RECREATION RESERVATIONS

4/18/14

New system begins for county parks next week

BY NORMAN CANNADA
THE JOURNAL



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This group of family and friends was among many that brought campers to South Cove Park in the early-week rainy and cool weather to have prime spots for the nicer days of spring break and the Easter holiday weekend. County officials said campers will have it easier after a reservation system opens for Oconee County parks next week.

SENECA — Amanda Smith and her family were camping with family and friends Thursday at South Cove Park, enjoying a day of sunny skies and warmer temperatures that they didn't see when they brought campers to their site in the rain earlier in the week.

Smith, who says she camps 10 or more times a year, knows the system. Campers have to come in earlier than they need to in order to get a prime spot on a busy week in Oconee County parks' first-come, first-serve policy.

"We wanted to camp this

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week Wednesday through Saturday, but we brought our campers on Sunday, so we actually paid for three extra nights when everybody wasn't here just to get these spots," said Smith, who lives in Westminster. "We were here on those cold, rainy days this week just to get our spot."

That issue for Smith and other campers in Oconee County parks is changing next week, as the county moves to a reservation system. Beginning April 24, Oconee County residents will be the first to be able to reserve spots at South Cove, High Falls and Chau Ram parks by calling a reservation call center at 855-622-6727 or the parks office at (864) 888-1488 or by stopping by one of the three parks. Before making a reservation, county residents are also encouraged to call the office to set up an account as a county resident to receive a discount on reservations.

Beginning May 8, anyone will be able to call the reservation call center or make online reservations at www.reserveamerica.com.

Oconee County Council recently approved the change to allow reservations. Phil Shirley, director of the Oconee Parks Recreation and Tourism Department, said the reservation system should make it more convenient for campers who have often had to come earlier than they wanted and pay for extra days to reserve a holiday weekend or other busy time.

Reservations will require a two-night minimum for waterfront sites at South Cove and High Falls. On holidays like the Fourth of July, Memorial Day and Labor Day, a three-night minimum will be required. Chau Ram has no minimum night requirements.

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>
> **Matt Saffer**
> Seneca resident

Smith said she has mixed feelings about the reservation system.

"If the weather is nice, we just kind of show up," she said. "The good sites will get reserved, and you never know what the weather is going to be like, so I'm torn. In the long run, I think it will be beneficial to the camper."

Kenneth Anders, of Lake Toxaway, N.C., was at South Cove for a fishing trip with his brother, Dennis. He said he comes to South Cove three to four times a year.

"I'll probably use the reservation system if I have to, but I liked it better the other way," he said.

Phil Rech of Seneca said the new system will be good for him and his large RV, which he said can only be accommodated by a few sites at South Cove.

"Being able to reserve is a real advantage for me," he said.

Brenda Dotson of Easley and her friend, Melinda Paris of Seneca, both said they like the idea of being able to reserve their spot.

"I think it's a good idea, because we can pick whatever site we want to come out to ahead of time," Paris said.

Matt Saffer of Seneca said Pickens County parks already have a reservation system.

"I think it's a good thing," he said. "It's going to help others who might not get a prime spot be able to plan ahead and get it. It helps out planning-wise, so I like it."

But Kelly Wright of Westminster, who calls herself a "spur-of-the-moment camper," is not sure she likes the fact that people can make reservations.

"I think with reservations it's just going to be hard, just coming for a couple of days," she said. "If they do it in couple-of-day increments it might work, but I like pulling up to the site."

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