Parks thriving locally and statewide

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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SENECA — A combination of heat and lower gas prices is sending families racing to local community and state parks.

According to officials at the South Carolina State Park organization, attendance numbers are holding strong and getting stronger at parks across the state.

At Devil's Fork State Park off of North Hwy. 11, Park Manager Kevin Evans said the park is seeing lots of visitors.

"We are as busy as we've ever been," he said. "Visitation has gone up and we're always happy to see that."

Adding that his park was never in danger of closing over the past few years while other local parks were experiencing lower numbers, such as Hartwell State Park, he said that because of Lake Jocassee, visitors know they can find the perfect mix of depth, coolness and clarity on the water.

"Not to mention, we have great lodges, camping areas and picnic areas to take advantage of," he added. "Families know they can expect a quality time when they come here."

Anyone under the age of 16 is admitted free, while adult passes are $2 per day.

Parks such as Table Rock, Oconee State Park and Hartwell State Park are seeing strong and steady numbers, while South Cove Park continues to draw in regulars and newcomers alike.

"We just moved here from New Jersey," said Kellie Pearson, a camper at South Cove. "We love to utilize the options outdoors and we've done a lot of traveling, but this park is fantastic. You can't beat it. We are so happy to be living here now. Within an hour drive, we can visit more than a dozen parks. How cool is that?"

According to the superintendent of South Cove, Tim Copeland, the feedback has been positive since he came on board.

"I've been here for about a year now," he said. "For a county to have parks with a lake, lodging and park amenities, it makes for a major benefit. People love coming here and I'm happy to see that families take advantage of what we can offer locally."

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These two sisters, Braylin, 1, and Lorelai, 2, are bubbling with fun as they play together while camping recently with their parents at South Cove Park in Seneca.