



Smith Mountain Lake State Park
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SMITH MOUNTAIN LAKE STATE PARK MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 UPDATE

Department of Conservation and Recreation
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources
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Smith Mountain Lake State Park

MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2020 UPDATE

Presented for review at a public meeting on September 30, 2019, then recommended for adoption by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on January 6, 2020, and then reviewed for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly.

Adopted:

/S/

Clyde E. Cristman, Director
Department of Conservation and Recreation

March 2, 2020
Date



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Park Purpose Statement

“The purpose of Smith Mountain Lake State Park is to provide premiere outdoor recreational and educational opportunities associated with Virginia’s largest lake, while interpreting the natural, historical, and cultural resources of the west piedmont region of Virginia.”

Introduction

The Smith Mountain Lake State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the official unabridged master plan document adopted in 2003 by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Board. This 2020 executive summary represents the most recent ten year review mandated in §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*.

Smith Mountain Lake State Park is on the 20,600-acre Smith Mountain Lake that was created in 1960 when Appalachian Power Company (now American Electric Power) built a dam on the Roanoke River in Smith Mountain Gap. Construction of the dam was completed in 1966, and a year later Appalachian Power donated the first parcel of land to the Commonwealth for the establishment of the state park. The state bought the rest of the land during the next six years. Early conceptual drawings from 1968 envision a high density development, including a hotel, lodge, cabins, marina, horse stable, campgrounds, ferry landing and other complementary recreation amenities. A 1972 plan recommended a more moderate approach to developing the park. The first stages of development and road construction began in 1975. The park, which includes 16 miles of lakefront, opened to the public in 1983.

Smith Mountain Lake State Park is located in Region 2000 Local Government Council (also known as Planning District 11), which lies in the southwest and central part of Virginia along the eastern edge of the Blue Ridge physiographic region on the Roanoke River branch of Smith Mountain Lake. The park consists of 1,248 acres, primarily in Bedford County. An additional 37-acre peninsula across the lake from the main state park property is in Franklin County. This parcel is leased to Franklin County and has been developed as a county park. Smith Mountain Lake State Park is accessed via Route 626. It is about 40 miles southeast of Roanoke, 40 miles southwest of Lynchburg, and 140 miles southwest of Richmond.

Park Resource Management Plan

The resource management plan consolidates all known resource information for a park and provides management direction for maintaining and enhancing those resources. The plans identify the physical, abiotic, and biotic characteristics of the park, and historic and archaeological resources, as well as a description of the legal constraints and limitations of the property. The park is delineated into undeveloped areas based on the ecosystems found in these areas; unique management areas which are undeveloped areas with a specific purpose or function such as a historic battlefield or open field; and developed areas where park facilities are located yet have natural and cultural resources requiring specific management. The plan has defined management

objectives and action recommendations that guide resource management and allow for continuity over time.

The park consists primarily of two ecosystems. An Acidic Oak Hickory Forest, which comprises 896 acres or 68% of the park. The current state of this ecosystem varies throughout its range within the park. A significant portion of this ecosystem has been manipulated by humans who cleared the area in the past and with a near monoculture of VA Pine having taken its place. The more natural areas are a predominately White Oak and Chestnut Oak, with the normal associated mid and under story. A Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest ecosystem comprises 414 acres or 32% of the park. This ecosystem is also varied in its natural condition throughout the park, being highly impacted by human actions. With the creation of the manmade lake, this Mesic Mixed Hardwood Forest ecosystem may have not been the same in the past with the proximity of the water influencing the ecosystem. Areas in the north and east sections of the park are naturally this ecosystem type.

Approximately 268 acres of the park are in a Virginia Pine monoculture. Using managed timber harvests, these areas will be incrementally converted back to natural ecosystems. Proper timber harvest timing, techniques, and the ability to rehabilitate the heavily impacted areas are necessary to ensure continued operation of the park during and after the harvest operations. An estimated 20 acres has undergone a timber stand improvement with the intent to create a more oak savannah type ecosystem and promote oak-hickory regeneration. In spring of 2015, the park collaborated with the American Chestnut Foundation to plant over 400 American chestnut seedlings in an area previously clear cut of pine. The hope is these seedlings, which have been bred for blight resistant, will continue to flourish resulting in a long-range partnership with future plantings. Some of these harvested areas are also being converted to open areas focused on habitat plantings for pollinator species.

The cultural resources of the park can be traced back to the era when the region was actively farmed. The ruins of the Five Oaks Plantation date back to the late 1850s. There are remnants of tobacco barns found on the park, highlighting the strong focus on tobacco in the early farming years. Numerous cemeteries have also been identified on the property including one for enslaved African Americans associated with the plantation.

Park Visitor Experience Plan

The park visitor experience management plan (VEP) is a companion document to the park resource management plan. Together they describe how the Division of State Parks will achieve its dual mission: “To conserve the natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources of the Commonwealth (resource management plan) and provide recreational and educational opportunities (visitor experience management plan) consistent with the good stewardship of these lands, waters, and facilities that leaves them unimpaired for future generations”.

The visitor experience management plan provides a park-wide vision for the future of interpretation, education, recreation and other visitor experience opportunities. The plan addresses all elements of a park that affect visitor experiences, including personal services, media, facilities, and landscapes. It is a conceptual document that lays a foundation for subsequent phases of comprehensive interpretive planning: facility and media planning, design and production; organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans.

The plan consists of three parts; the foundation, the experience areas, and the desired future. The foundation presents information needed to make decisions concerning how visitor experience opportunities will be planned, developed and managed. It identifies essential stories and experiences of the site, specific audience types and their wants, needs, and expectations, interpretive themes (essential messages), issues and influences, goals and objectives as well as park purpose and mission of the agency. Experience areas are delineated, mapped and name geographic visitor experience areas based on distinct resource character and interpretive opportunities. Experience areas are categorized by resource type or condition, social environment, type and extent of park development, level of management, or kind and density of visitor use. The desired future section of the visitor experience plan describes the mix of personal service, media, facility, and landscape conditions that can effectively communicate park significance to guests and facilitate established visitor experience objectives.

While a plan has not been created for the park at this time, planning workshops were held prior to exhibit design and installation in the Visitor Center. Relevant information was captured during these workshops, although focused more on the exhibits than the park as a whole.

Essential messages in exhibit plan relate primarily to the interaction between visitors and the resource. The main theme statement (below) captures this concept, providing guidance for interpretation, and exhibits. Other themes are centered specifically on history, nature, education, and recreation.

“Smith Mountain Lake State Park, located at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, offers a variety of fun and educational activities that connect visitors to both the solitude of the land and the intrigue of the water while conserving natural resources and cultural history and providing recreation at the largest lake in Virginia.”

Workshops dedicated to capturing the necessary components of the Visitor Experience Plan are needed to expand the document to address the concepts beyond the visitor center.

Park Master Plan

Reviewed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation Board on January 6, 2020 and adopted by DCR Director, Clyde Cristman on XXXX, 2020.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Planners and State Park Staff conducted this master plan update in accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park during a 30-year planning horizon. As required by the *Code of Virginia*, it must be revisited every ten years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and conservation needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

While preparing the initial 2003 Smith Mountain Lake State Park Master Plan, meetings were held with DCR staff and an advisory committee comprised of area citizens, local government officials, and representatives of interested organizations to assist with the development of the plan. The committee helped formulate a park purpose statement as well as park goals and objectives, which will guide future park operations and development. Public input was solicited at the beginning and at the end of the process to ensure that plan recommendations were understood and accepted by the

community. Following the development of the master plan, it was recommended for approval by the Board of Conservation and Recreation and then adopted by the DCR Director.

As a part of the 2020 master plan process, the initial 2003 master plan, as well as the 2011 park master plan update, were reviewed. Planning staff met with park staff and conducted a site visit at the park to gather information for this plan update. A public meeting was held on September 30, 2019 to share the draft plan and receive public input. Following the public meeting, the phased development plan and estimated costs were revised, as were the staffing and operational costs for the park for each phase of development. The final draft of the executive summary and map were also developed.

The draft 2020 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their January 6, 2020 meeting and were recommended for adoption. The documents were then placed on the DCR website for a 30-day review by the Virginia General Assembly. Following that review, the updated plan was presented to the DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman for adoption. Following adoption, the updated executive summary and map were placed online <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/masterplans> for the public to access.

Attendance, Economic Impact and Park Revenues

The following table depicts park attendance during the period 2009 to 2018.

Park Visitation – Smith Mountain Lake State Park (Calendar Year¹)

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
358,611	357,486	426,652	444,522	345,418	406,113	360,198	434,510	512,960	357,920

¹Note that the calendar year ends 6 months after the fiscal year.

Smith Mountain Lake is widely known as a water destination park and continues to draw in many visitors. Boaters and anglers have easy access to Virginia's second largest lake while families can enjoy the many amenities of the park and swim beach. Smith Mountain Lake's beach is one of only two public beaches on the lake and the largest. Novice and experienced hikers can enjoy hikes on trails that are relatively flat. Besides the water activities, Smith Mountain Lake State Park offers birding, a glimpse of history at the remains of Five Oaks Plantation, year round nature programs, and beautiful mountain vistas.

Economic Impact – Smith Mountain Lake State Park

Economic activity is created by the park from three sources: Park visitation, the park operating budget (but only to the extent that it was not funded by park visitor revenues in order to avoid double counting), and park construction projects. The following table summarizes this economic activity for 2018:

Total Economic Activity including Visitation, Park Budget, and Construction (Adjusted to local economy)	Visitor Spending	Spending on Park Budget (excluding portion derived from visitation)*	Spending on Park Construction	State and Local Taxes Created
Dollars	Jobs	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars
\$ 12.6 million	134.6	\$10.3 million	\$ 127 thousand	\$ 7 thousand
				\$ 940 thousand

Overnight visitors create the greatest amounts of economic activity with dining, shopping and recreation use in the local area. Smith Mountain Lake attracts water enthusiasts, boat rentals and use of fishing piers/docks. Smith Mountain Lake also boasts a venue for local sporting and outdoor events such as triathlons and fishing tournaments. A majority of the 134.6 jobs that are created by the park's economic activity are local jobs that benefit the local community. It is also notable that this park generates state and local taxes in excess of \$940K. Master plan recommendations designed to increase visitation and improve the visitor experience, once implemented, should have a further positive impact on the region's economic vitality.

The following table depicts park revenue in fiscal years 2013 to 2019:

Park Revenues – Smith Mountain Lake State Park

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
\$874,697	\$956,064	\$967,354	\$1,048,955	\$1,098,864	\$1,086,862	\$1,066,257

In FY 2019 Virginia State Parks generated \$24,678,607 in total revenue. Smith Mountain Lake State Park contributed \$1,066,257 to the revenue total from paid parking, cabin rentals, camping, swimming, shelter/amphitheater rentals, weddings, interpretive events and merchandise sales. Revenue generated by Virginia State Parks is reinvested in the state park system to maintain and operate the parks. In FY 2019, 58% of the state park budget came from revenues generated in the parks.

Existing Facilities

A portion of the park is designated as the **Victor Thomas Outdoor Recreation Area**, which is a 37 acre park parcel located across the lake is leased to Franklin County as a County park. The park is open year-round and offers a partly-covered handicap accessible fishing pier with seating, picnic shelters with grill, playground area, restrooms, hiking, jogging, 1.7 miles of walking trails, and a seasonal community beach with lifeguards on duty when open.

Park Office
Visitor Center
Discovery Center
Contact Station
Staff Residences (3)
Maintenance Area
Trails (15.6 Miles)
Birding Trail (3.2 miles)
Amphitheater
Docks (6)
Cabins (20)
Campground (24 RV sites, 25 camping sites)
Playground (2)
Fishing Pier
Boat Ramp
Boat Rental
Swimming Beaches (2)
Beach Bathhouse/Concession
Beach Volleyball Court
Picnic Area with shelter
Cemeteries (2)
Tobacco Barns (3)
Old House

Connectivity

This 2020 update places value on connecting the park to other resources in the community. Localities in the region include the counties of Bedford, Franklin, Roanoke and Pittsylvania along with the cities of Lynchburg and Roanoke. The National D-Day Memorial is in the Town of Bedford, and Jefferson's Poplar Forest is further east off Forest Road on the way to Lynchburg. Portions of State Highway 43 near Bedford and routes 640,748 and 602 in Franklin are designated Virginia Byways, and the Blue Ridge Parkway is an All American Road. Portions of the Blackwater, Roanoke and Pigg rivers are recommended for designation as Virginia scenic rivers. Other significant public lands within the area are Booker T. Washington National Monument, Explore Park, Carvins Cove, the Grassy Hill and Bald Knob Natural Area Preserves, Smith Mountain Cooperative Wildlife Management Area and Bourassa State Forest. These areas along with local parks offer plenty of trails and recreation opportunities to choose from. Water trail recreation abounds, with numerous water trails along rivers in addition to Smith Mountain Lake. The park is already recognized on the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Birding and Wildlife Trail. The Smith Mountain Lake State Park Regional Connectivity Map is an attachment to the full master plan document.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

Smith Mountain Lake State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1967, 1973, 1978, 1985, 1987, 2000 and 2001 for land acquisition, road development and various park facility development. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.

Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection

Additional land acquisition is recommended to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development and/or protect valued viewsheds. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes, and scenic resources in close proximity to the park will be encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time.

Environmental/Design Guidance

This 2020 master plan update describes both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views in the park and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies. Consideration will be given to eliminate excessive, misdirected or obtrusive artificial light in the park in order to maximize the dark sky effect and encourage astronomy and night-sky viewing.

Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Environmental Quality's best management practices for erosion, sediment control and stormwater management in order to protect water quality. A setback guideline of 100 feet from the shoreline has been established by DCR, and trails and water dependent facilities such as fishing stations, piers and other water access facilities will be the only developments permitted within the 100-foot setback.

There are potential challenges of overuse and crowded conditions, which may require management actions to protect the resources and the quality of the park experience. Issues related to resource carrying capacity and social carrying capacity should be evaluated prior to developing new facilities.

Phased Development Plan

The proposed developments for Smith Mountain Lake State Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the master plan), and covers a 30-year timeframe.

Phase I

- Cabins - 8-3 BR, 2- 6 BR, linen/storage building, boat parking, docks (2) and playground
- Fuel Station and second dock with 10 slips (reconfigure area)
- Picnic Area – large shelter, conference shelter, 10 picnic pads, comfort station, dock, playground, car top launch and parking (60 spaces)
- Campground with 60 sites (6 yurts), 2 bath houses, dock and small playground
- Expand overflow overnight trailer parking for charging boat batteries (10 spaces)
- Widen entrance road and redesign contact station area
- Protect and interpret historic sites. Stabilize Five Oaks Plantation site.
- Maintenance Area - storage building, chain link fence, and 3 bay pole shed
- Replace playground equipment (2 sites)
- Connect beach area to public water authority
- Boat Launch -Reconfigure and expand area and parking including new surface pavers
- Shoreline protection (all three phases)
- Resurface parking areas throughout the park (all three phases)

The total estimated cost for Phase I development is \$34,208,968

Phase II

- Fishing piers (5 small)
- Water Feature, merchandise building and 100 parking spaces (relocate Volleyball)
- Covered boat dock with lift and storage shed
- Shoreline protection (all three phases)
- Repave and widen park roads to accommodate bicycle lanes (all three phases)
- Resurface parking areas throughout the park (all three phases)

The total estimated cost for Phase II development is \$13,000,240

Phase III

- Staff residence
- Paved off-road multiuse path from cabins to beach
- Connect to public water authority (Discovery Center area)
- Shoreline protection (all three phases)
- Repave and widen park roads to accommodate bicycle lanes
- Resurface parking areas throughout the park (all three phases)

The total estimated cost for Phase III development is \$20,337,470

The total cost to bring Smith Mountain Lake State Park to its desired future condition is \$67,546,678

Staffing and Operations

Staffing and operational costs at Smith Mountain Lake State Park are presently budgeted at \$1,369,000 annually, including salaries for 7 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 3 additional positions and \$544,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 2 additional staff will be needed and an additional \$456,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the existing staffing and operating costs and the projected costs for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Smith Mountain Lake at full build out is projected to be \$2,369,000 with 15 staff positions.

Smith Mountain Lake State Park – Operating and Staffing Requirements

EXISTING (FY 20)	STAFFING MATRIX*	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	FULL BUILD OUT
STAFFING					PARK STAFFING
Park Manager					Park Manager
Asst. Park Manager					Asst. Park Manager
Chief Ranger	Chief Ranger				Chief Ranger (2)
	Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper				Chief Rgr – Visitor Exper
Park Ranger (3)	Park Ranger	Park Ranger			Park Ranger (5)
Office Manager					Office Manager
	Housekeeper Mgr				Housekeeper Mgr
	Housekeeper (2)	Housekeeper			Housekeeper (3)
SALARY TOTAL					SALARY TOTAL
\$656,000	\$544,000	\$180,000			\$1,380,000
WAGE TOTAL					WAGE TOTAL
\$358,000		\$110,000	\$7,000		\$475,000
OTPS TOTAL					OTPS TOTAL
\$355,000		\$148,000	\$6,000	\$5,000	\$514,000
TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)					TOTAL BUDGET (FY20 dollars)
\$1,369,000	\$544,000	\$438,000	\$13,000	\$5,000	\$2,369,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY20 budget projections.

* The state park staffing matrix identifies the staffing complement of a park based on size and resources, number and type of facilities, as well as types of programming and activities. The staffing complement will be re-evaluated with the addition of new facilities.

