescope.
9. If you're there during the day to do maintenance on the observatory, please stop by BBNC's office and let them know what you're up to. The same 48-hour notice is a courtesy since BBNC has limited, busy staff. Of course, they do have the right to postpone our access in favor of their priorities.

C. A Quick Summary:

- Send **requests to use the property or observatory**
 - to Jeff Burns (jburns@curtisswright.com) and Laurie Ansorge (treasurer@westminsterastro.org) at least 48 hours in advance.
 - Wait for an affirmative response, and any additional details on use of property.
- For "**members' only**" usage *and/or when we already have club permission to use property*, email your intention to attend to:
 - Jeff Burns (jburns@curtisswright.com) and Laurie Ansorge (treasurer@westminsterastro.org)
- ✓ Bring your membership card.
- ✓ Be "light" responsible.
- ✓ Take back what you brought.

*04-13-2025 v1.1 Updates – formatting and explanation are added for clarity.

*07-13-2025 v1.2 Updates – updating Jeff Burns' email & added emphasis to areas commonly overlooked.