

North Chickamauga Creek Gorge Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

Updated in 2025

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Park Purpose, History and Description

Governor Bill Lee dedicated North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park in 2023. However, the history of the land protected within the boundaries reaches much further back in time. Millions of years ago, a major orogenic event created what we now know as the Appalachian Mountains. During this event, shifting tectonic forces created extraneous lifting and folding of geologic plates that would create the Cumberland Plateau and Valley along with unique examples of karst topography. These major geologic shifts also incited ecological events, which led to the creation of the hardwood forests of the Cumberland Plateau. The earliest people to inhabit these forested lands would have been roving bands of prehistoric Native Americans, who used the natural cave systems of the Southeast region as shelters and ritual sites. Later, these nomadic people would form permanent settlements. The Muscogee Creek and Cherokee people were the first known permanent inhabitants of the area now known as Hamilton County. However, following the passage of the Indian Removal Act these people were forced to abandon their lands. The Trail of Tears passed very near to the boundaries of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge, and the Taylor Route branch of the Trail of Tears traveled along Montlake Road which is also the location of the main trailhead for the park. The Native American history of the site is still remembered through its name *Chickamauga*, loosely translating to “dwelling place by the water”. Although numerous other meanings of the word “Chickamauga” exist, this translation is widely accepted. In addition to a rich history of Native American occupancy, this area was later utilized for timber resources and coal mining.

The Bowater Corporation previously owned multiple tracts of land along the Cumberland Plateau. A portion of these land tracts, known as Pocket Wildernesses, were designated as recreation areas. Due to the previous resource extraction that had been taking place, the acquisition of the Pocket Wilderness by the North Chickamauga Creek Conservancy would be essential to protecting the Gorge itself. The area of land acquired by the Conservancy included Upper North Chickamauga Creek, the South Rim of the Gorge, Flipper Bend, and Cain Creek. The natural area was designated in 1999, and thousands of additional acres have been added since then. In 2006, the Pocket Wilderness was transferred to the State and became a part of the natural area. As a State Natural Area North Chickamauga Creek Gorge was managed through Cumberland Trail State Park until 2023. The addition of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge to the Tennessee State Park system allows for the opportunity to improve conservation management of the natural and historic features of the site.

The primary mission of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park is to protect and preserve the unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic resources of the Cumberland Plateau as well as the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge. Management of this area shall restore and maintain the diversity and integrity of the resource through lawful protection, education, research, and restoration. The park will endeavor to present compelling interpretations of the park’s story and resources, provide opportunities for safe, accessible, and enjoyable outdoor and recreational experiences to all park visitors. Along with all of these important points, the park will strive to provide a safe and inspiring workplace for park employees and volunteers.

The park will seek partnership opportunities with local community leaders to bring a positive economic impact to the area surrounding the park.

North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park consists of 5995 acres and is designated as a Class II Natural-Scientific State Natural Area. The park is located in both Hamilton and Sequatchie Counties in Southeast Tennessee, and while this area is mostly composed of rural communities, the city of Chattanooga is a 15-minute drive south from the Montlake Road Trailhead. The park is named for the largest waterway which runs through it, North Chickamauga Creek. This creek is 32 miles long and is one of the most significant tributaries for the Tennessee River in the area.

The gorge itself is cut from the steep sandstone cliffs of Walden's Ridge Plateau. A mixed mesophytic forest combines with oak-hickory, and oak-pine forests to form a rich mosaic throughout much of the gorge. Small pockets of old growth forest with towering tulip poplar, yellow buckeye, and basswood occur in remote locations where rugged topography has protected the forest from past logging. On the uplands and bluffs, there are oak-hickory and oak-pine forests, upland ponds, and sandstone glades and barrens. Riverside shoals and stream cobble bars in North Chickamauga Creek provide habitat for several threatened and endangered plants.

Recreational opportunities in the park include hiking, backpacking, birding, fishing, swimming, mountain biking, rock climbing and bouldering, and whitewater kayaking. Indeed, North Chickamauga Creek is one of the foremost seasonal whitewater creeks in the southeast and Hamilton County boasts some of the best Southern sandstone for rock climbing in the US. The Cumberland Trail can be accessed from two trailheads within the park and backcountry campsites both within the boundaries of North Chick and along the Cumberland Trail are utilized year-round.

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 steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan: Create/Distribute programming, promote Community Engagement Initiatives, and maintain meaningful relationships/partnerships so as to fulfill the mission statements of both Tennessee State Parks and North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park. It is important that the park communicate regularly with local/statewide communities about their needs and interests. This should be done in an effort to ensure that we are not only telling the full stories of our park, but also to ensure that we maintain equitable outreach practices. This is done by providing information about the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge to as many demographics as possible, while ensuring more effort be directed towards historically underrepresented communities simultaneously.

The NCCG has a long and storied history in Hamilton County and the surrounding area, and diving deep into the rich stories that permeate this place will be of highest importance in garnering support from the community. Establishing relationships with community leaders will also be key for progress, in generating stewardship. Keeping lines of communication open with local representatives, heads of communities, etc. creates new possibilities that would otherwise be impossible if not extremely difficult.

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

Action Plan: Engage with local and statewide resources/subject matter experts in all relevant fields of study, in order to both preserve and protect the myriad of resources within park boundaries. High standards of training for all staff should be encouraged, as well as diversity of expertise. Reach out to subject matter experts to gather relevant knowledge about the freshwater ecology, geology, conservation, etc. of the park. Create partnerships with local universities and create regular intervals for natural resource management surveys. Work towards being as proactive as possible in all conservation efforts.

There have already been noteworthy efforts in the name of conservation within the boundaries of the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge. In 2008, there was a study done on the "Vascular Flora of the North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Natural Area, Tennessee" done by Stacy Huskins of USGS and Dr. Joey Shaw of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Work towards ensuring regular research efforts, to put into practice every up-to-date conservation effort necessary.

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

Action Plan: Encourage staff to strive for higher levels of knowledge, especially in the data driven fields that allow our agency to make meaningful progress toward the goals we have in place. ARCGIS/PPI/RMS data should be entered within their specified timeframes. Create partnerships with conservation organizations that begin and maintain the collection of meaningful amounts of data and then use that data to monitor and evaluate the progress or status of the resource in question. This data should also be collected for the purpose of analyzing and evaluating the overall health of the resource, as small changes can mean significant developments.

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: Connect people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks through both established and innovative methods of interpretation, education, and recreation. Innovative technologies may include virtual programs, novel sensory technologies, and adaptive mobility technologies.

Utilize available resources to connect with audiences both within the park, as well as those audiences beyond the park. These resources may include (but are not limited to): park and Friends social media pages, state websites, virtual seminars, in-person park visits, off-park programming, and community engagement events.

Seek novel methods of interpretation, education, and recreation to improve accessibility to the park for audience members who were historically underrepresented in outdoor recreational opportunities, possess a language or economic barrier to parks, or who may have physical or mental disabilities which limit access to park services.

Research full stories of the history of the site to identify best practices for interpretation, education, and recreation to represent diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just stories. These stories will be communicated to audiences in ways which establish dialogs and connect people to the historical and cultural resources of the site.

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

Action Plan: Utilize State Parks IPE Sharepoint to store, share, and manage a thoughtful portfolio of natural, historic, and cultural resource based interpretive programming. This digital portfolio should be updated and managed as new programs are created for the site. Park

interpretive staff and Park Rangers can utilize IPE Sharepoint as a resource to tailor established programs to fit the needs of specific audiences. Programs stored in IPE Sharepoint can be shared with audiences either through digital links or physical copies.

Interpretive experiences offered by the park will vary in intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences. Park guests will have the opportunity to participate in both scheduled events and impromptu programs throughout the course of the year. Both free and fee-based programs will be offered, program fees to be calculated based on the value of the program to the participant as well as the financial cost and time commitment of the program to the park.

Collaborations with community organizations including but not limited to Friends organizations, school groups, non-profits, and local and corporate business entities will be utilized for additional program opportunities both on and off park.

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

Action Plan: Park interpretive staff and Park Rangers will support current recreation activities such as hiking, backpacking, trail running, aquatic recreation, and climbing and will ensure the visitor's ability to reasonably pursue these recreational activities. Additionally, interpretive staff and Park Rangers will continue to create and promote natural resource-based programs as well as historic and cultural programs at the park. Volunteer programs for visitors of varying skill levels will be offered multiple times a year. These programs will afford audiences the opportunity to experience the site on a multifaceted spectrum of education and interpretation, volunteerism, and recreation, ensuring that visitors have a stake in maintaining the beauty and ecological integrity of the site.

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: Once park amenities are installed, a proactive, preventative maintenance plan will be created for each amenity. These maintenance plans will be established to prevent excessive wear and tear on park resources. The maintenance staff as well as Park Rangers will be trained in the HIPPO Management System to track maintenance records and communicate maintenance plans with appropriate State Park staff members. In the event of deferred maintenance projects, the projects will be completed in order of priority to effectively leverage funding for the project.

Maintenance staff will be appropriately trained to efficiently manage park resources. Maintenance staff will have contact with the Regional Maintenance office to ensure that staff is aware of any available training and will coordinate with Park Management for any potential training opportunities.

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

Action Plan: To ensure that all visitors have a meaningful experience at the site, park materials such as park signs and interpretive panels will be printed in English with options for digital translation or printed with photographic representations. Reading level and stylization of park interpretive panels will adhere to the state park standards to meet the accessibility needs of park visitors.

Park staff will identify spaces where ADA accessibility could be improved. These areas may include the future parking lot, creek overlooks, and the future Ranger contact station. Park staff will also explore plans to integrate ATV wheelchairs into the accessibility goals. Park social media and web pages will host information to aid in trip-planning for people with disabilities.

ADA compliant overlook platforms of North Chickamauga Creek at the future parking lot and the future Ranger contact station will be installed.

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

Action Plan: Improve and standardize park signage, blazes, kiosks, and waysides for organized, effective, and welcoming appearance throughout the park. Park sign style will be standardized to match signs of the Cumberland Trail.

Improve existing backcountry campsites at the park and add these campsites to Itinio. Existing campsites are located at Stevenson Branch and park staff will evaluate potential for additional campsites once improvement of existing campsites is completed.

New infrastructure at the park will include Ranger contact station with broadband service for operational demands, staff office space, staff break room, interpretive area, gift shop, and restrooms. Until this space is constructed a temporary office space for use by Rangers and park staff can be utilized. This temporary office space will be located at the Montlake Forestry Office.

Seek opportunities for green infrastructure such as electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, water bottle refill stations, and dark sky approved lighting.

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: Thoughtful, specific, and measurable performance plans for all employees will be used to measure employee growth and productivity. Management will recognize and award stellar performance, commitment, and loyalty as permitted by state policies. Management will offer appropriate training opportunities to employees and will encourage staff to attend and

allow time for training that will further the employees' professional growth and goals. Management will work with state park leadership to increase staffing levels in response to anticipated increased visitation and new facilities.

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

Action Plan: Park staff will work with the Marketing and Capital Projects Teams to increase occupancy and revenues and bring the park closer to cost recovery through the creation and promotion of revenue generating operations for the park.

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 additional training opportunities for all employees to develop their skills and encourage leadership qualities. Identify and provide professional development opportunities to all personnel, to further advance the competency in their positions and career growth. Enhance career pathways where every employee has the opportunity for growth and a fulfilling career, as a parks and recreation professional. Strive to create a stronger and more diverse workforce that better reflects the demographics of our citizens. Maintain and grow the personal relationships between park staff to further promote a positive work environment. Empower all staff to make customer service decisions with minimal prior approval from managers, to streamline the customer service for our visitors.

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

Action Plan: North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park will become a model of compliance and accountability, confidently meeting legal and regulatory standards.

The Park will seek to be the model of environmentally and sustainable park operations. This will be measured by assessing and improving our GO Green score each year. The park will be entrepreneurial in its operational strategy, to optimize cost control measures in balance with earned revenues opportunities and resources stewardship requirements. NCCG will continuously develop and work towards optimal levels of fiscal management, while never faltering in its efforts to protect and preserve the resources within its borders.

The park will leverage public and private partnerships to enhance outcomes and increase community stake in the park and the park's resources. Examples of public and private partnerships could include: Utilize rental and lease programs for equipment rather than purchase, create partnerships with other area parks to utilize skills that their park employees have and share our staff knowledge with other parks to reduce the reliance on contractors, the creation of specific volunteer opportunities for partner participation.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park
Site Manager	<i>Currently vacant; hiring in process</i>
Area Manager	Jacob Young
Park acreage	5,999
Total number of visitors (FY 2025)	200,000
Total expenses before CO (FY 2025)	\$704,436
Total revenues (FY 2025)	\$3,573
Retail self-sufficiency % ¹	N/A
Park self-sufficiency %	0.5%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2025)	\$3.52
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2025)	\$0.02
Gross profit or loss	NA
Total full-time available positions / filled	8/7
Total part-time available positions / filled	2/1
Primary feeder markets	Hamilton County, North Georgia, local colleges and universities
Primary reasons people visit	Recreational opportunities including swimming, hiking and backpacking, rock climbing, and kayaking
Opportunities for improvement	Montlake parking area, Flipper Bend section of the park, Stevenson Branch Campgrounds, Barker Camp parking area, trail systems, Reynolds Road Section of the park (new trailhead and trails)

Key Attractions

- The Blue Hole
- North Chickamauga Creek
- Hogskin Branch Loop Trail
- Stripmine Falls
- Boston Branch Overlook
- Access to Leda (private property) from the Montlake Trailhead
- Stevenson Branch campsite
- Barker Camp access trail
- The Cumberland Trail
- Furnace Rockhouse
- Paradise
- Flipper Bend Loop Trail

¹ Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Self-sufficiency 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 North Chickamauga Creek Gorge 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.
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Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at North Chickamauga Creek Gorge State Park and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in September 2025.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Shed office	1	Good
Backcountry campsites	5	Good
Entrance sign	1	Excellent
Gravel parking areas	3	Main area-Poor Others-Fair
Trail bridges	2	Excellent

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Mileage	Condition
Hogskin Loop Trail	1.5	Excellent
Flipper Bend Access Trail	2.3	Poor
Flipper Bend Loop Trail	3.5	Fair
Clear Branch Loop Trail	1.75	Fair
Springfield Trail	1.5	Good
Cumberland Trail	7.5	Fair
Barker Camp Access Trail	1.4	Excellent
Barker Camp Emergency Access Trail/Road	1.2	Poor
Blue Hole Trail	1.1	Fair

Hogskin Loop Trail - Excellent - This trail is in excellent condition. Sections of this trail were repaired in 2023 and 2024 by volunteer efforts and contracted labor.

Flipper Bend Access Trail - Poor - The quality of this trail is poor. Heavy use by ATVs, mountain bikes, and horses have degraded the integrity of this trail in several locations. Additionally, multiple social trails from private property provide unauthorized access to the site. A maintenance plan to best manage this section of trail is necessary to restore it.

Flipper Bend Loop Trail – Fair – This trail is in fair condition but can be subject to illegal use by ATVs and horses. It is currently open for mountain biking and hiking. It has a fantastic overlook at a TVA powerline and has Clear Branch Falls, which does not have a good access point for up close public viewing.

Clear Branch Loop – Fair – Clear Branch is currently in fair shape. Park staff worked to clear downed trees and widen the trail corridor in 2024. This trail features its namesake, Clear Branch, which is a small but pretty stream. This trail is the narrowest trail on the park and needs to be trimmed back yearly. It is also more subject to fallen trees.

Springfield (previously Ivy) Trail - Fair - This trail is in good condition. Due to limited access to parking on Highway 27, this trail is almost exclusively used by Ivy Academy staff and students. Increased parking availability through the acquisition of the empty lot on the corner of Highway 27 and Montlake Road would allow other guests to utilize this trail and would also ease heavy use of the Montlake trailhead. The Springfield Trail is heavily overgrown in sections with invasive species. A short section of the trail is at high risk of washing into North Chickamauga Creek, and several feet of the bank has already eroded into the creek. Sections of this trail are relatively steep, and maintenance is needed to lower the grade. A project is programmed for late 2025/early 2026 to improve the Springfield Trail and connect it to the Blue Hole trail.

Cumberland Trail - Fair - The Cumberland Trail from Barker Camp Trailhead to Montlake Trailhead is in fair condition. This trail needs continued seasonal maintenance due to overgrowth and tree falls. Additionally, a section of trail near Stevenson Branch needs to be routed away from the water source to prevent erosion into the creek. The wooden staircases to the Boston Branch overlook should be assessed annually and following each major storm for damage caused by high winds and tree falls. Graffiti is present near an old mine opening and in various rocky sections. Heavy water erosion is present on this trail near the Barker Camp Trail junction. Signage on this trail is good and was last updated by the Cumberland Trail in 2023.

Barker Camp Access Trail - Excellent - This trail is in excellent condition. This trail starts at Barker Camp trailhead and intersects with the Cumberland Trail. Little maintenance is needed to maintain the integrity of this trail other than seasonal trimming and cutting.

Barker Camp Emergency Access Trail/Road- Poor - This gravel road/trail is in poor condition. This emergency access trail is wide enough to drive ATVs and vehicles down. Bush Hog work is needed to remove the invasive privet and autumn olive near the trailhead. Severe water erosion is present on the sloped sections of this trail. Large piles of fill dirt and rock were dumped onto the road approximately .5 miles from the gate. These piles should be removed and/or graded to a level condition. A metal gate and other natural barriers are utilized to prevent all traffic except foot travel.

Blue Hole Trail - Fair - This trail is in fair condition. This trail is impossible to access by foot during high water on the North Chickamauga Creek. Large rocks on this trail make hiking difficult, especially during emergency carry-out situations. The grade is steep in some sections and the trail itself holds water and can become very muddy. Rock work throughout the trail would be beneficial. As this is the most popular trail at the park, trail maintenance here should be prioritized.

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
Bridge over North Chickamauga Creek	A Bridge over the North Chickamauga Creek would allow for a continuation of the Cumberland Trail and provide year-long access to both sides of the creek. It would also decrease incidents of swift water rescue scenarios and would aid in carry-out situations from the Blue Hole side of the park.
Lot on Highway 27/Montlake Road	This is an empty 4.5 acre lot at the intersection of Highway 27 and Montlake Road. The acquisition of this property will allow for additional parking for the Blue Hole, access to the Ivy Trail and Pride Rock, and a future space for park infrastructure.
Visitor Center	This asset has been programmed, but not yet funded. It is crucial to the visitor experience at North Chick.
Maintenance Facility	This asset has been programmed, but not yet funded. It is crucial to the operations of North Chick.
Pavilion	This asset has been programmed, but not yet funded. It is crucial to the visitor experience at North Chick.
Natural Playscape	This asset has been programmed, but not yet funded. It will be crucial to the visitor experience at North Chick and provide a primitive recreation amenity that connects visitors to the resources of the park.
Corner property on Montlake Road	On Montlake Road at the first curve uphill from the main access is a small piece of land that is privately owned. This piece of private property is obscure and prevents the park from having complete access to the Montlake Road from the main part of the park.

Prioritized Facility Needs

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

Facility Need	Priority Assignment
Visitor Center at Montlake Road Trailhead to also serve as ranger contact station, administration office, and maintenance office	High
Natural Playscape	High
Rentable Pavilion	High
Park Gates	High
Restroom Facilities at Montlake Road Trailhead	High

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 (to be offered) at North Chickamauga Creek Gorge 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 conditional public access to the park, the facilities, and the grounds.
- Provide a kiosk at each trailhead to orient visitors and give them more information on the site
- Provide public safety for visitors

- Provide protection of the natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for maintenance of grounds, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Maintain facilities developed through the LWCF program to required ADA standards.
- Provide for basic, non-staff supported day-use activities 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.
- 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 North Chickamauga Creek Gorge have been identified as **important services**:

- Provide a full range of environmental, cultural and recreational programs.
- Offer park-specific information at the Ranger Contact Station.
- Provide educational programs for schools and organized groups.
- Provide for basic, non-staff supported day-use activities such as hiking and picnicking

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 North Chickamauga Creek Gorge have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Operate and provide retail support services for the gift shop.
- Provide support services for camping.

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at North Chickamauga Creek Gorge represent the largest area of budgetary expense at 70% of the total operating budget each year for the last year, which is 5% higher 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 II	1	*
Park Ranger II	3	*
TSP Maintenance Supervisor	1	\$42,700
TSP Maintenance Lead	1	\$40,416
Account Clerk	1	38,628
Clerk 3	1	\$33,726
TOTAL	8	\$523,696

**Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.*

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Job Share/ Gate Keeper	1	\$27,504
Seasonal Interpretive Ranger	1	<i>Funded by IPE</i>
TOTAL	2	\$27,504

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	795
Community Service Workers	
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
Other:	
TOTAL	795

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$523,696
Part Time Employees	\$27,504
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	\$551,200

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Park Ranger III	1	FTE	2026	Improved organization, training, and management of safety and security protocols for park staff.
Administrative Assistant 1	1	FTE	2026	Upgrade current Account Clerk position
Clerk	1	FTE	2026	Staff Visitor Center
Job Share	1	PT	2027	Staff Visitor Center
TOTAL	4			

Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit (**Rev Per Unit**) for the last year in the park's overnight facilities is detailed in the table below.

Current Rev Per Unit

Fiscal Year	Campsite Rev Per Unit
2024	0
2025	\$1.45

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

Fiscal Year	Campsite Rev Per Unit
2026	\$1.50
2027	\$1.55
2028	\$1.60
2029	\$1.65

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Google	2025	4.8/5
AllTrails	2025	4.5/5
TripAdvisor	2025	4.5/5

Professional Development and Training

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

- Procurement and Project Management training for Facilities Supervisor
- Procurement and HR training for Administrative Assistant
- PMTI Training for interested ranger staff
- Routine management training
- Routine law enforcement training
- Trail Master Certification for all conservation workers and any new ranger staff
- EMR Certification for all current and future rangers
- Wildland Firefighters Type 2 for all current and future rangers and any interested maintenance staff
- Chainsaw Training
- CIG Training
- Trail Maintenance Training-Volunteers
- High and Low Angle Rescue Training for Ranger Staff
- Swift Water Training for Ranger and Maintenance Staff
- Search and Rescue Training for Ranger staff

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. Rehab and improve emergency access roads on Montlake Road and Barker Camp trailhead.
- b. Continue to enforce restriction of ATV access to the Flipper Bend Trails, working with DNA to close the social trails and eliminate use by non-authorized vehicles.

- c. Completion of the North Chickamauga paving and construction project to include a paved road from Montlake Road to the Montlake Road/ North Chick trailhead, installation of a paved parking lot from this paved road, public restroom facilities, and the creation of a new Ranger Contact Station at this trailhead
 - d. Create an accessible trail within the park on the Springfield/Ivy Trail or from the main parking area to the North Chickamauga Creek Crossing.
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
 - 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
 - a. Make new park map brochure available for purchase in the Ranger Contact Station.
 - b. Improve landscaping around park entrances by using the IRIS Fund to purchase and install native plants.
 - c. Continue community outreach programming that interprets the park's story and emphasizes the state park's mission.

Mid Term Recommendations (2–5 years)

- 1. Site and Facilities**
 - a. Acquire all land deemed “high priority” by Park Management
 - b. Pedestrian Bridge crossing North Chickamauga Creek Gorge near the main parking area
 - c. Installation of ADA accessible viewing platforms over North Chickamauga Creek
 - d. Expansion of gravel lot at Barker Camp Trailhead
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
 - a. Determine and implement optimal hours of operation for the new Ranger Contact Station
 - b. Fund additional full/part time positions as recommended above.
- 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
 - a. Design and install site specific and high-quality interpretive exhibits within the new Ranger Contact Station with the help of IPE.
 - b. Creation of a Friends Group to support the mission of the park and host public outreach initiatives

Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

- 1. Site and Facilities**
 - a. Installation of rentable day use facilities at the bottom of the main parking lot at North Chickamauga Creek trailhead
- 2. Operations and Staffing**
 - a. We should be fully staffed at this point with new positions needed only from the addition of extra park operations or unexpected surges in park visitation.
- 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
 - a. Expansion of quality outdoor experiences with additional ADA accessible areas, rock climbing locations, hiking trails, and backcountry campgrounds
 - b. Expansion of Commercial Use Agreements offering a variety of quality outdoor experiences and supporting local small businesses and community tourism efforts.

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.

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation exists to enhance the quality of life for citizens of Tennessee and to be stewards of our natural environment by protecting and improving the quality of Tennessee's air, land, and water through a responsible regulatory system, protecting, and promoting human health and safety, conserving, and promoting natural, cultural, and historic resources, and providing a variety of quality outdoor recreational experiences. North Chickamauga intends to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic areas and provide a variety of safe, quality outdoor experiences through a well-planned and professionally managed system of state parks and to provide memorable and educational experience for all the visitors of Chickasaw State Park. North Chickamauga will forever be managed to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural, cultural, and recreational features of the park for future generations to use and enjoy.

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.

Action plan: North Chickamauga Creek Gorge draws the interest of the community and many key stakeholders act as stewards for the preservation and integrity of the site. In addition to maintaining and improving relationships with established stakeholders such as North Chickamauga Creek Conservancy, Ivy Academy, and Wild Trails, park staff will work to establish new stewards of the park through outreach, education, and volunteer events. Maintaining open and honest communication of the mission and goals of park management with the stewards are key to a successful stewardship plan. Park stewards will be informed of and ought to adhere to park management's plan for the maintenance of the site's natural and cultural resources.

Park stewards and volunteers should be appropriately trained on how to accomplish their assigned goals. Planning opportunities available through state parks for volunteers, such as the chainsaw training and trail building training, should be offered to volunteers as the training

becomes available. Volunteers should only participate in events appropriate for their level of experience and skill. Volunteers should adhere to TN State Parks volunteer policies. Safety should be prioritized for all volunteer events.

Park management considers the potential creation of a Friends Group for North Chickamauga Creek Gorge a valuable resource for future consideration. Friends Groups support TN State Parks in fundraising, events, promotion, and volunteerism and at their core support the mission and values of the park.

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

Action plan: Catalog and inventory resources yearly for continual management.

Partner with research partners such as the Division of Natural Areas, Division of Archeology, Division of Forestry, Division of Water Resources, Historical Commission, TWRA, TN Aquarium, as well as others to identify and manage significant unique natural and cultural resources. Continue to allow permitted research by experts in their field within the natural area.

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

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

Strategies

- A. The rangers of North Chickamauga will provide educational and interpretive programming to the public on the resources of the park. These programs will be targeted to promote the park's natural value. These values include recreational, aesthetic, and ecological services provided by the conservation and preservation of the state park.
- B. Create an inventory of plants, animals and ecological communities within the park in order to improve management of the park's natural resources.
- C. Develop and implement a management strategy to manage or eradicate invasive and exotic pests from the park.
- D. Interpretative panels will be used to inform the public of recreational activities of the park and responsible ways to recreate. Panels will also discuss the natural resources and history of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge. Panels will serve as a way to inform the public of the rules and regulations of the park and how to be a responsible steward of the resource.
- E. Continue to identify natural areas of the park that are currently actively being maintained, i.e. mowed fields, that can be converted to native plantings to provide both habitat, food sources, and pollination areas while not impacting visitor uses or expectations.

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
Hardwood Forests	Varying sizes	Good	Hemlock Woolly Adelgid present in the park. Management plans in place to treat affected trees, further management needed to prevent spread across park. Invasive species prevalent at the Barker Camp Trailhead Emergency Vehicle Access point.
North Chickamauga Creek	Approx. 10 miles	Good	Water quality monitoring stations upgraded, and new stations installed in Dec. 2023
Panther Branch	1.19 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Clear Branch	1.36 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Cooper Creek	2.02 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Stevenson Branch	1.2 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Cain Creek	1.46 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Rogers Creek	1.6 miles	Excellent	Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.
Cumberland Trail (within North Chick)	7.5 miles	Good	Most of the Cumberland Trail within North Chick is in good condition. Where the CT enters the Stevenson Branch Campsite the trail has eroded

North Chickamauga Creek Gorge Strategic Management Plan

			into the creek. This section needs re-route or management.
Hogskin Branch Loop Trail	1.5 miles	Excellent	This trail is in excellent condition. It was completely rebuilt in 2024
Blue Hole Trail	1.25 miles	Fair	This trail is short but the steep grade on some sections and the rocks make the trail moderate-difficult. This trail is in need of maintenance to fix the grading and puddling issues.
Springfield (Previously Ivy) Trail	1.5 miles	Fair	This trail is short but the steep grade on some sections and the rocks make the trail moderate-difficult. This trail is in need of maintenance to fix the grading and puddling issues. Invasive species on this trail (with the exception of those found in Invasive Alley) should be removed.
Flipper Bend Access and Loop Trails	5.8miles	Poor/Fair	This trail is overly wide and is crosscut by social trails leading to private property. This trail is frequently inappropriately used by ATVs and horses. Erosion and flooding issues are prevalent. Managing this trail is a high priority.
Clear Branch Trail	1.75 miles	Fair	The Clear Branch Trail is in fair condition, but needs annual corridor widening and removal of down trees. A small re-route may be necessary in the future as part of the trail enters private property for the Flipper Bend subdivision.
Barker Camp Access Trail	2 miles	Excellent	This pedestrian access trail from the Barker Camp trailhead to the junction of the CT is in good shape.
Backcountry Campsites	5 sites	Good	The campsites are in good shape. There is a firepit and stone benches at this site. Water access is both Stevenson Branch and North Chickamauga Creek. Management is needed to prevent overcrowding at this popular campsite. Plans include identifying individual campsite in the area and.
Stripmine Falls	1	Excellent	In excellent condition, however, crossing over Stripmine Falls when the water is high can be difficult.
Mystic Caverns (North Chickamauga Cave)	1	Poor	Graffiti and litter are prevalent both within the cave and on the boundary line. Recommend closing this cave with a gate to prevent public access to the site.

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
<i>Example: Upland hardwood forest</i>	Public Use: <i>Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – access limited to trails and back country campsites with usage policies and regulations.</i> General Management: <i>The upland hardwood forests are managed for improvement of overall forest health which include ongoing invasive species management, erosion mitigation in areas of steep topography, and understory management through prescribed burns. Pursue collaboration with TN Division of Forestry to assist with overall forest management.</i>	High
Hardwood Forests	Public Use: Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – access is limited to trails and backcountry campsites with usage policies and regulations. General Management: Frequent trail maintenance provided by park staff and volunteer efforts. Forest health is a top priority and the park collaborates with TN Div. Of Forestry and TN State Natural Areas to assist in overall forest management. Invasive species removal, HWA treatments erosion control, and prescribed burns are all ongoing.	High
North Chickamauga Creek	Public Use: Managed access with little infrastructure – the creek is a natural flowing creek. It is the most visited feature of the park and provides year-round recreational opportunities for visitors General Management: North Chickamauga Creek water flow is observed daily, and park staff update a flag advisory system to indicate water depth/flow. There are dedicated trails leading to the creek and social trails need to be monitored and naturalized. Sandstone riprap should be considered for installation at some heavily eroded areas to prevent future land erosion. The creek is stocked twice annually with rainbow trout. Future bridges crossing North Chickamauga Creek will provide safer visitor access to both sides of the creek and views of the gorge.	High
Panther Branch	Public Use: Limited public access. Park visitors briefly cross Panther Branch when hiking the Cumberland Trail. A pedestrian bridge is in place. General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source. Water quality should be tested annually.	Moderate

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Clear Branch	Public Use: Public use is limited. Hikers cross Clear Branch on the Springfield Trail and Flipper Bend areas. General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source. Water quality should be tested annually.	Moderate
Cooper Creek	Public Use: Limited public access. Park visitors walk alongside and cross Cooper Creek when hiking the Cumberland Trail. Pedestrian bridge in place. There is one campsite near the creek. General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source. Water quality should be tested annually.	Moderate
Stevenson Branch	Public Use: Limited public access. Park Visitors pass by this stream while hiking the Cumberland Trail. There are two campsites located near Stevenson Branch Falls, a small but scenic waterfall deep within the gorge. General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source. Water quality should be tested annually.	Moderate
Cain Creek	Public Use: Limited public access. Park visitors cross Cain Creek on a pedestrian bridge at the boundary of NCCGSP and the Upper North Chickamauga Section of the Cumberland Trail. Kayakers also use Cain Creek when paddling the entire gorge General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source. Water quality should be tested annually.	Moderate
Rogers Creek	Public Use: Limited public access. There are no sanctioned trails leading visitors to Rogers Creek. General Management: Management plan is to maintain this stream as a pristine water source.	Moderate
Cumberland Trail (within North Chick)	Public Use: Park visitors may access the CT from either the Montlake Road or Barker Camp Trailheads. NCCGSP features approximately 7.5 miles of the Cumberland Trail. General Management: Frequent trail maintenance provided by park staff and volunteers to remove fallen trees, clear corridor and manage erosion. In 2025, a backcountry trail crew will make improvements deep in the gorge between Stevenson Branch and the Cable Crossing. In the future, the CT may be rerouted to allow hikers a continuous path to the Mowbray Trailhead of the CT.	High
Hogskin Branch Loop Trail	Public Use: Park visitors access this trail from the Montlake Road Trailhead. It is a popular trail in the park due to its location, views and loop design. General Management: Frequent trail maintenance by park staff to remove fallen trees, clear corridor and control erosion. Future bridges may be considered by management for crossing Hogskin Branch twice.	Moderate
Blue Hole Trail	Public Use: The Blue Hole Trail is the most popular trail in the park due to its destination at the Blue Hole. The trail allows access to the	High

	creek in several locations and allows for hiking, fishing, swimming, or otherwise enjoying the nature of the park. General Management: Management of the Blue Hole Trail includes ongoing maintenance of fallen tree removal, corridor clearing and erosion control. Most importantly, a bridge crossing North Chickamauga Creek is needed to allow year round access and reduce high water rescues of park visitors.	
Springfield (Previously Ivy) Trail	Public Use: Public use is currently limited geographically. As of 2025, visitors must cross North Chickamauga Creek at an unbridged and unmarked location to legally access the trail. Some visitors access the trail via Dayton Blvd, but there is no legal area to park a vehicle at this location. General Management: Management plans include invasive species removal, reforestation and trail improvements to accommodate all terrain type wheelchairs or similar device. The park has acquired land on the opposite side of the creek for this trailhead where a future Visitor Center will be placed – that will also serve as a trailhead for the Springfield Trail. A pedestrian bridge at this location should also be considered.	High
Flipper Bend Access and Loop Trails	Public Use: Park visitors access the Flipper Bend Access and Loop Trails from the Flipper Bend Trailhead. It is open to foot traffic and bicycles only. General Management: Management at Flipper Bend includes ongoing fallen tree removal, erosion control and clearing corridor. This area has been illegally used for ATVs, motorcycles and hunting. Efforts continue to block ATVs trails, remove and naturalize other unsanctioned trails, while signing and blazing approved trails within the Flipper Bend area.	Moderate
Clear Branch Trail	Public Use: Park visitors may access and use the Clear Branch Trail after hiking the Flipper Bend Access Trail. General Management: Ongoing trail maintenance including removing fallen trees, clearing trail corridor and erosion control.	Moderate
Barker Camp Access Trail	Public Use: Park visitors use the Barker Camp Access Trail to access the CT (both north and south) and to access both Cain and North Chickamauga Creeks. General Management: Management plans include ongoing trail maintenance for fallen trees, clearing corridor and erosion control. Future improvements are planned to improve trail tread near the intersection of the CT and the Barker Camp Trail.	Moderate
Backcountry Campsites	Public Use: Park Visitors can access the NCCGSP's 5 backcountry campsites by utilizing the Cumberland Trail from either the Montlake Road or Barker Camp Trailheads. Fees and rules apply. General Management: Management plans include monthly checks on campsites to remove litter, unauthorized fire rings or other campsite additions. Park staff will annually inspect immediate area around campsites for hazards and remove if necessary. Campsites will be intended to provide a remote, wilderness experience for campers.	Moderate
Stripmine Falls	Public Use: Public can access the bottom of Stripmine Falls via the Cumberland Trail. Climbing or camping at the falls is not permitted.	Moderate

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	General Management: Management plans include trail maintenance leading to the falls and having appropriate signage, but otherwise leaving the falls in their current, untouched state.	
Stripmine Cave	Public Use: Public use is limited. Visitors cross the CT in front of Stripmine Cave. General Management: There are currently no signage forbidding visitors from entering this cave, but there is nothing in park literature to publicize the cave. Future plans may include installing a bat gate to restrict human access, while still allowing wildlife to freely enter and exit the cave.	Moderate
Mystic Caverns (North Chickamauga Cave)	Public Use: Limited public access. There are no designated paths or trails that lead to Mystic Caverns. General Management: Formerly an attraction in Soddy-Daisy, Mystic Caverns sits on the boundary of NCCGSP. The entrance to the cave has become littered with garbage and graffiti. Future plans for the park include litter clean-ups, but no advertised public access. As of 2025, the cave has been permitted for use for scientific research and cave rescue training operations. In the future, a bat gate may be considered at the entrance that would restrict human entry, while still allowing wildlife to freely enter and exit the cave.	Moderate

Land Management Strategies

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

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Acquire properties for watershed and viewshed protection	Mid Term

Interpretive Programming and Education Plan

The Interpretation, Programming, and Education planning is currently going through a planning process to further build out the process. This section only represents the very basic framework. As TSP moves forward with the future of Interpretive programming and education this section will likely be changed to accommodate those modifications.

Attached to this plan are the Interpretive Program Templates in fillable PDF forms.

The Interpretive Mission of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge is to provide park guests with a full and genuine picture of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the park through the use of thoughtful storytelling techniques, clear and inclusive communication strategies, and safe and creative recreational opportunities.

Park staff should strive to provide frequent, high-quality, and accessible interpretive opportunities to park guests. The goal of this interpretive mission is that the park guest departs with a renewed sense of wonder and a desire to further engage with natural resources in ways which promote environmental responsibility and stewardship for this and future generations. Proper implementation of the interpretive mission ensures that park guests are afforded extraordinary educational and recreational opportunities within the park which will in turn foster meaningful and lasting relationships to North Chickamauga Creek Gorge. The staff of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge shall support and uphold the interpretive mission of the park.

Main Interpretive Theme

The primary interpretive theme is to interpret the unspoiled natural features, flora, and fauna found within the state park & natural area and their relationships to the surrounding forest, aquatic, and geologic communities, along with the historical context that made this park possible and made the local community what it is today.

Sub-Themes

1. North Chickamauga Creek Gorge provides a significant contribution to the state park system, protecting a Class II state natural area and providing a buffer zone around one of the state's Wild and Scenic Rivers. The park also provides a corridor for the Cumberland Trail and preserves a representative example of the ecological and geological diversity of the Cumberland Plateau region in Tennessee.
2. The cultural history of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge is deep, beginning with the Native American people who once crossed and hunted on this land, to the coal and timber mining industry of the early 1900s. The interpretation of North Chickamauga's cultural history now falls to the park staff. Much research is necessary to form a complete and true picture of the cultural history of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge and the surrounding Cumberland Plateau.
3. Recreational opportunities abound at North Chickamauga Creek Gorge and include hiking, fishing, kayaking, backpacking, rock climbing, and mountain biking. These seasonal recreational opportunities are available to visitors of all skill levels, making North Chickamauga an ideal recreational state park. To promote safe recreational practices, park staff should become well versed on how, when, and where visitors are recreating as well as develop procedures to mitigate the need for emergency rescue. However, when emergency rescue is the necessary course of action, park staff shall remain up to date on suggested rescue training and techniques.

Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals

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.

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

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

Within these objectives are the following desired outcomes:

- Building stewards
- Ensuring Equity
- Provide the Highest Value
- Develop Resource Based Programming
- Support Staff

Strategic Programs and Services

The strategies detailed below with corresponding action plans are aligned with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Tennessee State Parks.

Strategy: Telling Full Stories: to identify and replicate best practices while establishing new methods for representing diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.

Action Plan: Research the cultural history of North Chickamauga Creek Gorge and the surrounding area. These stories will likely include Native American history, Civil War campaigns, and local timber and coal mining. Create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited, following guidance, training, and directives led by the Division of Interpretation Programming and Education

Strategy – Interpretative Media: Connecting people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks with technology in ways that compliment and expand interpretation within and beyond the park, giving everyone access to becoming a park steward.

Action Plan: Create high-quality programming through technology: develop and support mission based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community well-being so that all audiences feel welcome and invited, following guidance, learning, and directives led by the Division of Interpretation Programming and Education.

Strategy – Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- B. 3-5 unique experiences for all audiences
- C. Varying intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences
- D. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- E. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant.

Action Plan: Create and provide resource-based outdoor recreation: provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities of all levels of ability and experiences that ensure the representation of Tennessee’s natural, scenic, and cultural resources located within North Chickamauga Creek Gorge.

Strategy – Develop and maintain diverse and varied resourced-based outdoor recreation opportunities across multiple types of experiences:

- A. Managing recreational use with the stewardship needs of the resource
- B. Varying intensity from self-guided to guided experiences
- C. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- D. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant and impact to the resource.

Action Plan: Create and provide resource-based outdoor recreation and stewardship opportunities: providing resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities of all levels of ability that add value to the park visitors’ experience.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- Non Personal Interpretation: Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (i.e. exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, etc.).
- Personal Interpretation: One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

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	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	5.5%	12%	12.5%

