# Summer drawing campers



JESSICA NELMS | THE JOURNAL

**Emily Williams and her daughters Amber, 14, Katie 16, and Gracie, 6, enjoy a day of camping at South Cove Park near Seneca.**

**BY NORMAN CANNADA**
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — A visit to the South Cove Park campground early Friday afternoon found swimmers, fishermen, children playing, adults relaxing and campers – lots of campers.

Phil Shirley, director of the Oconee County Parks and Recreation Department said county parks are about 70 percent full since Memorial Day week, a slight increase over last year.

"Since Memorial Day, we've been busy," said Shirley. "We had a lot of rain in the spring, and that hurt us a little bit kicking off the spring season. But we're seeing things pick back up especially at South Cove, where we are getting anywhere from 65 to 80 percent full every weekend. Last year was a good year. This summer is looking to be bigger than last.

"Based on the past few weeks, we've been up," Shirley added. "I'm hoping, if we get rain, we get it in the middle of the week, because that plays a key role in revenue coming into the park system."

Of the three county parks, South Cove has the most waterfront campsites, with 44 of its 88 spots on the water. High Falls Park has 10 waterfront sites. Chau Ram has 27 sites, but is not on Lake Keowee, unlike the other two parks.

Shirley said the county parks have a first-come, first-served system, but are planning to go to a reservation system. Without reservations, some people come early for prime dates.

"We have people already there for July 4," Shirley said. "You can be at the same site for 30 days before you have to move. Three and a half weeks before July 4, we have those who want a guarantee of where they want to be and they start coming now."

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# CAMPING: 'During the summer we come out here very often'



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**The summer vacation season brings more people to South Cove and other parks in Oconee County for recreation and camping activities. Officials say they expect numbers to increase at the parks this summer.**

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The lake sites are the most popular, he said.

"Most of the folks who come in the summer, they're trying to get to the lake," said Shirley. "They want to be on the water. We have had instances in the past where we have had to push people to Chau Ram and they would go camp at Chau Ram and drive over to (South Cove or High Falls) and put their boat in during the day. That's not ideal. We get to a point sometimes when we get full and have to turn people away."

In recent years, Shirley said about 60 percent of campers at the county parks are Oconee County residents.

Tracy Sanders of Westminster said her family comes to South Cove because of the convenience.

"During the summer we come out here very often," said Sanders, who arrived at her site on the lake since Tuesday. "It's our home away from home. It's so convenient to home. My husband can go back and forth to work. We love the lake. We love to camp."

Theresa Kelley, who camps at South Cove during the summer and has even camped with her family at Thanksgiving, said the lake is the big attraction.

"We like to camp here because it's right on the water," said Kelley. "You can sit in your camper and just look at the water. The moon shining on the lake is just gorgeous."

Tim Smith was with Kelley and other family members. They were expecting about 10 family members at their sites this weekend.

"In the summer time, it is definitely the place the kids like," Smith said. "They can swim close to the campsite. You can do everything and not have to be all over the campground watching the kids."

Mark Stanley of Brevard, N.C, said he has been coming to South Cove for 20-25 years.

"I just enjoy coming here," said Stanley. "I like the lake. I like the convenience to the stores. I enjoy it meeting different people here."

At Oconee State Park in Mountain Rest, 90 percent of the 140 standard sites and 15 rustic sites are occupied this summer. Reservations for the campsites have been completely booked for July 4 for about two months.

"It will really pick up around the fourth (of July) and will be busy the rest of the summer," said Joanna White, park manager. "We fill every major holiday weekend and pretty much every weekend in October."

"It's family's oriented," she said. "We have the heritage and the traditions here at the park. We have a natural swimming area, lake swimming and a little carpet golf course, a (recreation director) who does programs and square dancing on Friday nights that has been going on since 1944."

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