

History of Kentucky 4-H Camps

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West Kentucky 4-H Camp—Dawson Springs, Kentucky (1950)

Discussions regarding the leasing of a 400-acre parcel of land at Dawson Springs began in 1947. The land was slated to become Dawson Springs State Park. Much of the negotiations centered around a 1935 deed which stipulated that if the site ceased to be used as a state park, it would revert back to the United States government, who had conveyed it to the state. In 1950, the land was procured by the University of Kentucky through a 99-year lease with the Commonwealth of Kentucky for use as a 4-H camp. In 1951, the Commonwealth of Kentucky gave the camp to the University of Kentucky.

The original facilities included a 14-acre lake with a beach and bathing facilities, bath houses and other structures. The funds needed to build a kitchen, dining hall and staff quarters were donated, by and large, by W.C. Sparks in honor of his father, William Ballard Sparks. The central camp building bears the name, Sparks Hall.

The 450-acre camp has a 14-acre fresh water lake. The buildings, athletic fields, recreation areas, roads and parking areas are situated on an approximately 20-acre area. The remainder of the area is utilized for environmental education and is bisected by several miles of trails. The camp serves 37 counties and has a camping capacity of 386.

Today, the camp's facilities include an archery range, shooting sports range, basketball court, softball field, soccer/football field, [swimming pool with diving board](#), large modern dining hall, Sparks Hall (used now as a multipurpose meeting/classroom building), [a shelter house for small gatherings](#), a [pavilion](#), a [nature hut](#), a crafts room, a country store for souvenirs and snacks, [heated cabins](#) and bath houses, and a [horse arena](#). The lake creates opportunities for fishing, [canoeing](#), hiking, and wetlands studies. A state of the art challenge course program with seven [high elements](#) and twelve [low elements](#) are settings for exciting and highly effective leadership and teambuilding training. Evening programs can be conducted in its rustic campfire or singing areas. A full time on-site camp director position was added in 2006 to coordinate and supervise all programs at the camp.