

Making progress

Oconee PRT director gives updates on projects

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Oconee County parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley spoke to county council members recently with updates about his department's active projects, including progress on the master planning process at Chau Ram County Park, above, and a \$3 million project to update the Seneca Creek access area on Lake Hartwell, below.

WALHALLA — Oconee parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley recently provided officials with an update on 14 active projects in the county — with a special emphasis on Chau Ram County Park master planning and the Seneca Creek access area.



Shirley

Shirley told Oconee County Council at its meeting in late October the projects are “anywhere from design, engineering, bid or construction phase.”

“We serve over 300,000 people a year in our park system. That’s across 13 different locations,” he said. “It’s a lot of people coming in — treading, trotting, recreating — and then you have just a couple of

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months to prepare and put band-aids and put it back together."

CHAU RAM MASTER PLAN

Master planning for Chau Ram is expected to begin late this fall or during winter, Shirley said.

"There's a couple things that we're still dotting the I's on and crossing the T's on before we're ready to do that," he said.

The project would include the original property that's both city of Westminster and county property, as well as a 212-acre parcel that has been added with a conservation easement.

Shirley said Westminster requested the property upstream on the Chauga River under a conservation easement be included, too.

"They have requested us ... to look at what the opportunities are for recreation above the park as well," he said. "We now have 2 miles of the Chauga River running through the Chau Ram Park. If we're able to include that additional acreage above (U.S. Highway 76), we could potentially have 3 miles of Chauga River running through the park."

The master plan will "be a public process," Shirley added.

"We'll set up several evenings of meetings and allowing the public to come out and provide input and help guide us through that process," he said.

SENECA CREEK PROJECT

An approximately \$3 million project that includes a new three-lane boat ramp at the Seneca Creek access area is nearing its end. Located on Lake Hartwell at 280 Seneca Creek Road, the creek's access area project includes construction of two courtesy docks for the boat ramp, a fishing pier and a kayak launch.

Engineered by Thomas and Hutton and completed by the Belk Company, the new design will also have a picnic area, parking for up to 49 vehicles with trailers, parking for 20 single vehicles and security cameras in partnership with Clemson University.

"This is the big one we have going on. It is all black as of this past week. All the asphalt is down, the binder coat and the topcoat are in place," Shirley said. "The bulkheads are in place, the docks are being built. The ramp is in place. We are probably 30 to 45 days from seeing some of the docks going in and the picnic area beginning to take shape. I see this opening in a December, January timeframe, depending on how things go."

"It's amazing what the change has done and what that's going to do for access for our citizens to get to Lake Hartwell," he added. "It's going to be an incredible asset for us on that end of Seneca Creek."

OTHER CAPITAL PROJECTS

Other ongoing projects include:

• Chau Ram shelter demolition and rebuild — A stream coming out of a nearby mountain and rainfall over the past several months washed off the foundation of the shelter that sits above Ramsey Creek Falls at the park. The project is in the design and reengineering phase to relocate and control the water for a new shelter.

• Chau Ram maintenance building — Shirley said a maintenance building is necessary for staff to have plenty of space to store all their equipment under one roof and away from where people are recreating. The project is in the design phase.

• High Falls County Park point shelter — The almost 50-year-old shelter needs a replacement, Shirley said, adding the new one will be slightly larger to adjust to a higher number of park visitors and have a better design. The project is in the design phase.

• High Falls recreation building — This project includes constructing a new covered back deck for the recreation building at High Falls. Shirley said his department received funding for the first phase through accommodations tax and county council and is working on the engineering phase of the project now.

• High Falls patio deck and Mullins Ford paving — The patio deck at High Falls was built about three years ago, according to Shirley. The project scope includes paving the gravel area from the parking lot down to the patio and adding in handicap parking. At Mullins Ford Boat Ramp, Shirley said the launch area is not big enough to accommodate the size of trucks and boats people have now. The paving project would make the launch area bigger. Both are in the bid phase.

• High Falls Alexander-Cannon-Hill House preservation project — Preservation work is continuing on the Alexander-Cannon-Hill House that was built in 1830, Shirley said. Park staff will use part of the historic house as office space upstairs, with a store accessible to the community downstairs. Shirley said progress on the project is ongoing.

• High Falls shoreline restoration — A multi-year project to repair the shoreline at High Falls is in its design phase. Shirley said the park was losing shoreline "by the feet" and officials are working with Duke Energy to "actively control the shoreline" and "actively support recreation."

• High Falls master plan — High Falls' master plan is also planned for late this fall or during winter in the hopes of being completed alongside Chau Ram's, Shirley said. A big question for the project is whether to include local property at the end of Waterfall Road in Seneca that Duke Energy has "offered to the county" for recreation, Shirley said, adding he wants public and county council input before deciding "our next steps."

• South Cove County Park recreation building — Renovations to South Cove's rec building are "a major transformation," according to Shirley. With how many people venture through the building, Shirley said the space is "much-improved" and the project is in a "final punch list" phase.

• South Cove beach project — The beach area at South Cove has been ex-

periencing Lake Keowee water issues — whether the lake's water level is low or high — that affects the sand disbursed by the county, Shirley said. He said the project would include "capturing the water with a sidewalk, a curb and gutter system and then enhance some of that with some established picnic spaces" and to "increase our beach area to be able to keep the sand in place." The project is in the design phase, but engineering will begin soon.

• South Cove tennis and pickleball parking — The demand for pickleball has increased over the years in the county, leading to the need for additional parking at the courts at South Cove. Though tennis and pickleball are not lake recreation, Shirley said Duke Energy is allowing the county to build more parking at the existing courts, but not to expand the courts there. He added the project might also include looking at nearby areas in Seneca for tennis courts so pickleball can be in one spot and tennis in the other for more space. This project is in its engineering phase.

• South Union shoreline restoration — The two-week project is underway now, according to Shirley. Like High Falls, waves have deteriorated the asphalt over time. Shirley said the county roads and bridges department is working with his department "to recapture what has collapsed over the past 10 or 15 years from the water action."