

Burgess Falls State Park and Natural Area Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

Updated in 2025



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Park Purpose, History, and Description

Burgess Falls State Park and Natural Area, designated in 1973, serves as an important element of the Tennessee State Park system and a unique natural and cultural resource to both Tennesseans and out-of-state visitors. Burgess Falls State Natural Area occurs within the dissected section of the Interior Low Plateau (ILP), within Tennessee's Eastern Highland Rim (Fenneman 1938), between the Outer Central Basin and the Western Escarpment of the Cumberland Plateau. With its proximity to major population centers, short distance from Interstate 40, and relatively small size for the quality and abundance of its picturesque vistas and hiking opportunities; this state natural area has become a premier destination within the Tennessee State Park system. Particularly, it serves as a central hub for visitors hoping to explore several other state parks in the area such as Rock Island, Edgar Evins, Cumberland Mountain, Standing Stone, Cummins Falls, and Fall Creek Falls State Parks.

Window Cliffs Class II Scientific State Natural Area is a 275-acre satellite area of Burgess Falls. It was designated in 2014 and was opened to the public in April 2017. Window Cliffs is a prominent geological cliff-top feature that consists of a very narrow, elongated ridge that lies in the neck of an incised meander of Cane Creek. While it is about 150 feet wide at its base, it is only a few feet wide on the narrow cliff-top 200 feet above Caney Creek. A trailhead with an interpretative kiosk is located at the parking area at the end of Old Cane Creek Road. The trail is 5.5 miles roundtrip from the parking area to Window Cliffs.

Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Develop programs to familiarize park guests with the TSP mission, agency history, as well as the Natural Areas enabling legislation.
- Continue to offer diverse volunteer opportunities to adults and children in order to foster internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks' core values.
- Offer a wide selection of interpretive and educational programming that engages and supports our local public schools and homeschool groups.
- Work with the Burgess Falls Friends group to encourage user engagement and stewardship.
- Create partnerships with other state agencies and outside groups to further expand outdoor recreation opportunities for the public.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Action Plan:

- Review and update the park's Resource Management Plan bi-annually.
- Continue all taxa biodiversity inventory in order to manage resources and ecology of the Natural Areas. Staff will work with TDEC employees, university professors, students, specific interest groups, and volunteers.
- Identify adjacent properties to pursue for acquisition to expand park boundaries and resources.
- Identify areas that can be turned over to native grassland to improve habitat and increase native biodiversity.
- Work with staff to identify resource management projects and develop resource management plans to ensure the natural and historical features are protected and maintained.
- Solicit input to help inform and guide, then implement resource management strategies utilized by other land management agencies, educational institutions, and other professionals.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Action Plan:

- Continue staff efforts to create a centralized ATBI database.
- Continue staff efforts to create a centralized park history database.

- Utilize GIS technology to assist with boundary maintenance, invasive species documentation and removal, habitat improvement projects, and historical resource documentation.
- Encourage the use of iNaturalist and similar apps to obtain species data.
- Install pedestrian trail counters to get a more complete picture of the human impact on the resource.

THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan:

- Create quality interpretive, educational, and recreational experiences for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities through the guidance of the Telling Full Stories process. Include both free and fee-based opportunities.
- Use technology, such as virtual tours, QR codes, and social media, to enhance the visitor experience and increase access to interpretive and educational programming.

Objective: *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan:

- Review and update the park's Interpretive Action Plan bi-annually.
- Develop a variety of interpretive, educational, and recreational programs that utilize the passions and strengths of park staff.
- Develop and maintain a database of program descriptions, transcripts, and materials for all our core programs.

Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Continue to offer high quality Jr Ranger Camps.
- Evaluate current offerings and develop new resource-based and recreation opportunities.
- Offer programs such as fishing, kayaking, camping, astronomy, and wilderness survival programs to build outdoor skills and encourage responsible enjoyment of the state's resources.

THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be well maintained with facilities and amenities that delight visitors and make Tennesseans proud.

Objective: *Improve maintenance:* Improve overall maintenance and upkeep of all park facilities and amenities that contribute to meaningful visitor experiences.

Action Plan:

- Ensure the completion of the new visitor center and maintenance facility.
- Continue to push for a fulltime maintenance position.
- Track and monitor preventative maintenance tasks.
- Explore opportunities to gain additional training for all staff on various maintenance topics.
- Team up with local state parks maintenance teams to expand staff capabilities.
- All plans, schematics, blueprints, operational, troubleshooting, repair and safety manuals, warranty, model, replacement part and service provider documents for park vehicles, equipment, buildings, and mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems will be well-organized and housed in a designated central location for easy access when needed.

Objective: *Better Park accessibility:* ensure all visitors have opportunities for meaningful experiences in every Tennessee State Park.

Action Plan:

- Explore opportunities to improve accessibility to the Middle Falls and Burgess Falls overlooks.
- Develop the trail from the playground to the dam to the cascades as an ADA accessible paved trail.
- Improve access to Burgess Falls Lake.
- Replace the existing aging playground with an inclusive ADA accessible playground.
- Develop the top of the dam as an ADA accessible overlook.
- Add color blind viewers to the main overlooks.

Objective: *Quality and welcoming facilities and amenities:* provide high-quality and well-planned facilities and amenities that enrich the visitor experience.

Action Plan:

- Provide organized, effective, and welcoming signage where needed in the park and remove unnecessary/aging signage.
- Plan new displays to engage visitors and enrich their experience.
- Maintain clean, aesthetic, and operable facilities.
- Ensure staff are trained in great customer service.
- Provide opportunities for staff to visit other parks to explore what works for them.
- Conduct inspections, review visitor comments, and interact with visitors to obtain timely information on building or grounds maintenance problems and work to resolve those issues as swiftly as possible.

THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be a national model for operational excellence in a state park system.

Objective: *Support and empower our people:* support and empower our workforce by creating a caring environment that encourages professional growth and great customer service.

Action Plan:

- Provide a safe and welcoming work experience.
- Provide training and professional development opportunities.
- Explore and share opportunities for career employees to advance.
- Engage Park staff in all updates to the park management plans.
- Empower all staff to identify park improvement projects and pursue those passion projects.

Objective: *Efficient and effective operations:* provide efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible service to Tennesseans and our visitors.

Action Plan:

- Provide training for all staff on fiscal responsibility and budgeting.
- The park will perform an annual review of all operations to identify strategies for increasing efficiency and revenue while reducing expenditures and waste.
- Explore partnerships with other government agencies, non-profits, and businesses.
- Use EnergyCap to monitor for potential problems in electricity and water consumption.
- Seek alternate sources of funding for programs and projects through grants, donations, and in-kind contributions.
- Actively seek volunteer assistance to support park initiatives and projects.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Burgess Falls State Park and Natural Area
Site Manager	Nathaniel Garrison
Area Manager	Kenny Gragg
Park acreage	Burgess Falls – 326 Window Cliffs - 254
Total number of visitors (FY 2025)	239,748
Total expenses before CO (FY 2025)	\$775,200
Total revenues (FY 2025)	\$65,209
Retail cost recovery % ¹	197.6%
Park cost recovery %	8.8%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2025)	\$3.23
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2025)	\$0.04
Gross profit or loss	(\$709,991)
Total full-time available positions / filled	6/6
Total part-time available positions / filled	3/3 (Operations Worker, Maintenance Worker, SIR)
Primary feeder markets	Cookeville, Sparta, Nashville Area
Primary reasons people visit	Hiking, Playground, Waterfalls
Opportunities for improvement	Additional recreational opportunities to spread out crowds, as well as some type of visitor management system.

Key Attractions

The amenities or features listed below are those that seem to be most popular for visitors.

- Upcoming Visitor Center and aviary
- Gift shop
- Waterfalls
- Hiking trails
- Playground
- Lake Observation Deck

¹ Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities

Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Burgess Falls State Natural Area. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present but provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site’s current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

Site and Facility Assessment

Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	General Description
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in ‘excellent’ condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in ‘good’ condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in ‘fair’ condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.
Poor	Facilities/amenities are in ‘poor’ condition when they show significant, on-going maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently-deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Burgess Falls State Park and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in Sept 2025.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Park Restrooms	1	Good
Playground	1	Fair
1920's Dam	1	Fair
Hydroelectric	1	Poor
Maintenance Facility	1	Excellent
Shelter	1	Good
Overlooks	2	Good
Dunn Property Residence	1	Good
Dunn Property Haybarn	1	Good
Dunn Property Horsebarn	1	Fair

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Mileage	Conditions
Ridgetop Trail	0.29	Good
River Trail	0.52	Fair
Window Cliffs Trail	2.66	Good
Grand Total	3.47	

The trail system is in good condition. However, with such a highly used trail system, continual maintenance is required. The trail side split rail fencing will need to be replaced in most places at both Window Cliffs and Burgess Falls in the next 10 years. Approximately 25% of this fencing was replaced in 2023. This fencing not only helps to protect the resource but also enhances visitor and staff safety. Dirt and gravel will be needed to repair erosion from natural causes and high use. Some sections of the trail might benefit from raised decking/catwalks, steps, new water bars, and drainage improvements.

New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve visitor experience and operational efficiency.

New Asset & Amenities	Description
Middle Falls Overlook	Replace the Middle Falls overlook destroyed in 2015
Redesigned Upper Parking Lot	Redesign the upper parking lot to increase parking/improve flow
Dam Pedestrian Walkway	Would allow another viewshed and more interpretive options
Dam Improvement Plan	Multipart project to mitigate debris issues with the dam
Ramp Extension / Dock	Needed to provide access to Burgess Falls Lake

Access Area to Burgess Falls Lake	Develop lake access point north of Hwy 135 bridge.
Additional pavilion on Dill Property	Construction of pavilion on current concrete pad

Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) Core or Essential Services;**
- 2) Important Services; and**
- 3) Value added or Visitor Supported Services.**

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential in order to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

- The services are mandated by the agency’s law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
- The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public’s health and safety.
- The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
- The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers, and partners.
- The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
- The services provide a sound investment of public funds.

The following programs and services offered at Burgess Falls have been identified as **core services**:

- Law Enforcement
- Medical/First Aid
- Park Maintenance and Upkeep
- Resource Management

CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services and facilities are those the agency should provide, and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency's ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance or support identified core services.
- The services are broadly supported and utilized by the community, and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon how the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all of the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Burgess Falls State Park and Natural Area have been identified as **important services**:

- Visitor Center
- Trails
- Picnic Shelter
- Quality Education and Interpretive Programming
- Recreational Opportunities: Hiking, Boating, Fishing
- Picnic Areas
- Restrooms
- Playground

CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor supported programs, services and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category 3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor supported are:

- The services expand, enhance or support Core Services, Important Services and the quality of life of the visitors, community or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees or other sources that offset some or all of their cost and/or provides a meaningful return on investment.
- The Services can possibly be provided through outsourcing or use of concessionaires, providing opportunities for community enterprise or services that may not otherwise be provided by the agency.

The following programs and services offered at Burgess Falls State Park have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Interpretive Programs
- Gift Shop
- Conference Area

Personnel / Staffing Review

The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

Full Time Equivalent Employees

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager 1	1	*
Park Ranger 2	4	*
Administrative Assistant	1	\$55,188
TOTAL	6	\$398,976

*Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Conservation Worker 1 Job Share	2	\$55,809
Seasonal Interpretive Recreator	1	N/A Salary hits Program Services
TOTAL	3	\$55,809

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	615
Community Service Workers	0
Engineering and Construction Crews	0
Resource Management Crews	0
Other:	0
TOTAL	615

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$398,976
Part Time Employees	\$55,809
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	\$454,785

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Chief of Maintenance	1	FT	2026	With new visitor center and two parks a skilled maintenance person is needed. We currently have no fulltime maintenance personnel.
Clerk 3/Clerk 2	2	FT	2025	These positions will be critically important to adequately staffing a visitor center and managing gift shop operations.
TOTAL	3			

Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit for the last four years in park facilities is detailed in the table below.

Current Rev Per Unit

Fiscal Year	Day Use Facility Rev Per Unit
2022	
2023	0.33
2024	0.33
2025	0.16

Projected Rev Per Unit - Based on current Rev Per Unit trends at the park and any known developments over the next four years.

Fiscal Year	Day Use Facility Rev Per Unit
2026	0
2027	0
2028	0
2029	0

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Net Promoter Score	2025	33
Google	2025	4.8 / 5.0
Yelp	2025	4.8 / 5.0
Trip Advisor	2025	4.7 / 5.0

Professional Development and Training

The following professional development and training opportunities are being explored and planned for the staff and volunteers at this park:

- PMTI
- TSAR Level 1, 2, & 3
- Emergency First Responder
- Green Leadership
- Trail Master Certification
- Wildland Firefighter/Burn Boss Training
- Horse Mounted Ranger
- In-house GIS/IPE/RMS/Go Green/Resource Management Trainings
- Commercial Applicator Certification (herbicides and pesticides)

- National Association of Interpretation Certifications
- Certified Park and Recreation Professional
- State Tuition Fee Waiver Program
- Routine Management Training
- Routine Law Enforcement Training

Summary of Key Recommendations

Please provide short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for addressing operational issues at the park and improving overall park performance.

Short-Term Recommendations (Less than 1 year)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. New Visitor Center
- b. New Aviary
- c. Clearing of the log jam on the dam
- d. Finish replacing old signage
- e. Pursue land acquisition opportunities

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Two new clerical positions
- b. Improve cellular service through WiFi access or boosters for both parking areas
- c. Utilization of job share hours to allow rangers to focus on safety and security, interpretive programming, and resource management.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Improve parking management
- b. Develop an area for park visitors to access the water from the trailhead to the dam
- c. Clear sightlines around the parking areas, dam, and Visitor Center
- d. Develop an educational firepit area
- e. Increased programming experiences
- f. Improve and add additional interpretive displays throughout the park

Mid-Term Recommendations (2-5 years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Replace playground and swings
- b. Trail work and repair the heavily impacted sections of the River Trail
- c. Trail work and repair the heavily impacted sections of the Window Cliff Trail
- d. Explore accessibility upgrades along the gravel service road

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Full-time maintenance position

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Finish the RTP grant: Accessible switchback providing access to Burgess Falls Overlook
- b. Continue the Window Cliff Grassland Project
- c. Outdoor education area at Window Cliffs
- d. Additional recreational opportunities and accessibility improvements

- e. Colorblind Viewers at all overlooks
- f. Improve the lake access on Spears Road
- g. Develop a lake access point north of the Hwy 135 bridge
- h. Develop interpretive displays for the park office
- i. Develop Burgess Falls arboretum
- j. Add Burgess Falls to the TSP Honey Project

Long-Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Develop ADA trail from the playground to the dam to the cascades
- b. Resurfacing and opening the dam as an ADA accessible overlook.
- c. Improve the debris management of Burgess Falls Lake
- d. Bathrooms at Window Cliffs
- e. Pave or concrete the service road
- f. Clearing of old homesites at Window Cliffs

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Yearly staffing review as Burgess offers additional services.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Rebuild the Middle Falls overlook
- b. Develop the old Dill barn into a picnic shelter and add parking
- c. Turn suitable property over to native grassland habitat and/or shortleaf pine restoration

Resource Management Plan

A resource management plan is a specific statement of the objectives you have for your land and natural resources, as well as any significant cultural and historic resources stewarded by the state park. This includes a defined series of priorities and activities that will take place to meet those objectives. This can include future potential land acquisitions or divestitures that are necessary to meet the park's resource management goals and objectives.

The Falling Water River and its four waterfalls are the main attraction of the park. Burgess Falls, over 100' tall, is the final waterfall that marks the end of Falling Water River as it plunges into Center Hill Lake. The watershed containing hardwood forests and Riparian corridor are the primary natural resources found within Burgess Falls State Park, while the waterfalls create a mist zone habitat.

The park experiences heavy visitation that has a significant impact on the forest and riparian corridor along the trail. The park must continue to manage visitation in a manner that allows guests to experience the resource while also protecting the resource.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment
3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

Resource Management Objectives

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks' core values and can contribute to the State Parks' mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *Better resource management practices:* Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Objective: *Better data and technology:* Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Aligned with these objectives are specific strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of this park.

Strategies

- A. Potentially limit visitation and solve issues around parking that will allow Park Rangers to better protect the resource by spending more time on resource management projects.
- B. Offer additional recreational opportunities to disperse the heavy usage of the trail.
- C. Block and vegetate social trails that have been created by guests going off trail.
- D. Install pedestrian trail counters to get a more complete picture of the human impact on the resource.
- E. Continued monitoring of ATBI.
- F. Invasive species removal

G. Update the resource management plan biannually.

Resource Inventory and Assessment

The significant natural, cultural and historic resources of the park requiring management are detailed below including a condition assessment rating for each. Condition assessments are selected from the following options based on what most describes the current condition of the resource:

1. **Excellent** – resource is in excellent condition; all potential threats to the integrity of the resource are currently managed and effectively mitigated.
2. **Good** – resource is generally in good condition and stable; threats to the integrity of the resource require regular management in order to mitigate.
3. **Fair** – resource is in stable condition but difficult to mitigate ongoing threats; additional management support is required.
4. **Poor** – resource is generally in poor condition with management support required to both improve existing conditions and address threats.
5. **Critical** – resource is highly threatened or deteriorated and requires immediate management prioritization.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Riparian Corridors	Approximately 5 miles	Good	Most riparian corridors have recovered and are in good condition. However, there are significant invasive plant species in some locations of Burgess Falls and Window Cliffs. Some areas where public has access to, i.e. top of the main waterfall and cascades at Burgess Falls have significant riparian erosion along the trail side bank.
Hardwood Forest	1	Good	The forest is in good shape but suffers from off trail use. There are a number of social trails causing significant erosion in places.
Hydroelectric Powerhouse	1	Poor	The Powerhouse was not preserved when the City of Cookeville ceased operations in the 1940s. Repeated flooding and other weather events, as well as theft, have left a dilapidated shell of the powerhouse.
Burgess Falls Dam	1	Fair	The dam itself is in stable condition. The bridge surface of the dam is failing and has some sizable holes.
Burgess Falls Lake	1	Fair	Heavy siltation and continual log jams at the dam.
Mist Zone Habitat	3	Good	Found at the base of each fall. The biggest at the Base of Burgess Falls.

Management Strategies

The management strategies outlined below are directly correlated to the resources identified previously in the *Resource Inventory and Assessment* section immediately above. These are general and overall management recommendations for each resource from which priority actions will be determined. Each resource has both a “Public Use” management strategy (which could include limited or no public access, or managed access with infrastructure and regulation) and a “General Management” strategy.

The priority assignments reflect the highest resource management priorities of the park over the next 1-5 years (High Priority) and 6-10 years (Moderate Priority)

Resource	Management Recommendations	Priority
Hardwood forest	<p>Public Use: Access is on designated trails only in use zone for natural areas.</p> <p>General Management: The upland hardwood forests are managed for improvement of overall forest health which includes ongoing invasive species management, erosion mitigation in areas of steep topography, and understory management through prescribed burns. Continue to work with Natural Areas and researchers.</p>	High
Mist Zone microhabitats	<p>Public Use: Typically, not public use, except at the base of the main waterfall at Burgess</p> <p>General Management: Other mist zone habitats are not open to visitor use except for research to protect the unique flora and fauna in these sensitive areas.</p>	High
Burgess Lake	<p>Public Use: Not much public use currently. Fishermen do access at a few points.</p> <p>General Management: Not much management other than clearing the log jam from the dam. The lake is heavily silted and could benefit from dredging. We would like to improve/expand access.</p>	Moderate
Riparian Corridors	<p>Public Use: The public is allowed access to the Riparian corridor from the trailhead to the Dam.</p> <p>General Management: The area has been thinned to improve viewsheds, and invasive species have been targeted to improve habitat.</p>	Moderate
Hydroelectric Powerhouse	<p>Public Use: The only access is from Center Hill Lake. Most guests do not realize it’s significance.</p> <p>General Management: Not currently being managed.</p>	Moderate

Land Management Strategies

In some cases, strategic land acquisitions or divestitures are necessary to meet the overall resource management goals and objectives of the park. This can include opportunities to address buffers, watersheds, viewsheds, inholdings, and adjacent properties. The table below details **general strategies** for land management. Timelines refer to Short Term (1-3 years), Mid Term (4-6 years), and Long Term (7-10 years).

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Acquire adjacent properties from willing sellers to protect watersheds, view sheds, and habitat management/restoration.	Short Term
Acquire properties that allow the park to increase recreational opportunities within Burgess Falls State Park.	Long Term

Interpretive Programming and Education Five-Year Action Plan

Tennessee State Parks' Interpretation, Programming, and Education team is helping park staff set and achieve programming goals by developing Interpretive Action Plans. This process begins with conversations with Area Interpretive Rangers that prepare field staff for the Scoping Meeting. This meeting brings park staff and stakeholders together to identify audience(s), themes, resources, and set goals and objectives. This information then turns into the five-year Interpretive Action Plan.

Park Primary Interpretive Theme

Burgess Falls State Park protects the natural wonders and history of the eastern Highland Rim, which, due to its waterfalls, possesses diverse ecology, flora, fauna, geology, and history.

Park Secondary Interpretive Themes

- S.1. Burgess Falls was the State of Tennessee's first State Natural Area due to its rare and unique flora, fauna, and microclimates.
- S.2. The moving waters of Burgess Falls provided power to the early Burgess Falls electrical power stations, which served the nearby communities.
- S.3. The surrounding limestone presents a unique story about geology and terrain that explores Tennessee's deep past.
- S.4. Burgess Falls has many fascinating microclimates created by the terrain, geology, and water.
- S.5. The story of the water inside the park is significant to understanding the unusual ecosystems.
- S.6. There are rare and unique flora and fauna in the park.

Existing Audience

- This audience consists of single Adults, aged in their 30s to 70s.
- Interested in short hikes and information about what is on the trails.
- Interested in getting away from crowds.
- Regional and folks from out of state on vacation (seasonal)

Emerging Audience

- Groups with limited English, Homeschool groups, Seniors 65 and up

Park Programming Inventory Data

Number of Programs:	Number of Attendees:	Number of Programmers:	Total Cost Offset:	
263	5227	8	\$11,814	
Scheduled Programs:	Scheduled Program Attendees:	Supporting Programmers:	Programs with a Fee	Fees Collected
167	4741	7	47	\$11,624
Roving Programs:	Roving Program Attendees:		Programs with Donations	Donations Collected
96	486		5?	190
Offsite Programs:	Offsite Attendees:		Programs with Grants:	Grant Funds:
25	2461		0	0

Key Park Natural, Cultural, and Recreational Resources

Resource	Resource Type
Burgess Falls Scenic Area/Water Quality	Natural
Geology/Hydrogeology/Dam significance	Natural
Grasslands, Rx burns, Invasive species removal	Natural
Plants/Animals (Hemlocks, Woodrat, Research Finds)	Natural
Native American History	Cultural

Key Park Interpretive Infrastructure

Future visitor Center

Interpretive Panels

Kiosks

Park Personnel Primarily Dedicated to Interpretation

Position Titles	Percentage of Time Dedicated to Interpretation
Park Manager 1	5%
Park Ranger 3	5%
Park Ranger 2 Interp Lead	20%
Park Ranger 2	10%
Park Ranger 2	10%
SIR	50%

Volunteer Hours and Numbers for Most Recent Fiscal Year

- Volunteer hours: 301
- Volunteer opportunities: Trash pickup, white oak initiative, invasive species removal, trail work, BFG clean-ups, company volunteer days, GSLSP, signature volunteer events,
- Number of volunteers: 110

Park Interpretive Goals

Goal 1 – Natural Resource Interpretation: Visitors will be engaged with the park's resources beyond just the waterfalls.

Theme(s) Supported: S1, S3, S4, S5, S6

2-Year Objective: There will be an increase in attendance at scheduled programs by 10%.

5-Year Objective: There will be an increase in attendance at scheduled programs by 20%

Resources Assigned to Goal: Park office staff, seasonals, and rangers

Strategy for Implementation: Educate staff on themes of the park, so when interactions occur with the public, they can confidently speak about the park's natural and cultural resources.

Goal 2 – Natural Resource Interpretation: Visitors will become better stewards of the park's resources.

Theme(s) Supported: S1, S3, S4, S5, S6

2-Year Objective: The park will establish a baseline for the number of social trails and see that number stabilize.

5-Year Objective: There will be a reduction in the total number of social trials by 25%.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Park staff, seasonals, and rangers will teach Leave No Trace principals to visitors so they can reduce their footprint within natural areas and appreciate the natural ecology, geology, and history of the park.

Strategy for Implementation: All park staff will be briefed on Leave No Trace principles, so that they can teach visitors how to become better stewards.

Goal 3 – Natural Resource Interpretation: Visitors will be prepared as recreators.

Theme(s) Supported: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6

2-Year Objective: Park staff will assess how visitors obtain information, establish a baseline, and see a 7% reduction in the number of responses to aid unprepared recreators.

5-Year Objective: Park staff will monitor return visits and track program participants, targeting a 15% increase in return visitation from the baseline.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Park office staff, seasonals, and rangers

Strategy for Implementation: Park staff will understand rules and regulations to correctly direct visitors to recreate safely, so the park has less calls to respond to.

Goal 4 – Education Goal: Educators will be prepared for field trips.

Theme(s) Supported: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6

2-Year Objective: The park staff will add resources to the educator's page, establish partnerships, and track the percentage of successfully scheduled field trips. The park will see a 12% increase in successfully planned and scheduled field trips.

5-Year Objective: The Park will see a 25% increase in successfully planned and scheduled field trips.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Park office staff, seasonals, and rangers

Strategy for Implementation: All staff will learn what educational programs we can offer, so they can promote programming in person, via phone calls, emails, and requests.

Goal 5 – Volunteer Goal: Volunteers will seek out regular service opportunities.

Theme(s) Supported: S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6

2-Year Objective: Expand opportunities and increase the number of Volunteers by 10%. The number of volunteer hours will increase by 25%.

5-Year Objective: The number of volunteers increased by 20%. The number of hours will increase by 50%.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Park office staff, seasonals, and rangers

Strategy for Implementation: Provide monthly volunteer events and other opportunities so that volunteers have the opportunity to volunteer and learn about why and how we protect our park's resources.

Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represents the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2025)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2027	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2028	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2029	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2030
Park Overall	8.8%	10%	11.5%	10.4%	10%	10%

