

Big Hill Pond State Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

Updated in 2025



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Park Purpose, History and Description

Big Hill Pond State Park exists as a recreation and education area in West Tennessee. The area now known as Big Hill Pond got its start in the early 1850s, when the Charleston/Memphis Railroad cut its way through the Tuscumbia River Bottoms resulting in the 35-acre borrow pit. The large depression soon filled with water creating what is now Big Hill Pond. Due to the remoteness of this wilderness, it became a stopover for migrating waterfowl and home to a variety of wildlife. Some of the old duck hunters in the early part of the 1900's talked of thousands of mallards and wood ducks wintering there and the hunting was fantastic. Some of the old hunters were Eber Greer, W.T. Greer, Roscoe Baldwin, Spurgen Browder, Dr. Jim Smith, and Merle (Slick) Lohma, just to name a few. Big Hill Pond was also a great place to fish, with large creels of bream, bass and crappie taken on a regular basis.

The idea to develop Big Hill Pond occurred when John Howell confided in Joe Hamm about a group of doctors and lawyers that were interested in buying his land for use as a private hunting and fishing club. Howell felt he and his wife needed better access to the highway, so they were able to get to the doctor and grocery store when the backwater got out. In those times, the only way to reach anyone was by boat. Mr. Howell said he had fought the beavers for ten years, but they had won the fight! The dam had flooded roughly three hundred and fifty acres of his farm. Howell named his farm "Beaver Lake" and started charging \$0.50 for hunting and fishing. However, there was one thing that concerned Howell, if his land sold to a private group, his friends and neighbors couldn't continue to hunt and fish the property. This turn of events leads to Hamm asking Howell if he would be interested in selling this property to the state for a wildlife refuge or a wildlife management area, so that the public could still enjoy the property. Howell liked the idea and agreed to hold the land until the state could secure the appropriations to buy the property. Hamm discussed this proposition with Leon Jones, the McNairy County Agent. With Jones help maps of the entire area were created and a plan formed to acquire property in the sum of 30,000 acres across the area. They also met with Bill Roberts, Manager of Pickwick Electric Cooperative and Chairman of the McNairy County Development Committee, who agreed with the idea. The group of men that got the ball rolling in the 1960's thought that the name Big Hill Pond Wildlife Management Area was a good fit, and over time it became Big Hill Pond State Park.

Big Hill Pond served as a strategic point between Corinth, Ms. and Pocahontas, Tn. for the Memphis to Charleston Railroad during the Civil War. This area saw many troops during this time including an African American Regiment who was tasked with guarding a small fort and the railroad trusses, between Corinth and Pocahontas. Big Hill Pond was also a part of the Davis Bridge Battle Site from the Tuscumbia River to Metamora Hill, this was the second largest battle in West Tennessee. After the Civil War, the land sat quietly being used for hunting, farmland, and a place for whiskey production.

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: Encourage park staff to follow Go Green Guidelines, continue working with volunteers to maintain the trails, and provide educational opportunities for visitors-focusing on resource management.

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

Action Plan: Continue to promote native grasslands in areas around the park that promote pollinators while reducing erosion, follow lake management plan for Travis McNatt Lake to improve the fishery, and identify and preserve cultural areas on the park, such as the Civil War Earthworks.

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

Action Plan: Utilize Park and department databases to identify resource management projects and set SMART goals to achieve necessary outcomes to preserve the natural and cultural resources at Big Hill Pond.

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 educational programs that tell the full story of Big Hill Pond and the surrounding area, promote recreational programs through public outreach targeting the local community.

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

Action Plan: Continue working with McNairy County and surrounding schools by providing high quality programs that assist teachers with meeting state curriculum standards. Partner with Memphis Museum of Science & History and McNairy County schools to provide high

quality programs that assist teachers with meeting state curriculum standards in the classroom or provide opportunities for outside educational learning. Use Park ambassadors such as the Barn Owl to assist classrooms with understanding of how soundwaves are used in their everyday lives to survive.

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 working with volunteers to keep hiking trails open while also making improvements to help reduce erosion and further damage to ecosystems.

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: Use employee action plans as well as HIPPO software to hold park staff accountable while accomplishing short- and long-term goals set by the park and the department.

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

Action Plan: Ensure that all projects are completed on time and that ADA standards are being met when possible. Make improvements to all parking areas to include at least one van accessible parking space at each facility. Make improvements in the campground including ADA campsites and restroom facilities. When installing new features such as playgrounds ADA features and access is desired. These goals will help assist people with needs to enjoy many of the features of Big Hill Pond that have not been accessible in the past.

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

Action Plan: All public facilities will be kept safe, clean, and inviting while continuing to make improvements that help meet ADA goals. Make improvements that support Big Hill Pond’s theme and improve the park’s aesthetics to create a great experience for the visitors.

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 and promote a safe work environment, while providing training and professional development opportunities that support the park and departments goals while advancing the employees knowledge.

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

Action Plan: Create more opportunities for volunteer projects, increase the native habitat while reducing maintenance needs, and explore partnerships that help promote the park with the goal of finding partnerships that support the park to reduce park expense.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Big Hill Pond State Park
Site Manager	Justin King
Area Manager	Zach Tinkle
Park acreage	4,905
Total number of visitors (FY 2025)	49,954
Total expenses before CO (FY 2025)	\$713,478
Total revenues (FY 2025)	\$39,994
Retail cost recovery% ¹	%
Park cost recovery%	5.6%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2025)	\$14.28
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2025)	\$0.80
Gross profit or loss	(\$673,484)
Total full-time available positions / filled	6/6
Total part-time available positions / filled	1/1

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

Primary feeder markets	Fayette County, Shelby County, North Mississippi, McNairy County, Hardeman County, Madison County
Primary reasons people visit	Hiking, Camping, Fishing, Recreation, Paddling, Hunting, Horseback Riding
Opportunities for improvement	Expand Camping to RV sites, Wrangler Sites, Lake Management

Key Attractions

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

- Dismal Swamp Boardwalk
- Observation Tower
- Travis McNatt Lake & Big Hill Pond
- Davis Bridge Battlefield
- 30 miles of Hiking Trails; 6 miles of shared horseback and mountain bike trail
- Aviary
- 18 Hole Disc Golf Course
- 28 site Campground

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 Big Hill Pond 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 Big Hill Pond State Park, and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in August 2025.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Snack Bars	3	Excellent
Visitor Center/Maintenance	1	Good
Pocahontas School House	1	Poor
Manager Residence	1	Good
Ranger Residence	2	Poor
Basketball Court	1	Excellent
Pickleball Court	1	Excellent
Boat House	1	Excellent
Kayak Storage	1	Good
Travis McNatt Lake Bridge	1	Excellent
Travis McNatt Lake Boat Ramp	1	Excellent
Big Hill Pond Boat Ramp	1	Fair
Dismal Swamp boardwalk	1	Under Construction
Campground Bath House	1	Under Construction
Picnic Area Rest Rooms	1	Excellent
Campground (28 sites)	1	Under Construction
1800s Chimney	1	Good
Disc Golf 18 hole	1	Good

Aviary	1	Good
Picnic Shelter	1	Good
Picnic Shelter at Chimney	1	Excellent

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Big Hill Pond has a total of 9 hiking trails spanning over 30 miles within the park. These trails are natural surface trails that have a lot of elevation change making them moderate to difficult for most hikers. The trails take in a vast array of scenery of the park from rolling hills covered in hard wood timber to low lying cypress wetlands only crossable by an elevated bridge. There are four opportunities for overnight camping on the trails at a back country trail shelter. Big Hill Pond also has one horse trail that is an easy day ride consisting of 6 miles. The newest addition to the trail system is a 1/2mile accessible loop at the park office. This is a porous pavement trail that has low impact for a comfortable walk through the woods.

Some challenges that the park’s trails face is constant erosion due to the poor soil quality found at the park, McNairy loam. Some trails are also experiencing continued flooding from heavy rains and beaver populations expanding. Storm damage is a challenge for the parks trails as many trails have numerous trees fall during the spring and fall seasons.

Trail Name	Length	Condition
Big Hill Pond Trail	4.75	Good
Dogwood Point Trail	3.1	Good
Big Hill Pond Access Trail	0.3	Good
Fox Hollow Trail	0.65	Good
Dry Ridge Trail	2.85	Good
Rocky Knob Trail	2.4	Good
Turkey Call Trail	2.45	Good
Tuscumbia Trail	2.3	Good
Horse Trail	6	Fair
Accessible Paved Trail	0.5	Excellent
TOTAL	30*	<i>*due to connections</i>

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
Wrangler Campground	10 to 15 site full hook up wrangler camp
Cabins on the Travis	5 to 8 cabins on the Travis McNatt Lake

Visitor/Education Center	Visitor Center with public restroom, giftshop, conference room, and educational area
Additional RV campsites	Expand the campground
Public Restrooms at the Chimney	With the addition of the new play area and the picnic shelter at the Chimney there is a need for public restrooms in this area.

Prioritized Facility Needs

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

Facility Need	Priority Assignment
Visitor Center development	1
Restrooms at the Chimney and Play area.	2
Wrangler Camp development	3
Additional RV Campsites	4
Cabins at the Travis McNatt Lake	5

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 Big Hill Pond State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Support the mission of Tennessee State Parks which is "To preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources while providing safe, quality outdoor experiences."
- Provide for public access to the park, the facilities, and the grounds.
- Provide for public safety for visitors and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for maintenance of grounds, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Maintain facilities developed through the LWCF program to required standards.
- Provide for basic, non-staff supported day-use activities (such as hiking and picnicking) with trails, informational signage, picnic tables, trash cans and restroom facilities.
- Maintain Park drinking water and wastewater programs to state standards.

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.
- These 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 the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Big Hill Pond have been identified as **important services**:

- Provide a full range of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs.
- Offer park-specific information at the Visitor Center and Nature Center.
- Provide educational programs for schools and organized groups.
- Provide public access to Shelters, Playgrounds, Aviary, Boat Launches, and Public Restrooms.

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 provide 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 Big Hill Pond have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Provide support services for 28 tent/RV campsites.
- Provide support services for picnic shelters.
- Operate a boat rental operation on the Travis McNatt Lake, including a snack bar and gift shop.
- Operate the camp store within the campground
- Provide support for gift shop in the park office
- Provide mobile gift shop options for organized events at the park, as needed or requested

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Big Hill Pond State Park represent the budgetary expense of 48.4% of the total operating budget, which is below 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	*
Park Ranger	2	*
Administrative Assistant 1	1	\$52,212
Maintenance Lead	1	\$40,284
Maintenance Technician	1	\$34,404
TOTAL	6	\$334,044

**Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.*

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Job Share Clerk 2	1	\$10,944
TOTAL	1	\$10,944

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	1500
Community Service Workers	0
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
Other: _____	
TOTAL	0

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$334,044
Part Time Employees	\$10,944
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	\$344,988

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	
Interpretive Park Ranger	1	FTE	2026	Meet staffing needs for improving onsite and offsite program needs and request
Clerk	1	FTE	2030	Additional staffing to support a future Visitor Center
Campground attendant	1	PT	2026	Needed to operate the camp store and camper check-in
TOTAL	3			

Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit (RevPAR) for the last three years for overnight facilities and day use facilities is detailed in the table below.

Current RevPAR

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit	Day Use Facility Rev Per Unit
2023	\$1.57	\$0.83
2024	\$1.63	\$1.21
2025	\$1.65	\$0.64

Projected RevPAR - Based on current RevPAR trends at the park and any known developments over the next four years. Revenues will be down in FY 26 due to the campground being closed for much needed upgrades.

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit	Day Use Facility Rev Per Unit
2026	\$0	\$0.50
2027	\$2.50	\$1.00
2028	\$2.75	\$1.25
2029	\$3.00	\$1.50

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
YELP	2025	4.8
Google Reviews	2025	4.6
Facebook	2025	98% recommend (53 reviews)

Professional Development and Training

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

- Routine management training.
- Routine law enforcement training.
- Maintenance staff have requested electric and plumbing certifications.

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

- Complete the RTP Grant for the ADA kayak launch and parking area at the Big Hill Pond.
- Follow recommendations made by TWRA to improve the Travis McNatt Lake that align with the Bill Dance Signature Lake plans.
- Complete the Campground renovation Capital Project including all 28 sites receiving upgrades of water, electric, and sewer on every site, the addition of two ADA sites, bath house remodel to improve ADA access, and relocation of the camp store to the entrance of the campground.
- Complete the Dismal Swamp Boardwalk Capital Project.
- Create or improve an access trail to meet ADA standards to the Dismal Swamp boardwalk.
- Pave public parking areas at the chimney.
- Create a management plan for the Civil War Earthworks at Big Hill Pond and at Wolfpen Road.
- Develop and manage the newly acquired 360 acres of public hunting area while continuing to protect the cypress wetlands.
- Develop a management plan for the 1850s house located on Wolfpen Rd.
- Develop a management plan that will keep all the new amenities in good working order insuring that regular and preventive maintenance is being performed to reduce unnecessary cost associated with neglect.
- Complete the ADA story book trail that is funded through the Project Diabetes Grant and the TEAP Grant.

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Hire an Interpretive Ranger to meet staffing needs. As the park continues to grow both on site and in the community an Interpretive Ranger could assist with and expand the program and education experience of Big Hill Pond.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Refill and open the Travis McNatt Lake for recreational paddling while the fishery continues to receive improvements.
- b. Expand and improve public fishing areas on the Travis McNatt Lake.
- c. Improve informational kiosk signage around the park to help Big Hill Pond tell its full story and provide visitors with simple directions around the park.
- d. Create a self-service boat rental program for the Travis McNatt Lake and Big Hill Pond.

Mid Term Recommendations (2-5 years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. Improve parking for the Travis McNatt Lake to assist visitors with accessing the lake and the boat rental operation.
- b. Follow recommendations made by TWRA to improve the Travis McNatt Lake that align with the Bill Dance Signature Lake plans.
- c. Develop a management plan to continue improving and protecting the wetlands in the Cypress Creek area.
- d. Add restrooms at the 1800's chimney picnic shelter to support visitor's needs at the recreation area.
- e. Work with McNairy County Highway Department and TDOT to widen and pave the entire park road system as larger campers will be using the extremely narrow roads after the campground renovation is complete.
- f. Pave public parking areas at the chimney.

2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Completely staff all operations, including the camp store and boat house, expanding the hours at both locations to improve customer's experience after the campground project is complete.
- b. Explore the opportunity of having a camp host to help with customer's needs in the campground.

3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Local Community outreach to promote the new amenities opened at Big Hill Pond.
- b. Develop a management plan that will keep all the new amenities in good working order insuring that regular and preventive maintenance is being performed to reduce unnecessary cost associated with neglect.

Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. Site and Facilities

- a. New Visitor Center located in a central location of the park housing a giftshop, interpretive area, conference room, office space, and aviary.
- b. Create a new primitive campground with restrooms and a bath house.

- c. Wrangler campground with hook ups to provide overnight accommodations.
 - d. Erect five to eight small cabins on the Travis McNatt Lake.
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
- a. Additional support staff for the visitor center would be needed to keep the visitor center open seven days a week.
 - b. With the expansion of the existing campground, RV campground, wrangler campground, and cabins an additional Ranger position could be justified.
- 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
- a. Improve at least one trail to meet ADA compliance.
 - b. With the new visitor's center being open seven days a week, we could offer more in person interpretative programming during extended hours of operations to offer guests a more immersive visit to the park.

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.

Big Hill Pond's unique landscape is a great example of the diversity held within the state of Tennessee. At Big Hill Pond, one can view the 1850's Cypress Pond created by the Memphis to Charleston Railroad as a borrow pit. Less than half a mile away, you can ascend some of the highest peaks in McNairy County. The parks trails twist and turn through huge sandstone rock outcroppings. This diversity of the landscape provides numerous habitats that are the homes to many wildlife and plant species, such as the endangered Tuscumbia Darter and the Big Eared Bat. Big Hill Pond also holds the state record Sparkleberry Tree with a circumference of 39 inches and height of 29 feet.

The area now known as Big Hill Pond played a huge roll in the historic and cultural story of the park and surrounding McNairy County. Before Westward Expansion, the Chickasaw and Cherokee Indians called this land home. The area held great importance during the 1850's when the railroad passed through the Hatchie River, Tuscumbia River, and Cypress Creek bottoms. The railway through the park played a key role during the Civil War as it was a main line for the transportation of troops and supplies. After the war, the area was settled quietly with row crop and sharecrop farmers.

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. Identify and document endangered and protected species within the park boundary, developing a management plan to keep records of any threats or positive improvements to the population.
- B. Research the impact of the Civil War to Big Hill Pond and tell the full story of how the troops here guarded important railway trusses.
- C. Use the park raptor program to educate visitors about conservation, rehabilitation, and the importance of raptors within the ecosystem
- D. Use state park software to record and manage park trails and their impact.

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.

Big Hill Pond State Park Management Plan

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Dismal Swamp	300 acres	Good	Continuing to increase in size due to beaver population and drainage issues
Travis McNatt Lake	165 acres	Renovations underway	The Lake has been selected to become a Bill Dance Signature Lake. This project will support the fishery as well as provide improvements to better support our visitors needs.
Big Hill Pond	35 acres	Good	Fishing is fair at the Big Hill Pond. This is a great cypress lake viewing area. Great for birding and recreational kayaking.
Upland Hardwood Forest	3,000 acres	Good	The forest is healthy.
Tuscumbia River	3.5 mile	Fair	The Tuscumbia River is silting in at a fast rate. No boat traffic in the summer months. Winter months provides access for hunting.
Cypress Creek	1 mile	Fair	The Cypress Creek is silting in at a fast rate. No boat traffic in the summer months. Winter months provides access for hunting.
Hatchie River	.5 acre	Good	Boat ramp access and parking area. Gravel Parking area with a concrete ramp.
Low lying hardwood forest	1,200 acres	Fair	Currently losing trees in these areas due to increased flooding, storm damage, and beaver population.
John Howell Slough	1 mile	Excellent	Very healthy oxbow located in the park hunting area.
Pollinator Habitat	3 acres	Good	The pollinator fields have been sowed to help reduce erosion and mowing while providing habitat for nature.
Civil War Earth Works	1	Good	Earth Works overlooking the Charleston to Memphis Railway.

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
Big Hill Pond	<p>Public Use: Develop a management plan with TWRA to help improve the fishery while also preserving the natural habitat in this area. Promote canoe and kayak use in this area so visitors can enjoy the experience of this area.</p> <p>General Management: Identify species in this area, promote a healthy habitat through a well-developed management plan that supports TWRA initiatives.</p>	Moderate
Upland Hardwood Forest.	<p>Public Use: Continue to manage and upkeep the access trails through these areas.</p> <p>General Management: Identify all hazardous trees in these areas removing the ones that pose a threat to the public or structures.</p>	Moderate
Travis McNatt Lake	<p>Public Use: Public bank fishing access and boat ramp access.</p> <p>General Management: Continue working with TWRA and their management plan for Travis McNatt Lake to meet the goals established for the Bill Dance Fishing Trail Lake project.</p>	High
Dismal Swamp	<p>Public Use: Access is limited to the Dismal Swamp Boardwalk which is a half mile elevated boardwalk in this area.</p> <p>General Management: Continue to identify trees that area hazardous to the public and the boardwalk structure removing these as needed. Manage the water level in this area with beaver control removing beaver dams to reduce the water level in this area. Continue working with USDA and the feral hog control plan to reduce erosion and wetland habitat destruction.</p>	High
Tuscumbia River	<p>Public Use: Public Boat ramp access.</p> <p>General Management: Continue to work with TWRA managing this resource that passes through the park.</p>	Moderate
Hatchie River	<p>Public Use: Public Boat ramp access</p> <p>General Management: Continue working with TWRA to manage this access point.</p>	Moderate

John Howell Slough	<p>Public Use: Hiking Trail access only.</p> <p>General Management: Continue working with TWRA to manage this area within the public hunting area in the park. Educate park visitors about this area and why it is a public hunting area.</p>	High
Civil War Earth Works	<p>Public Use: Education and interpretation</p> <p>General Management: Resource protection, preservation, and interpretation.</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
Assess strategies to resolve easement issues	Short Term
Dispose of Pocahontas School House	Short 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 creation of the 1860s railroad line and pond at Big Hill Pond State Park set the stage for the preservation of four thousand acres of hardwood forests on the Mississippi flood plain.

Park Secondary Interpretive Themes

- S.1. Recreation and outreach has power in creating long-term stewardship.
- S.2. Historical modification to landscapes create lasting changes to the environment.
- S.3. Those who built and defended Big Hill Fortification are not remembered in the history books, but the park stands as a testament to their efforts

Existing Audience

- Upper-middle class adults, ages 25-40, regional (within 2 hours) some with, some without kids. Primarily day use, they come to escape the city and primarily hike. They are not regularly attending programs
- Overnight guests, ages 25-40 with children 4-16, that are lower-income and local that use the campground, trails, playground, aviary, no-cost recreation, and free programs.
- Overnight guests, ages 25-40 with children 4-16, that are upper-income and regional that use the park as a family weekend get-away. They hike, use the playground and aviary, attend paid programs, and visit the gift shop.

Emerging Audience

- Seasonal hunters 18+, local and growing regional, using areas recently opened for hunting deer, turkey, and duck. Some conflict between current hunters, new hunters, and hikers. Can lead to LE issues.
- Local education groups such as homeschools, middle class, local/regional (45-90 minutes), elementary ages with several parents, requesting programs and using the aviary and the Visitor Center.

Park Programming Inventory Data (FY25)

Number of Programs	Number of Attendees	Number of Programmers	Total Cost Offset	
90	6,739	5	\$1310	
Scheduled Programs	Scheduled Program Attendees	Supporting Programmers	Programs with a Fee	Fees Collected
82	5106	4	19	\$650
Roving Programs	Roving Program Attendees		Programs with Donations	Donations Collected
8	1633		0	\$0
Offsite Programs	Offsite Attendees		Programs with Grants	Grant Funds
26	5251		0	\$0

Key Park Natural, Cultural, and Recreational Resources

Resource	Resource Type
Travis McNatt Lake	Recreational
Big Hill Pond	Cultural
Trail System-30 mi	Recreational
Dismal Swamp	Natural
Civil War Earthworks	Cultural
Pre-1860s House	Cultural
1853 Railroad	Cultural
Rock Structures	Resources

Key Park Interpretive Infrastructure

- Aviary
- Pavilions
- Visitor Center
- Rock Outcrops
- Civil War Earthworks
- Big Hill Pond
- McNatt Lake
- Fire Tower
- Trails
- Dismal Swamp Boardwalk
- Pre-1860s House
- Dismal
- Branch (creek)

Park Personnel Primarily Dedicated to Interpretation

Position Titles	Percentage of Time Dedicated to Interpretation
SIR	60%
Park Ranger 1 (interp. lead)	50%
Park Ranger 2	30%
Administrator	15%
Park Manager	<10%

Volunteer Hours and Numbers for Most Recent Fiscal Year

- Volunteer hours: none recorded*
- Volunteer opportunities: 1
- Number of volunteers: none recorded*

*Private group hours and personnel not included

Park Interpretive Goals

Goal 1 – Cultural Resource Interpretation: Big Hill Pond will introduce visitors to Civil War era events and history.

Theme(s) Supported: P, S1, S3

2-Year Objective: Work with IPE Planning and Exhibits to create 3 interpretive panels about African American soldiers. Install panels in designated space. Improve site accessibility.

5-Year Objective: Create three interpretive programs relating to the exhibit. Offer one of the new programs quarterly.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Full-time Ranger staff, IPE, SIR

Strategy for Implementation: Park staff will work with IPE to research information related to this interpretive infrastructure and design panels. Panels will be installed, and staff will develop programs. SIRs and ranger staff will offer one of the programs quarterly.

Goal 2 – Natural Resource Interpretation: Through recreational opportunities visitors will learn about the historical and ecological significance of the pond at Big Hill Pond.

Theme(s) Supported: P, S1, S2

2-Year Objective: Create one guided historic float and write a program outline for the park program library. Offer floats 12 times per year.

5-Year Objective: Create boat/kayak rental opportunities for visitors on the pond.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Full-time Ranger, SIR, Seasonal job-share

Strategy for Implementation: Ranger staff and SIRs contribute to creating a program outline and upload the final copy into the park's program library. Staff will build secure storage for watercraft near the canoe launch.

Goal 3 – Education Goal: Through educational programs, Big Hill Pond State Park teaches local students the importance of conserving the ecosystems found within BHPSP.

Theme(s) Supported: S2

2-Year Objective: Work with statewide program team in IPE to create and publish an Educator Program Guide. Create four self-guided activities for groups.

5-Year Objective: Expand regular high school education visits by 50%. Utilize Local Educator Community guide to develop relationships.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Full-time Ranger staff, Statewide programs team, SIR

Strategy for Implementation: Park staff will inventory existing program offerings and conduct research and development of new topics to meet education standards to include in the program library. Staff will reach out to local schools to establish and foster a relationship leading to more educational opportunities.

Goal 4 – Volunteer Goal: Through regular volunteer opportunities, Big Hill Pond State Park will continue to offer high quality and safe outdoor recreation experiences.

Theme(s) Supported: P, S1, S2

2-Year Objective: Record 100% of volunteer efforts in Galaxy Digital.

5-Year Objective: Increase public volunteer opportunities by 50%. Offer 12 volunteer opportunities for special interest groups.

Resources Assigned to Goal: Full-time staff, Friends Group, Volunteers

Strategy for Implementation: By fully utilizing Galaxy Digital and engaging with our volunteers through staff outreach and the Friends Group, we can move them up the stewardship staircase.

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	5.6%	2.2%	11%	12%	14%	14%