

Harpeth River State Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

Updated in 2025



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Park Purpose, History and Description

Harpeth River State Park is a Linear, Day-Use, Historical and Recreational Park located in both Cheatham and Davidson County. With 12 sites along 40 miles of the Harpeth River, the park manages a total of 676 acres, including 4 Historical sites: Mace Bluff and the Mound Bottom Complex (914 CE – 1450 CE), Montgomery Bell’s Tunnel (1820), Newsom’s Mill (1862), and Hidden Lake (1931-1940), as well as 9 river access points allowing for boating, fishing, swimming, picnicking, and hiking. Initial land acquisition began in 1971 with the State of Tennessee acquiring Mace Bluff, a 53-acre tract with a Pre-Historic Native American Petroglyph site, and Mound Bottom in 1972, thus establishing a satellite area of Montgomery Bell State Park. Tennessee State Parks established Harpeth River State Park in 2004.

The founding purpose of Harpeth River State Park is to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, the natural, archaeological, and historical areas for the benefit of the public. Harpeth River State Park exists to provide safe, quality, outdoor experiences and to conserve and steward its ecologically significant areas through education and a well-planned professionally managed operation.

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 Tennessee’s natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

1. Partner with local government and business entities who are willing to contribute time, effort and resources to Harpeth River State Park’s mission.
2. Create master lists of volunteers that can be utilized when help is needed. One list shall contain individuals that are willing to help the park when general labor or assistance is needed. A separate list shall contain volunteers that possess special skills such as carpentry, electrical, plumbing, etc. that would be willing to assist the park when these talents are needed.
3. Create relationships with Cheatham and Davidson County Schools to promote educational interpretive programs that highlight the park’s natural and historical features to enhance school curriculum for educators.

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

Action Plan:

1. Create individual plans to address the restoration and protection of historic structures within the park. These shall include Hidden Lake dance floor, Newsom’s Mill, Pattison Forge Tunnel, Mace Bluff Petroglyph, and Mound Bottom.
2. Provide frequent educational and volunteer-based program opportunities to address and repair erosion issues on park trails and removal of invasive exotic plant species.

3. Work to establish and post signage at all Harpeth River access points to inform and educate boaters on how to protect the river and its ecosystem while still being able to enjoy the resource recreationally.
4. Implement a stewardship plan for the 144-acre acquisition at Newsom's Mill focused on preserving green space, managing meadows, removing invasive species and debris, identifying and protecting key species, and safeguarding cultural resources. A sustainable trail system will be developed to balance visitor access with long-term conservation and ecological health.

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

Action Plan:

1. Partner with local non-profits such as Harpeth River Watershed and Harpeth Conservancy to establish a live water quality reporting system available to river users.
2. Create an online link and QR code signage for park kiosks to inform river users of current water levels to reduce search and rescue operations during high water events.
3. Establish an online interactive river map for Harpeth River State Parks website that will show distances between access points, average paddle times and photographs of the next downstream access point.
4. Work with GIS and Maps to properly survey and mark all park boundaries and address any encroachments that may have occurred.

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:

1. Work with Harpeth River State Park Friends Group to fund and construct an ADA boardwalk along the Tunnel Trail allowing access to this historic feature for all.
2. Establish outreach relationships with local senior centers in Cheatham and Davidson Counties to provide quality interpretive programs that share Harpeth River State Parks history, flora, and fauna using power point presentations and captive wildlife.
3. Pave the existing Blue Bird Trail and Story Book Trail Loop at Hidden Lake to allow for more ADA accessibility within the park.
4. Pave the existing Upper Loop Trail at the Gossett Tract Lake to allow for more ADA accessibility within the park.
6. Develop and pave an ADA perimeter trail on the newly acquired Newsom's Mill property.
5. Develop and implement a plan for the newly acquired All-terrain wheelchair to provide access to quality outdoor experiences for all park visitors.

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

Action Plan:

1. Construct wayfinding kiosks with interpretive panels at Montgomery Bell's Pattison Forge, Mound Bottom, Newsom's Mill and Hidden Lake to tell the story of these sites.
2. Develop site specific program outlines for all historical areas that are age specific and can be used by all staff members.
3. Continue growing the Junior Ranger Program and develop a Junior Archaeologist Camp at Harpeth River to inspire youth to learn about and protect the natural and historical resources.

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

Action Plan:

1. Create a core set of new recreation-based programs that promote the mission of Tennessee State Parks while at the same providing fun and educational experiences within Harpeth River State Park.
2. Develop an annual fee-based overnight boating / camping program to expand upon current recreational opportunities.
3. Establish an annual monarch butterfly initiative featuring live releases, habitat monitoring hikes, and host plant restoration programs to engage visitors of all ages.

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:

1. Develop a comprehensive maintenance schedule to ensure all upcoming facilities, such as the visitor center, bathhouse, pavilions, and maintenance building are consistently maintained and remain safe and accessible for all park visitors.
2. Create digital logs to ensure all facilities and equipment are receiving preventative maintenance as required.
3. Log into the Energy Cap system weekly to monitor all utility usage, checking for and addressing any discrepancies.

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

Action Plan:

1. Work to secure capital funding for an ADA accessible pedestrian bridge over the Harpeth River from the Gossett Tract to Mound Bottom and construct a self-guided mowed trail system around the mound complex.

2. Conduct monthly safety inspections of Harpeth River State Parks trail system to identify and promptly address hazards.
3. Provide ADA accessible boat ramps at all river access points.

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

Action Plan:

1. Design the greenspace surrounding the visitor's center in a manner that provides additional interpretive opportunities and ensures that all visitors feel welcome.
2. Fund and construct restroom facilities at Newsom's Mill and Hidden Lake.
3. Fund and construct picnic pavilions at Newsom's Mill and Hidden Lake to provide covered gathering space for park visitors and revenue generating rentals facilities for organized groups.
4. Fund and construct a new maintenance building.
5. Fund and develop the land acquisition at Newsom's Mill, which will include the construction of a new entrance, the development of a new parking area, fencing, access gate and new electrical utilities.
6. Fund and construct an additional river access at Newsom's Mill.

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:

1. Allow time for staff to attend trainings that will further benefit their professional growth and goals.
2. Increase staff morale by providing a safe and positive working environment through time management and efficient scheduling. This shall include additional opportunities for time off during the parks busiest season.
3. Support park staff by working to increase the current staffing pattern to accommodate increased visitation and new facilities.

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

Action Plan:

1. Conduct monthly reviews with all park staff to ensure the park is operating within its budget and discuss ideas to reduce wasteful spending.
2. Construct automated gates at all facilities to maximize staff efficiency.
3. Install additional camera systems throughout the park to support Law Enforcement staff and to provide the park visitors safe and secure areas.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Harpeth River State Park
Site Manager	Bill Morton
Area Manager	Ryan Forbess
Park acreage	676
Total number of visitors (FY 2025)	272,010
Total expenses before (FY 2025)	\$526,906
Total revenues (FY 2025)	\$18,142
Retail cost recovery % ¹	N/A
Park cost recovery %	3.4%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2025)	\$1.94
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2025)	\$0.07
Gross profit or loss	(\$508,764)
Total full-time available positions / filled	7/7
Total part-time available positions / filled	1/0 <i>(Slated to be converted to a full-time position)</i>
Primary feeder markets	Cheatham, Davidson, Williamson, Dickson Counties
Primary reasons people visit	Paddle sports / hiking / history
Opportunities for improvement	Picnic pavilions. Pedestrian Bridge to Mound Bottom. Permanent restroom facilities. Additional Parking and trails at Newsom's Mill. Sterns parking area paved. Pave appropriate trails for ADA usage. Additional river access at Newsom's Mill. Maintenance building.

Key Attractions

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

- 9 Harpeth River access points for recreational boating and fishing.
- Mound Bottom Archeological Area.
- Montgomery Bell Tunnel and Pattison Forge Site.
- Narrows of the Harpeth Bluff Trail Overlook.
- Hidden Lake.
- Newsom's Mill.

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 Harpeth River State Park. 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 Harpeth River State Park and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in January 2023 (month, year).

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Park Office	1	Good
Maintenance Shop	1	Good
Tool Shed	1	Fair
Portable Restrooms	5	Good
Water Fountains	6	Fair

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Mileage	Condition
Bluebird Trail	0.42	Drainage issues, exposed roots. Tree line needs trimming.
Bluff Trail	0.24	Hillside Erosion needs repairs.
Connector Trail	0.07	Good
Harpeth River Blueway	73.04	Good
Harris Street Bridge Trail	0.33	Erosion along bluff line. Recommend boardwalk.
Hidden Lake Trail	0.22	Erosion. Needs repairs due to heavy use.
Lower Field Loop Trail	0.38	Tree line needs trimming.
Lower Loop Trail	0.93	Tree line needs trimming.
Paw Paw Trail	0.42	Good
Railroad Spur Trail	0.15	Good
Ridge Loop Trail	0.78	Erosion. Needs repairs due to heavy use.
Storybook Trail	0.39	Good
Tunnel Trail	0.20	Hillside Erosion needs repairs.
Upper Loop Trail	0.47	Tree line needs trimming.
Grand Total	78.03	Good

Narrows of the Harpeth

1. Bluff Trail - .25 Mile – Hillside Erosion and trail needs repairs due to heavy use.

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2. Tunnel Trail - .20 Mile - Hillside Erosion and trail needs repairs due to heavy use.
3. Harris-Street Bridge Trail - .35 Mile – Erosion along bluff line that needs a boardwalk.

Gossett Tract

1. Upper Loop Trail - .55 Mile – Tree line needs to be trimmed back.
2. Lower Loop Trail – 1.0 Mile - Tree line needs to be trimmed back.
3. Connector Trail - .10 Mile
4. Paw Paw Trail - .40
5. Story Book Trail - .40

Hidden Lake

1. Lower Field Loop – .40 Mile - Tree line needs to be trimmed back.
2. Blue Bird Trail – .45 Mile – Drainage issues, exposed roots and tree line needs to be trimmed back.
3. Ridge Loop Trail – 1.15 Mile - Erosion and trail needs repairs due to heavy use.
4. Hidden Lake Trail – .25 Mile - Erosion and trail needs repairs due to heavy use.
4. Railroad Spur Trail - .15 Mile

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
Maintenance Building	New maintenance building
River Access	Additional river access at Newsom’s Mill
Restroom Facilities	New restrooms at Newsom’s Mill and Hidden Lake
Picnic Pavilions	Picnic shelters at Newsom’s Mill and Hidden Lake
Pedestrian Bridge	Bridge over Harpeth River at Gossett Tract into Mound Bottom
Visitor’s Center	Visitor’s center at Gossett Tract <i>(Currently Funded)</i>
Expanded Parking / Paving	Newsom’s Mill lot extension and Sterns lot paved
New Park Entrance	Additional entrance for acquired property at Newsom’s Mill
ADA Paved Trail	Pave Hidden Lake upper loop for handicap accessibility
ADA Paved Trail	Pave Gossett Tract upper loop for handicap accessibility
ADA Paved Trail	Pave Newsom’s Mill perimeter trail for handicap accessibility

Prioritized Facility Needs

Based on the facility inventory and assessment, these prioritized needs have been identified.

Facility Need	Priority Assignment
Visitor’s Center	High
ADA accessible boardwalk along the tunnel trail	High
Pedestrian bridge over the Harpeth River into Mound Bottom	High
Restroom facilities at Newsom’s Mill and Hidden Lake	Medium
Paved ADA Blue Bird Trail at Hidden Lake	High
Paved ADA Upper Loop Trail at Gossett Tract	High

Expanded Parking / Paving	Low
Picnic Pavilions	High
Harris-Street Bridge Trail repair (boardwalk over eroding bluff line)	Medium
Electric gates with timer capabilities at all park sites	Medium

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 Harpeth River have been identified as **core services**:

- Provide public access to the park, facilities and grounds.
- Provide public safety for visitors and protection of the natural and cultural resources.
- Provide maintenance of park grounds, facilities and infrastructure.
- Maintain clean and accessible drinking water fountains.

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 the manner by which 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 Harpeth River have been identified as **important services**:

- Offer a full range of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs.
- Make available park-specific information through on site public contact and informational kiosks.
- Provide on and off-site educational programs for schools and organized groups.

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 Harpeth River have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Provide volunteer opportunities allowing the community to have a personal stake in the park.
- Host community based special event programs such as the Harpeth Harvest Fest and Gossett Gobble 5K Race.

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Harpeth River represent the largest area of budgetary expense at 85.5% of the total operating budget for FY25, which is more than the target of labor costs not exceeding 65% of total operating expenditures. 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	3	*
Park Ranger 3	1	*
Interpretive Ranger 1	1	43,140
TSP Maintenance Lead	1	40,364
TOTAL	7	\$422,586.00

*Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Job Share Laborer	1	\$27,912
Seasonal Interpretive Ranger	1	Funded by IPE
TOTAL	1	\$27,912

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	2
Community Service Workers	
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
Other: _____	
TOTAL	2

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$422,586
Part Time Employees	\$27,912
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	\$450,498

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Administrative Assistant 1	1	FTE	2026	Visitor's Center/Gift Shop
Clerk 3	1	FTE	2026	Visitor's Center/Operations
TSP Maintenance Worker	1	FTE	2026	Grounds/Facilities Maintenance
Seasonal Interpretive Ranger	1	PT	2026	Additional annual SIR for park support
Seasonal TSP Operations Worker	1	PT	2026	Visitor's Center/Operations Support
TOTAL	5			

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Google	2025	4.8/5
All Trails	2025	4.7/5
Trip Advisor	2025	5.0/5
Yelp	2025	4.3/5

Professional Development and Training

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

- Swiftwater Rescue Training.
- Trail Building.
- TWRA Boating Safety and BUI.
- Chainsaw Safety.
- Emergency Medical Responder.
- 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. Construct boardwalks on the Bluff, Harris-Street Bridge, Hidden Lake and Ridge Loop Trails to prevent further erosion and create a safer hiking experience.
- b. Reconstruct two bridges on the Harris-Street Bridge Trail.
- c. Construct a transition staircase/ramp at the junction of the Bluebird and Hidden Lake Trails to prevent further erosion and create a safer hiking experience.
- d. Expand upon basic infrastructure at Newsom’s Mill by adding access to electricity.
- e. Demolish dilapidated buildings at Hidden Lake.
- f. Clear wooded areas that are primarily invasive at Newsom’s Mill.

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Work to grow Harpeth River State Parks Friends Group and expand membership.
- b. Expand volunteerism within the park.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Install security cameras at Newsom’s Mill to enhance safety and security.
- b. Develop and implement a standardized approach for usage of All-terrain wheelchair.
- c. Implementation of consistent interpretive program offerings.

Mid Term Recommendations (2–5 years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Construction of a visitor center at the Gossett Tract.
- b. Expand and pave parking areas at Newsom’s Mill and Stern Property.
- c. Construct picnic pavilions at Hidden Lake and Newsom’s Mill.
- d. Install electric gate at all park sites.
- e. Construction of an additional maintenance building.
- f. Removal of paved drag strip at Newsom’s Mill.
- g. Construction of a new entrance, trails and river access at Newsom’s Mill.

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Obtain additional equipment to assist park staff and visitors. This is to include 1 bat wing bush-hogg, 1 heavy duty trailer, 1 skid steer, 1 mini-excavator and upgrade current tractor to a higher horsepower and closed cab configuration.
- b. Increase staffing by 1 Administrative Assistant 1, 1 TSP Maintenance Worker, 1 Seasonal TSP Operations Worker, and 1 Clerk 3 to accommodate additional facilities.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Pedestrian bridge over the Harpeth River into Mound Bottom allowing for additional Ranger guided and self-guided tours of the site.
- b. Construct wayfinding kiosks with interpretive panels at Montgomery Bell’s Pattison Forge, Mound Bottom, Newsom’s Mill and Hidden Lake to tell the story of these sites.
- c. Create a park website extension that will include links to current water levels, water quality and an interactive park river map.

Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Construct an ADA accessible boardwalk along the Tunnel Trail to allow access to all park visitors.
- b. Build restroom facilities at Newsom’s Mill and Hidden Lake.

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Establish relationships with corporations who are willing to support the park through larger donations and volunteerism.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Daily ranger guided hikes to Mound Bottom, Hidden Lake and Pattison Forge.
- b. Pave the Blue Bird Loop trail at Hidden Lake to allow for more ADA accessibility and provide a safe and level .5 mile walking path for the community.
- c. Pave the Upper Loop Trail at Gossett Tract to allow for more ADA accessibility and provide a safe and level .55 mile walking path for the community.
- d. Pave Perimeter Trail at Newsom’s Mill to allow for more ADA accessibility and provide a safe and level walking path for the community.

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 in order 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.

Harpeth River State Park is approximately 676 acres and located on the Western Highland Rim consisting of Oak and Hickory hardwood stands of secondary forest with a complex ecosystem consisting of many different flora and fauna species. The park has 2 manmade lakes left over from an early 20th century rock quarry at Hidden Lake. Both lakes are spring fed and are part of the Harpeth River Watershed. The underlying bedrock of the region is chiefly Mississippian Limestone, Chert, Shale, and Sandstone with exposures of Devonian Silurian Ordovician and Cambrian limestone Chert and Shale. Plant communities are Mesosphytic. In some areas there are large colonies of Bluebells, May Apples, Trillium, and other Ephemeral species are found in the spring. As the season changes, summer wildflowers begin to bloom such as Golden Rod, Iron Weed, Comb flowers, Brown Eyed Susan found in open and meadow areas of the park.

There is a diverse selection of fauna at Harpeth River State Park. Some of the migratory birds through the spring and summer season consist of Osprey, Ruby Red Throated Hummingbirds, Yellow Belly Sap Suckers, Warblers, White Throated Sparrows, Broad wing Hawks etc. The park has a very diverse selection of woodpeckers such as Pileated and Red Headed. There have been sightings of Bald Eagles but no known nests. Large and small game animals are prominent in this area such as white tail deer, turkey, raccoon, rabbits, grey and fox squirrel, red and grey fox, and bob cats. Many reptiles call Harpeth River home with numerous species of snakes, turtles, and lizards. Amphibians such as frogs, toads and salamanders are prominent in this area.

The natural area is located within the Western Highland Rim ecoregion of Tennessee. Rolling terrain covered primarily by oak-hickory forest communities characterizes this region. Flood plains dominate the areas between the river and forests and are maintained as perineal forb and native grassland meadows. The natural area contains moderately steep bluff lines ranging in height from 80 – 150 feet. Dry oak-hickory forests dominate the ridge tops, and south and west facing slopes while Mesosphytic forests dominate lower slopes and north and east facing slopes. The Dry Oak-Hickory forests are dominated by Scarlet Oak, Southern Red Oak, Post Oak, Eastern Red Cedar, Pignut and Mockernut Hickories. The Mesosphytic forests are dominated by White Oak, American Beech, Sugar Maple, and Tulip Poplar.

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. Continually maintain vegetation growth within the plaza area and the mounds at Mound Bottom.
- B. Increase public access to Mound Bottom allowing for educational opportunities on how to protect and preserve these ancient sites for future generations.
- C. Partner with archeology to perform additional research of the Mound Bottom and Mace Bluff sites.
- D. Provide enhanced security at the Mace Bluff petroglyph and Newsom’s Mill.
- E. Manually (by cutting vegetation at ground level) and through the selective use of herbicides remove all non-native/non-desirable plants and hazardous trees from within and on top of the walls of Newsom’s Mill, 14 mounds of the Mound Bottom State Archeological Area, and from Hidden Lake’s 1930’s era Terrazzo dance floor.
- F. Improve native grass stands on the Upper and Lower meadows at both Hidden Lake and Gossett Tract. The preferred method for seeding will be hydroseeding with native grass seed and broadcasting native perennial forbs.
- G. Improve health of Riparian Corridors through annual inspections and rehabilitation efforts.
- H. Conduct annual inventories of park artifacts and art collections.
- I. Provide opportunities for public education with emphasis to not disturb artifacts from their discovered locations.
- J. Conduct annual boundary patrols to maintain TDEC boundary and no hunting/no trespassing markers.
- K. Actively seek to encourage relationships with community and regional contacts that will develop into partnerships to support park operations and the goals of the partnering operations.
- L. Develop a 1:2 scale reproduction of Montgomery Bell’s Pattison Forge.
- M. Restoring the 1930’s era Terrazzo dance floor at Hidden Lake.
- N. Annually obtain at least Gold level audit accreditation through the Tennessee State Parks Go Green With Us sustainability initiative.
- O. Improve visitor education of native flora/fauna and ecosystems through well thought and professionally produced signage.
- P. Target Chinese Privet, Tree of Heaven, Jacob’s Staff, Japanese Honeysuckle, and Shiso as priority invasive/non-native plants for removal.

- Q. Develop native plant/wildflower areas for the benefit of native pollinator and migratory species while reducing the acreage that requires mowing.
- R. Educate Park visitors on native plants and how invasive species impact Tennessee ecosystems. This will be accomplished through personal and nonpersonal interpretation.
- S. Raise public awareness and offer opportunities for positive action on the impacts of litter and pollution through interpretive programming efforts, partnerships with environmentally focused organizations and hosting volunteer workdays to collect litter.
- T. Improve recycling and waste reduction efforts collecting materials not commonly recycled, identifying operational efforts for waste reduction, and working with community leaders to improve public recycling opportunities.

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
Mound Bottom Complex	14 Mounds	Good	Mounds and site require continual vegetative maintenance. Sinkholes (4) are forming within the plaza.
Mace Bluff Petroglyph	1	Fair	Petroglyph is deteriorating. Outside threats of vandalism have caused damage to the patina.
Pattison Forge Site and Tunnel	1	Fair	The interior of the tunnel is collapsing.
Hidden Lake (Lake)	35,000 Square Feet	Excellent	Historic features are within the lake.
Hidden Lake Dance Floor	1	Poor	The Dance floor is deteriorating. Large holes have formed in the center and the edges are crumbling.

Hidden Lake Caretakers House	1	Poor	Exposed concrete building had vegetation growing within and the walls are unstable.
Newsom's Mill	1	Good	Vegetation is going within and on the structure. Stone blocks have been vandalized with spray paint and pushed from the building.

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
Mound Bottom Complex	<p>Public Use: Managed access with infrastructure and regulation. Access is currently limited with park personnel being present only.</p> <p>General Management: Site is managed by park staff mowing the plaza area and contract vendor cutting the temple mound. Outer areas are cut for hay 3 times annually. Public access to this site is a priority.</p>	High
Mace Bluff Petroglyph	<p>Public Use: Managed access with infrastructure and regulation. Access is limited by not advertising the existing trail to the petroglyph.</p> <p>General Management: Visitors seeking the site are allowed to access the petroglyph. The trail is maintained by park staff and the site is monitored for vandalism. Security cameras should be added to the site for monitoring and potential prosecution.</p>	High
Pattison Forge Site and Tunnel	<p>Public Use: Managed access/ accessible to the public.</p> <p>General Management: The tunnel is collapsing, and large debris enters during flooding events. The site is patrolled and signage to disallow entry into the structure is posted. Consideration should be given to researching additional methods to prevent entry into the structure.</p>	Moderate
Hidden Lake (Lake)	<p>Public Use: Managed access/ accessible to the public.</p>	Moderate

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	General Management: Remove any historic structures from the lake for potential future use in exhibits.	
Hidden Lake Dance Floor	Public Use: Managed access/ accessible to the public. General Management: The dance floor is kept free from debris to reduce further damage to the concrete. Work with archeology to create a plan to protect and restore the structure.	High
Hidden Lake Caretakers House	Public Use: Managed access/ accessible to the public. General Management: This structure is a safety hazard that need to be demolished.	High
Newsom’s Mill	Public Use: Managed access with infrastructure and regulation. General Management: The mill needs additional security in the form of cameras to monitor for vandalism. All vegetation on and within the mill is sprayed with herbicide monthly.	High
Newsom’s Mill (Racetrack Property)	Public Use: No public access. General Management: This land acquisition requires demolition of a one-mile lone racetrack, concrete block watchtower and restroom building. All litter and construction debris needs to be removed.	High

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
Land acquisition to benefit the Narrows of the Harpeth river access by relocating the park’s river access off of the county road and into a larger and more manageable space.	Short Term
Land acquisition to allow more space for loading boats at the Park’s last river access.	Long Term
Land acquisition in partnership with TWRA to protect and conserve the riparian buffers that exist on neighboring properties.	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

The Harpeth River immerses visitors in the area's diverse past through engagement with its natural resources.

Park Secondary Interpretive Themes

- S.1. The river and lands surrounding it played an important part in the lives and culture of the indigenous people who lived here.
- S.2. Through proper interpretation of the Montgomery Bell tunnel Harpeth River State Park teaches park visitors about the impact enslaved people had on the region around the park.
- S.3. Harpeth River State Park preserves the unique history of the region by interpreting the Newsom's mill historical site.
- S.4. With its unique placement and historical use the Hidden Lake area teaches park guests how outdoor recreation has changed over time.
- S.5. The rivers and bluffs at Harpeth River State Park give park guests the opportunity to recreate and appreciate the natural resources of the park.

Existing Audience

- Local young adults without children looking for a place to hike, paddle, or walk their dog.
- Non paddling day users from the region looking to hike and picnic
- Neighbors who are looking for a place to relax while fishing, hiking or walking the trails.

Emerging Audience

- Novice recreators who are exploring a new recreational opportunity.
- Outdoor fitness enthusiasts looking for a convenient place to exercise.
- Local retirees looking to relax in nature.
- Local families with young children looking for outdoor interpretive experiences.

Park Programming Inventory Data

Number of Programs	Number of Attendees	Number of Programmers	Total Cost Offset	
87	2521	8	\$1870	
Scheduled Programs	Scheduled Program Attendees	Supporting Programmers	Programs with a Fee	Fees Collected
86	2498	9	34	\$1770
Roving Programs	Roving Program Attendees		Programs with Donations	Donations Collected
1	23		2	\$100
Offsite Programs	Offsite Attendees		Programs with Grants	Grant Funds
9	1780		0	\$0

Key Park Natural, Cultural, and Recreational Resources

Resource	Resource Type
Harpeth River and accesses	Natural
Post Contact: Newsom Mill, Hidden Lake, MB Tunnel	Cultural
Pre-Contact sites: Mace Bluff, Mound Bottom	Cultural
Gosset tract and hidden lake meadows	Natural
Railroad trussell, Newsom station	Cultural

Key Park Interpretive Infrastructure

- Boat Ramps (Narrows being the biggest)
- Trail kiosk at Hidden Lake
- Interpretive panels at the tunnel
- Mound Bottom sign (needs replacing)

Park Personnel Primarily Dedicated to Interpretation

Position Titles	Percentage of Time Dedicated to Interpretation
Sydney Hale	100%
Lisa Conner	50%
Sydney Starnes	40%
Jack Foresman	30%
SIR	80%

Volunteer Hours and Numbers for Most Recent Fiscal Year

- Volunteer Hours: 312.5
- Volunteer Opportunities: 17
- Number of Volunteers: 140

Park Interpretive Goals

Goal 1 – Recreation Skills Development: Improve visitor awareness of the Harpeth River’s resources and history via recreational skill building and water safety.

Theme(s) Supported: *The rivers and bluffs at Harpeth River State Park give park guests the opportunity to recreate and appreciate natural resources of the park.*

2-Year Objective: Develop 5 ranger led paddle program outlines.

5-Year Objective: Offer 12 ranger led experiences over 1 fiscal year.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Harpeth River and accesses, Ranger Staff

Strategy for Implementation: Create new program outlines and equipment and safety lists to meet objectives.

Goal 2 – Cultural Resource Interpretation: Bring awareness to important park historical and cultural sites and events that span thousands of years of Tennessee history.

Theme(s) Supported: *The river and lands surrounding it played an important part in the lives and culture of the indigenous people who lived here. Through proper interpretation of the Montgomery Bell tunnel Harpeth River State Park teaches park visitors about the impact enslaved people had on the region around the park. Harpeth River State Park preserves the unique history of the region by interpreting the Newsom’s mill historical site. With its unique placement and historical use the Hidden Lake area teaches park guests how outdoor recreation has changed over time.*

2-Year Objective: Create 1 Telling Full Stories program outline for each of the 5 park satellite sites.

5-Year Objective: Offer at least 1 of 5 created programs once per month.

Resources Assigned to Goal: All prehistoric and historic sites on the park, Ranger Staff

Strategy for Implementation: Creating programs and outlines highlighting the unique stories of each site with historical significance and offering at least one of those programs on a routine basis.

Goal 3 – Education Goal: Harpeth River State Park will serve its community better by better aligning some programs with the educational needs of local schools.

Theme(s) Supported: *The river and lands surrounding it played an important part in the lives and culture of the indigenous people who lived here. Through proper interpretation of the Montgomery Bell tunnel Harpeth River State Park teaches park visitors about the impact enslaved people had on the region around the park. Harpeth River State Park preserves the unique history of the region by interpreting the Newsom’s mill historical site. With its unique placement and historical use the Hidden Lake area teaches park guests how outdoor recreation has changed over time.*

2-Year Objective: Identify program offerings that align with state standards via facilitate meeting with Interpretive Programs & Education staff. Complete Education Program Menu.

5-Year Objective: Contact School administrators from all 4 counties to make them aware of program offerings. Identify 2 key partnerships based on contact conversations.

Resources Assigned to Goal: All park sites of cultural, historical, natural significance. Ranger Staff

Strategy for Implementation: Identify program offerings that align with state standards via facilitate meeting with Interpretive Programs & Education staff. Complete Education Program Menu. Contact School administrators from all 4 counties to make them aware of program offerings. Identify 2 key partnerships based on contact conversations.

Goal 4 – Volunteer Goal: To encourage and educate visitors to take an active role in park stewardship.

Theme(s) Supported: *The river and lands surrounding it played an important part in the lives and culture of the indigenous people who lived here. Through proper interpretation of the Montgomery Bell tunnel Harpeth River State Park teaches park visitors about the impact enslaved people had on the region around the park. Harpeth River State Park preserves the unique history of the region by interpreting the Newsom’s mill historical site. With its unique placement and historical use the Hidden Lake area teaches park guests how outdoor recreation has changed over time.*

2-Year Objective: The park staff will ensure that 100% of volunteer efforts are recorded in Galaxy Digital.

5-Year Objective: Every Ranger will host at least 2 volunteer events per year.

Resources Assigned to Goal: The Harpeth River and the historic sites. Ranger Staff

Strategy for Implementation: Providing routine volunteer opportunities for visitors.

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.

FINANICAL 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	3.4%	3.9%	2.8%	5.25%	6.5%	6.7%

