

Fall Creek Falls State Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

Reviewed 2024



Table of Contents

Park Purpose, History and Description	3
Goals, Objectives and Action Plans	4
THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship	4
THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All.....	7
THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities	9
THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence	11
Park Overview	13
Site Fact Sheet.....	13
Key Attractions.....	14
Site and Operations Assessment	15
Site and Facility Assessment	15
Operational Assessment	21
Summary of Key Recommendations.....	29
Resource Management Plan	31
Resource Management Objectives	31
Resource Inventory and Assessment	35
Management Strategies.....	36
Land Management Strategies	38
Interpretive Programming and Education Plan	39
Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals.....	39
Strategic Programs and Services.....	40
Financial Performance Goals	43

Park Purpose, History, and Description

Fall Creek Falls State Park encompasses approximately 25,568 acres along the western escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau. It is part of a large complex of State and non-government organization-owned lands, with neighbors that include Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, State of Tennessee Division of Forestry, The Nature Conservancy, Boy Scouts of America, and the newly formed Scotts Gulf State Wilderness Park. The parkland is situated along Cane Creek with headwaters near Little Mountain and flows approximately 25 miles through a deep gorge, emptying into the Caney Fork River. Hundreds of smaller streams flow into Cane Creek. The elevation changes along these streams and creeks result in waterfalls and cascades ranging from inches high to hundreds of feet. The park's namesake drops 256 ft. into the gorge and is the highest waterfall east of the Rocky Mountains. Piney Creek, Raccoon Creek, Rock House Creek, and Cane Creek Falls and Cascades are other dramatic water features in the park. 16,500 acres of the park are designated as class 2 natural areas. The park is covered in mature, healthy stands of Oak-Hickory forests, with groves of Hemlocks shading thick stands of Mountain Laurel and Rhododendron along the creeks and streams. The park's amenities include 226 campsites, 2 group camps, 2 group lodges, the park visitor center, nature center, village green and pool, boat dock, and over 50 miles of hiking trails. The hospitality offerings at the park include the Lodge, with 85 rooms, restaurant, and conference space, an 18-hole golf course, and 30 landside and lakeside cabins.

The area now known as Fall Creek Falls State Park has long been regarded as a true wilderness area. Indigenous cultures such as the Cherokee, Yuchi, and possibly Creek peoples visited this land on hunting excursions, no known permanent settlements existed in the area. Around 1760, the long hunters began making their way over the plateau, camping, hunting, and fishing along what was then called Cane Creek. White settlement was slow in the area and by 1900 only a few sparse mountain communities, of mostly Scots, Irish, and English families were scattered along Cane Creek. In 1930 James Maurice Taft first visited these communities, preaching in local churches and teaching in the schools. Known locally as "Judge" Taft, he was the first to recognize the need to preserve this land and develop it for recreation purposes. Judge Taft's efforts led to the federal government designating the area as a National Recreation Demonstration area in 1935. The land was turned over to the State of Tennessee as a State Park in 1944. In 1965 plans were put into action to develop the central area of the park. This included constructing the Fall Creek Falls Lake and building the first Hotel that sat along its shore. On July 2nd, 1972, the park was designated a State Resort Park.

The purpose of Fall Creek Falls is essentially two-fold. The first, and primary purpose is to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources located within the park's borders. There is no draw to the area without these features. Every decision should be guided first and foremost by the effect they would have on the resource and the impact they would have on our ability to actively steward this property. The second purpose is to provide a well-managed entry point for visitors to experience the park's resources. This includes managing our amenities and operations at the highest standard possible with the understanding that this park sets the tone in many ways for the entire State Park System. The safety of our guests and the quality of their experience is of utmost importance. This land has been home to countless people from equally countless backgrounds throughout the years. It has provided shelter, safety, and provision to travelers and settlers alike. As a state park, we honor this heritage by seeking to provide guests with safety and shelter as well as the provision that comes from time and experience in nature. The entire purpose of our guest-driven services is to encourage appreciation for the natural world and inspire stewardship.

Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks' core values and can contribute to the State Park's mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- To encourage more buy-in with staff, we will create opportunities to educate and engage team members in the stewardship process.
- Fall Creek Falls will develop an onboarding process for all employees that incorporates knowledge of the park's story to help employees develop a "sense of place" for the park.
- We will pursue partnerships with Bledsoe and Van Buren County historical societies to involve them in telling the park story and ensure we are using all our resources to "tell full stories".
- Fall Creek Falls will work with local tourism boards to encourage resource-based recreation opportunities and train stewards to manage county-held resources by involving them in park stewardship projects.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to partner with local groups such as chambers of commerce, tourism boards, schools and school clubs, community centers, and community action groups, and provide presentations and training to encourage better stewardship practices such as native plant landscaping, waste reduction, and volunteer organization.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve Wildlife Management Area access to hunters to create buy-in among the hunting public and align them with the park's goals.
- Fall Creek Falls will utilize social media as a platform to inform the public about the values, principles, and methodology behind our rules and regulations to help them understand why we prohibit or encourage certain behaviors and practices.
- Fall Creek Falls will partner with local photographers to create an inventory of pictures, "worth a thousand words" to be used in social media posts, campaigns, and donation drives to inspire appreciation for the natural resources we steward.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Action Plan:

- Fall Creek Falls Rangers will be tasked through performance plans to engage in resource management activities. We will attempt to augment staffing patterns when necessary to ensure Rangers have time to devote to RM projects.
- Fall Creek Falls Rangers tasked with supervising seasonal interpretive recreators will ensure they each have an ongoing resource management project.

- Fall Creek Falls will continue the FCF Resource Survey project, which is a comprehensive resource inventory project. This project will inventory, map, and describe resources in the park utilizing the GIS division’s OneSmartPark application. This data will then be used by university partners, currently Tennessee Technological University and Middle Tennessee State University, to coordinate more in-depth, discipline-specific research.
- Fall Creek Falls will identify areas that can be restored to native grassland/meadowland to improve habitat. These areas may be sections currently maintained by mowing or areas that have suffered recent storm damage.
- Fall Creek Falls will increase efforts to patrol and maintain park boundaries. There are incursions that need to be addressed. These points will be identified and documented, and then appropriate action will follow such as re-surveying boundary lines, installing gates, positing boundary lines, deploying camera systems, etc. New boundaries resulting from the 2023 Transfer of Jurisdiction with TWRA will be scouted and marked in cooperation with the WMA Manager.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue in wild hog remediation efforts. Wild hogs are destroying sensitive habitats across the park. Our partnerships with external State and Federal agencies will continue, and we will seek new partnerships to help us deal with this issue. A focus will be placed on remediating areas that have been disturbed. It isn’t enough to simply remove the hogs, the habitat must be restored. Monitoring of these efforts may be facilitated through our university partners within the FCF Resource Survey project.
- Fall Creek Falls is partnered with TWRA in developing our 365-acre lake as a Bill Dance Signature Series Lake. Rangers will lead the effort to remove invasive aquatic plants, primarily phragmites, and systematically replace them with native aquatic plants. This will be done “cove by cove” gradually leading to the entire lake. This progressive attack will ensure that adequate fish habitat will remain while native introductions have time to mature.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to train not only Rangers but other park staff to identify and remove invasive species. Within this step, an invasive removal plan will be created and augmented as needed. This will identify priority areas and designate the treatment plan for the identified area.
- Fall Creek Falls has a substantial amount of hazard trees that need to be removed. Accompanying this project will be a concurrent plan to “give back” in the areas where heavy tree removal occurs. This will include plantings of native shrubs and trees or converting to grassy wooded meadows that will enhance the habitat and aesthetic quality of these areas without presenting the same hazards in the future.
- Fall Creek Falls maintains a relationship with Responsible Stewardship. They are a nonprofit organization that organizes, schedules, and performs trash clean-ups. Responsible Stewardship refers to Fall Creek Falls as their “home”. We will strengthen this relationship and work to create a “sense of place” for that group here at FCF. We will utilize their services to maintain the park and work to provide them with opportunities to host their training, in-services, and recruitment events here at the park.
- Fall Creek Falls manages property that the Trail of Tears once crossed. A management plan is being developed for this area that will include initially scheduling clean-ups with Responsible Stewardship and park staff. This area will be more proactively patrolled and monitored. Discussions with IPE staff have already taken place. The next step will be site evaluations conducted by the State Archaeologists office. Following that, we will invite

the Eastern Band of the Cherokee people to be part of the planning process. Their input will guide the direction of the project.

- Fall Creek Falls will identify and document all cemeteries on park property. This information will be added to the digital archive and included in the FCF Resource Survey. Training will be organized relating to cemetery preservation and preservation strategies will be employed.
- The areas around the seven main waterfalls are badly eroded due to visitor impact. These areas will be evaluated, and individual erosion remediation plans will be put in place to restore and bolster these areas for the future.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve wildlife habitat in developed areas. Plans will be made to reduce light pollution, add native plants to landscaping, and add structures such as bat boxes, bird boxes, and waterfowl nesting areas where applicable.
- The trails at Fall Creek Falls lead our guests into some of the most pristine wilderness in this region. These trails need attention. A systematic plan will be developed to address trail issues in high-traffic areas first, and then to backcountry areas. Rangers will be trained to do quality trail maintenance and the park will seek to locate partners that can assist. We have several Scout Lodges already helping with this as well as Mountain Bike clubs. The Upper and Lower Loop trails are the main backcountry trails in the park and have both been closed since 2020. The suspension bridges crossing Cane Creek on both trails were lost due to flooding. The bridge on the Upper Loop is a current capital project. Funding hasn't yet been acquired for the Lower Loop bridge. This is a high priority for the park. A plan is in place to see the loop trails reopened with new bridges and maintaining their current route. However, a plan needs to be developed to address the Lower Loop area if replacing the suspension bridge is not possible. The Lower Loop trail may need to be adjusted into an out and back trail. This would not be easy or ideal, but those miles of trail are among the most beautiful in the park and efforts to keep them open in some form must be taken. There is a potential for a low water / dry season crossing if we moved the trail downstream past the "sink". This would, however, add the complication of needing a high-water notice to the trail system information.
- Fall Creek Falls has several historic structures on the park dating from the early days of the park. Many are CCC and WPA projects. These structures need to be preserved as they are integral to the park's history. Projects are currently ongoing to replace "like-kind" siding at the group camps and the historic park maintenance area. The Fire tower is an interesting piece of park history. It was originally constructed at the Chickamauga battlefield to allow Civil War Veterans to have an aerial look at the battlefield and describe troop movements to historians. It was then disassembled and reassembled on Bradden's Knob where it served as a fire tower for a number of years. It is currently on the National Registry of Historic Places. The fire tower was a popular interpretive location, and the "Life of a Lookout" program was a beloved offering. This provided guests with a true "wow moment" experience, as they were able to take in views of the park from the highest elevation in the park. A plan needs to be developed to: 1) address structural concerns to the tower to preserve it, and 2) make it safe for guests to visit. There is a lookout house at the foot of the tower that was built around 1950. This house was long used as a Ranger/seasonal residence. This house and the access road to it, need attention. A plan to address the preservation of this structure is badly needed. It is a unique area in the park and has value as both a staff house and potentially as a dynamically priced rental

option. The preservation of the structures is of utmost importance. The use of the area can be determined by the park's needs in the future.

- The caves at Fall Creek Falls are a resource that has been largely neglected. We will continue to utilize the Formstack registration process to monitor how many people are legally using our caves. New surveys of the caves will be facilitated through a partnership with the Southeastern Regional Association of the National Speleological Society and the TN Cave survey group. This group's involvement will also increase our monitoring efforts allowing us more opportunity to prevent vandalism and entry into sensitive systems.
- Priority will be given to identifying and acquiring land that satisfies three primary goals.
 - The protection of viewsheds.
 - The protection of watersheds
 - The inclusion of unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resource stewardship.

Action Plan:

- Rangers have trained in GIS capabilities and are logging information from the FCF Resource Survey into OneSmartPark. Until recently, various resources were monitored using a plethora of programs which was confusing and inefficient.
- Traffic and pedestrian monitors need to be implemented in high-traffic and sensitive areas to gauge the use and number of incursions in closed areas to help us identify strategies to mitigate overuse and address illegal entry.
- Fall Creek Falls needs to implement more camera traps across the park to monitor wildlife. We are currently using cameras to monitor wild hog activity with great success, which can be replicated for other species.
- The archive at Fall Creek Falls is sufficient to begin the digital archive process but is far from user-friendly. A new archive system needs to be implemented to make research more efficient.
- Regular species inventory needs to be collected and digitized to establish a baseline for certain species and to better monitor others.
- Climate Change is a major issue all environmental stewards are facing. A weather station will be installed at the park to monitor daily weather and establish baseline climate data for reference and future research. Fall Creek Falls is blessed to have had employees recording weather since the 1990s and this data needs to be digitized for comparison. This will also provide guests with an option to get real-time weather data from the park during their stay.

THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan:

- Fall Creek Falls will continue to implement plans to ensure we are “telling full stories”. We will focus on researching and developing programs that highlight lesser-known elements of our cultural history such as the role of women on the frontier, Native American perspectives, and minority groups from the area.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to strive to develop a “sense of place” among communities that traditionally have been underrepresented in previous efforts. An example would be Camp Yoshi, this group has partnered with the park to provide excursions in the park for the African American community.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to evaluate our program offerings, retail merchandise, and events to ensure we are projecting TSP values and ensuring a welcoming environment.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to improve accessibility to our facilities, working to make all retail operations, front country overlooks, and shelters ADA accessible.
- Fall Creek Falls will install adaptive kayak launches in Fall Creek Falls Lake.
- Fall Creek Falls will designate and develop sections of trail to accommodate all-terrain wheelchairs to provide access to guests with mobility challenges.
- Fall Creek Falls will develop mountain bike trail sections that are accessible by adaptive mountain bikes.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to develop virtual reality experiences at the Nature Center to allow for an immersive experience for guests who cannot access the park’s trails and backcountry areas.
- Fall Creek Falls will work to diversity among our workforce.
- Fall Creek Falls will strive to create opportunities to provide programming for diverse community bases. This may lead to partnerships with schools, businesses, etc.

Objective: *high-quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan:

- Ensure all Rangers, AmeriCorps members, and Seasonal Interpretive Recreators are up to date with training as determined by IPE staff.
- The Park Manager and supervising Rangers will ensure program offerings fall thematically within the park's primary and secondary themes.
- Locate opportunities to improve training for programmers.
- Develop initiatives to create programmers within “support staff” and hospitality roles. Empowering these interested employees will allow them to invest in the park and contribute to overall programming efforts.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to partner with the Van Buren Health Council, and Bledsoe County Tourism Board to engage with local stakeholders and seek to develop outreach leading to program opportunities and a general sharing of resources to tell the park’s story in conjunction with the county’s story.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to work with IPE staff to workshop initiatives and goal implementation to ensure individual staff members have autonomy over program offerings which allows for diversification of program offerings and perspectives.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to develop multimedia program offerings that will allow us to reach more people. Offerings such as digital, audio, and virtual reality programs will be explored.

Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure the representation of Tennessee’s natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- New program offerings will be evaluated by Park Rangers/Managers to determine if they meet our interpretive themes before being offered.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to operate a “two-prong” rule that ensures offerings satisfy at least two elements of the overall TSP mission statement.
- Thematically appropriate programs will be added to Fall Creek Falls’ seasonal special events, such as Christmas on the Mountain, Spooktacular, Fourth of July, etc., to ensure these are not simply community events but high-quality program opportunities.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to implement more regularly scheduled program events that allow for exercise within the resource. Staff-led activities will be offered that serve to teach guests about outdoor recreation opportunities and highlight their health-related benefits.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to host resource experience-based programs to encourage and instruct in safe resource-based activities. This may be introductory outdoor skills programs or more advanced programs such as a ranger-led backpacking trip.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to use digital and social media to deliver PSAs about the benefits of resource-based recreation and their associated health benefits to the public.

THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be well maintained with facilities and amenities that delight visitors and make Tennesseans proud.

Objective: *Improve maintenance:* Improve overall maintenance and upkeep of all park facilities and amenities that contribute to meaningful visitor experiences.

Action Plan:

- Yearly plans will be made to identify and assign a priority value to maintenance projects.
- Top 15 suggestions will be compiled by a team effort to ensure various park perspectives are considered in determining these projects.
- Supervisors and leads over operations such as the Visitor Center, Nature Center, Group Camps, bunks, etc., will be tasked with identifying their own “Top 5” projects each year to ensure stock is being taken of these facilities and that maintenance remains a priority.
- Park Management and Maintenance staff will audit and utilize the computerized maintenance system (HIPPO).
- Park Management will seek to develop maintenance staff members by exploring training opportunities and allowing for certain “passion projects” such as small pollinator gardens, bridges, etc., to be developed by maintenance staff to ensure they have rewarding and meaningful careers.
- Park Management will seek to capitalize on interest among maintenance staff members to be involved in certain resource management projects to further develop their involvement in the park.
- Park Management will place a priority on ensuring maintenance staff have access to good quality tools and equipment to ensure their efficiency.

- Park Operations maintenance supervisors will give input to a Memorandum of Understanding with the Hospitality maintenance teams. (Done, waiting on Staff certifications and Vendors Preference Addendums)
- Maintenance supervisors will seek to develop and offer cross-training opportunities to other park maintenance teams, i.e., Golf Course, Lodge, and Park maintenance teams, to make our overall maintenance abilities stronger and allow for more ease in addressing staff vacancies or management changes.
- Structures that require continuous maintenance will be evaluated for removal and or replacement as necessary.
- Maintenance staff will be included in more discussions about the park's future to ensure their perspectives are considered in those decision-making processes.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve fundraising abilities to achieve and exceed donation goals to allow for more flexibility in funding needed maintenance projects.
- Fall Creek Falls is fortunate to have several groups with a vested interest in the park. These volunteer groups often offer their services to maintain certain areas of the park. Rangers and operation leads will be tasked with providing opportunities to capitalize on these groups' services to serve as an additional resource in maintaining areas and facilities.
- Fall Creek Falls will identify areas suitable for "rewilding". These areas will be marginal land that is not within the utilized curtilage of facilities and operations that can be allowed to return to a native state allowing for both more and better wildlife habitat, as well as reducing the amount of area that needs to be maintained.
- Interpretive signage will be developed and deployed that explains the rewilding process to ensure guests that these are purposeful areas being designated as habitats and not areas neglected by groundskeepers.
- Improve equipment storage areas for satellite areas such as the Village Green and Campground.

Objective: *Better Park accessibility:* ensure all visitors have opportunities for meaningful experiences in every Tennessee State Park.

Action Plan:

- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve accessibility to all park operations by ensuring ADA accessibility to the facilities.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to develop adaptive mountain bike trails that allow for ADA off-road bicycle use.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to develop trails accessible by all-terrain wheelchairs and acquire a fleet of these to be made available to park guests.
- Fall Creek Falls will maintain and add color-blind viewfinders at certain overlook areas.
- Certain applicable overlooks such as Cane Creek Falls, Millikan's, and Fall Creek Falls will be improved to allow for more handicap accessibility.
- Partnerships with groups that focus on serving diverse communities will be forged and maintained to create a more diverse user base.
- Fall Creek Falls will establish itself as a leader in diversity initiatives by providing opportunity and usable space to groups that espouse and further these goals.
- Rangers and staff will seek to develop and implement programs or facilitate professional programs that engage those with mental disabilities.

- Fall Creek Falls will seek to partner with Veteran groups, allowing for experiences in Nature that have been proven to aid in PTSD and related issues that many veterans experience.

Objective: *Quality and welcoming facilities and amenities:* provide high-quality and well-planned facilities and amenities that enrich the visitor experience.

Action Plan:

- Fall Creek Falls will seek to implement “guest survey” projects that may be conducted by volunteers, seasonals, or full-time employees to establish some baselines for what guests want to see improved on.
- Departmental goals within Access 2030 will be considered during any capitol project meetings or facility design/re-design processes.
- Fall Creek Falls staff members will be encouraged and allowed to visit other parks and similar recreational facilities to develop a better idea of possibilities to enrich visitor experiences.
- Care will be taken to ensure retail experiences are thematically appropriate and that merchandise is reflective of the TSP mission.

THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be a national model for operational excellence in a state park system.

Objective: *Support and empower our people:* support and empower our workforce by creating a caring environment that encourages professional growth and great customer service.

Action Plan:

- Ensure opportunities for staff recognition always exist.
- Ensure opportunities for training and development.
- Supervisors will be tasked with meeting their employees regularly to gauge where they are and what their career goals, family situations, and general suggestions are to ensure employees have an opportunity outside performance plan meetings to discuss concerns and express themselves.
- Retention training and resources will be made available to supervisors to encourage engagement with employees.
- Events such as staff meetings, outings, and retreats will be encouraged to encourage familiarity and fellowship among teams.
- Supervisors will be encouraged to develop “resource inventories” for their teams. These documents will list employees and their interests, goals, skills, and passions. These will be utilized when assigning special projects or when evaluating training opportunities.
- Park Management will arrange opportunities for TDEC leadership to address park employees and explain training, promotional, and employee development opportunities to encourage team members to invest in.
- Supervisors will work to actively recruit talented employees. This will begin in the area schools since so many employees begin their careers as seasonals.

- More thorough onboarding processes will be developed at the team level to ensure responsibilities and roles are clearly defined. This may involve the creation of dedicated orientation days at the start of each season or quarterly.
- Care will be taken by supervisors to promote a “One Park, One Team” mentality among the various park operations.

Objective: *Efficient and effective operations:* provide efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible service to Tennesseans and our visitors.

Action Plan:

- Park Management will encourage discussions about how to optimize operations.
- A focus will be placed on streamlining inventory processes to ensure efficiency.
- Contracted labor will be monitored closely to ensure quality work is provided. Park staff will be engaged with TDEC leadership to report shortcomings and ensure work meets desired standards.
- A reward system needs to be implemented to at the very least, recognize exceptional employees who save the department money by solving maintenance issues in efficient, cost-effective ways.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to make quality purchases and upgrades within operations and facilities to ensure the most return on those investments.
- Volunteer labor and donation funds will be used to augment the park budget and allow for more to be accomplished.
- Training will be developed and implemented based on best practices, to ensure efficient check-out procedures are completed and improve accuracy.
- Care will be taken by supervisors to ensure employees are respectfully using equipment in a way that prolongs its service life. Abuse of tools and equipment will be dealt with appropriately.
- Care will be taken to evaluate the necessity of contract labor to ensure expenditures are necessary and outside the ability of our staff to accomplish in a timely cost-effective manner.



Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Fall Creek Falls State Park
Site Manager	Sarah Leedy
Area Manager	Kenny Gragg
Park acreage	25,568
Total number of visitors (FY 2024)	793,134 (significant natural disaster impacts, combined 32 days closed FY23/24)
Total Park operations expenses before (FY 2024)	\$5,802,006
Total Hospitality expenses before (FY 2024)	\$6,295,567
Total Park Operations revenues (FY 2024)	\$2,339,236
Total Hospitality revenues (FY 2024)	\$8,669,841
Park Operations Retail cost recovery % ¹	10.8%
Hospitality Retail cost recovery % ²	4.4%
Park Operations cost recovery % (FY 2024)	42.1%
Hospitality cost recovery %	137.7%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2024)	\$7.32
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2024)	\$12.76
Gross Park Operations profit or loss	(\$3,462,770)
Hospitality profit or loss	\$2,374,271
Total Park Operations full-time available positions / filled	37/37
Total Hospitality full-time available positions / filled	49/42
Total Park Operations part-time available positions / filled	18/14
Total Hospitality part-time available positions / filled	29/27
Primary feeder markets	Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

¹ Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities

² Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities

Primary reasons people visit	Waterfalls, Hiking, Boating, Fishing, Golf
Opportunities for improvement	More aggressive resource management, golf course improvements (bunkers, cart paths), bike lanes on select park roads

Key Attractions

The amenities or features listed below are those that seem to be most popular for visitors.

- Fall Creek Falls
- Cane Creek Falls
- The Woodland/Gorge Overlook Trail
- Piney Falls
- The George Hole Swimming Area
- The Betty Dunn Nature Center
- The FCF Visitors Center
- The Lodge at FCF
- The FCF Golf course
- The FCF boat dock and lake
- The Taft Village Green

Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Fall Creek Falls State Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present but to provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site’s current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

Site and Facility Assessment

Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	General Description
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in ‘excellent’ condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in ‘good’ condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in ‘fair’ condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need major repair or replacement.
Poor	Facilities/amenities are in ‘poor’ condition when they show significant, ongoing maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Fall Creek Falls State Park, and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in May 2023.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Park Residences	6	Good
Park Residences	2	Fair
Park Residence	1	Fair
Historic Maintenance Shop	1	Good
Historic Sawmill and Shed	1	Fair
Historic Garage	1	Good
Historic Stables	1	Good
Historic Black Smith Shop	1	Fair
Historic Auto Shop	1	Fair
Mobile Home Shed	1	Good
Mobile Home	1	Poor
Honeybee Hives	3	Excellent
Historic Liberty Hill School	1	Good
Historic Springhouse	1	Fair
Picnic Shelters	9	Good
Betty Dunn Nature Center	1	Good
Cane Creek Falls Overlook	1	Good
George Hole Low Head Dam	1	Fair
Campsites	202	Good
Primitive camp sites	16	Good
Bathhouses	7	Good
Sewer Dump Station	1	Excellent
Sewer Dump Stations (auxiliary)	1	Fair
Laundromat	1	Fair
Playgrounds	3	Excellent
Playground	1	Fair
Playground (Campground)	1	Poor
Visitor Center	1	Excellent
Woodshed	1	Excellent
Village Green Office	1	Poor
Village Green General Store	1	Fair
Village Green Outfitters	1	Fair
Village Green Rec Hall	1	Good
Ropes Course Ticket Office	1	Fair
Ropes Course	1	Obsolete
Boardwalk	1	Good
Pool	1	Fair
Snack Bar	1	Good
Athletic Fields	3	Good
Basketball Courts	2	Fair

Sand Volleyball Courts	2	Good
Tennis Courts	4	Fair
Picnic Sites	21	Good
Boat House	1	Good
Boat Docks	2	Good
Boat Ramp	1	Fair
Lake	1	Excellent
18 Hole Golf Course	1	Good
Pro Shop	1	Good
Cart Shed	1	Fair
Golf Course Maintenance Shed	1	Poor
Wastewater Treatment Plant	1	Fair
Wastewater Treatment Lagoon	1	Fair
Maintenance Mechanic Shop	1	Fair
Maintenance Shed	1	Good
Maintenance Shop/Office	1	Good
Maintenance Warehouse	1	Good
Maintenance equipment shed	1	Good
Maintenance Fuel Station	1	Fair
Maintenance Baler Shed	1	Good
Maintenance Salt Shed	1	Good
Group Bunks	2	Fair
Group Camps	2	Good
Group Camp Swimming Areas	2	Fair
Group Camp Boathouses	2	Poor
Group Camp Bathhouses	6	Fair
Historic Fire Tower	1	Fair
Lake Standpipe Tower	1	Fair
Suspension Bridges	2	Excellent
Suspension Bridge	1	Under construction
Suspension Bridge	1	Poor
Fall Creek Falls Overlook	1	Fair
Piney Falls Overlook	1	Excellent
Platform Overlook	1	Good
Trash Compactor	1	Fair
Fishermen Cabins	20	Excellent
Landside Cabins	10	Good
85 Room Lodge	1	Excellent
Public Water Infrastructure	1	Poor

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail	Condition	Issues
Upper Loop (14 miles) Natural Surface	Fair	Suspension Bridge rebuild in progress, 2-foot bridges destroyed / rebuild planned, trees cleared. Recently blazed. Projected reopen Feb. 2025.
Lower Loop (13.2 miles) Natural Surface	Poor	Suspension Bridge destroyed; trees need clearing. Recently blazed.
Gorge Overlook Trail (1.2 miles) Natural Surface	Fair	Heavily used trail, erosion near overlooks, Cane Creek Falls Overlook severely eroded. Recently blazed.
Woodland Trail (0.9 miles) Natural Surface	Good	Heavily used trail, 2 small reroutes needed to address eroded areas. Recently blazed. Potential ATWC route.
Turkey Pen Ridge (0.5 miles) Natural Surface	Good	Recently blazed. Potential for ATWC route.
Base of Fall Creek Falls Trail (0.4 miles) Natural Surface, wooden steps	Fair	Heavily used. Major erosion issues near base. Possible reroute needed including wooden step construction and area rehabilitation. Recently blazed. Crib wall recently installed.
Paw Paw Trail (2.7 miles) Natural Surface	Poor	Heavy storm damage. Open, but armoring or reroute needed. Recently blazed.
Gilbert Gaul Trail (4.3 miles) Natural Surface	Good	Recently blazed, armored at stream crossings, with new Link Trail connector bridge. Potential ATWC route.
Link Trail (4.6 miles) Natural Surface	Fair	2 boardwalks need constructed near stream crossings. Trail is ill defined. Recently blazed.
Bike Trail (3.4 miles) Paved Surface	Poor	Paving is split by roots in several areas. One 40 yard stretch of curve has crumbled 90% across the width of the trail.

		Transitions to gravel parking areas are rough.
Wheeler Farm Loop (1.9 miles) Natural Surface	Good	Back country trail. Boardwalk could be implemented along the field. Heavy gullies in roadbed section.
Prater Place Trail (2.9 miles) Natural Surface	Fair	Back Country Trail. Wild Hogs do considerable damage to this trail.
Cable Trail (0.3 miles)	Good	Cable anchor needs reestablished. Plans in place.
Campground Trail (0.2 miles) Natural Surface	Good	Regular erosion associated with heavy use.
Chinquapin Ridge Mountain Bike Trail (6 miles round trip) Natural Surface	Fair	Trail needs evaluated as to whether it will be maintained as a bike trail or designated as a hiking only trail. To develop and maintain as a <i>mountain</i> bike trail, professional help will be needed.
Piney Mountain Bike Trail (8 miles round trip) Natural surface	Fair	Decent trail along old roadbed. Extensive amount of hazard trees adjacent to trail.

New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve visitor experience and operational efficiency.

New Asset & Amenities	Description
Dump Station	A better sewage dump station is needed to serve RV campers that will include the renovation of existing dump station and the addition of a second station. As of 9/26/2024, this is under construction, about 50% complete.
Staff Dormitory	Dedicated housing for Seasonal Interpretive Recreators. Off-season use could be housing for in-service instructors or an agency training location.
Public Drinking Water System	Capital maintenance to replace aging and failing drinking water system.

Bike/pedestrian network	Interoperation connector trail system to provide safer, non-automotive travel for visitors, especially between Village and Dam and between the campground and Nature Center.
Phases 3, 4, and 5 of Village Renovation	Capital maintenance to improve visitor experience and concessionaire business flow by removing or repurposing obsolete structures.
Event Space	Large event space that could support park/private use.
Interpretive Space	Climate-controlled Interpretive space, to accommodate groups.
Village Maintenance Area	Storage area needed for maintenance tools and equipment.
Campground Maintenance Area	Storage area needed for maintenance tools and equipment.
Historic Demonstration Area	Develop "Old maintenance" area into a living museum.
ADA Overlook Cane Creek	New ADA overlook above Cane Creek Cascades.

Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) Core or Essential Services;**
- 2) Important Services; and**
- 3) Value added or Visitor Supported Services.**

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential in order to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

- The services are mandated by the agency’s law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
- The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public’s health and safety.
- The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
- The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers and partners.
- The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
- The services provide a sound investment of public funds.
-

The following programs and services offered at Fall Creek Falls State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Protection of the Natural Resources within the Park Boundaries
- Protection of Park guests and employees through provision of Law Enforcement and Emergency Response
- Public potable water distribution system
- Treatment of Wastewater to ensure compliance in effluent discharge.
- Responsible and efficient maintenance of park facilities and amenities
- Trails and Overlooks
- Maintenance Facilities
- Wastewater treatment plant and lagoon

- Solid Waste compactor

CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services, and facilities are those the agency should provide and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers, and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency's ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance, or support identified core services.
- The services are broadly supported and utilized by the community and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon how the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social, or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Fall Creek Falls State Park have been identified as **important services**:

- Provision of quality Education and Interpretive Programming
- Visitor's Center (Ranger Station)
- Nature Center
- On-site housing (for Rangers and staff)
- Public Restroom facilities
- Provision of areas accessible to community organizations

CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor-supported programs, services, and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category 3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor-supported are:

- The services expand, enhance, or support Core Services, Important Services, and the quality of life of the visitors, community, or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued, and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees, or other sources that offset some or all their cost and/or provide a meaningful return on investment.
- The Services can be provided through outsourcing or the use of concessionaires, providing opportunities for community enterprise or services that may not otherwise be provided by the agency.

The following programs and services offered at Fall Creek Falls State Park have been identified as **visitor-supported services**:

- Campground
- Retail Operations
- Lodge
- Cabins
- Golf Course

- Boat Dock
- Group Camps and Lodges (Newton Ford Bunkhouse needs prompt capital maintenance.)
- Village Green (concessionaire locations, amphitheater, swimming pool, and Rec Hall)
- Shelters and picnic areas
- Swimming areas
- Sports fields and athletic courts
- Electric Vehicle charging stations.

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Fall Creek Falls State Park represent the largest area of budgetary expense at an average of 56% of the total operating budget each year for the last three complete years, which is lower than the target of labor costs not exceeding 65% of total operating expenditures. The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

Full-Time Equivalent Employees Park Operations

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager 3	1	*
Park Manager 1	1	*
Park Ranger 2	6	*
Museum Curatorial Assistant	1	43,056
Treatment Plant Operator	1	60,612
Facilities Supervisor	1	67,896
TSP Custodial Supervisor	1	34,496
TSP Custodial Lead	1	33,180
TSP Maintenance Supervisor	2	96,648
TSP Maintenance Lead	6	259,440
TSP Maintenance Technician	7	247,740
Conservation Worker 1	1	34,320
Admin Service Assistant 1	1	46,752
Account Clerk	2	86,424
Clerk 3	3	94,692
Storekeeper 1	1	38,496
Equipment Mechanic 1	1	54,144
TOTAL	37	1,197,896

*Law enforcement compensation is confidential by TN law.

Part-Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
TSP Custodial Worker	1/4	30,186
TSP Maintenance Worker	5/8	47,482
TSP Operations Worker	5/15	122,102.50
Clerk 2 JS	1/4	30,186
Room Clerk	1/7	28,333.50
Lifeguard	4/12	37,232
Seasonal Interpretive Recreator	1	29,016
TOTAL	18/51	324,538

Full-Time Equivalent Employees Hospitality Operations

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
General Manager	1	76,656
Assistant General Manager	1	75,300
Administrative Assistant 1	1	46,728
Account Clerk	1	38,496
Group Sales Manager	2	86,280
Kitchen Manager	1	54,624
Food Service Assist Manager 1	1	43,140
Lead Cook	4	145,152
Line Cook	1	33,180
Lead Dishwasher	1	35,448
Dishwasher	1	30,192
Restaurant Manager	1	52,368
Lead Bartender	1	20,475
Lead Server	3	61,416
Facility Manager 1	1	66,096
Chief of Maintenance	1	54,204
Maintenance Supervisor	1	43,140
Maintenance Technician	2	76,992
Rooms Operations Manager	1	46,500
Lead Front Desk Associate	1	34,320
Front Desk Associate	1	29,460
Lead Night Clerk	1	37,224
Night Clerk	1	30,504
Housekeeping Supervisor	1	35,160
Lead Room Attendant	2	72,576

Room Attendant	4	113,328
Golf Course Manager	1	58,740
Golf course Superintendent	1	55,776
Asst Golf Pro	1	43,140
Equipment Mechanic 1	1	54,144
Golf Shop Attendant	2	62,424
Conservation Worker	1	33,180
Grounds Worker 1	2	59,232
Asst Golf Course Superintendent	1	43,140
Irrigation Spray Tech	1	30,660
TOTAL	44	\$1,813,299

Part Time Employees Hospitality Operations

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Line Cook	2	438,867
Dishwasher	2	300,510
Server	4	181,000
Bartender	1	40,725
Front Desk Associate	1	204,001
Room Attendant	7	451,080
Host	1	175,635
Custodial Worker	1	64,440
Golf Course Attendant	1	71,600
Maintenance Tech	1	158,850
Golf Shop Attendant	1	71,600
TOTAL	24	\$2,158,308

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	360
Community Service Workers	
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
Other: Inmate Crews	1,600
OTHER: Golf Volunteers	2,100
TOTAL	4,060

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	4,342,147.00
Part Time Employees	1,048,512.50
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	5,390,659.50

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Servers	2	PT	2024	Continued increase in restaurant and catering business volumes
Room Attendants	2	PT	2024	10 Fisherman Cabins will come back
TSP Maint. Wrkr (NC)	1	FTE	2024	Resource Mgmt., Trail maintenance
TSP Operations Lead	1	FTE	2024	Split between Boat Dock and Campground
TSP Custodial Worker	1	FTE	2024	Recruitment more likely with benefits
TSP Maintenance Worker	1	FTE	2024	Hospitality Grounds
TOTAL	4			

Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit (**Rev Per Unit**) for the last four years in park facilities is detailed in the table below.

Current Rev Per Unit

*1 Lodge Closed, reopened December of 2022

Fiscal Year	Cabins Rev Per Unit	Campgrounds Rev Per Unit	Day Use Facilities Rev Per Unit	Group Camps /Lodges Rev Per Unit	Lodge Rev Per Unit	Restaurant/ Catering Average Check	Golf Revenue per Round
2021	\$156.94	10.33	3.3	41.45	*1	*1	\$39.43
2022	\$114.17	11.72	3.24	25.75	\$45.97	\$16.45	\$43.30
2023	\$109.90	16.02	3.76	26.59	\$104.06	\$26.54	\$43.40
2024	\$151.80	23.10	27.93	206.69	\$102.22	\$27.34	\$46.21

Projected Rev Per Unit - Based on current Rev Per Unit trends at the park and any known developments over the next four years.

Fiscal Year	Cabins Rev Per Unit	Campgrounds Rev Per Unit	Day Use Facilities Rev Per Unit	Group Camps/Lodges Rev Per Unit	Lodge Rev Per Unit	Restaurant/Catering Average Check	Golf Revenue per Round
2025	\$159.83	13.95	8.13	65.33	\$107.62	\$28.16	\$45.76
2026	\$151.80	15.35	9.28	73.23	\$113.00	\$29.00	\$45.32
2027	\$156.35	16.75	10.43	81.13	\$117.52	\$29.58	\$46.23
2028	\$161.04	18.15	11.58	89.03	\$122.22	\$30.17	\$47.15

Customer Service

Overall NPS is 65

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Trip Advisor	2023	4.8/5.0
Google Reviews	2023	4.9/5.0
All Trails	2023	4.3/5.0

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Park Overall	2023	65 Overall/ 4.30 Staff Service
Lodge	2023	74 Overall/ 4.68 Staff Service
Golf	2023	84 Overall/ 4.69 Staff Service

Professional Development and Training

The following professional development and training opportunities are being explored and planned for the staff and volunteers at this park:

- A new onboarding process is being explored to offer all new employees a shared experience that acclimates them to the park’s history and purpose.
- Several key employees are nearing retirement age, this necessitates development training to ensure capable people can fill those roles. Supervisory training opportunities for employees interested in promotion are needed.
- Fall Creek Falls is a prime location for a Field Training Officer. Interest in this has been expressed through the Chief Ranger’s Office. Identifying interested Rangers and allowing for them to train up into this role would be beneficial.
- Fall Creek Falls has an excellent onboarding process for SIRs, the next step is ensuring our SIRs leave with several applicable certifications to help them further their careers.
- To ensure compliance with TSP policy, a chainsaw training opportunity severely needs to be identified and implemented. Trainings offered by TSP are sporadic and difficult to get employees into. Something available online would be ideal so new employees can get proper training to use saws.
- Rangers and managers need opportunities to further their skills as medical first responders. Elevating a few Rangers from EMR to EMT certifications would be beneficial for the park.
- Ropes training needs to be organized with corresponding refresher courses as ropes rescues are common occurrences.
- Wilderness first aid courses need to be offered to ensure staff, beyond the Ranger team, are trained in safe practices. We rely on our maintenance and support staff a great deal to assist in medicals and rescues and offering training to them would be a benefit to the park and another development opportunity for staff.
- Routine management training.
- Routine law enforcement training.

Summary of Key Recommendations

Please provide short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for addressing operational issues at the park and improving overall park performance.

Short Term Recommendations (Less than 1 year)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Identify inefficiencies in maintenance facilities in terms of tools and equipment to better address maintenance concerns.
- b. Upgrade the wastewater treatment plant. Compliance with the new NPDES permit will be unattainable without upgrades. In Progress
- c. Implement a plan to remove 700 hazard trees from campground areas. Tree-related damage is a major use of time each year.
- d. Implement plan to mitigate the fire hazard caused by storm damage on the rim of the gorge.
- e. Complete Campground C renovations. Complete
- f. Begin capital project to replace the backcountry bridge on the Upper Loop trail. In progress
- g. Complete the project to address the slump on the lake dam. In Progress
- h. Complete scheduled renovations of the boat dock (completed) and adjacent restrooms (cut from the statewide capital project).

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Evaluate admin staffing structure to ensure the most efficient use of staff time and ensure employee talents are utilized. Complete
- b. Address operational changes within the Ranger team to ensure operations have the support they need. Complete / ongoing
- c. Evaluate the potential need for a full-time staff position in the campground.
- d. Evaluate the potential for a full-time interpretive staff position.
- e. ~~If a possibility, evaluate how best to utilize positions returning from Virgin Falls. Complete~~

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Begin ADA accessibility projects, at shelters first, then on from there.
- b. Seek training opportunities to educate front desk employees on park facilities, amenities, and general information to allow them to better serve guests.
- c. Seek to cross-train between hospitality and park operations. It is unprofessional for Fall Creek Falls employees to not be able to advise guests about basic info such as room, cabin, campsite rates, and basic operational information. (In progress – monthly FAM trips)

Mid-Term Recommendations (2-5 years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Complete plans to relocate the Taft Village Green and construct new structures.
- b. Begin the project to redesign the Fall Creek Falls overlook and approach road. Could be via top 15 or capital funding.
- c. Develop plans to address major structural issues at the golf course pro shop (complete) (Major structural issues, not familiar with this issue or completion) and maintenance building.
- d. Complete TDOT projects to widen the scenic overlook drive.

- e. Begin renovations on B area campsites to address leveling concerns.
 - f. Access improvements to the Lodge.
 - g. Add additional parking for the Lodge.
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
- a. Implement better recruiting efforts to ensure we have enough seasonal help.
 - b. See developed employees advance to supervisory positions.
 - c. See marked improvement in training opportunities for staff.
- 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
- a. Complete Nature Center projects such as a new interpretive entryway, interactive maps, VR experiences, and handicap-accessible overlook at Cane Creek Cascades.
 - b. Develop plans for a dedicated interpretive space in the new Village Green location.
 - c. Add more color-blind viewfinders at overlooks.
 - d. See all shelters made ADA compliant.
 - e. See completion of adaptive mountain bike trails.

Long-Term Recommendations (5+ years)

- 1. Site and Facilities**
- a. Complete demo and replacement of Nature Center.
 - b. New Maintenance facilities for park operations.
 - c. Complete trail system, including any needed backcountry bridges, that circumnavigates the FCF lake and develop it for use with off-road wheelchairs. This would be the longest backcountry trail in the country accessible by off-road wheelchairs.
 - d. Strategically acquire land in the adjacent area allowing for the protection of entire watercourses.
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
- a. Additional Ranger position added. Operations established with independent leads to free Rangers to do more job-specific roles.
- 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
- a. Maintain FCF as the best and most visited state park in TN.

Resource Management Plan

A resource management plan is a specific statement of the objectives you have for your land and natural resources, as well as any significant cultural and historic resources stewarded by the state park. This includes a defined series of priorities and activities that will take place to meet those objectives. This can include future potential land acquisitions or divestitures that are necessary to meet the park’s resource management goals and objectives.

Fall Creek Falls State Park exists to protect and preserve the unique natural resource that falls within the park’s managed acreage. Within the park boundaries, there are a plethora of rare and endangered plant species, unique floral and faunal habitats, hundreds of miles of riparian corridors, streams, creeks, and waterfalls. Within the park, there are over 12,000 acres of old-growth forest.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment
3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

Resource Management Objectives

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Park’s core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee’s natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resource stewardship.

Aligned with these objectives are specific strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of this park.

Strategies

A.

- To encourage more buy-in with staff, we will create opportunities to educate and engage team members in the stewardship process.
- Fall Creek Falls will develop an onboarding process for all employees that incorporates knowledge of the park’s story to help employees develop a “sense of place” for the park.
- We will pursue partnerships with Bledsoe and Van Buren County historical societies to involve them in telling the park story and ensure we are using all our resources to “tell full stories”.

- Fall Creek Falls will work with local tourism boards to encourage resource-based recreation opportunities and train stewards to manage county-held resources by involving them in park stewardship projects.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to partner with local groups such as chambers of commerce, tourism boards, schools and school clubs, community centers, and community action groups, and provide presentations and training to encourage better stewardship practices such as native plant landscaping, waste reduction, and volunteer organization.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve Wildlife Management Area access to hunters to create buy-in among the hunting public and align them with the park's goals.
- Fall Creek Falls will utilize social media as a platform to inform the public about the values, principles, and methodology behind our rules and regulations to help them understand why we prohibit or encourage certain behaviors and practices.
- Fall Creek Falls will partner with local photographers to create an inventory of pictures, "worth a thousand words" to be used in social media posts, campaigns, and donation drives to inspire appreciation for the natural resources we steward.

B.

- Fall Creek Falls Rangers will be tasked through performance plans to engage in resource management activities. We will attempt to augment staffing patterns when necessary to ensure Rangers have time to devote to RM projects.
- Fall Creek Falls Rangers tasked with supervising seasonal interpretive recreators will ensure they each have an ongoing resource management project.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue the FCF Resource Survey project, which is a comprehensive resource inventory project. This project will inventory, map, and describe resources in the park. This data will then be used by university partners, currently Tennessee Technological University and Middle Tennessee State University, to coordinate more in-depth, discipline-specific research.
- Fall Creek Falls will identify areas that can be restored to native grassland/meadowland to improve habitat and reduce areas in need of mowing or to restore storm damaged areas.
- Fall Creek Falls will increase efforts to patrol and maintain park boundaries. There is a good deal of incursion areas that need to be addressed. These points will be identified and documented, and then appropriate action will follow such as re-surveying boundary lines, installing gates, positing boundary lines, deploying camera systems, etc.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue in wild hog remediation efforts. Wild hogs are destroying sensitive habitats across the park. Our partnerships with TWRA and the USDA will continue, and we will seek new partnerships to help us deal with this issue. A focus will be placed on remediating areas that have been disturbed. It isn't enough to simply remove the hogs, the habitat must be restored. Monitoring of these efforts may be facilitated through our university partners within the FCF Resource Survey project.
- Fall Creek Falls is partnered with TWRA in developing our 365-acre lake as a Bill Dance Signature Series Lake. Rangers will lead the effort to remove invasive aquatic plants, primarily phragmites, and systematically replace them with native aquatic plants. This will be done "cove by cove" gradually leading to the entire lake. This progressive attack will ensure that adequate fish habitat will remain while native introductions have time to mature.

- Fall Creek Falls will seek to train not only Rangers but park staff to identify and remove invasive species. Within this step, an invasive removal plan will be created and augmented as needed. This will identify priority areas and designate the treatment plan for the identified area.
- Fall Creek Falls has a substantial amount of hazard trees that need to be removed. Accompanying this project will be a concurrent plan to “give back” in the areas where heavy tree removal occurs. This will include plantings of native shrubs and trees that will enhance the habitat and aesthetic quality of these areas without presenting the same hazards in the future.
- Fall Creek Falls maintains a relationship with Responsible Stewardship. They are a nonprofit organization that organizes, schedules and effects trash clean-ups. Responsible Stewardship refers to Fall Creek Falls as their “home”. We will strengthen this relationship and work to create a “sense of place” for that group here at FCF. We will utilize their services to maintain the park and work to provide them with opportunities to host their training, in-service, and recruitment events here at the park.
- Fall Creek Falls manages property that the Trail of Tears once crossed. A management plan is being developed for this area that will include initially scheduling clean-ups with Responsible Stewardship and park staff. This area will be more proactively patrolled and monitored. Discussions with IPE staff have already taken place. The next step will be site evaluations conducted by the State Archaeologists office. Following that, we will invite the Eastern Band of the Cherokee people to be part of the planning process. Their input will guide the direction of the project.
- Fall Creek Falls will identify and document all cemeteries on park property. This information will be added to the digital archive and included in the FCF Resource Survey. Training will be organized relating to cemetery preservation and preservation strategies will be employed.
- The areas around the seven main waterfalls are badly eroded due to visitor impact. These areas will be evaluated, and individual erosion remediation plans will be put in place to restore and bolster these areas for the future.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to improve wildlife habitat in developed areas. Plans will be made to reduce light pollution, add native plants to landscaping, and add structures such as bat boxes, bird boxes, and waterfowl nesting areas where applicable.
- The trails at Fall Creek Falls lead our guests into some of the most pristine wilderness in this region. These trails need attention. A systematic plan will be developed to address trail issues in high-traffic areas first, and then to backcountry areas. Rangers will be trained to do quality trail maintenance and the park will seek to locate partners that can assist. We have several Scout Lodges already assisting with this as well as Mountain Bike clubs that are helping as well. The Upper and Lower Loop trails are the main backcountry trails in the park and have both been closed since 2020. The suspension bridges crossing Cane Creek on both trails were lost due to flooding. The bridge on the Upper Loop is a current capital project. Funding hasn’t yet been acquired for the Lower Loop bridge. This is a high priority for the park. A plan is in place to see the loop trails reopened with new bridges and maintaining their current route. However, a plan needs to be developed to address the Lower Loop area if replacing the suspension bridge is not possible. The Lower Loop trail may need to be adjusted into an out and back again trail. This would not be easy or ideal, but those miles of trail are among the most beautiful in the park and efforts to keep them open in some form must be taken.

- Fall Creek Falls has several historic structures on the park dating from the early days of the park. Many are CCC and WPA projects. These structures need to be preserved as they are integral to the park's history. Projects are currently ongoing to replace "like-kind" siding at the group camps and at the historic park maintenance area. The Fire tower is an interesting piece of park history. It was originally constructed at the Chickamauga battlefield to allow Civil War Veterans to have an aerial look at the battlefield and describe troop movements to historians. It was then disassembled and reassembled on Bradden's Knob where it served as a fire tower for a number of years. It is currently on the National Registry of Historic Places. The fire tower was a popular interpretive location, and the "Life of a Lookout" program was a beloved offering. This provided guests with a true "wow moment" experience, as they were able to take in views of the park from the highest elevation in Fall Creek Falls. A plan needs to be developed to: 1) address structural concerns to the tower to preserve it, and 2) make it safe for guests to visit. There is a lookout house at the foot of the tower that was built around 1950. This house was long used as a Ranger/seasonal residence. This house and the access road to it need attention. A plan to address the preservation of this structure is badly needed. It is a unique area in the park and has value as both a staff house and potentially as a dynamically priced rental option. The preservation of the structures is of utmost importance. The use of the area can be determined by the park's needs in the future.
- The caves at Fall Creek Falls are a resource that has been largely neglected. We will continue to utilize the Formstack registration process to monitor how many people are legally using our caves. New surveys of the caves will be facilitated through a partnership with the Southeastern Regional Association of the National Speleological Society and the Tn. Cave survey group. This group's involvement will also increase our monitoring efforts allowing us more opportunity to prevent vandalism and entry into sensitive systems.
- Priority will be given to identifying and acquiring land that satisfies three primary goals.
 - The protection of viewsheds.
 - The protection of watersheds
 - The inclusion of unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species.

C.

- Rangers need to be trained in GIS capabilities and a consistent program needs to be designated to log all information from the FCF Resource Survey into. Currently, various resources are monitored using a plethora of programs which is confusing and inefficient.
- Traffic and pedestrian monitors need to be implemented in high-traffic and sensitive areas to gauge the use and number of incursions, in closed areas, to help us identify strategies to mitigate overuse and address illegal entry.
- Fall Creek Falls needs to implement more camera traps across the park to monitor wildlife. We are currently using cameras to monitor wild hog activity with great success, which can be replicated with regard to other species.
- The archive at Fall Creek Falls is sufficient to begin the digital archive process but is far from user-friendly. A new archive system needs to be implemented to make research more efficient.
- Regular species inventory needs to be collected and digitized to establish a baseline for certain species and to better monitor others.
- Climate Change is a major issue all environmental stewards are facing. A weather station will be installed at the park to monitor daily weather and establish baseline climate data

for reference and future research. Fall Creek Falls is blessed to have had employees recording weather since the 1990s and this data needs to be digitized for comparison. This will also provide guests with an option to get real time weather data from the park during their stay.

Resource Inventory and Assessment

The significant natural, cultural and historic resources of the park requiring management are detailed below including a condition assessment rating for each. Condition assessments are selected from the following options based on what most describes the current condition of the resource:

1. **Excellent** – resource is in excellent condition; all potential threats to the integrity of the resource are currently managed and effectively mitigated.
2. **Good** – resource is generally in good condition and stable; threats to the integrity of the resource require regular management in order to mitigate.
3. **Fair** – resource is in stable condition but difficult to mitigate ongoing threats; additional management support is required.
4. **Poor** – resource is generally in poor condition with management support required to both improve existing conditions and address threats.
5. **Critical** – resource is highly threatened or deteriorated and requires immediate management prioritization.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Historic Cemeteries	9	Good	These cemeteries are in need of documenting and adding to digital archives.
Gorges	5, approximately 12 miles	Excellent	Excellent examples of old-growth forests. 12,500 acres.
Lake	365 Acres	Good	Invasive aquatics need removal and structure for fish habitat needs improved
Riparian Corridors	Over 20 miles	Good to Excellent	Streams near the park borders show negative effects from pesticides and fertilizer from nearby farms.
Caves	Over 300	Excellent	We have examples of perfectly intact cave ecosystems, including some of the largest in the country.
Historic Fire Tower	1	Poor	The structure is extremely damaged and in need of repair.
Overlooks	12	Fair	These overlooks show signs of overuse and erosion is beginning to be both a structural concern and an aesthetic issue.

Waterfalls	7	Excellent	Waterfalls are clean and remain in a largely natural state.
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Management Strategies

The management strategies outlined below are directly correlated to the resources identified previously in the *Resource Inventory and Assessment* section immediately above. These are general and overall management recommendations for each resource from which priority actions will be determined. Each resource has both a “Public Use” management strategy (which could include limited or no public access, or managed access with infrastructure and regulation) and a “General Management” strategy.

The priority assignments reflect the highest resource management priorities of the park over the next 1-5 years (High Priority) and 6-10 years (Moderate Priority)

Resource	Management Recommendations	Priority
Historic Cemeteries	<p>Public Use: Most of these are in areas where visitor access is restricted.</p> <p>General Management: At present, they are sporadically patrolled.</p>	Moderate
Gorges	<p>Public Use: Several backcountry trails cross through the gorges and hunting is allowed during WMA and regular season. No back-country camping is allowed in the gorges.</p> <p>General Management: These areas are patrolled by Rangers. Several research projects are ongoing, being conducted by university partners.</p>	High
Lake	<p>Public Use: The lake is accessible to fishing all along the shore, and hiking along most of the shore, and boating is restricted to non-gas-powered equipment.</p> <p>General Management: We are currently partnered with TWRA to manage the lake as a Bill Dance Signature Series Lake.</p>	High
Riparian Corridors	<p>Public Use: About half of these corridors lie in areas of restricted access. The other half is accessible by trails, mostly in the backcountry.</p> <p>General Management: Regular stream surveys are conducted, and boundary patrols are prioritized in areas where known rare species exist.</p>	High
Caves	<p>Public Use: Certain caves are accessible to the public and are monitored by Formstack permits. Occasional tours are led by park staff.</p> <p>General Management: The cave entrances are patrolled sporadically and need to be more heavily monitored.</p>	Moderate



	Partnerships have been created to enlist area cave associations to aid in the monitoring of these caves, though these partnerships are in the very early stages.	
Historic Fire Tower	Public Use: This area is accessible by sections of the Upper Loop trail. General Management: Access to the tower itself is discouraged. The tower needs extensive repairs.	Moderate
Overlooks	Public Use: All the overlooks are accessible to the public and receive heavy visitation. General Management: Erosion control methods have been used but the heavy use of these areas makes it difficult to stay on top of. Erosion and severe soil compaction are the chief concerns here.	High
Waterfalls	Public Use: Fall Creek Falls, Cane Creek Cascades, Cane Creek Falls, Raccoon Creek, and Rock House Creek are all accessible at their respective plunge pools. Piney Falls is accessible at the top but not at the plunge pool. General Management: Waterfalls are patrolled heavily during warm weather for public safety and trash control is necessary on the more accessible falls such as Cane Creek and Fall Creek to ensure trash doesn't make its way into the gorge and Natural Area.	
Hardwood Forests	Public Use: Criss Crossed by trails. General Management: Hazard trees are regularly cut.	
Cultural Resources	Public Use: Public Access to historic cemeteries, cabins, and structures. General Management: Cemeteries are maintained, and cabins and structures are maintained per historical society standards.	
Wildlife Management Area	Public Use: Approximately 8,000 acres of Wildlife Management Area accessible to the hunting public during 2 weeks of deer season and one week of turkey season. General Management: The harvested game is documented by park staff and shared with TWRA.	
Class 2 Natural Area	Public Use: 16,000 acres of designated state Natural Area accessible only by 3 backcountry trails and occasional kayakers on Cane Creek. Utilized sporadically by hunters during the season.	

	<p>General Management: Patrolled as often as possible by Rangers. Partnership with USDA to assist in managing feral hogs. Partnerships with Universities to conduct research.</p>	
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Land Management Strategies

In some cases, strategic land acquisitions or divestitures are necessary to meet the overall resource management goals and objectives of the park. This can include opportunities to address buffers, watersheds, viewsheds, inholdings, and adjacent properties. The table below details **general strategies** for land management. Timelines refer to Short Term (1-3 years), Mid Term (4-6 years), and Long Term (7-10 years).

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Land acquisitions to protect headwaters of streams.	Mid Term
Land acquisitions to protect viewsheds.	Long Term

Interpretive Programming and Education Plan

The Interpretation, Programming, and Education planning is currently going through a planning process to further build out the process. This section only represents the very basic framework. As TSP moves forward with the future of Interpretive programming and education this section will likely be changed to accommodate those modifications.

Attached to this plan are the Interpretive Program Templates in fillable PDF forms.

The unique geologic features and diverse range of habitats found within Fall Creek Falls State Park, and the historic cultural interaction of local people with those resources will be presented to the visitor through a wide range of educational and recreational experiences throughout the year in order to serve the needs of each demographic group utilizing the park

Fall Creek Falls and the surrounding streams and gorges create an ecologically diverse environment encompassing multiple forest types; temperature, elevation, and substrate specific plant and animal communities; and a visually stimulating landscape and skyline.

The unique landscape of Fall Creek Falls State Park has produced the resources necessary for survival from early Native American times until present, resulting in a rich cultural heritage relating directly to the park's resources such as but not limited to rock shelters, lumber, plentiful water supply and abundant wildlife.

Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Objective: *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Within these objectives are the following desired outcomes:

- Building stewards
- Ensuring Equity
- Provide the Highest Value
- Develop Resource Based Programming
- Support Staff

Strategic Programs and Services

The strategies detailed below with corresponding action plans are aligned with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Tennessee State Parks.

Strategy – Telling Full Stories: to identify and replicate best practices while establishing new methods for representing diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.

Action Plan:

- Partnerships have been made with both Van Buren and Bledsoe County historical societies to have better access to historical materials to help us understand our story.
- An ongoing partnership with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee is being developed to help us tell the park story as related to indigenous groups.
- We are seeking partners such as the TSP diversity task force and Camp Yoshi to offer exclusive access to areas and opportunities within the park that have traditionally not been available to certain communities.
- We are actively developing programs and interpretive material related to the experience of women, Native Americans, and labor groups.

Strategy – Interpretative Media: Connecting people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks with technology in ways that complement and expand interpretation within and beyond the park, giving everyone access to becoming a park steward.

Action Plan:

- Multimedia platforms are being explored.
- Virtual Reality offerings are being developed at present and we expect to have those implemented within 2-3 years.
- A focus should be placed on developing our ability to use social media as a tool to address interpretive goals.
- Sensory programs are being developed and have been implemented, although sporadically, to accommodate guests with learning and developmental disabilities.
- A project we support through the Bledsoe Country Tourism Board and Bledsoe Telephone Cooperative seeks to add QR codes to interpretive signage allowing guests to scan and view local storytellers speak on park history.

Strategy – Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- B. 3-5 unique experiences for all audiences
- C. Varying intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences
- D. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- E. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on the value of the benefit to the participant.
- F.

Action Plan:

- Forest Ecology / Geology Hike
- Scenic Bike Tour
- Hike to the Base of Fall Creek
- Rock Hop
- Lower Loop Hike/ Backpack trip
- Prater Place Hike
- Pontoon Boat Tour
- Natural Bridge Excursion
- Canoe Float
- Bus or Van Tour
- Nature Station
- Tree ID Hike * Slideshows (various themes)
- These programs are offered usually as paid programs but are also offered as free programs.
- Rangers are tasked in their IPPs to offer both free and paid programs.
- Pontoon tours are utilized as the main paid program offering, these are so popular that they allow us room to offer other programs for free.
- The programming pricing tools need to be implemented further to make sure our pricing is consistent.

Strategy – Develop and maintain diverse and varied resourced-based outdoor recreation opportunities across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Managing recreational use with the stewardship needs of the resource.
- B. Varying intensity from self-guided to guided experiences
- C. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- D. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on the value of the benefit to the participant and impact on the resource.

Action Plan:

- New program offerings will be evaluated by Park Rangers/Managers to determine if they meet our interpretive themes before being offered.
- Fall Creek Falls will continue to operate a “two-prong” rule that ensures offerings satisfy at least two elements of the overall TSP mission statement.
- Thematically appropriate programs will be added to Fall Creek Falls’ seasonal special events, such as Christmas on the Mountain, Spooktacular, Fourth of July, etc., to ensure these are not simply community events but high-quality program opportunities.

- Fall Creek Falls will seek to implement more regularly scheduled program events that allow for exercise within the resource. Staff-led activities will be offered that serve to teach guests about outdoor recreation opportunities and highlight their health-related benefits.
- Fall Creek Falls will seek to use digital and social media to deliver PSAs about the benefits of resource-based recreation and their associated health benefits to the public.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- Nonpersonal Interpretation: Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (i.e. exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, etc.).
- Personal Interpretation: One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represents the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2024)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2025	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY: 2027	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2028	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2029
Park Overall	88%	89%	90%	91%	92%	93%

