

**PLANNING GUIDE SUMMARY
FOR
DEVELOPMENT OF
ALABAMA STATE PARKS**

MARCH 1979

**PREPARED BY
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS AND RURAL SOCIOLOGY
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VOLUME 6 - SUMMARY

**ALABAMA STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE
OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN**

PREFACE

This publication was prepared at the request of the Parks Division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The real concern of the Division for Alabama citizens became evident in the early stages of the research on which the publication is based. The desire to provide for citizen recreational needs in an efficient and orderly manner which was expressed by Parks personnel indicates that the public trust in the parks system is well placed. There are problems which must be overcome to be sure. Yet, there are many difficult situations which have already been resolved through aggressive and independent action by Parks personnel.

Information in this publication represents a summary of a larger report on findings from a study entitled, Planning Guide for Development of Alabama State Parks. The study was conducted by Auburn University Agricultural Experiment Station under contract with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Under the supervision of Frank A. McLean, Director of the Department's Outdoor Recreation Section, the study was part of the State's continuance planning program.

Presented in this report is information on the Alabama state park system's current situation, needs, and priorities for improvement over the next 20 years. Recommendations are made on the basis of implementing an orderly, continuous program of park improvement via a revised park system framework.

Development and printing of this summary and the main report were financed in part through a planning grant from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, Department of the Interior, under provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-578). Auburn University staff members with major responsibilities for preparation of this report were R. P. Wolfe, Richard J. Lichtkopler, Sally R. Purohit, J. Homer Blackstone, R. E. Stevenson, and Howard A. Clonts as project leader.

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DEVELOPMENT OF ALABAMA STATE PARKS

Planning Guide Summary

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PLANNING GUIDE SUMMARY

FOR

DEVELOPMENT OF ALABAMA STATE PARKS

Alabama state parks have offered visitors unique recreational experiences for a half-century. From a meager beginning in 1927, when the first park lands were officially designated, the park movement has grown to the present system that boasts facilities in some parks that equal those of many states in the nation.

The history of Alabama's parks can be divided into two major periods of development: (1) a 40-year period (1927 to 1967) of slow development when major land acquisitions were made but with only modest facility construction; and (2) the period beginning in 1967 when large expenditures were made to develop superior park facilities.

A major breakthrough for Alabama state parks occurred in 1967 when state voters approved a bond issue authorized by the Legislature to provide \$43 million for construction and development of Alabama state parks. Other available state and federal funds were added, bringing the total to approximately \$70 million. These funds were used to develop six large parks into "resort" type parks, and to make needed improvements and acquisitions at several other parks in the system. As a result, by 1974 Alabama had the beginnings of one of the most modern and complete park systems in the United States.

Unfortunately this rapid growth has been accompanied by serious problems, many of which relate to lack of maintenance funds to support the extensive new facilities. Beginning in 1975, funds remaining from the development package began to be utilized to maintain park facilities. These funds were depleted by 1979, greatly reducing further improvements to the park system.

The problems facing the park system are not solely financial, but relate also to the failure to follow a systematic, legislatively approved plan in development. Much of this failure resulted from political decisions regarding development as opposed to managerial decisions. Thus, the system is now facing a dilemma common to unplanned growth. It has become obvious that careful planning of facilities, development, growth, and maintenance must be simultaneous if Alabama's park system is to remain one of the best. This need has been studied and is the subject of this report.

OBJECTIVES OF PLANNING GUIDE

A planning guide for park development must offer a lot more than just enumerated recommendations for the future. It must, in effect, sell the public on the need for park improvements, by offering a full understanding of the function of state parks and revealing public expectations for parks in future periods. Also a plan must be accepted, supported, and allowed to be followed by legislative action. Such requirements are recognized in the following objectives that were

established for the formal Planning Guide for Development of Alabama State Parks:

1. To differentiate state parks from other types of recreational facilities and define the purpose for state parks.
2. To explain to the public, legislators, and other government agencies the function to be served by state parks now and in the future.
3. To anticipate future demands for state supplied recreational opportunities in the state parks.
4. To establish a framework whereby expected future demands may be reasonably met through a combination of public and private efforts.

A research project by recreation planners of Auburn University Agricultural Experiment Station was used to achieve the objectives listed, and to develop a comprehensive guide for parks in Alabama. An analysis of state park operational procedures led to conclusions concerning objectives 1 and 2. Objective 3 was approached by interviewing park visitors and park personnel and holding public hearings throughout Alabama. Park conditions were observed during interviews and suggestions made by the public were incorporated into the projections and recommendations for the future. Data obtained under objectives 1-3 were used in arriving at the framework for action described in objective 4.

Findings of the study established the present status of Alabama's state park system and indicated directions for change needed to meet future conditions.

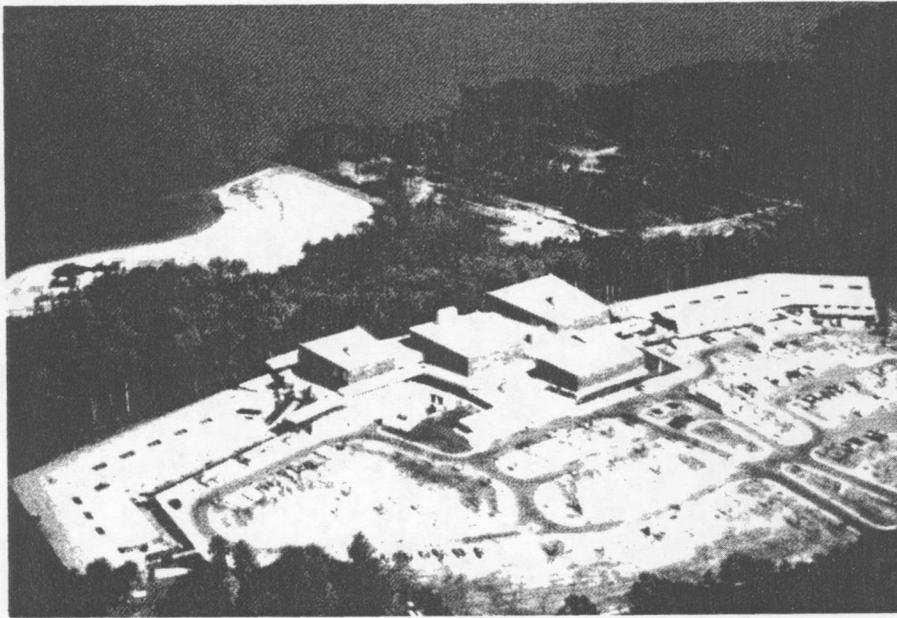
Details are presented on the following pages, along with recommended actions to meet needs and suggested priorities to assure orderly development that will best serve the needs of the state.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING PARK SYSTEM

Classification and Organization

The Alabama state park system is made up of 22 developed parks, 2 undeveloped parks, and 2 small undesignated holdings, encompassing a total area of 49,474 acres. All but one of the developed state parks have personnel assigned to the site.

Existing state parks fall into two general classes: Class I--those where significant development has occurred in recent years; and Class II--those where little money has been spent for capital improvements. Locations of the 8 Class I and 14 Class II parks are shown in Figure 1.



Guntersville State Park is typical of the Class I park sites that have received significant development in recent years.

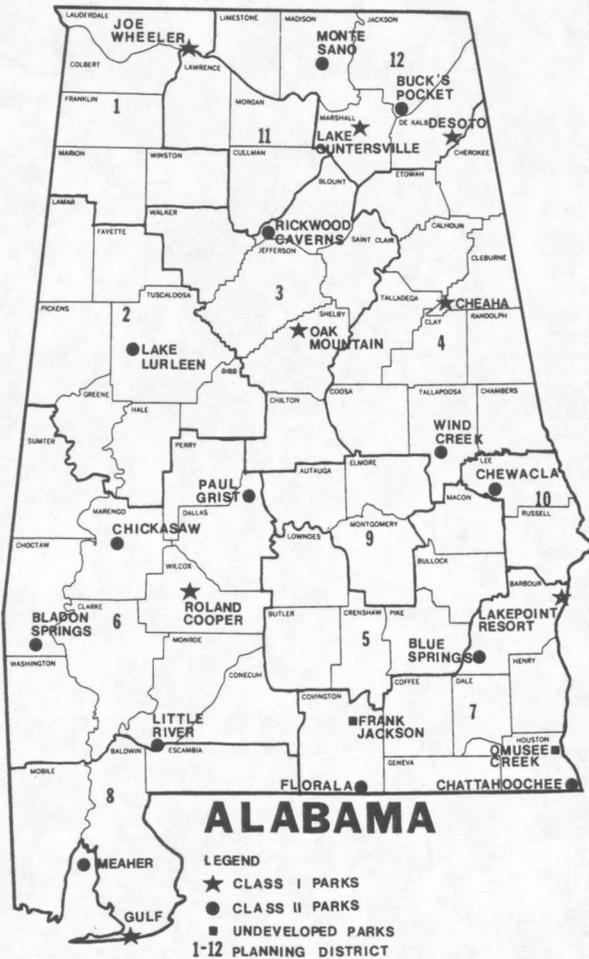


Figure 1. Location of Alabama State Parks by Planning Districts

Operation of state parks is under the Division of State Parks, Monuments, and Historical Sites--better known simply as the Parks Division--of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. It is headed by a director, who is assisted by an assistant director, section heads, and park managers. There are four major sections of the Parks Division: (1) Operations and Maintenance, (2) Plans and Analysis, (3) Facilities Development, and (4) Procurement and Property Management. Although each section has specific responsibilities, there is close cooperation among sections.

Responsibilities of State Parks Division

The Parks Division is responsible for recreational opportunities, protection, services, and planning for state park lands and areas. This covers a wide range of responsibilities, but it also excludes many areas of service, as indicated by Table 1. Problems have arisen in the past when financial or physical responsibility was extended to other lands or facilities. It is clear that if the Parks Division is to be responsible for any area of service, then it should have full jurisdiction. At no time should responsibility be fostered on the Division if financial needs extend beyond the capability of the Division. The relationship between local, state, and federal governments and private groups or agencies in recreational responsibility is illustrated by information in Table 2. Responsibilities overlap in many areas, of course, which calls for cooperation among different levels of government.

Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities of the State Parks Division

State park functions	Responsible for	Not responsible for
<u>Recreation:</u> To provide opportunities for outdoor recreation conveniently located To provide quality recreational experiences To provide adequate facilities and services to enhance the quality of life To acquire recreation lands with natural attractions	Developing areas most feasible for state operation Providing recreational experiences convenient to population centers Providing natural area activities such as picnicking, camping, hiking, swimming, fishing, nature study, and interpretation	City parks, community playgrounds, athletic fields, federal lands, private recreation Development on non-state lands
<u>Protection:</u> To safeguard natural resources To insure preservation of significant scenic, ecological, or cultural resources	Acquiring and protecting unusual state resource areas suitable for recreation needs	Areas administered by other agencies Areas already under protection Areas infeasible for state action
<u>Service:</u> To provide visitor information programs on ecological balance and natural area enjoyment To promote complementary development on private and other governmental resource areas To supply the public information on outdoor recreation opportunities	Information materials on state park resources Encouraging private development of resource areas Providing information on surrounding areas through brochures, signs, and maps, as well as in-park programs	Local, federal, or private information Private recreational services State tourism publicity not related to state parks Historical sites and landmarks not located in state parks
<u>Planning:</u> To promote the economy of Alabama through proper utilization of park areas and facilities To evaluate natural, recreational, and cultural resources and determine their best use To formulate a state parks plan To involve the public in park planning	Insuring proper management and long-run operation and maintenance of park facilities Encouraging Alabama citizens and visitors to use facilities available Identifying statewide park needs State park policies and future programs Inviting public comments on major park proposals	Planning beyond projected financial capability Programs beyond fiscal responsibility Areas outside state park jurisdiction Programs administered by other state or federal agencies or private sources

Table 2. Responsibility for Supply of Selected Outdoor Recreation Areas and Facilities in Alabama

Area type	Local		State							Federal					Other			
	Cities	Counties	State Forest	State Highways	State Lands	State Parks	Game and Fish	Marine Resources	Marine Police	Historical Commission	Corps of Engineers	T. V. A.	Fish and Wildlife	National Parks	Bureau of Land Mgt.	National Forest	Quasi-public	Private
Athletic fields	●	○																
Boat launch sites	●	●			○	○	●	●	●		●	●				●		●
Camping sites		○	○			●					●				○	●	●	●
Cultural sites	●	○			○					●								
Golf Courses	○	○			○	○												●
Historic sites & monuments	●	●	○	○	○	○				●					○	●	○	○
Marinas	○	○					○	○	○	○	○	○					●	●
Nature preserves & refuges	○	○	○	○	●	●					●	●			○	●	○	○
Gulf beaches & waters	○	○			●	●		○	○						○	○	○	○
Parks-local	●	●				○				○					○		●	○
Parks-regional		○				●					●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Picnic sites	●	●	○	●	○	○				○					○	○	○	○
Playgrounds	●	●				○											○	○
Recreation areas-general	●	●	○			●				○					○	○	○	○
Recreation areas-ORV	○	○			○	●					○				○	●	○	○
Swimming pools and lakes	●	●				●											○	○
Tennis courts	●	●				○											○	○
Trails-bicycle	●	●		●		○											○	○
Trails-hiking	●	●	●	○	○	●				○					○	○	○	○
Trails-horse	○	○	○														○	○
Vista points	●	○		●		●				○							○	○
Rest areas	○	○		●		○											○	○
Wilderness areas			○		○	○							●	●		●		
Scientific sites	○	○				○							●	●		●		
Water access areas	●	●		○	○	●	○	●			●	●	○		○	●	○	○
Wildlife mgt. areas			○		○	●	●				●	●	●		○	●	○	○
Winter sports areas																		●
Fishing and boating					○	●	●	●			●	●					○	○
Scenic waterways		●		○	○	●		○	○			○			●		○	○
Nature studies center	●	○			○	●	○		○		○	○	●		●		○	○

● Major responsibility
○ Minor responsibility

Mission of State Parks

Throughout its history, the Alabama State Parks Administration has followed this basic statement of missions: "To provide the people of Alabama with an ample supply of high quality outdoor recreational experiences in state owned and managed areas." This statement of mission is expanded to represent three fundamental goals:

1. To provide optimum quality state park recreational facilities conveniently located and in sufficient quantity to meet the needs of all state citizens and visitors. This goal is accomplished by improving existing parks, adding new parks, attracting and retaining qualified personnel, improving maintenance, and providing a full range of supporting services and conveniences.
2. To provide adequate facilities and skilled leadership for developing and safeguarding natural resources to enhance the quality of life for all citizens and to promote associated social, cultural, and economic values. Specific steps to accomplish this include preserving scenic, ecological, and cultural resources; enhancing visitor information programs; stressing human responsibility for ecology; and minimizing damage from heavy visitor use.
3. To promote the economy of the state through increased utilization of state park resorts and other recreational facilities. This could be achieved by encouraging Alabamians and visitors to patronize the various state parks and promoting meetings and conventions of business and civic groups in Alabama state park resort facilities.



Providing Alabamians with high quality outdoor recreational experiences is a basic mission of the Alabama State Parks Division. Oak Mountain State Park shown here provides a wide variety of such opportunities.

This planning guide translates these goals into an overall program, with administrative directions for guiding future growth of the park system. Both short-run and long-run recommendations are given.

Geographical Distribution of Parks

Although distributed generally across the state, Alabama state parks are slightly more concentrated in areas having outstanding natural features. As a result, there is unequal distribution among the state's planning districts, Figure 1. For example, districts 5 and 9 do not have a park facility, and District 1 has only a portion of Joe Wheeler park within its boundary. This is not a serious limitation, however, since the parks are located so as to be accessible to population centers of the state. Nearly every Alabama resident is within 50 miles of one or more state parks, and all are within a 4-hour drive (200 miles) of a major resort park. The concentration of parks in north Alabama places these parks in good locations to support resort tourist travel.

Distance is not the deterrent to park use that it once was. The Alabama study found that the average distance traveled to state parks was 117 miles, with visitors from all districts found in nearly every park. Nevertheless, 57 percent of the visitors had traveled 50 miles or less to reach the park. Thus, it is important that parks be furnished within a reasonable distance of each area. One deficit noted was the lack of parks with overnight facilities in the western half of the state. With only 14 of the 22 developed state parks having overnight facilities (beyond the primitive stage), there is a need for adding this type facility to better serve the park needs of all Alabamians.

Use Patterns of Alabama State Parks

Visitation to Alabama state parks increased tremendously from 1970 until 1978, indicating good public acceptance of services provided in the system. Attendance figures showed a total of 6.5 million in 1978, up from 3.6 million in 1970, Table 3.



Overnight facilities at Lakepoint Resort State Park get heavy use by out-of-state visitors, with facilities for travel trailers being especially popular.

Table 3. Estimated Alabama State Parks Visitation, Fiscal years 1970-71 and 1977-78

State Park ^{1/}	Number of Visitors 1970-71	Number of Visitors 1977-78
Bladon Springs	20,465	30,225
Blue Springs	46,363	66,069
Buck's Pocket	25,741	19,611
Roland Cooper	*	47,205
Chattahoochee	11,936	11,756
Cheaha	176,784	418,637
Chewacla	188,861	94,188
Chickasaw	20,625	87,917
DeSoto	232,535	391,971
Floral	*	74,980
Gulf	1,812,282	3,380,704
Joe Wheeler	118,912	384,085
Lake Guntersville	224,628	440,120
Lake Lurleen	67,851	68,654
Lakepoint	*	143,040
Little River	21,216	36,171
Monte Sano	438,385	293,465
Oak Mountain	128,940	259,882
Paul M. Grist	97,458	8,083
Rickwood	*	68,130
Wind Creek	*	99,218
TOTAL	3,632,982	6,424,110

*Not in Alabama state park system in 1970.

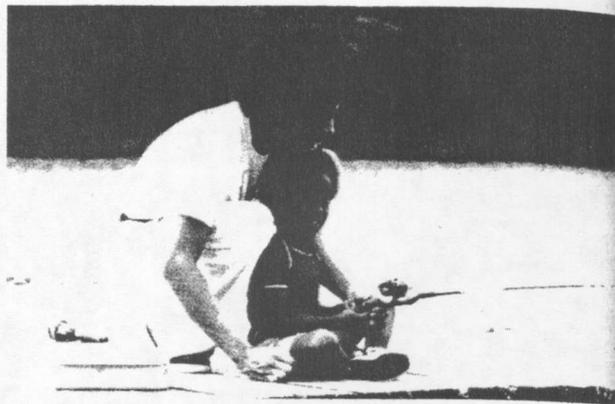
^{1/} Meaher State Park was not included in attendance data because no personnel were located on the site to collect the information. Frank Jackson and Omusee Creek State Parks were not part of the system and were undeveloped when data were collected.

Even larger increases were noted in visitation by specific types of visitors. For example, there was a 5-fold increase in the number of overnight visitors--100,000 in 1970 and a half a million in 1977. While June and July continue to be peak months for campers, there has been a large increase in the number of campers during winter, particularly in Gulf State Park and other south Alabama sites. Increasing numbers of these visitors are coming from the northern United States and Canada.

VISITOR SURVEY FINDINGS

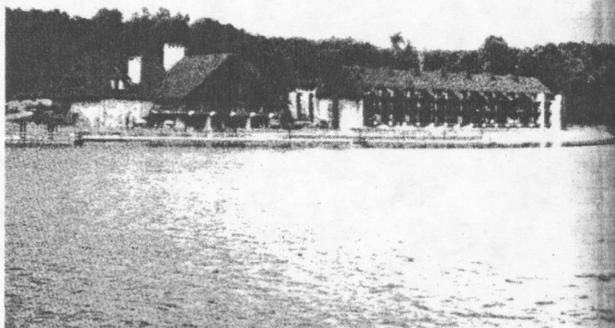
Type of Visits

That Alabama's state parks are being used for their intended purpose was evident in findings of the 1977-78 survey in which 1,088 park visitors were interviewed. Nearly half the visitors were day-use visitors, and most of these were in parks oriented to such visitation (Class II parks). Major facilities provide for such things as picnicking, swimming, and fishing, which can be enjoyed during a visit of a few hours duration. By contrast, only 23 percent of visitors to Class I parks were there for a one-day visit. These parks are more oriented to overnight and vacation use, and the majority reported their visit was for more than a single day.



Fishing is one of the major activities expected by visitors to Alabama state parks.

Out-of-state visitors were heavy users of overnight facilities. Over 15 percent used motels, cottages, or lodges in parks, 10 percent chose non-park facilities nearby, and 38 percent brought a motor home or travel trailer for use in a park campground. The non-Alabama visitors who used park lodging facilities represented over 40 percent of all cabin and motel guests in the park and 42 percent of all motor home and travel trailer users. Non-Alabama park visitors traveled an average of 438 miles to reach the park, which indicates they considered it their vacation destination. Thus, large overnight use would be expected.



Joe Wheeler Resort State Park



Visitors to Alabama state parks may choose from a variety of overnight accommodations ranging from Joe Wheeler Resort to a rustic cabin in Monte Sano State Park.

Park Ratings by Users

Individuals interviewed were generally satisfied with their experiences in the parks, citing park scenery, environment, and location as particularly satisfying. Heading the list of least liked things about parks were comfort stations and other inadequate facilities, with insects and limited maintenance also getting significant mentions.

An indication that users like Alabama parks was the finding that over half were repeat visitors, and family groups made up a large proportion of all visitors. The more developed parks were chosen most frequently for repeat visits, a seeming paradox to the fact that the more developed parks also received the most complaints. With more facilities available, there are obviously more opportunities for dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, the high visitation rate and high rate of return visits to Gulf and Lake Guntersville indicate high user satisfaction with this type facility.

Although attractive natural features and developed facilities help draw visitors to state parks, location near to their home was cited more than any other reason for visiting a particular park. Opportunities for swimming, camping, fishing, picnicking, boating, and relaxing--most popular activities--were available at most parks, so large numbers of recreationists simply chose the park nearest to home. This was especially true of Class II parks, with nearness being listed first for 8 of the 14 parks. In the case of Class I parks, nearness was the major drawing card for Oak Mountain and Roland Cooper, which received mostly day-use visitors. Advertising was the primary factor in drawing visitors to DeSoto, Gulf, Guntersville, and Lakepoint parks, and placed second for Oak Mountain. Cheaha's location in the mountains was its top attention getter, while golf placed first at Wheeler.

Major resources of the parks generally were reflected in the listings of primary attractions by visitors to parks with a water orientation, while scenery rated high in such parks as Cheaha, DeSoto,

and Monte Sano. Park visitors apparently preferred to visit a nearby park, but their responses showed they were looking for specific opportunities and were willing to travel longer distances to reach such a park.

Park Visitor Priorities for Development

When park visitors were asked about needed park improvements, buying more land was mentioned more than any other--over 50 percent. Improving existing campgrounds was close behind with 45 percent, followed by improving educational programs, building more campgrounds, and improving natural area management, with 42 percent each. Getting more than 30 percent mention were more and better hiking trails, better facility maintenance, historic exhibits in the parks, and expanded reservation system. Park safety, more cabins, program staff, and better law enforcement were mentioned by 20-23 percent. These findings indicate a concern that adequate land be set aside for preservation, protection, and enjoyment, and an interest in learning about the state's natural resources.



Visitors to Alabama state parks want more and better hiking trails and other natural features that can be enjoyed by family groups.

Visitors interviewed expected state parks to have facilities for camping, swimming, fishing, boating, and picnicking, and they expected comfort stations, a clean and quiet environment, and attractive natural scenery. Not nearly so many expected horseback riding, bike rentals, bike trails, food service, golf, and lodging facilities, however, few participants objected to these facilities where they were available.

In general, entrance fees and fees for other services were accepted as reasonable by park users interviewed. They voiced willingness to pay for using any facility except picnic grounds. However, they felt user fees should be kept reasonable by using state funds for park operation and maintenance.

As ways of obtaining additional needed funds for parks, about one-third recommended increasing fees for admission and individual activities. Over 40 percent suggested additional excise taxes on such items as cigarettes, alcohol, and even sporting goods. Income and other personal taxes were not a popular choice for generating needed state park funds.

PARK SYSTEM NEEDS

The basic need for detailed planning to guide development of the Alabama state park system reflects the past history of the State Parks Division, a history characterized by limited long-range comprehensive planning. Planning, acquisition, and development of separate park units were largely on an individual park basis, which led to their functioning as separate entities rather than as units comprising a unified park system. The result is a park system having a wide variety of parks that vary greatly in quantity and quality of facilities and services. Developmental efforts to date have resulted in a good state park system, but one which is hampered in its goals to fully provide for the recreational needs of the people of Alabama.

Capacity to Meet Growing Demand

A master plan for the park system must be based on future needs. In 1976-77, park visitation totaled 6,193,128, which equaled 1.7 visits per capita for Alabama residents. If population grows as projected by the Alabama Development Office, there will be 537,900 more people in 2000 than in 1977, which will result in added pressure on the state park system for recreation land, facilities, and programs. The extent of this increased pressure is indicated in Table 4 for individual parks, based on population projections for each park's service area. Demand was projected using constant, low, moderate, and high levels of visitation per capita for future years. Table 4 shows the projections based on moderate per capita rates.

The increasing state park visitation pressures expected in the future may be rather large. Based on anticipated higher visitation rates per capita by 2000, demands could reach 16 million state park users by 2000 and as many as 26 million by 2020. Even a low visitation rate would result in over 9 million visitors by 2020. Thus, even under conservative estimates future park use is

Table 4. Projected Park Visitation for the Year 2000. Visitation Rates were estimated for Each Parks' Service Areas^{1/}

State park ^{2/}	Projected visitation by years			
	1980	1985	2000	2020
Blue Springs	130,734	131,220	134,406	138,834
Buck's Pocket	97,020	105,400	126,200	150,620
Cheaha	899,232	940,464	1,028,232	1,115,928
Chewacla	241,680	249,717	266,760	283,290
DeSoto	824,296	862,092	942,546	1,022,934
Gulf	7,943,216	9,307,432	9,082,716	9,857,364
Lake Guntersville	749,360	783,720	856,860	929,940
Lake Lurleen	200,484	206,640	217,058	222,768
Lakepoint Resort	224,808	235,116	257,058	278,982
Little River	84,000	87,144	93,552	99,216
Monte Sano	651,496	722,567	907,096	1,130,462
Oak Mountain	785,668	815,219	870,000	907,468
Paul Grist	20,832	21,840	24,384	28,160
Rickwood Caverns	236,628	243,348	254,184	259,056
Roland Cooper	39,814	40,137	39,746	38,896
Joe Wheeler	509,546	532,930	582,665	632,359
Wind Creek	230,356	242,687	265,658	290,016
TOTAL	13,869,170	14,527,673	15,949,215	17,386,293

^{1/} Parks included in this visitation projection are those which have the resource base for future growth and development. Excluded parks have somewhat limited potential for attracting larger numbers of visitors as explained in the text.

^{2/} Projections were based on 1976-77 attendance levels. Data for Lakepoint Resort State Park does not reflect expected visitation to the newly completed lodge complex. Also, when development of Wind Creek State Park is completed, visitation levels could easily triple. Figures shown here reflect only conditions existing in 1976-77.

projected to increase by 50 percent or more in the near future.

These projected demand figures point to the need for more park land, an area in which the state is already deficient. The state now has 13.7 acres of park land per 1,000 people, well below the 15 acres per 1,000 population recommended in the 1975 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) goal. This current figure will decrease as population increases unless additional lands are acquired.



Crowding is already a problem in Alabama state parks, but it will be worse in years to come unless provision is made for larger crowds.

Adequate Funding Necessary

A major concern about meeting future needs is the financial position of state parks. The problem is simple: Current park revenues do not meet current operating, maintenance, and capital outlay needs. Furthermore, direct park incomes should not be expected to cover all costs. To do so would require a significant change in the public service orientation of state parks. State parks should not be expected to be profit making enterprises if they are to be utilized by people of all income levels. Therefore, additional funds are needed each year, and these should be provided by some form of taxation or general fund appropriation.

The bond issue that financed, in part, recent park expansion and development is now being paid off by a one cent tax on each package of cigarettes. Since this development funding was not followed by adequate operational and maintenance funding, individual parks have not been able to provide the level of service which should be expected at such parks. Needed maintenance has been postponed, and additional needed construction and new programs have not been implemented. Thus, the functional utility of the entire park system is impaired, and recreational opportunities for visitors are not up to needed levels.

A funding program for needed operation, maintenance, and development normally is made a part of the financial requests by the Parks Division. But, these funds seldom have been provided by appropriation. Hence there is a critical need to develop a long term planning framework for Alabama state parks operation, maintenance, and long term growth that includes adequate funding.

Requirements for State Park Designation

Existing units of the state park system came into being without any formal measure to determine if they met minimum requirements for a state park. Whether the parks came into being by planning and design, as was the case with the resort parks, or just happened because of political motivation or by a chance occurrence, acquisition and development was generally on an individual park basis. Thus, inadequate consideration was given as to how a particular park would fit into or complement the overall park system. Unfortunately there still is no formal criteria for judging potential park areas.

A high priority in any park system planning guide must be for development of some criteria for selecting future park areas and developing facilities so that the unit will serve a definite purpose in the park system. This yardstick for measuring park suitability should consider three major areas: desirability, suitability, and feasibility. Not only would anticipated park units be evaluated, but the same measure should be used in updating current park units. Those that fall below standards should either be improved to make them suitable parts of the system or they should be disposed of or shifted to other uses.

Desirability

An area proposed for state park use should first possess the potential for providing recreational opportunities of the kind expected of Alabama state parks. It should have the potential for either regional or statewide park function, and be able to contribute to achieving the mission of the state park system. High priority for acquisition should be given to land capable of providing a wide range of recreational opportunities and having a large recreational carrying capacity.

To be desirable in terms of potential for state park utilization, the area's natural resource base should rank high in such measures as scenic values, proximity to water, unique natural features, wildlife and historical interest, vegetation, and potential recreational experience. The potential for recreational experience is most important.

Suitability

Several factors determine the suitability of a site for state park development. It should be able to provide for most of the activities or facilities that people expect to find in an Alabama state park: camping, swimming, picnic facilities, comfort stations, a clean and quiet atmosphere, fishing, and scenery. Both quantity and quality must be compatible with the planned level of use of the site. For example, there should be adequate

shaded level areas for improved camping to provide the size campground needed. The site should be of sufficient size and configuration to serve the intended purposes within the park's boundaries, and to help protect the resource base and insulate it from outside influences.

Minimum size of an area for state park use should be 500 acres. This would allow development as a day-use facility with limited overnight capabilities. Overnight, regional parks require 1,000 acres or more, and destination, statewide parks require at least 2,000 acres. Such size requirements allow both for facility development and resource protection.

Location and accessibility are other suitability factors to consider. First priority would be to place new parks in locations not presently within the service areas of existing parks. Second priority would go to new parks in areas where better service could be provided by overlapping the service area with those of other state parks.

Feasibility

If a park site can qualify on the basis of desirability and suitability, then feasibility can be determined by considering public support, costs versus benefits, and funding priorities. Providing the kinds of facilities and services which state parks represent requires the public support expressed through the public's willingness to pay for the service--through legislative appropriation, special taxes, bond issues, and user fees charged at the parks.

How the park site fits into the comprehensive recreation plan for the state is another important feasibility consideration. It must fulfill a need for this type facility based on current and projected population distribution in the park's service area. Duplication of existing or planned local, state, federal, or private facilities is unwarranted in light of the scarcity of state funds and the pressure for their use.

Some reasonable planning guidelines regarding locations for units of Alabama's state park system include:

1. Provide a park with day-use capabilities within 50 miles, or 1 hour's drive, of each citizen.
2. Provide a park with some overnight capabilities within 100 miles, or 2 hours' drive, of each citizen.
3. Provide a destination park within 200 miles, or 4 hours' drive, of each citizen.

Funding priorities should first emphasize properly located state parks with adequate day-use facilities for the people of Alabama. Second priority would be overnight capabilities sufficient to meet a reasonable proportion of the needs of both Alabama's citizens and out-of-state visitors. Additional statewide, destination type parks would be next in funding priority provided such additional

facilities were needed. These goals could be achieved by acquiring and developing new park lands, or through upgrading and improving existing park holdings.

New Park Classification System

The need for a classification system for state parks is quite obvious. Each land holding of the State Parks Division is termed a state park regardless of its resource base or development. The only grouping has been into Class I (developed) and Class II (standard), based on acquisition and development expenditures only. The overall result has been reduced public understanding of the state park system, a situation that makes long-range park planning difficult.

A classification system is suggested that should facilitate future planning and development. The proposed system is based on classification according to type of park, length of stay of visitors, area served, and size, as indicated below. Existing Alabama state parks are classified according to these suggested criteria in Table 5.

<u>Type of park</u>	<u>Length of Stay</u>
Resort	Destination
Natural area	Overnight
	Day-use
<u>Area served</u>	<u>Size of Park</u>
State	Large--more than 2,000 acres
Regional	Medium--1,000-2,000 acres
Local	Small--500-999 acres
	Very small--less than 500 acres

Using this classification system with present parks places them in the categories shown in Table 5.

Classification by Type

The classification by type category, largely reflecting the major resource base of the park, divides the state parks into resort and natural area groups.

Resort parks are characterized by a resort inn (motel), restaurant, and lodge facility. The four parks that fit under the category, Gulf, Joe Wheeler Resort Park, Lake Guntersville, and Lakepoint Resort, provide convention facilities and golf courses, along with numerous other recreational opportunities. This type of park is further subdivided into sub-groups known as water, landforms, unique features, and undeveloped parks, with these classifications reflecting the major feature of each park.

Classification by Length of Stay

Duration of time spent at each park by the majority of visitors provides another meaningful classification of state parks. Under this classification, parks are either destination, overnight, or day-use, Table 5.

Table 5. Present Alabama State Parks Classified Under a Revised System^{1/}

Type of park	Length of stay				Service area			Size
	Destination	Overnight	Day use	Overnight facilities	Statewide	Regional	Local	
<u>Resort parks</u>								
Gulf	X			1	X			1
Joe Wheeler-First Creek	X			1	X			1
Lake Guntersville	X			1	X			1
Lakepoint Resort	X			1	X			2
<u>Natural parks</u>								
<u>Water</u>								
Chattahoochee			X	6			X	3
Floral			X				X	4
Joe Wheeler-Wheeler Dam		X		3		X		4
Lake Lurleen		X		4		X		2
Little River			X	6			X	3
Meaher			X				X	2
Oak Mountain			X	2		X		1
Omusee Creek			X				X	4
Paul Grist			X	6			X	2
Roland Cooper			X	2			X	4
Wind Creek		X		4		X		2
<u>Landforms</u>								
Buck's Pocket			X	4			X	2
Cheaha	X			1	X			1
Chewacla			X	3			X	3
Chickasaw			X	6			X	3
DeSoto	X			1	X			1
Monte Sano			X	3			X	1
<u>Unique feature</u>								
Bladon Springs			X				X	4
Blue Springs			X	5			X	4
Rickwood Caverns			X	5			X	4
<u>Undeveloped</u>								
Frank Jackson	Undeveloped							1

^{1/} Key to classifications:
X-Present classification

- Facilities
- Lodge/motel, cabins, all camping
 - Cabins, all camping
 - Cabins, primitive camping
 - All camping
 - Improved camping
 - Primitive camping

- Size
- Large-> 2,000 acres
 - Medium-1,000-2,000 acres
 - Small-500-999 acres
 - Very small-< 500 acres



Facilities such as golf courses are popular attractions at highly developed parks in the Alabama system.



Numerous attractive natural features abound in Alabama state parks.

Destination parks usually provide facilities that are conducive to an extended stay, such as campgrounds, lodges, motel, restaurants, swimming beaches, swimming pools, and tennis courts. Their location usually combines naturally attractive features with convenient access to travelers. The surrounding area usually has recreational opportunities that complement those found in the park.

The majority of visitors to an overnight park usually stay less than a week. While accommodations are provided for overnight visits, the facilities are usually less "plush" than at destination parks, and opportunities for recreation also are fewer.

Day-use parks mainly cater to visitors who spend just a few hours. Such use may be the result of a lack of facilities for overnight use, or the location near a population center may provide the heavy day-use orientation. This classification includes the greatest number of Alabama state parks.

Classification by Area Served

Statewide, regional, and local are sub-groupings for the park service areas. Each classification fills an important need in satisfying recreational demands of Alabamians and out-of-state visitors.

As indicated by the name, statewide parks draw people from all over Alabama. But they also have significant numbers of out-of-state visitors. These parks are enough of an attraction that people are willing to drive long distances to visit them. As would be expected, parks that fit this designation also fall into the destination category under length of stay criteria.

Regional parks serve a multi-county area, with service areas extending as far as 100 miles away. Those near Alabama's borders draw many visitors from out of state.

Local parks represent the majority in the Alabama system, and they get heavy day-use from people in a one- or two-county area of service. About 50 miles is generally considered the maximum distance that people will drive to visit a local type park.

Classification by Size

Classifying parks according to size provides a useful basis for planning and improves the descriptive nature of the classification system. Size is important because it has a strong bearing on the capacity of the park to provide recreational opportunities.

Large and medium parks have much more potential carrying capacity than smaller units. There is room for expansion, if needed, and for many types of recreational experiences. Development can be done without crowding and without damage to the resource base. Open space, a desirable park feature, can be maintained in a large park along with adequate development for desired activities, making the large parks especially valuable for the future. Acreage requirements for these categories are 1,000 to 2,000 for medium and more than 2,000 for large parks.

Small and very small parks, 500-999 and under 500 acres, respectively, obviously are more limited as to the quantity of recreational opportunities they can provide. Such parks cannot offer the open space desired by recreationists, nor is there space for numerous types of recreational facilities. Adequate separation of different activities is hampered. Encroachment of undesirable industries or other "neighbors" also is a disadvantage. There is an obvious need for land acquisition at many smaller park sites to improve their potential for service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions regarding existing and proposed opportunities in each park and the overall park system were obtained from respondents in the park survey, from all park management personnel, and from citizens responding in four public meetings held throughout the state. These inputs were combined with findings from a study of park natural resources, population trends, and anticipated desires of the public to develop a set of recommendations concerning future state park classifications. Each park was examined relative to its place in the state system now and in future years. Recommended changes in individual park designations are shown in Table 6. Suggested reclassifications were based on meeting needs of the total park system rather than on needs of individual parks. Specific recommended changes are discussed more fully in the main report on which this summary is based. Highlights of the recommendations are presented below.

An appropriate park system for Alabama can never be expressed in terms of a maximum or minimum

number of parks, park locations, and specific facilities. Rather, logic dictates the addressing of projected needs over a long time period, such as 20 years. A 20-year time span is about the maximum period over which one may "foresee" park needs. Recommendations are based on this philosophy. Although there are some immediate park needs which would make the system function more efficiently, the more important needs must be met over a long time.

The more significant changes proposed are directed toward making the parks more appealing and more available to more people. A beginning step is to shift several parks from emphasis on a local service area to regional or statewide service areas. For example, of the 22 parks operating in 1977-78, 14 were primarily serving a local populace only. The plan calls for only four of these to remain as local parks in the future (Paul Grist, Roland Cooper, Blue Springs, and Meaher). Five parks should become regional in service area (Little River, Buck's Pocket, Chewacla, Monte Sano, and Rickwood Caverns). One regional park, Wind Creek, is recommended for statewide status. Five parks should be dropped from the system and replaced with parks better suited to serve the needs of Alabama and the park system (Bladon Springs, Chattahoochee, Chickasaw, Florala, and Omusee Creek). Cedar Creek and Fowl River are undeveloped areas that fail to meet the criteria for park development and have limited potential to ever meet state park standards. Thus, disposal of these areas is suggested. Frank Jackson State Park needs extensive study prior to expenditure of additional funds. When new criteria for state park designation are applied to the proposed site for Frank Jackson park, serious questions are raised.

Disposing of selected parks represents only one phase of recommended changes. Other important needs call for upgrading park facilities and, in some cases, increasing park size. Limited overnight accommodations are recommended for all parks. Improved campgrounds (with associated day-use facilities) are suggested for four parks and cabin construction is proposed in all others. No additional lodge-motel-convention type centers appear to be necessary over the 20-year planning period.

Land Needs

One of the most difficult decisions in long-range planning is projecting open space requirements for future park users. The park system had a total of 49,474 acres in 1978, but following the recommended park deletions from the Parks Division jurisdiction gives a final total of 47,599 acres divided among 19 parks, Table 7. This will amount to 12.65 acres per 1,000 residents in 1980 if population increases as expected (down from 13.77 acres per 1,000 people in 1975). Assuming that park lands remain unchanged while population grows, the acreage ratio will drop to 12.10 in 1985, 11.60 in 1990, and 11.07 in 2000. Meeting the acres per 1,000 population standard will require an additional 19,162 acres in 1980, 22,362 acres in 1990, and 23,950 acres by the turn of the century.

Table 6. Recommended Alabama State Park Classifications^{1/}

Type of park	Length of stay				Service area			Size
	Destination	Overnight	Day-use	Overnight facilities	Statewide	Regional	Local	
<u>Resort parks</u>								
Gulf	X			1	X			1
Joe Wheeler-First Creek	X			1	X			1
Lake Guntersville	X			1	X			1
Lakepoint Resort	X			1	X			2
<u>Natural parks</u>								
<u>Water</u>								
Chattahoochee ^{2/}								
Floral ^{2/}								
Joe Wheeler-Wheeler Dam		X		3		X		4
Lake Lurleen		X		2		X		2
Little River		*X		2		*X		3
Meaher			X	5			X	2
Oak Mountain			X	2		X		1
Omusee Creek ^{2/}								
Paul Grist			X	*4			X	2
Roland Cooper			X	2			X	*3
Wind Creek		X		*2	*X			2
<u>Landforms</u>								
Buck's Pocket			X	4		*X		2
Cheaha	X			1	X			1
Chewacla		*X		*2		*X		3
Chickasaw ^{2/}								
DeSoto	X			1	X			1
Monte Sano			X	*2		*X		1
<u>Unique feature</u>								
Bladon Springs ^{2/}								
Blue Springs			X	*4			X	*3
Rickwood Caverns			X	*4		*X		*3
<u>Undeveloped</u>								
Frank Jackson	Undeveloped							1

^{1/}Key to classifications:

	Facilities		Size	
X-Present classification	1. Lodge/motel, cabins, all camping	3. Cabins, primitive camping	1. Large- >2,000 acres	
*-New classification	2. Cabins, all camping	4. All camping	2. Medium-1,000-2,000 acres	
		5. No overnight facilities	3. Small-500-999 acres	
			4. Very small- >500 acres	

^{2/}No longer recommended to be operated as a state park

Table 7. State Park Acreage by Parks and District in 1978, and Projected Minimum District Needs in Future Years

District and park ^{1/}	1978 acreage ^{1/}		Projected district total future acreage needs			
	Individual park	District total	1980	1985	1990	2000
<u>District 1</u>						
Joe Wheeler Resort	2,400	2,400	3,182	3,401	3,623	3,935
<u>District 2</u>						
Lake Lurleen	1,625	1,625	3,410	3,497	3,585	3,692
<u>District 3</u>						
Oak Mountain	9,940					
Rickwood caverns	380	10,320	13,668	14,225	14,777	15,194
<u>District 4</u>						
Cheaha	2,719					
Wind Creek	1,354	4,073	6,285	6,441	6,588	6,693
<u>District 5</u>						
	-0-	-0-	1,602	1,607	1,614	1,616
<u>District 6</u>						
Roland Cooper	200					
Paul M. Grist	1,080	1,280	3,399	3,443	3,486	3,497
<u>District 7</u>						
Blue Springs	103					
Lakepoint Resort	1,220					
Frank Jackson	2,050	3,373	3,621	3,635	3,644	3,705
<u>District 8^{2/}</u>						
Gulf	6,160					
Meaher	1,327					
Little River	960	8,447	8,447	8,447	8,447	8,447
<u>District 9</u>						
	-0-	-0-	3,765	4,020	4,274	4,463
<u>District 10</u>						
Chewacla	696	696	1,745	1,845	1,943	2,088
<u>District 11</u>						
Joe Wheeler Dam	420	420	2,672	2,844	3,015	3,254
<u>District 12^{2/}</u>						
Monte Sano	2,140					
Lake Guntersville	5,835					
Buck's Pocket	2,000					
DeSoto	4,990	14,965	14,965	14,965	14,965	14,965
STATE TOTAL		47,599	56,410	59,000	61,569	64,480

^{1/}Acreage not included for parks recommended for transfer out of system.

^{2/}Districts 8 and 12 state park acreage exceeds the minimum recommended level of 15 acres per 1,000 residents through 2000 as projected. This condition merely indicates that park acreages in these districts are above minimum levels which is a good sign. Total needs in the state are not net. Rather, they are cumulative over all districts.

A portion of the park land needs can be met by adding additional acres to most existing parks. Specific land acquisitions are recommended for Cheaha, Blue Springs, Rickwood Caverns, and Roland Cooper state parks. Such acquisitions are necessary for park operations, but the limited recommended acquisitions will not be sufficient for all the future needs.

Although the need for additional park land is clearly defined, these needs are complicated by questions about future park locations. The greatest needs expected are near the Birmingham and Montgomery metropolitan areas, districts 3 and 9. Geographically, however, needs are great in the western and south-central sections of the state. Thus, the decision of locating areas for future acquisitions is difficult. There will be an immediate need for land in areas where inadequate parks are recommended for closing.

Decisions on park locations must include consideration of complementary recreational developments by private, municipal, county, federal, or other state agencies. State parks are not intended as competitors to private or other government sector ventures. Rather, they should provide recreational opportunities not normally available elsewhere.

Three major federal recreational suppliers in Alabama are the Tennessee Valley Authority, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Forest Service. Two of these agencies provide a significant portion of the water-based recreational opportunities in Alabama. TVA provides public camp grounds, day-use areas, and water access points in districts 1, 11, and 12. The Corps of Engineers offers recreational activities at several points along several of Alabama's major rivers, and more are planned along the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway. Forest Service recreational areas are quite important in providing land-based activities.

Location of any new facilities by the Parks Division should be determined after plans of other primary suppliers are considered. When potential sites offered or provided by various federal and state agencies meet criteria set for state parks, these sites should be evaluated as possible additions to the parks system. However, the mere existence and/or availability of any site developed by other agencies does not qualify the site as a state park. Several parks now being considered for deletion from the system were previously owned or developed by another operating agency. In most instances, the site was transferred to the state because it was ill-located, inefficient, too undeveloped, or too costly to operate. Thus, sites offered by another agency must meet minimum criteria to be considered for state park designation.

Once complementary or alternative recreational sites operated by other agencies are determined, the need and location for a new or expanded state park can be determined. A strong recommendation is made that a careful study be made prior to incorporating any existing or potential site into the state park system.

Individual Park Needs

The 1977-78 user survey provided considerable insight into concerns of citizens about the state park system. Many valuable comments and suggestions about individual parks were obtained in a series of public hearings in Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile. All park managerial staff and some operational staff also were interviewed, providing another viewpoint on park needs, problems, and advantages. Specific recommendations obtained relate to facility needs or improvements, as well as to operational, personnel, and administrative problems.

Wishes of park users center around providing more "things to do," with an educational or nature interpretive program getting the largest number of mentions. Interest was strong for protecting natural features, with many calling for even less development in certain parks to maintain the natural setting for unstructured recreation.

Comments from the user interviews and public hearings were considered carefully in making the following suggestions for individual parks in the system. Recommendations presented below are summaries of details presented in the full park planning guide.

Bladon Springs

This 357-acre park in southern Choctaw County is seriously limited by its remote location, lack of a source of good fresh water, and limited population of the area. It should be discontinued as a state park, and either closed or leased to Choctaw County for use as a county park.

Blue Springs

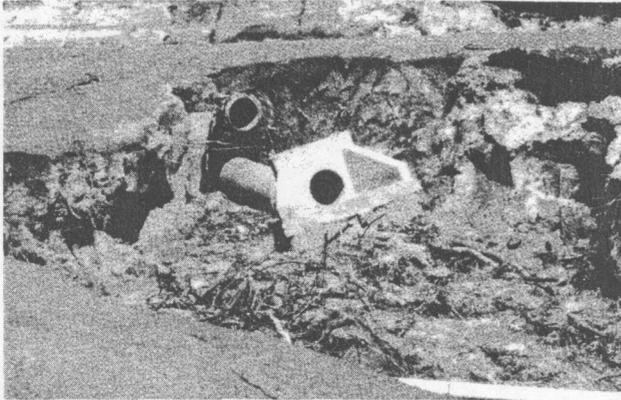
Although Blue Springs is too small for state park designation (103 acres), it fills an important need for people of Barbour, Pike, Coffee, and Dale counties. Its day-use facilities get heavy use from family, church, school, and social groups. The rare and unique character of the natural spring is its most valuable resource.

Additional lands should be acquired to change Blue Springs from a local to a regional day-use park. This land could be used for expansion of picnic facilities, fields sports areas, and campgrounds. Adding a few cabins and some hiking trails would enhance this park's recreational value.

Buck's Pocket

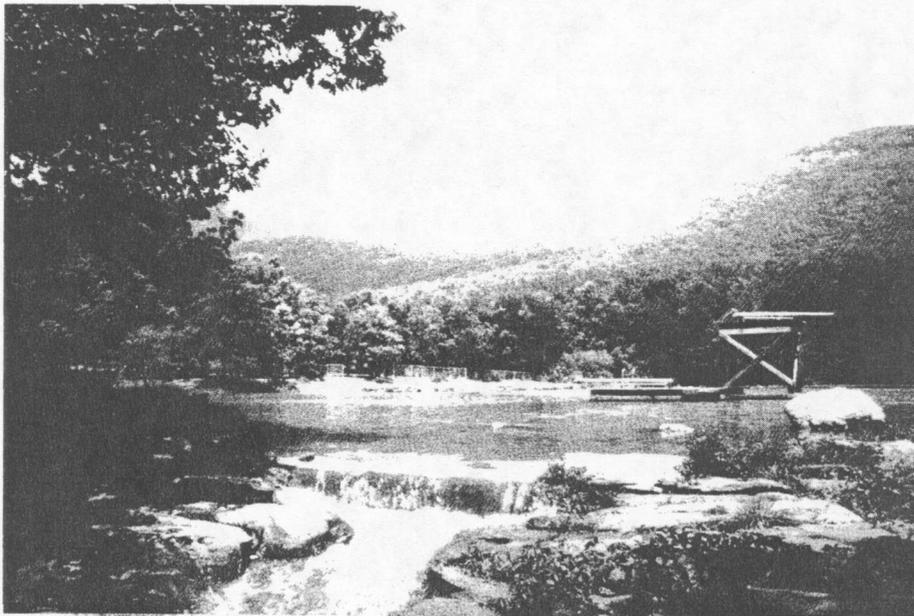
Road improvement and making changes to cope with the flooding problem are major actions recommended for Buck's Pocket State Park, a site with unique geographic and geologic features. Flash flooding creates a safety problem for park personnel and visitors alike, and it is recommended that overnight development be moved out of the flood plain area. A further suggestion concerns acquiring land in the Point Rock area to locate park headquarters and the park campground. Since danger of flooding

limits all but day-use activities on the canyon floor, the logical move would be to shift facilities to the canyon rim. A paved road is needed from park headquarters to Morgan's Cove to replace the treacherous dirt road now in use.



Solutions to flooding problems is a major need for Buck's Pocket State Park to reach its potential.

A geologic interpretive center and series of geologic hiking trails are needed to enhance visitor enjoyment of this unique park. Maintaining Buck's Pocket as a distinct, natural, landform park will help keep the entire park system in balance, by preserving a rich diversity of natural features among the total resource base of the system.



Although Cheaha State Park should continue to emphasize its natural beauty and scenic attractions, certain development is needed for best service.

Chattahoochee

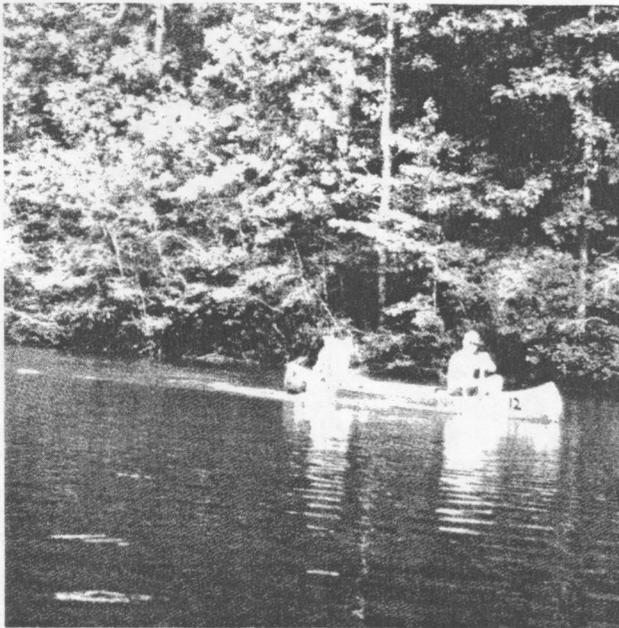
Since it contributes little to a well rounded state park system, Chattahoochee State Park is recommended for discontinuance. This 16th section land, which was leased from the State Department of Education, should be returned to that agency, for proper management of the mature pine timber stand and possible leasing to Houston County for a county park.

Cheaha

Located atop Mount Cheaha, Alabama's highest point, Cheaha State Park was upgraded to a limited resort park with funds from the 1967 bond issue. Despite its scenic mountain setting and developed facilities (campgrounds, cottages, motel, and restaurant), this park has several basic needs that must be met for its full potential to be reached. The most immediate need is for construction of new office, maintenance, and visitor center buildings. A visitor center, doubling as a nature interpretive center, is a must for this mountain park. Complaints about lack of activities and facilities and poorly developed campsites identify some of the park's needs.

Chewacla

Chewacla State Park has a wealth of natural resources, but only limited facilities, mostly for day-use activities. Its location, resources, and attractions are of the quality and quantity that could change it from a local day-use to a regional day-use park with limited overnight accommodations. Improvements could result in large increases in visitation.



Boating is a popular activity at many state parks.

Recommendations include significant expansion of day-use capabilities plus adding approximately 100 campground sites and 13 rustic cabins to expand overnight capacity. A natural-environmental interpretive center is suggested to appeal to nearby universities and to provide a point of interest for day-use and overnight visitors. Improving water quality of streams through the park and in the 26-acre lake and closing of a road through the park are suggested as ways to improve this park and help it contribute its maximum to the state park system.

Chickasaw

Another unit of the state park system that should be discontinued is Chickasaw State Park, in Marengo County. While the park has limited facilities for day-use activities, it draws only a small number of visitors each year, and nearly all of these are from the local area. The major natural feature of the park, located on 16th section State Department of Education land, is its large tract of native pine timber, including some "reported" virgin timber.

It is recommended that this park be returned to the State Department of Education for possible leasing as a county park. Adding a state park of 1,500-2,000 acres in a better location of District 6 would provide a better balance of state parks in the system.

DeSoto

The fourth largest of Alabama's state parks, DeSoto has some unique features--DeSoto Falls, Little River Canyon, and the resort facility--that make it a popular drawing card. Over 41 percent of the 1977-78 visitors interviewed at this park were non-Alabama residents, which indicate its widespread

appeal. It is popular both for day-use visits and for long vacations.

Recommendations for this valuable park stress expansion to meet anticipated growing visitation rates. Renovation of the falls area to protect it against deterioration and to make for pleasant visits by large numbers of people is a priority item. Permanent staff is needed at the falls, and land acquisition by fee title to lands around the falls is needed. Developed scenic overlooks are a necessity for safety and scenic enjoyment.



Improvements around the Falls area of DeSoto State Park are vital for safety of visitors and for enjoyment by recreationists.

Efforts should be begun to encourage the appropriate state or federal agencies to obtain control of as much land as necessary to provide a buffer around Little River Canyon. The rim scenic drive which is already part of DeSoto State Park should be improved for safety and access, and a permanent control headquarters and rest area--with furnished staff housing--should be provided. Access to the canyon floor should be by permit only for user safety and site protection.

An interpretive center with auditorium and mini-museum is suggested for the main section of this park. Also needed are more rustic cabins, meeting rooms, dining space, and additional motel rooms. Additional land acquisitions for picnicking and other day-use facilities also are suggested.

Florala

Also recommended for disposal is Florala State Park, a 35-acre strip along Lake Jackson in the City of Florala. Although used by a limited number of visitors during summer, this day-use facility has no potential for expansion to meet criteria of a state park.

The first suggestion is to turn this site over to the City of Florala or Covington County for use as a local park. Another option would be to close the park and dispose of the property, an action that would not be popular locally. If neither of these steps are taken, then the site should be changed to the classification of a "state recreation area" and services reduced accordingly.

Frank Jackson

A 2,050 acre site in Covington County has been designated for development as Frank Jackson State Park. Located just northwest of Opp, the site is presently undeveloped swamp and upland hardwood areas. A 1,000 acre lake fed by Lightwood Knot Creek is planned. As proposed, the park would eventually serve as a primary recreational attraction for residents of planning districts 5, 6, 7, and 8. However, several existing factors place severe limitations on the area's potential for becoming an effective state park.

Applying the criteria for state park designation (developed earlier in this report) and analyzing the current situation, it is questionable whether the proposed Frank Jackson Park could meet all these criteria. This area has an acceptable rating in terms of its desirability for state park use. The general location is such that it could serve a region which is in need of additional state park services, but the specific location is not conducive to providing the desired state park features. Also, serious developmental and operational problems are anticipated under the suitability and feasibility criteria. Physical site characteristics pose obstacles that must be overcome prior to the development of a suitable state park.

Limited alternatives are available with respect to these problems. Development of normal park-type facilities, such as camping, swimming, boating, picnicking, and fishing, will require contiguous land areas or areas within easy access of one another. Present shoreline areas are not suitable for these needs. Hence the acquisition of additional contiguous lands up to 300 acres along the shore may be needed. Such an acquisition would allow more proper park development, although increasing the total costs for the project. The most logical area for acquisition is adjacent to an area east of the lake about half way up its length. This site has rather steep slopes and is not good land for campgrounds, etc. However, it does appear to be the better alternative.

On the positive side, the park location is acceptable. Opening a park in this area would mean Florala State Park could be phased out easily. Furthermore, the park could serve a region now deficient in state park lands. However, these

possibilities depend on the proper development of this site. The management associated with developing and operating a state park along the fringes of the proposed lake would be quite costly and complex. The returns to cost ratio of such a venture should be expected to be rather low. This means a worsening of Parks Division financial status rather than an improvement.

Needs of the park system include an area of similar size to the proposed Frank Jackson State Park. However, basic problems of topography, erosion, developmental space needs, and managerial problems indicate a need for an extensive study of the site prior to commitment of additional funds.

Gulf

Gulf State Park has several distinctions that make it an extremely valuable component of the state park system. Located on the Gulf of Mexico, it has 6,160 acres, it offers both fresh and salt water recreational opportunities, and it has excellent developed facilities (convention center, motel-lodge, large campground, guest cottages, and golf course). As might be expected, it has heavy visitation--more visitors than all other state parks combined.

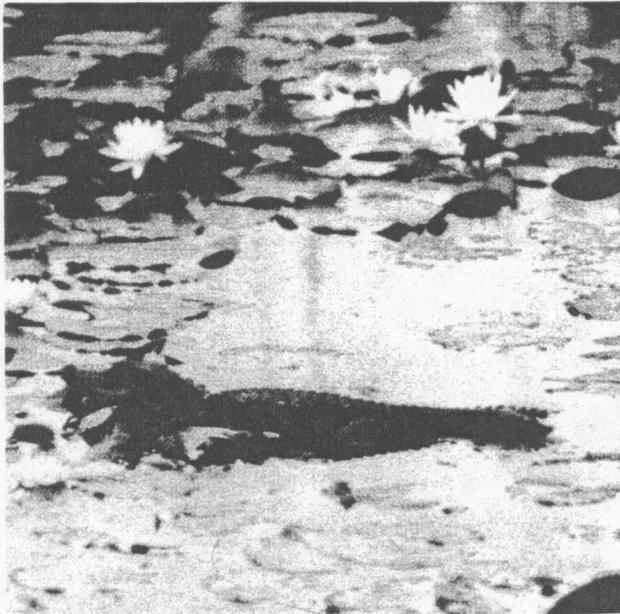
Specific recommendations for this park call for adding guest cottages, and campground sites to expand overnight capabilities. If technically feasible, an addition to the present fishing pier--300 to 400-foot extension into the Gulf and a 100-foot "T" on the end--are suggested to help relieve the overcrowding on this popular facility.



Gulf State Park is a popular vacation spot.

An educational center and interpretive program is another big need of Gulf State Park. In fact, facilities are needed for two concurrent programs, one at the campground and one at the lodge.

Other needs are for expanding and improving the headquarters, adding of picnic facilities, and renovations and additions to the beach side facilities.

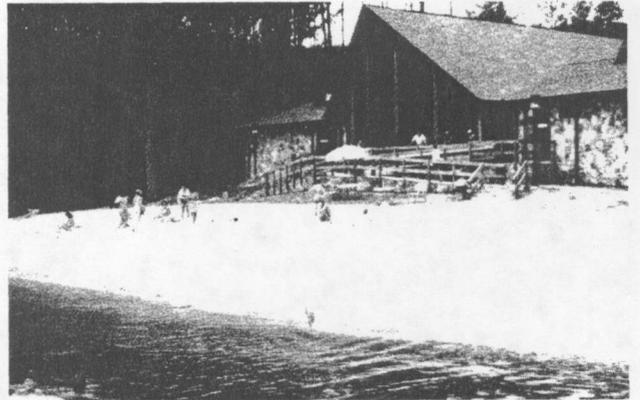


Preservation of wildlife is an important part of the program in Gulf State Park.

Joe Wheeler

Being divided into three separate areas represents some of the problems facing Joe Wheeler State Park. The First Creek area contains the major developments--a resort inn, restaurant, and convention center--and is the area that deserves major consideration. The Elk River area of the park is operated as a satellite, and the fishing lodge has been converted to a Young Adult Conservation Corps (Y.A.C.C.) housing center. The water access site for fishing and boating is still available to the public. Turning the Elk River access area over to Limestone County should be considered as an alternative to make park operations more efficient. The Wheeler Dam and Village area should continue to be operated as an adjunct to the First Creek Portion.

For the First Creek area, facility improvements needed are a primitive camping area, additional water access in the First Creek area, and a boat ramp at the improved campground. Day-use facilities--beach area, picnic area, bicycle and hiking trails--need improvements or additions.



New day-use facilities for swimming (above) and picnicking (below) are popular additions to Joe Wheeler State Park.



No development in the Second Creek area is recommended for the immediate future. Rather, attention should be concentrated on operating and maintaining the new overnight and day use centers in the First Creek area.

Lake Guntersville

The 5,838 acres of Lake Guntersville, with its convention center, motel, restaurant, campground, golf course, lakeside cabins, beach pavilion, and day-use areas provide for heavy visitor use at present. However, there are specific needs for meeting future demand, reflected in the following recommendations.

A waterfront dock and water access facility in the campground and beach area is presently needed, along with a more sophisticated marina to handle large boats that are operated on the Tennessee River. Also needed is an improved picnic area near the fishing center with comfort stations, lights, water sources, and a security fence.

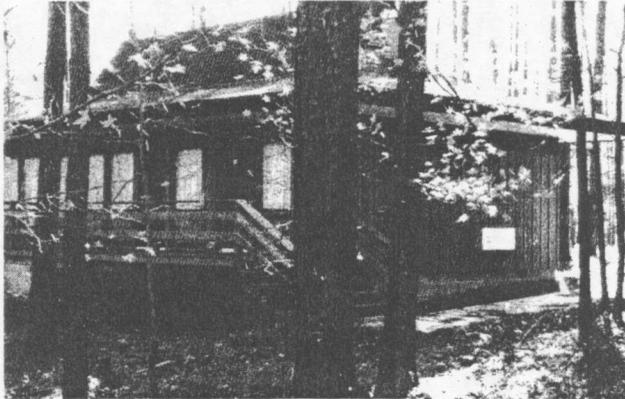
Overnight use of the present picnic area should be stopped. Primitive camping should be shifted to the main campground area. Actually, space permits only semi-primitive camping. Consequently, the "primitive" campground needs expansion and improvement, with control of vagrant camping a necessity.

Building needs are limited to additional waterfront cabins with better water access. The major needs cited by visitors were not buildings, however, but efforts to keep the park as natural as possible.

Lakepoint Resort

Being the newest resort park in the system, Lakepoint Park has good facilities to serve its function. Ten additional duplex guest cottages probably will be needed by 1990, and future camping needs anticipated are (1) 75-100 additional developed campsites, (2) a semi-primitive area for groups up to 100 people, and (3) 50 semi-primitive walk-in tent areas near the lakeshore.

Continued restoration of the natural landscape following development is probably the greatest need for Lakepoint. Another pressing need is for better traffic control and park security. Closing of State Road 165 to non-park use will help this, as will establishing a central gate for all traffic near park headquarters.



Additional guest cottages are needed at Lakepoint Resort to meet anticipated future needs.

Lake Lurleen

Developed on the site of the Tuscaloosa County public fishing lake, Lake Lurleen State Park has the potential and natural resources to fulfill its role as a natural, water-oriented, overnight regional park if needed improvements are made. Immediate needs include improved maintenance, solutions to sewage problems in the campgrounds, provision of a storage and maintenance building to shelter fertilizer and equipment, and designation of boating and fishing areas or hours on the lake to reduce conflict between the two groups of users.

Based on the park survey, additions are needed for camping, including an overflow area for

existing developed camping and adding of sanitary facilities for a primitive camping area at a site on the ridge above the chapel. Also needed are additional improved picnicking facilities and better trails. Development of an interpretive program to use facilities already available is recommended. Adding cabins is a need for the future, as is the construction of a combination group meeting facility and new interpretative center. A small amount of land should be acquired to prevent encroachment by conflicting land uses, and relocation of Tuscaloosa County Road 49 could reduce non-park traffic through the area and allow use of the old county road as a park road.

Little River

Shifting of Little River Park from a local day-use park to a regional overnight park is recommended. This will require extensive renovation of buildings, grounds, and the lake. Being accessible from I-65, this site could receive considerable overnight visitation if a few guest cabins and improved and primitive campgrounds were provided.

Action recommended to meet demands in the next decade are for 75 campsites providing water, electricity, and dump stations, a developed water system, 8 guest cabins, 100 picnic tables, new bathhouses, comfort stations, camp store, lake shore renovation, increased parking, and road improvements. A rustic appearance should be maintained in all construction.

Also suggested are more lake, beach, and shore management for day-use functions, as well as a park manager's residence within the park.

Meaher

Meaher State Park is severely limited for development because of its low site along Battleship Parkway. Much of the land is below 5-foot elevation, and over half is submerged. Fishing and water access are its main uses. Since filling in of areas currently is prohibited by regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency, only limited development is possible.

It is recommended that this park be operated under the special status of a "state recreation area" rather than as a state park with water access and fishing emphasized. This calls for improved access from U.S. 90, paved roads and parking lots on high ground, improved boat launching and shoreline fishing capabilities, addition of a fishing pier and comfort stations, and improved picnic facilities. The possibility of developing a tidal-bay environmental study area in Meaher State Park should be investigated.

Monte Sano

Location within the metropolitan Huntsville area makes the mountainous Monte Sano State Park a unique unit of the state park system. No change should be made in its orientation centered around its natural features, site, and location. However, several improvements are suggested to make it better able to serve the large population base surrounding it.

A large educational-interpretive center to inform school groups and individual visitors about the natural resources of the park and area are a major need. An interpretive center at the current office location plus a remote classroom on "Panther Knob," which could be reached only by trail, are specific recommendations.

Complementary developments recommended include a group lodge to house 30-50 people, 10 additional cabins with capacity of 6-10, and a 60- to 80-site developed campground. A water recreation area to serve day-use visitors also should be considered, and picnic facilities should be expanded and improved. In all development, however, the natural and scenic beauty and the wilderness-like features of this park should be maintained.

Oak Mountain

Being the only regional day-use park in the system is a distinction held by Oak Mountain State Park, which is situated to serve the large Birmingham area population. Projections for the future show large increases in day-use visitation, along with increased pressure for overnight use because of its access from I-65. Thus, change will be needed to make this park fill the public's needs of the future.

One possible change would be to develop an educational center to be operated by one of the area's universities to provide educational opportunities about the area's varied ecology. Another possible alternative would be to complete the development of a resort facility in the park. This alternative would call for a lodge and motel center with 100 rooms, along with renovation of the existing restaurant and meeting area.

Changing part of the demonstration farm into a visitor or nature center, gift shop, park headquarters, and farm resource museum is recommended. Shifting the visitor-headquarters center from the beach area would allow space for additional day-use activities. Other recommendations include providing a roof covering for the skating rink for use as a picnic pavilion, comfort stations, storage area, equipment rental area, a trail system, and an amphitheater in a natural "bowl" area for entertainment programs. Also needed is an additional campground with 150 developed sites. This new campground should be located on the west side of Double Oak Lake to increase overnight capability and visitor satisfaction. Park security is another area where improvement is needed.

Omusee Creek

Among the parks recommended for discontinuance is Omusee Creek State Park, a 165-acre site on the Chattahoochee River that is leased from the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Primary attraction of this park is a group of primitive Indian mounds, but the site does not meet minimum standards for a state park. Optimum use of the site would be as a State Historical Site, under jurisdiction of the Alabama Historical Commission. If the Commission cannot accept control of the property, it should be returned to the Corps of Engineers for possible

lease to Houston County to be used as a county park.

Paul Crist

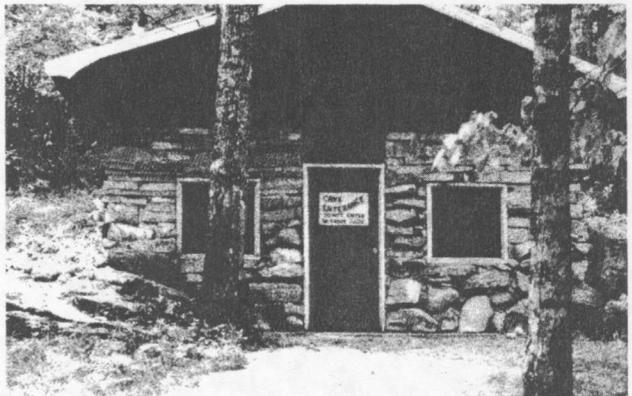
Although this lightly developed park receives only a small number of visitors each year, it should be continued as a local day-use park, but with improvements to enhance its value.

Specific recommendations call for improving water opportunities by adding a sand beach for swimming and adding a shoreline trail for fishing access. Trails or roads should be built for access to land areas throughout the park, and some degree of overnight accommodations (developed camping facilities) should be provided. Directional signs are needed within the park to differentiate between the private use area leased to the Selma YMCA and other state park public areas.

Rickwood Caverns

Once a privately owned attraction, Rickwood Caverns State Park adds another dimension to the state park system by offering visitors an opportunity to explore an underground cavern. For this park to reach its potential, however, will require some changes in its basic classification along with a number of important improvements. Overnight capabilities are needed, and it should be shifted from a local area park to one with a regional classification.

Short-term needs mainly consist of bringing Rickwood up to acceptable state park standards of appearance, management, maintenance, and operations, and overcoming the amusement park orientation left over from previous management.



Rickwood Caverns State Park needs to be brought up to standards of the Alabama park system.

A small portion of the cavern's passageway lies outside the park's surface boundaries. Thus, the necessary surface and mineral rights should be acquired in the southwestern corner of the park to fully encompass the cavern. Also, land is needed to provide a buffer zone to protect from outside

encroachment. Some land acquisition in the north-east area of the park is necessary to provide a much improved access point to the park from I-65.

Development recommendations call for a 100-site campground with full hook-ups and central restrooms and a semi-primitive camping area of 50 sites with restrooms, water, and electricity. The park also needs an interpretive center oriented to the cavern and geologic features of the area. A trails system and improvements to picnic facilities are other needs that should get attention.

Roland Cooper

This entire 200-acre park on the Dannelly Reservoir is operated by a concessionaire on a contractual basis. Thus, the profit motive is the overriding factor in park management. This is the basis for many problems that exist on this intensively developed small park, problems that reflect the poor use being made of the site's natural and developed resources.

The first recommendation is for the State Parks Division to begin operating the park under the system's public service orientation. This must then be followed by solutions for maintenance problems and adding of such recreational opportunities as swimming and shoreline fishing. Trail development, improved natural area management, educational program offerings, and more and better water access points are suggested. Finally, additional land should be acquired to bring this park up to the 500-acre minimum suggested for a small state park.

Wind Creek

Wind Creek State Park is another of the system's units that was formerly a private operation. This park has deteriorated badly in recent years, but a massive improvement and redevelopment program are now underway.

Recommendations for this site on Lake Martin call for shifting its classification from a regional park to a destination statewide park, but retaining its natural water orientation and size classification. In addition to improvements already planned, recommendations for the future are to increase the number of developed campsites to 1,000 and to build 15 to 25 rustic style cabins. An interpretive program is also highly desirable to make use of the park's resources and additional recreational opportunities.

Operational Changes

Concession Operation

The Parks Division began the massive expansion program in an uncertain position with respect to managerial ability in motels, lodges, and restaurants. To gain time to learn about such ventures, lease arrangements were developed for several concessionaires to operate some of the facilities. ARASERV, Inc., became the leading concessionaire with leases on the motel, lodge, restaurant, and cabin facilities in the resort parks. The entire

operation of Roland Cooper State Park was assumed by ARASERV. Lake Guntersville park management was retained by the state for trial purposes.

Park resort facilities apparently have been profitable. A payment of \$414,720 was received from concessions by the state in 1977-78 alone. Concession receipts received by the state have grown each year of such operation.

There is no justifiable reason why the state should not be receiving the full return from resort operations. Lake Guntersville results have shown that the state can operate these facilities. Continuation of these contracts simply means that the income during the prime years of operation, when facilities are new, goes to a private operation. When the facilities deteriorate, the logical action of a concessionaire is to drop the lease. Results for the state are obvious.

Consequently, a strong recommendation is made that the state assume operation of these facilities as quickly as existing contracts expire. If that option is not possible, the best alternative is a long-term, 25-year lease on the facilities with maintenance and improvement costs borne by the lessee. This option is considered a poor second choice.

There are several changes in personnel classifications which must be made before the state can assume full operations. Immediate attention to personnel needs is recommended. Necessary legislative action to clear these and other legal obstacles should be sought immediately in order to avoid delays in assumption of operations.

Park Staffing

In addition to personnel needed to assume full park operation in facilities now under lease, additions to park professional staff are recommended. Much emphasis has been given in this report to development of an interpretive-educational program in state parks. Implementation of such a program will require several trained professionals for the state office and in the individual parks where programs are recommended. Furthermore, a sizeable budget for both personnel and capital items will be needed to initiate such a program and bring it into maturity so that resulting park attendance revenues will pay for much of the effort. These funds should provide for staff, printed materials, labor in the parks, equipment, and promotional efforts.

Another area of personnel need is in park security forces. A serious gap exists in the ability of existing staff to adequately protect the public or the public's investment in facilities. A cooperative arrangement between the Parks Division and the Game and Fish and Marine Police Divisions for help on weekends and holidays in the summer season has been most helpful. However, this arrangement is at best a stop-gap measure. As crowds continue to increase, full-time, on-site security needs will be more obvious. Even now the park management staff must assume security duties as well as their own management responsibilities.

Consequently, neither job function receives the attention needed. Exact needs should be determined by professional law enforcement personnel.



Park security needs to be improved to handle large crowds that will be visiting state parks in the future.

FUNDING NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

State parks are owned by the public. Consequently, they must be built and operated by the public as well as for the public. However, public opinion varies widely on how parks should be financed. Some people say tax monies should support the parks 100 percent, while others believe park users should pay the full costs. Nearly all individuals interviewed in the 1977-78 survey thought the existing fee structure for the various park activities and services was reasonable. They expected to pay for use, but only up to a point. Over half of these people believed more tax funds should be expended on parks. When given the choice of higher fees or reduced park recreational opportunities, 72 percent reluctantly said fees should be raised.

In essence, park users were saying that (1) park construction is a public expense; (2) park operation is a shared public, individual user expense; and (3) park maintenance primarily is a public expense. Most people interviewed felt Alabama state parks were not operating at full potential because of a lack of funds and personnel.

The needs observed by park visitors are quite real. Voter approval of the 1967 general obligation bonds for capital outlays in state parks implied an obligation to support the construction program by

operating and maintenance funds and staffing. However, this obligation has not been fulfilled. Approximately \$70 million worth of new construction has occurred in the state parks since the bond issue was approved. These facilities are now slowly deteriorating for lack of maintenance. Additional millions will be needed over time to complete the park modernization program. However, it is poor business to develop new facilities when existing ones are not properly maintained.

Crippling deficits in the parks operation and maintenance budget during the last 5 years are evident in Table 8. Since the improvement program began, there has been only one year, 1975-76, when requested appropriated receipts met needs. Even in that year, part of the money could not be spent because of expected deficits in 1976-77. In 1978-79, the situation became even more critical. Of \$3.2 million requested, \$2.6 million was appropriated, and non-expenditure disbursements (transfers) absorbed nearly \$1.2 million of that. These funds merely flow through the parks budget and, while giving an appearance of an abundance, they are of no use whatsoever to the Parks Division. The park revolving fund derived from concession income is the only viable source of support for park operations and maintenance in fiscal year 1979-80. However, it will not be enough to continue the existing program. Consequently, the residual amount available for park operations is critical. The state parks cash flow situation is most critical. Expenditures for repairs and maintenance likely will deplete the budget before revenues from the park summer season begin to generate much cash. Hence, the Division is likely to end the year with some parks closed or an extremely low fund carry-over for repeating the cycle.

One park in Alabama has been partially funded by the Parks Division although not under Division control. Tannehill Historical State Park was developed by the Tannehill Foundary and Furnace Commission on the site of the old Tannehill Ironworks near Birmingham. This 1,000-acre park is located in the corners of Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, and Bibb counties.

The park is not a part of the Department of Conservation's State Parks Division since ownership and operation are controlled by the Tannehill Commission. However \$100,000 in State Park Division funds have been allocated to Tannehill during several years by virtue of a legislative directive. This dual nature of funding and operation has created some degree of confusion for the general public, and caused problems for the Parks Division. The Parks Division has had no opportunity to affect conditions in the park, and the types of development and operations are somewhat different from those of other state parks. However, it is a state owned park set up for a different purpose under a separate agency with no responsibility to the State Parks Division.

Two alternatives appear relevant for solving the problem. First, the Parks Division could assume complete ownership and control of the park. This procedure may be the ultimate long-run solution. However, in the short-run, this does not

Table 8. Budget Requests and Receipts for Operations and Maintenance, Alabama State Parks, Fiscal Years 1975-76 through 1978-79

Fiscal year	State General Fund				Other funds received for park use	
	Budget request	Total appropriation	Appropriation received for park operations	Appropriation not for park operation use ^{1/}	Amount	Source
	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	Dollars	
1975-76	3,234,665	1,500,000	1,000,000	500,000	2,250,000 ^{2/}	Revenue sharing
1976-77	3,390,962	-0-	-0-	100,000 ^{3/}	500,000	Federal funds for salaries only
					1,050,000 ^{3/}	Transfer of Parks Capital Outlay Funds
1977-78	2,837,783	1,357,500	700,000 ^{4/}	651,500	-0-	
1978-79	3,241,709	2,600,000	1,400,000	1,200,000	-0-	

^{1/} Legislature or Governor transfer of appropriated funds from Parks Fund to others and is part of total General Fund appropriations.

Year	Frank Jackson State Park	Tannehill Historical Park	Bibb County Lake	DeSoto Falls
1975-76	400,000	100,000	-	-
1976-77	-	100,000	-	-
1977-78	500,000	100,000	-	57,500
1978-79	1,000,000	100,000	100,000	-

^{2/} \$625,000 of the 1975-76 revenue sharing appropriation was received in 1976-77.

^{3/} Total transfer from Parks Capital Outlay Fund equaled \$1,150,000.

^{4/} Includes \$300,000 supplemental appropriation.

appear to be possible. A second possibility would be to eliminate the annual financial drain by removal of the legislative mandates to transfer funds from state parks to Tannehill Historical Park.

There is an obvious duplication of effort in providing recreation in this situation. If this park were the only one being operated by a state agency other than the Parks Division, then the solution would be simple. However other sites in the state also are being developed under funding from the Alabama Historical Commission. It is easily conceivable that similar financial arrangements might also occur in the future. Such a situation could be tragic for Alabama. A study of these type operations and their relation to the total state-supplied recreational situation is recommended.

In fiscal year 1977-78 the operations budget showed a ratio of receipts generated by the parks to expenditures of 0.73 to 1, Table 9. This ratio is much too high for proper operations since park maintenance is at a low point. Most states show less than 0.5 dollars of income generated by parks for each dollar of expenditure. Alabama never reached a figure this low during the last eight years. Many states report that receipts generated

operation and maintenance costs. Alabama achieved its high ratio by not carrying out a normal maintenance schedule. The higher expenditures projected for 1979-80 reflect funds needed to "catch-up" on the maintenance needs. Continuation of deferred maintenance will only result in higher costs later on and reduced incomes as facilities deteriorate.

The Parks Division has developed road systems as part of capital development. However, maintenance has been minimal because of lack of funds. As a result, the Parks Division was forced to request approximately \$1.5 million from the General Fund in fiscal year 1979-80 for roads and parking lot repairs. This cost should be borne by the Highway Department instead of the Parks Division. Presently nearly all park users pay the state gasoline tax since they get to the parks in gas driven vehicles. Upon arrival, visitors must pay entrance and various user fees to participate in park activities. These funds are used partially for road construction and upkeep. In essence, visitors are asked to pay twice for the privilege of using acceptable roads. Situations such as this have kept the Parks Division in a continual state of turmoil with respect to regular park operations.

Table 9. Alabama State Park Operations Receipts and Expenditures Fiscal Year Comparisons 1976-80

Fiscal year	Ratio receipts to expenditures		
	Receipts ^{1/} Dollars	Expenditures ^{2/} Dollars	
1975-76	3,826,044.33	5,826,543.80	.66 to 1
1976-77	4,726,643.26	7,066,548.73	.67 to 1
1977-78	5,519,599.85	7,602,303.18	.73 to 1
1978-79	6,063,037.00*	9,083,398.00*	.67 to 1
1979-80	6,592,060.00*	12,377,690.00* ^{3/}	.53 to 1

*Estimated

^{1/} Receipts include monies received from park sales, commissions, rentals, and fees, sand and gravel royalties, Comprehensive Employment and Training ACT (CETA) reimbursements, and other miscellaneous receipts.

^{2/} Excludes appropriation transfers from General Fund as per Legislature or Governor as outlined in Table 8.

^{3/} Estimated expenditures for 1979-80 include \$1,305,575.00 maintenance supplement General Fund request.

Alabama is about to enter an era of low income to expense ratios, primarily because park costs are climbing much faster than revenues generated from park operations. Unless additional state general funds are obtained, certain activities or even parks must be shut down. The result may be that only activities that produce self-sustaining revenues will be opened to the public. Furthermore, future maintenance needs will increase more rapidly than normal because of accelerated deterioration. The ultimate result of this cycle could be closing one or more of the newly developed parks. Under these conditions the parks system likely will degenerate to sub-par levels.

Overall, the park financial status is critical. Continued reductions in state funds can only mean a reduction in the quality of recreational experiences in Alabama state parks. Future needs are expected to greatly exceed present needs. Hence, a regular continuous fund source is essential for park operations. Under existing conditions, an annual outside source of no less than \$3.5 million is needed for park operations as developmental recommendations are implemented, this annual need may double. Uncertain general fund appropriations do not provide the continuity needed for a business operation such as exists in the parks. All Alabamians have the responsibility to provide support for the development they created. Hence, it is recommended that appropriate measures be taken to set aside specific state funds for park operations. Included in this is the recommendation that any funds generated by the cigarette tax in excess of the amount needed to amortize the general obligation bonds for capital outlay in parks be earmarked for Park Division use. When the bond issue is

paid off in 1984, the tax should be retained to finance park operations or park capital needs.

Another potential funding source is off-shore oil and gas royalties received by Alabama. A small percentage of these funds, say 15 percent, could be set aside for resource development and operation in state parks. This source, although quite uncertain at present, has high potential.

Other funding sources should also be explored. For example, an add-on tax on distilled alcoholic beverages of approximately 2.6 percent could generate up to \$3.7 million annually. Estimates are that some 15% of alcoholic beverage consumption occurs as a part of leisure pastime.

Without a specific outside fund source, the only alternative left to the Parks Division is to close selected parks or significantly increase user fees. Fees obviously can be raised. However, the amount of increase is restrained by the public service function of state parks. Excessive fee schedules for entrance and facility use in the parks could deprive many Alabama citizens of the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of outdoor recreation. Thus, it behooves all Alabamians to collectively seek the necessary funds for park operation and development in an optimum manner.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Priorities for implementing the specific recommendations regarding the Alabama state park system can be divided into present and future needs. Present needs are further divided into priorities for (1) system policy, (2) system development, and (3) system programs. Implementation of each phase is to some extent dependent on fruition of higher priority areas. However, several aspects of the full needs may be implemented simultaneously. Although immediate concerns may take several years to accomplish, these short-run needs should be used as goals for park system improvement. Taken as a whole the systems needs seem awesome. Yet, when they are broken down into short-range goals to be pursued sequentially, the task is feasible.

Park System Policies

Foremost among all aspects of the park system is the need for adequate funding. Unless an adequate and regular source of funds is provided, few of the remaining recommendations have substantial basis for implementation. Financial needs of the Parks Division form three categories--maintenance and operation, capital outlay, and personnel improvement. The capital outlay programs of the 1970's has thus far provided Alabama with some of the best resort park facilities in the United States. When on-going construction is completed, Alabama will have the basis for an excellent system with a wide ange of diversity. This level of excellence in development is the reason for recommending additional funding in park operations, maintenance, and staff improvement. It is accurate to say that without fund improvement and stability, an excellent system may become second rate.

Assuming that adequate funds are available, the most pressing need is to reorganize the full

system into the classifications outlined in this report. The reorganization recommendations fall into several categories which lend themselves to planning changes via short-run goals. Adoption of the park classification scheme has first priority with respect to system needs.

Second priority is acceptance of the general outline for changes within the system. Most other priority recommendations stem from the organizational changes as outlined. Clearly defined objectives and goals to be accomplished within a reasonable time period give park personnel a purpose and incentive in their daily efforts. Hence, a policy of an organized objective approach to meeting park system needs which simultaneously increases satisfaction levels of the public recreational experiences is recommended. Such a policy puts the needs and problems of the Parks Division clearly in perspective with respect to justifying the funding needs already mentioned.

Park Developmental Framework

Once the classification scheme is clearly understood and accepted, implementation of changes begins. Five parks were recommended for deletion from the system for failure to meet park standards and not having reasonable potential to do so. A gradual phasing out of these obviously is the preferred direction for the parks administration. However, these parks need to be phased out quickly to rechannel funds to more productive areas.

The remaining 19 parks have numerous developmental needs, but of immediate concern is the failure of some to fully meet specified park standards. Thus, all parks should be brought to minimum standards with respect to operations, maintenance, appearance, access, and resource protection. System quality will be limited until existing parks meet the strict criteria set forth for quality parks.

In bringing parks up to standards, the changes in classifications should be part of the quality improvement. Once existing parks are improved, concern should be shifted to acquisitions of new park lands in suitable locations. The central goal in this project should be to provide a quality state park recreational experience within an hour's drive of all Alabama residents. A secondary goal will be to acquire sufficient acreage to begin increasing the park land to population ratio for Alabama.

Finally, the developmental framework should include a program of goals to adjust park facilities and needs over time. Population growth and resource scarcity changes over time will dictate park locations and programs to a large extent. The park system must be flexible enough to allow managerial direction changes to respond to a variety of needs.

Individual Parks

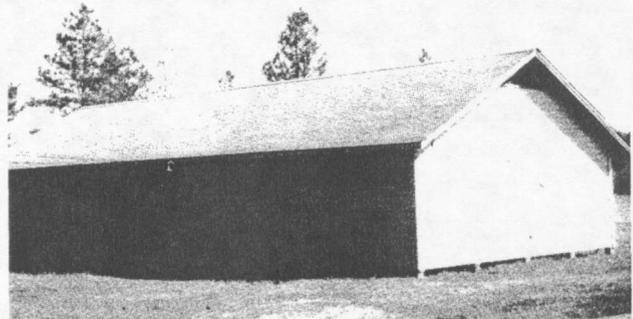
Individual park priorities must begin with the current rebuilding of Wind Creek State Park. This project leads the list of immediate park needs.

Full completion of the present goals for Wind Creek is recommended.

As soon as practical after the Wind Creek project, land acquisitions for Blue Springs, Rickwood Caverns, and Roland Cooper should follow. These land purchases are necessary to meet minimum size standards for these three important parks. Full development of these areas has lower priority, but land needs must be fulfilled to protect the existing resource base. This is most evident in the case of Rickwood Caverns.

The next park in need of modernization is Monte Sano, in Huntsville. This urban park is far behind in meeting demand pressures on the resource base. Full development of recommended programs in Monte Sano is suggested. Close behind in priority is Chewacla State Park in Lee County. If for any reason Monte Sano development is impractical, Chewacla should receive attention.

As time and money permits, the programs and needs of Rickwood Caverns, Little River, Cheaha, Buck's Pocket, Paul Grist, Lake Lurleen, and DeSoto should be upgraded in this priority order. As each of these parks is brought up to standards, a vital link in the envisioned park system is completed. A periodic review of this priority listing is recommended to balance visitor demands in a particular area with park needs. An annual priority review should consider such things as the cost efficiency of spending considerable money on one park when several could be greatly enhanced with the same amount. It is also possible that some additional expenditure in a more intensively developed resort park could show a greater return than development of any of the underdeveloped parks listed. Proper fund allocation is extremely important to the developmental framework for parks.



Many park buildings are badly outdated such as this facility at Little River State Park.

System Programs

The last major area of current needs concerns system programs. Three parks, Monte Sano, Gulf, and DeSoto, are recommended for well developed visitor information programs. Other parks will

have less intensive programs and thus will have other types of needs. Strong visitor programs require a good staff of professionals to conduct program efforts. High priority items are park staffing and training, and park security improvement to protect program investments in the three parks above. In conjunction with the visitor information programs, forest management, trail construction, and waterway development in parks must become an integral part of regular park operations.

Less intensive visitor educational systems have been suggested for Chewacla, Oak Mountain, Rickwood Caverns, Lake Lurleen, and Cheaha. Staff needs are not so great in areas where individual visitors may inform themselves via passive demonstration centers or self-service programs.

A third priority class for program implementation is recommended for the remainder of Alabama's parks. Passive, self-guided information programs are all that are immediately necessary in most of the parks not yet mentioned in this section. Remaining local, day-use facilities need only limited staff and program changes in the immediate future. As park classifications are changed over time, these minimum criteria will change also.

The Future

Future needs represent a category of recommendations which will be implemented over a long period, even though attention must be paid to them now.

Long-run projections for Alabama state park needs must always be kept in mind. No changes in park use, development, or even abandonment should be considered without looking at long term (20-year or more) needs.

A continuous priority item for the future is a regular land acquisition program. This is needed to maintain the park land to population ratio in the face of population growth. About 24,000 additional acres are projected as being needed by the year 2000. If this need is not programmed into a regular program of acquisition, Alabamians will find themselves becoming quite crowded in nearly all the state parks. A decrease in user satisfaction would obviously follow.

The 1975 SCORP recommended a minimum of 30 large well-developed state parks in Alabama by the year 2000. While this figure does not appear out of line in any way, a logical approach is to seek the optimum sites with potential to satisfy the stringent criteria for state parks set forth in this report. It is also important to satisfy realistic demand levels rather than just building up a specified number of parks. The optimum number of parks properly located could exceed or fall below 30.

Population, geography, ecology, and geology are important measures of long-term land needs. A regular monitoring program of these factors is recommended. Such a data base would be useful in determining location, type, and most importantly, timing of additions to the park system.

Although needed changes for Alabama state parks are divided into classes, there is no way to set a time table for each need independent of all others. Instead, the need is for a concerted effort to organize all the needs over the full planning period, and to establish achievable goals with the cooperation of the legislature and citizenry. This approach would allow many needs to be provided simultaneously. The result would be more satisfaction to more people than from other less cohesive alternatives.