

## **TACIR Panel Discussion: 12.2.2021 TN Water Resources / Water Recreation**

Thank you for this opportunity to present today. I am Mike Robertson the Director of Operations for Tennessee State parks. I have had the honor to be able to work for Tennessee State Parks in this role since 2012. Prior to becoming the Director of Operations, I have been able to serve Tennessee State Parks since 1980 in many different roles to include a Seasonal Park Attendant, Seasonal Interpreter/Recreator, Park Ranger, for 15 years, Park Manager for 9 years and as a Park Area Manager. Through those years I have experienced the support Tennessee State Parks has received from our legislators and the citizens. I want to take this time to thank you for that support.

Tennessee State Parks were established in 1937 to manage public lands which possessed natural, cultural, and historic features, or scenic beauty and provided aesthetic, scientific, creative, social, or other recreational values for the use and enjoyment of the people (the public).

*“Be it enacted by the General assembly of the State of Tennessee, that for the purposes of the Tennessee Department of Conservation the term ‘park’ shall mean and include any and all areas of land, hereto fore or hereafter acquired by the State, which by reason of having natural and historic features, scenic beauty or location, possesses, natural or potential physical, aesthetic, scientific, creative, social, or other recreational values; and is dedicated to and forever reserved and administered by the state for recreational and cultural use and enjoyment of the people.*

*Be it further enacted that every park under the provisions of this Act shall be preserved in a natural condition so far as may be consistent with its human use and safety and all improvements shall be of such character as not to lessen its inherent recreational value.”*

Next year in 2022 Tennessee State Parks will be celebrating 85 years of meeting the intent of this enabling legislation. Tennessee State Parks has provided citizens and visitors alike access to our public lands and water ways so that they can enjoy the natural, cultural, and historic resources that make Tennessee a special place to live, work, and play.

Today Tennessee State Parks manages over 220,000 acres within 56 State Parks across the state. From T.O Fuller and Meeman Shelby State Parks in Memphis to Warriors Path State Park in Kingsport, Red Clay State Historic Park in Cleveland to Reelfoot Lake State Park in Tiptonville. Each park established for the preservation, protection of the natural and cultural resources found within them and to offer opportunities for quality outdoor experiences.

Tennessee State Parks mission is 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.*

Or as I like to say:

To Preserve, Protect, and Share our Tennessee State Parks.

Tennessee State Parks have been recognized by the National Recreation and Parks Association as one of the best State Parks Systems in the nation and we are accredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies for our professionally managed system of state parks. We are continually striving to improve the services we provide our visitors and the citizens of our state and to grow in approach to professionally manage our Tennessee State Parks.

I have been asked to participate in this panel to discuss water resources and water recreation provided within Tennessee State Parks. Forty-seven (47) of our fifty-six (56) State Parks are located on reservoirs and rivers throughout the state, 22 have state park managed lakes, 18 with access to state reservoirs, and 23 with access to our state rivers. To included two parks that are primarily focused on access to our state's scenic rivers the Hiwassee / Ocoee River State Park and Harpeth River State Park.

Tennessee State Parks provides access for the public to our TN waterways through the management of public access points within our parks, to include:

- Lake and reservoir boat ramps,
- River put ins and take outs.
- Trails along the shorelines

Tennessee State Parks also manages 4 marina operations and offers 3 additional marinas as leased operations that provide storage for watercraft for easy access for owners of watercraft to our waterways.

State Parks also provides seasonal watercraft rental operations that provide the public access to John boats, Pontoon Boats, Canoes, Kayaks, paddle boats and paddleboards.

Tennessee State Parks provides recreational and interpretive program experiences utilizing watercraft that include guided interpretive canoe and kayak floats, and pontoon boat rides.

Tennessee State Parks has enjoyed partnerships throughout its 85 years with the TDEC Division of Natural Areas, the Department of Agriculture's Division of Forestry, and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency along with other Federal and Non-Profit organizations in providing access to our public lands and waterways.