

VIII. OPERATIONS ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Division of Parks and Recreation staff identified the major park issues facing Lumber River State Park at the initiation of the general management plan process. The issues have been divided into three categories: natural resources (see Chapter VI), capital improvements (see Chapter VII) and operations. This chapter identifies park operations issues and makes recommendations for addressing them during the next five years.

Operations issues for Lumber River State Park that are of significant concern are:

1. Clearing a Boat Passageway
2. Staffing Needs
3. Radio Communications
4. Road System
5. Lack of Facilities

CLEARING A BOAT PASSAGEWAY

Background

The Lumber River flows for 115 miles and it is becoming an increasingly popular waterway for boaters, canoeists and kayakers. All along the river, due to natural processes such as lightning, disease, erosion, flooding, wind and rain, downed trees are often found. Some of these trees provide obstructions to boating traffic, decrease the usability and enjoyment of the river, make multi-day trips difficult, and may also present safety concerns. After extreme weather events such as hurricanes and ice storms, the number of trees blocking passage on the river can be overwhelming. High water levels affect the ability to clear as well, making the summer the best time to undertake clearing activities. Permitting from the US Army Corps of Engineers is also required.

Staff training for clearing activities is adequate. The park's current staffing and other resources allow approximately 25 miles of the river to be cleared annually for a small boat passageway. Due to the danger and difficulty of the work, a crew of four is needed for the work. At the current time, the Division priorities for clearing activities focus on the 25 miles of river upstream from Fair Bluff, the segment of river that includes most of the park's facilities and much of the state- owned land.

Recommendations

The construction chief will investigate the feasibility of formulating a contract for clearing activities that would keep a business on retainer. By doing so, when conditions warrant, the Division could then act much more quickly to obtain outside assistance. The park superintendent will talk with the Corps of Engineers about permitting for such an arrangement so that a new permitting application and process will not be required prior to

undertaking such routine but unscheduled work. The park superintendent will also seek supplemental funding – grants, support from local governments, etc. – to help pay for contracting work. New staff positions should also be created and filled to assist the current staff with river clearing activities, thus allowing more than the current 25 miles to be cleared on an annual basis.

STAFFING NEEDS

Background

Staff positions at Lumber River have been reassigned and lost in response to the recent mandated budget reductions. At the same time, public demand for services provided by the state park has increased as knowledge of the services and recreational opportunities has spread. The park acreage has also grown considerably and land acquisition along the river continues.

As discussed above, additional park staff is needed to remove fallen trees and debris from the river. In the past, contractors have been hired with support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency following hurricanes, but an adequate source of funding and manpower is necessary to keep more of the river clear under normal circumstances for an increasing number of paddlers and boaters. Opportunities to provide four staff at the same time for clearing activities has decreased as mandatory training and other responsibilities make staff unavailable.

The park crosses three counties in an area of the state where opportunities for public environmental education and interpretation are limited. At least five school systems routinely request environmental education services. With the loss of staff, the park is not able to meet demand for this essential service. The park does not even advertise environmental education services anymore because current demand cannot be met.

Additionally, day use areas are scheduled to open in 2004 at the Chalk Banks area near Wagram. This area will be more than forty miles from the operational support area at Princess Ann. A minimum of three staff will be needed to staff the area and to be available for public assistance. Currently, only two staff members are designated to support this area.

Recommendations

Two additional park rangers and a maintenance mechanic are needed to enhance opportunities for interpretation and environmental education, to improve staffing available for river clearing activities, to better manage park resources spread over four counties, and to provide minimal staffing for new public facilities. The park's existing staff and recommended additions follow:

<u>Current Staff</u>	<u>Existing Number</u>	<u>Additional Staffing Needs</u>
Park Superintendent I	1	
Park Ranger II	3	2 Rangers
Park Ranger I	2	
Maintenance Mechanic II	1	1 Maintenance Mechanic
Maintenance Mechanic I	1	
Office Assistant III	1	
Peak Load GUW	1	
Park Attendants	2	

RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

Background

Comprised of 8,008 acres scattered along 115 miles of river, no other North Carolina state park is spread across a larger geographic area. Because of the linear nature of the park, staff is often miles apart and unable to communicate with each other by radio. Cellular telephone service is also intermittent regardless of the provider. Although the pending access to the Highway Patrol's radio network will provide for continuous coverage for law enforcement communication, it will not improve routine or other emergency radio communications between staff. Improved routine radio communications will require significant improvements if the staff is ever to function efficiently and effectively.

Recommendations

Investigate the feasibility of locating a second repeater upstream from the present location as a means to communicate directly between Princess Anne and Chalk Banks. This coverage would also provide radio communications to Pea Ridge, the future park headquarters area.

The Town of Wagram has already given tentative approval to locate an antenna on the town's water tower, which would enhance radio communications with Princess Ann. If the Division's radio engineer is unable to determine the feasibility of the Wagram location, a radio engineer should be hired to determine the best solution to the park's communications problem.

Should the action described above be insufficient, consideration should be given to locating mobile repeaters in staff vehicles. Staff is often away from vehicles, but radio system improvements should allow for direct and expanded communications via portable radios that are currently in use.

ROAD SYSTEM

Background

There are approximately 17.2 miles of unimproved roads located on state park property. Many are old logging roads or farm roads, and some are only single lane roads. Most are needed to allow staff access to isolated, undeveloped tracts for patrol, land management, and search and rescue. Others may be used for future development or may be incorporated into a trail system. Staff is unable to adequately maintain all of the roads due to the large road mileage, limited staff time, absence of adequate equipment, periodic flooding, and poor condition of some of the roads.

Recommendations

Determine which roads are required for present and future needs and allow others to be abandoned. Park staff will consult with Construction Section and Natural Resource Section staff to determine the feasibility of restoring roads to a manageable condition (replace culverts, reestablish drainage, etc.) and seek improvements through the DOT reimbursable agreement and capital expenditures. Natural Resources staff will work with the Corps of Engineers to obtain any permits needed for road and culvert work. If the roadwork needed is determined to be of a size too large for park staff and for the Division's existing agreement with the Department of Transportation and better suited for a capital project, a new capital improvement project will be developed and scored.

South District equipment money should be used to acquire equipment of sufficient size and capability to effectively maintain roads that are to be maintained. The park superintendent will develop a list of equipment that is needed for road maintenance.

LACK OF FACILITIES/ PEA RIDGE DEVELOPMENT

Background

Although the Lumber River is being used by a growing number of paddlers and boaters and 8008 acres have been acquired for inclusion in Lumber River State Park, there is an absence of adequate facilities, particularly for camping. Eight primitive tent campsites and one group campsite exist at Princess Ann, and 12 new primitive tent campsites are scheduled to become available in 2004 at Chalk Banks. Only four canoe campsites exist along the 115-mile long river. Demand has already been demonstrated for tent and trailer camping, and additional canoe campsites are needed as well. To accommodate those seeking extended canoe trips, canoe campsites are needed along the river approximately every ten miles.

The current office/ maintenance building was never intended to accommodate the current staff stationed at Princess Ann. Work and storage space are inadequate.

Recommendations

The park facility development proposed for the Pea Ridge area should be a high priority. Development of a family tent and trailer campground, visitor center and maintenance compound would meet expanding demand for public facilities and improve centralization of support facilities. Development of the visitor center would also solve the overcrowding issue that now exists at the Princess Ann office/ maintenance building. Property that is suitable for canoe campsites along the river and that has vehicular access to allow maintenance also needs to be identified and acquired in order to provide areas and facilities for canoe in camping.

The current schedule of development for Pea Ridge is still several years away, but the increased use being experienced at the park and the pending interim development of Chalk Banks supports the need to develop Pea Ridge. There has also been some additional residential development at Pea Ridge since the area was identified for the main park headquarters during master plan development. Expeditious land acquisition at Pea Ridge is needed to minimize expense and control the spread of private development. Pea Ridge was also used for sand mining when US 74 was widened, creating borrow pits that have since filled with water. Because of these changes at Pea Ridge, the site development plan for Pea Ridge has been revised and presented to the Park Advisory Committee for review. The Pea Ridge development projects have been reevaluated and rescored in light of the demand for additional facilities for recreation and environmental education, the overcrowding at the current park office at Princess Ann, and the increased development at Pea Ridge that make the project an even higher priority. Changes to the two capital improvement projects for Pea Ridge are described in Chapter VII of this general management plan, and a revised site development plan for Pea Ridge is included in Chapter VII as well.

06/04