Oconee to handle running of four Hartwell rec sites

Lease with corps will keep areas open

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Boat ramps and day-use areas at Lake Hartwell will be switching hands in an effort to keep some of the lake's recreation areas open despite federal budget cuts that will force the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to close four boat ramps on the reservoir popular with boaters.

Oconee County will take over operations of four sites after the corps, facing ongoing cuts to manage recreation around the lake, asked other agencies to lease recreation areas in a move to keep access to more popular boat ramps and day-use areas.

Oconee County Parks, Recreation and Tourism will operate the Lawrence Bridge, Fair Play and Mullins Ford day use areas, as well as the Choestoea boat ramp, the corps announced.

Annual passes that currently cover these parks will be honored until they are renewed with a new county-issued pass, the corps said.

The corps will take control of four boat landings — Holders, Lakeshore, Barton's Mill and Timberlake — which it will close this season, Tracy Robillard, public affairs specialist, said in a statement.

"They asked us to look at up to 15 total sites that included the eight we already had," said Phil Shirley, director of Oconee County PRT. "There were an additional seven in there that they hoped we could do something with due to the decrease in federal funding."

Oconee, which has held leases on eight corps sites since the 1980s, evaluated the options and decided to sign a new lease on eight total sites, offloading four that were used less in favor of four areas with greater use or better lake access, Shirley said.

Three of the sites Oconee will take control of have additional amenities that will be an added cost for the county, which it will cover with seasonal staffing, Shirley said.

Oconee will continue to lease the Seneca Creek, South Union, Port Bass and Mountain Bay ramps.

The new leases take effect April 1.

The corps will continue to operate the Coneross and Oconee Point campgrounds, Friendship Recreation Area, the US 123 fishing pier, and the Tabor and Martin's Creek access ramps on Lake Hartwell, Robillard said.