



Tennessee State Parks

Park Strategic Management Planning Response to Comments

North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park

The 10-year individual Park Strategic Management Plans for Tennessee State Parks are part of the overall planning processes within the department and are developed to guide the management and direction of each park. These plans steer continued success of each park and influence long term innovation by the park staff. Building on Tennessee State Parks' strong foundation they seek to address the various challenges anticipated for each park. The Strategic Management Plans present a strategic and actionable strategy for the next 10 years.

This document is shared publicly as a record of comments that were made at a public information meeting as well as an online survey. The public information meeting was held at the Greenway Farm Conference Center on January 8th, 2026, at 5:30pm.

Summary of Public Comments

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation received **51 public comments** specific to the draft Strategic Management Plan for North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park. Overall, respondents expressed deep attachment to the park's natural features, its recreation opportunities, and its significance to local communities, user groups, and regional outdoor culture.

Key themes included:

- **Mountain Bike Trail Development & Improvements** – Many respondents expressed strong support for expanding mountain biking opportunities, particularly by formalizing or constructing sustainable, signed trails on the south side of the creek and upgrading the existing Flipper Bend trail system, which users note suffers from erosion, unauthorized ATV use, lack of signage, and confusing routing. Some also requested trail connections between Flipper Bend, new visitor facilities, and other access areas.
- **Whitewater Kayak Access** – Numerous respondents stressed the importance of perpetual, unimpeded whitewater access, citing the creek's national reputation and the whitewater community's historic role in securing the area's protected status. Many requested seasonal gate hours based on daylight, assurance that closures will not limit



paddler access, and design of the new bridge at Montlake to maintain safe high-water clearance with no pylons in the riverbed.

- **Trail Sustainability, Signage & Safety** – Respondents requested improved blazing, erosion control, and clearer maps, particularly for Flipper Bend and Hogskin Branch. Some recommended adding bridges to improve high-water access or gravel surfacing to reduce muddy conditions near trailheads.
- **Resource Protection & Conservation Priorities** – Several respondents emphasized the need to prioritize conservation over development, citing concerns about tree removal, native plant disturbance, stormwater impacts, and potential overuse. Requests included tree-protection measures during construction, retaining natural water flow patterns, and evaluating land acquisition or management to safeguard nearby tributaries.
- **Parking, Access, and Construction Closures** – Many expressed concern about long-term closures during upcoming construction, urging the Department to keep partial access open whenever possible, especially for kayakers. Others commented on parking lot design, shuttle alternatives, and accessibility of alternative trailheads.
- **Interpretation, Naming, and Historic Features** – Several respondents addressed naming conventions (e.g., “Pride Rock” or “Ivy Trail”), suggesting alignment with historically established access points such as Springfield Trail. Some recommended Civil War interpretive opportunities and connections with regional trail systems including the Great Eastern Trail.
- **Hunting & Multi-Use Access** – A few respondents requested the addition of walk-in hunting opportunities to the Flipper Bend area or recognition of the existing Cain Creek kayak access trail in official inventories.
- **General Support & Community Partnerships** – Several organizations, including SORBA Chattanooga, the North Chickamauga Creek Conservancy, and the Ivy Academy, expressed strong support for the park, its planning process, and continued collaboration.

Department Response

The Department appreciates the significant volume and depth of public engagement for North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park. The park’s unique natural character,



recreational diversity, and community significance are clearly reflected in the comments received. All input has been reviewed by Tennessee State Parks leadership in relation to the park's mission, resource stewardship responsibilities, operational capacity, and the goals outlined in the draft Strategic Management Plan.

The Department acknowledges strong public interest in mountain bike access and trail system improvements, especially within the Flipper Bend area. These requests will be evaluated in the context of sustainable trail design standards, environmental protection needs, user safety, and opportunities for formal partnership with local volunteer organizations.

Comments related to whitewater access are deeply valued. The Department recognizes the vital role the paddling community has played in the history of North Chickamauga Creek and will continue to prioritize safe, reliable access wherever feasible. Input regarding seasonal closure hours, bridge design, and riverbed protection will be considered as planning and construction decisions progress.

Feedback highlighting the importance of resource conservation, including tree protection, hydrological considerations, native species preservation, and minimizing landscape disruption during construction, will be incorporated into environmental review and design processes.

Requests concerning trail signage, erosion control, blazing, and overall trail safety are consistent with the park's long-term goals for improving navigation, reducing user conflicts, and enhancing sustainability. These items will be considered during future trail improvement planning.

The Department also appreciates concerns regarding parking access, construction impacts, and visitor flow. Management will evaluate how best to maintain safe partial access during project phases when possible, balancing visitor needs with safety, staffing, and contractor requirements.

Comments regarding interpretive opportunities, trail naming traditions, and connections to regional trail networks such as the Great Eastern Trail will be reviewed as interpretive planning and access planning evolve.

The Department is grateful for the broad support expressed by community groups, educators, recreation advocates, and long-time park users. Public input will continue to



play a central role as the Strategic Management Plan for North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park is refined and implemented over the next decade.