County official calls new parks reservation system

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JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

Destry and Penny Davenport of Simpsonville take their kayak out of the water at South Cove State Park on Monday after camping there for Labor Day weekend. Last weekend marked the unofficial end of summer at the three county parks, which began offering reservations this year.

Labor Day signals unofficial end of summer camping season

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — As campers packed up to leave Oconee County parks Monday at the end of the busy summer camping season, a parks official called the county's first experience with a reservation system at all South Cove, High Falls and Chau Ram parks a success.

"It's been a transition year, but things run a lot smoother now that reservations are here," said Phil Shirley, director of Oconee's Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department. "During the holidays (Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day weekends) we were completely filled up, and that has not been the case in recent years."

While the numbers have not been officially tallied for the summer, Shirley said the camping nights would likely be close to a year

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ago, and Chau Ram saw an estimated 50 percent increase.

"Dollar-wise we brought in more money this year, but you can't really compare dollars because people can make reservations up to 11 months ahead of time," he said. "People are paying for reservations in the future, not just reservations now."

The county went to a reservation system where residents can call in reservations, go to the county parks to make reservations or make reservations using the www.reserveamerica.com website.

"We still accept walk-ins, something that I want the people to understand," Shirley said. "You don't have to have a reservation. You can still walk in and register. You just have to check and see what's been reserved when you do that."

He added using reserveamerica.com also helped bring in new people.

"We found a new customer base because of Reserve America," Shirley said. "There are campers who book all their stuff on Reserve America. We have never even been in the marketplace for them to find. There were a large number who found us that way."

While the traditional summer season has come to an end, Shirley said visitors are still camping at the parks.

"As I look at the next couple of weekends, we've got pretty decent numbers for weekend stays," he said. "As long as the weather holds out, we're still going to get those folks that want to camp on the weekends and get those last chances of lake time."

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