

Savage Gulf - Park Manager's Report

October, November, and December of 2024

6 Search & Rescue - lost or injured groups, 1 wildfire investigation.

Positive:

- Savage Gulf is featured on the cover of the January issue of the TN Conservationist.
- We have received both our new free park brochure and fold-out map.
- We have continued to collaborate with US Fish and Wildlife service and the TN Division of Natural Areas on the \$100k + grant that we received to continue the shortleaf pine stand improvements in the northeast parts of Savage Gulf. Prescribing burning is scheduled for January 2025. Understory thinning has begun on 500-acre unit near Meadow Creek. Many different agencies and groups have shown interest in the work that is being done out here.
- We have continued to receive the new equipment that was ordered last spring. We have received our track loader, two UTVs, 100-hp tractor, and dump truck. We are still waiting on one ranger patrol vehicle.
- Ranger Baxter along with John Collins and others have continued the construction of the new Meadow Creek Campground. Campground still needs tent pads, fire rings, and small bridge constructed. Connection trail to North Plateau still needs to be completed and will be the final stage of the project.
- ADA upgrade project continues to progress. We are still on track to receive a new stand-alone restroom at the Savage Gulf East entrance among other upgrades. Site prep work has begun at both the North and East entrances.
- ADA accessible concrete pad has been poured around the kiosk at the South Entrance to allow everyone to get up to the kiosk. Some dirt work around the pad is still needed.
- Planning has begun to use the Trail Pack Grant we were awarded to build stairs on and re-route a section of trail near Boardtree Falls. Materials have been purchased, and volunteer days will be posted in the next few months.
- I presented to the Heritage Conservation Trust Fund Board on July 9th, and they awarded \$689,400 toward the purchase of the 658-acre Stagecoach Road Tract. The property has closed and is now in the hands of the Nature Conservancy. Work is being done to transfer it to the state in the next few months.

Concerns:

- We ended up about 20% over budget for last fiscal year and were initially given the same operational budget again this year. We were able to secure a significant increase in the operational budget for this year, although a large chunk of it was a one-time adjustment for renting equipment.
- There is a new emergency communications tower in the works to be built in Beersheba Springs by the TN Department of Safety. They are currently considering two locations: one towards the end of Grassy Ridge Rd., and the other next to our maintenance shop at our new planned entrance. Both have positives and negatives. Work is being done to decide which site is best for emergency responders, the park, and the community.
- The large landslide on the Connector Trail about ½ mile from Hobbs Cabin has still not been fixed. Spencer has flagged a safe corridor for people to navigate around, but it will need a more permanent fix at some point.

Personnel:

- Our new administrative assistant, Jodie Nunley, is doing great. She has been able to step into her role with minimal training and be a huge help to the park.
- Our Clerk 3, Michelle Morrison, is no longer with the park. Jodie and I will be posting the position sometime during the second half of January.

Stone Door Development:

- We are currently finalizing the construction documents of Phase 1. The project has been pushed back a few months and I expect construction to begin sometime this summer.
- We are currently in the final stages of the site development of Phase 2. It is progressing well.
- Preliminary layout of the RV Campground for Phase 1 is complete. The sites are spaced out as much as possible and I'm happy with the layout. Phase 1 has been reduced to 35 RV sites due to budget constraints-with the other 25 sites as an alternant to be built if budget allows.
- We were asked by park leadership to try to remove as much of the nursery stock as we can by renting equipment and using park maintenance personnel. We are going to continue to work on this, but it is taking resources away from other park maintenance issues that could be addressed. We currently have a skid-steer with a mulcher head rented and are keeping someone on it 6 days per week.

Aaron Reid
Park Manager
Savage Gulf State Park