Panther Creek State Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033

TENNESSEE
State Parks

Table of Contents

Park Purpose, History and Description

Panther Creek State Park is located in the Hamblen County community of Panther Springs which is one of the area's oldest settlements. The park was officially established on August 10, 1967, after the Tennessee Valley Authority negotiated the transfer of 947 acres of land to the State of Tennessee to develop and maintain a public recreation area. The following year, the state purchased additional land which increased the park's size to 1,444 acres and began planning the construction of the park's infrastructure which took place in three phases from 1970 to 1986. Since that time, ongoing, smaller facilities and amenities have been added with the most recent being the construction of a professional grade, 18-hole disc golf course, and an aviary. The park is situated on Cherokee Lake six miles west of Morristown and offers a variety of recreational opportunities including: camping, fishing, boating, picnicking, disc-golf, hiking, biking, and horseback riding.

It is the mission of Panther Creek State Park to: provide professional, effective management and stewardship of the park and all its resources; present compelling interpretation of the park's story and resources; provide the highest level of quality and service while affording all visitors opportunities for safe and enjoyable outdoor recreational experiences; and provide a safe and inspiring workplace for park employees and volunteers while managing all park operations as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

Goals, Objectives, and Action Plans

THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Develop and conduct an ongoing series of high quality, park specific programs designed with the overarching goal of promoting TSP's core values, fostering awareness and appreciation for the park's unique natural and cultural resources, and educating the public on the responsible and sustainable use of Panther Creek State Park.
- Continue to promote awareness of and appreciation for the park's natural and cultural resources while conducting off-site school programs, on-site school field trips, and scheduled free programs for the public at the park throughout the year.
- Promote stewardship of the park's natural and cultural resources during the four ranger-led signature hikes and National Public Lands Day volunteer event held at the park each year.
- Promote and fully participate in TSP's Junior Ranger Program at the park.
- Continue to conduct Junior Ranger and Sprit of America Youth Boating Education camps and participate in TWRA's Wild Child Camp each year.
- Continue to participate in local and regional fairs, festivals, and other highly visited special events such as Wilderness Wildlife Week, Secret City Festival, and the Hamblen and Cocke County Field Day events to promote and encourage appreciation for and responsible use of the park.

- Continue to provide yearly overviews of park accomplishments and challenges to organizations such as the Morristown Rotary, Kiwanis, and Women's clubs, Hamblen County Commission and Morristown City Council as requested.

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

Action Plan:

- Develop and implement a process to better identify, prioritize, conduct and document natural and cultural resource management activities at the park.
- Assure ranger and maintenance staff are engaged in beneficial resource management activities throughout the year by incorporating this requirement in individual performance plans and monitoring progress in monthly activity reports.
- Encourage staff participation in resource management training such as TSP's Go Green, Resource Management, and GIS workshops, as well as web-based and off-site training opportunities provided by other resource management agencies and organizations.
- Take immediate, appropriate action when threats to park resources such as vandalism, encroachments, and illegal harvesting, dumping, or camping are encountered.
- Fully enforce park rules related to firewood, fires, metal detectors, ATV's, backcountry travel, camping, hunting, fishing, and other regulated activities that have the potential for direct, negative impacts on park resources.
- Perform inspections of the park's boundary, cultural features and rare, threatened, or unique species to identify, document and address any issues or problems a minimum of once per year.
- Review and update the park's Resource Management Plan with new information including results of scientific studies conducted, resource management accomplishments, and emerging threats a minimum of twice per year.
- Continue to compile an inventory of plants, animals, and ecological communities within the park to foster better management of natural areas and ecological resources.
- Provide opportunities for individual and group volunteers such as Tennessee Promise Students, JTEKT Automotive, Civil Air Patrol, 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Trout Unlimited, Carson-Newman University, Morristown West High School, The Avenue Church, Clayton Homes, Mahle, Macdermid Printing Solutions, Howmet Aerospace, and Friends of Panther Creek State Park to participate in safe, appropriate, and beneficial natural resource maintenance or enhancement projects at the park.
- Encourage, facilitate, and maintain records of departmental approved scientific research studies conducted on park flora and fauna by the US Forest Service, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, Carson-Newman University, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, University of Tennessee, Tennessee Environmental Council, and Morristown West High School's Science Club.
- Promote and participate in regional and statewide conservation events and programs such as Weed Wrangle, Tennessee Environmental Council's Tree Day, Keep Morristown Hamblen Beautiful Recycling Day, and TSP's Go Green program.

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

Action Plan:

- Participate in all departmental GIS training events and work with GIS staff to develop a database inventory of the park's valuable cultural and natural resources.
- Identify and utilize mapping and distribution databases of invasive, rare, threatened, and endangered species provided by organizations such as the US Department of Agriculture, University of Tennessee, University of Georgia, Tennessee Exotic Pest Plant Council, Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, and Tennessee Department of Agriculture to inform and guide natural resource management activity at the park.
- Solicit input from other land management agencies, educational institutions and other professionals to help inform and guide potential resource management activity at the park.
- Implement resource management strategies and practices provided by professionals conducting scientific research at the park.
- Explore the use of new tools such as drones to aid in resource management activity.

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:

- Park interpretive staff shall explore, market, and provide a variety of educational and interpretive programs using virtual platforms easily accessible to a broad audience such as Facebook Live, internet-based videos, MS Teams and QR Codes.
- Park interpretive staff shall be required to participate in inclusivity, sensitivity, and interpretive training events such as Telling Full Stories: Understanding Bias, Train the Trainer, Volunteer Coordinator Workshop and Respectful Workplace provided by IEP, DOHR and other organizations.
- Park interpretive staff shall develop, market, and conduct a series of ongoing interpretive programs specifically designed for visitors with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities that provide the best possible experience and exposure to park resources utilizing proven and effective forms of interpretation for those target audiences.
- Park interpretive staff shall continue to provide programs for disabled audiences during the Luke 14 Banquet and actively seek opportunities to engage other disabled audiences through this event. Interpretive staff will continue to provide educational and recreational opportunities for at-risk youth from the Helen Ross McNabb Center in Morristown and seek to engage other marginalized youth throughout the community.
- Park interpretive staff will work to develop programs that engages Morristown's large Hispanic population that frequent the park throughout the year.
- Park interpretive staff will accept invitations and participate in as many off-site special events as possible to engage a wider audience and encourage participants to visit and take advantage of interpretive opportunities at Panther Creek State Park.

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

Action Plan:

- Appropriate staff will review and update the park's Interpretive Action Plan yearly to assure the document remains relevant and programs offered are consistent with the park's primary and secondary interpretive themes.
- Park interpretive staff will research and develop programs that incorporate the elements of effective interpretation and organize program outlines and transcripts in the format established by IPE.
- Interpretive staff will engage the public at the park and during interactions in the community to obtain an understanding of the interpretive subjects about which they desire to gain greater understanding and incorporate those subjects in park programs whenever practicable.
- Rangers and other interpretive staff will complete all requirements to retain their status as Certified Interpretive Guides through the National Association of Interpretation.

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

Action Plan:

- Continue to conduct Junior Ranger and Sprit of America Youth Boating Education camps at the park each summer.
- Increase opportunities for visitors to participate in programs that enhance outdoor skills such as fishing, canoeing, wilderness survival, astronomy, land navigation, campfire cooking, pioneering, foraging, tracking and wilderness first aid.
- Develop and conduct an overnight event designed to expose participants to the park's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.
- Encourage appropriate use of the park by external groups such as athletic, civic and youth organizations and clubs for races, sports events, recreational activities, and camps.

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:

- Maintenance staff shall continue to use HIPPO CMMS as a tool to prioritize, schedule, perform and document all relevant preventative and routine work activities at the park, and will continue to load new locations, vehicles, buildings and building equipment into the system as necessary.
- All plans, schematics, blueprints, operational, troubleshooting, repair and safety manuals, warranty, model, replacement part and service provider documents for park vehicles, equipment, buildings, and mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems will be well-organized and housed in a designated central location for easy access when needed.

- The maintenance supervisor will review all purchase orders for work performed on the park by outside contractors. The maintenance supervisor will inspect the work of those contractors to assure they are adhering to written specifications, using appropriate building materials, and performing work that is safe and meets the standard of quality expected by the state of Tennessee.
- The park manager will commence weekly meetings with the maintenance supervisor to discuss maintenance priorities, concerns, and material and equipment needs to develop a plan for the subsequent week of work activities.
- The park manager and maintenance supervisor will collaborate to develop a Mowing Plan to identify priority areas to be mowed, establish a consistent mowing schedule, and, if possible, reduce the acreage mowed throughout the park.
- Maintenance staff should continue to use the campground and trail inspection forms monthly and the buildings inspection form every six months as a tool to identify and correct maintenance problems. Safety and Security Officer should continue to conduct inspections of the playground monthly and work with maintenance staff to promptly correct any problems discovered.
- Ranger and maintenance staff will continue to collaborate to perform inspections and removal of hazardous trees in accordance with the park's Hazardous Tree Management Plan.
- Implement a system to better communicate maintenance issues or problems identified by visitors and overnight guests through State Park Guest Surveys directly to maintenance staff to facilitate quicker response to problems.
- Require maintenance staff to attend one training course per year relevant to their scope of work such as basic plumbing, carpentry, electrical repair, chainsaw safety, first aid, HIPPO or mechanics offered through the TDEC, Morristown TCAT, online courses, and other agencies, organizations, and educational institutions. Incorporate this requirement in individual performance plans and monitor progress in monthly activity reports.

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

Action Plan:

- Continue to work with East Tennessee Regional Maintenance Office to upgrade buildings, restrooms, sidewalks, and parking lots that have yet to be upgraded to ADA Standards.
- Facilitate the funded capital project to replace the existing playground.
- Facilitate the funded capital project to construct new recreation building to ADA accessibility standards.
- Assure park LEP Coordinator is fully trained and up to date on current procedures for facilitating communication between park staff and foreign language speaking visitors.

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

Action Plan:

- Park staff will work closely with the Office of Facilities Management and architects to assure the new playground, recreation lodge, and other future facilities conform with TSP's Design and Landscaping Guidelines.

- Panther Creek State Park will continue to assure basic services such as daily restroom and shelter cleaning, daily trash removal, and weekly mowing is performed on a continual basis without disruptions.
- Panther Creek State Park staff will conduct daily inspections, review visitor comments, and interact with visitors to obtain timely information on buildings or grounds maintenance problems and work to resolve those issues in priority order as swiftly as possible.

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:

- All supervisors responsible for rating subordinates will be fully trained in the performance planning process and will consistently follow all steps in the process including the development of SMART work outcomes and action steps, drafting honest and constructive interim and final review comments, and conducting performance review meetings with subordinates.
- Employees struggling with their work responsibilities will be required to complete a Job Performance Improvement Plan and will be provided with ongoing coaching and support.
- All employees will be required to participate in Respectful Workplace and Customer Service training courses yearly by incorporating this requirement in individual performance plans.
- Every effort will be made to accommodate employee requests for training online, within the department or through outside educational institutions, agencies, or organizations.
- The park manager will work proactively to provide employees with information, access, and resources related to employee benefits, insurance, retirement, Tennessee State Employees Association, raises, bonuses, and new legislation and policies that affect staff.
- The park manager will continue to conduct relevant and meaningful monthly staff meetings where employees are offered an opportunity to freely discuss work-related issues, concerns, and solutions.
- The park manager will continue to maintain an open-door policy for employees to discuss (discretely if necessary) their needs and concerns.
- Park staff will be made aware of their co-worker's service anniversaries and birthdays so they may recognize and honor those occasions. Special ceremonies will be held upon any employee's retirement unless the employee wishes otherwise.

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

Action Plan:

- The park will continue to fully participate in the Go Green program and adhere to the program's guidelines for reducing material waste and conserving energy.

- The park will continue to use EnergyCap to monitor trends in electricity and water consumption and as a tool for alerting the park to potential maintenance problems.
- Preventative maintenance schedules on park vehicles, equipment, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems will be strictly adhered to and repairs to those systems will be assigned top priority upon discovery.
- The park will perform an annual review of all operations to identify strategies for increasing efficiency and revenue while reducing expenditures and waste.
- The park will fully support the department's initiative that encourages the use of and builds infrastructure for electric vehicles within the park.
- The park will actively seek volunteer assistance from Tennessee Promise Students, interns, and service organizations to provide labor support for park initiatives and projects.
- The park will seek alternate funding sources for programs and projects through grants, donations, and in-kind contributions.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Panther Creek State Park
Site Manager	Jason Chadwell
Area Manager	Veronica Greear
Park acreage	1,444
Total number of visitors (FY 2022)	485,680
Total expenses before CO (FY 2022)	$790,952
Total revenues (FY 2022)	$388,795
Retail cost recovery %[1]	84.21%
Park cost recovery %	49.15%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2022)	$1.62
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2022)	$0.80
Gross profit or loss	($402,157)
Total full-time available positions / filled	9/9
Total part-time available positions / filled	3/3
Primary feeder markets	Visitors to and from The Great Smokey Mountains National Park, and residents from Sevierville, Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg, Knoxville, Jefferson City, Greeneville, and Morristown. Groups include local citizens, private businesses, Friends of Panther Creek State Park, Morristown City and Hamblen County governments, Morristown Rescue Squad, Morristown Civil Air Patrol, Five Rivers Cycling Club, Morristown Disc Golf Association, Morristown West High School, Carson-Newman University, River Sports Outfitters, and Dirty Bird Events just to name a few.

[1] Based on **T.C.A. 11-3-305, Cost recovery of revenue-generating facilities**

Primary reasons people visit	What makes this park stand out from others is its convenient location, variety of outdoor activities available to visitors, and the support it receives from the community. The park offers a variety of outdoor activities including trails for horseback riding, mountain biking and hiking, camping, fishing, disc golf, tennis, sand volleyball, basketball, field sports, picnicking, and boating.
Opportunities for improvement	Construction of a recreation lodge would provide the park with an indoor venue for public and private events that would increase revenue, interpretive and educational efforts, and public access during the winter months. A replacement playground would increase park access to children with disabilities and improve the overall experience of young park visitors. Other projects that would significantly improve access and the overall quality of the park include repaving roads and parking lots, renovating all buildings, restrooms, walkway, and parking lots to comply with ADA standards, conducting ongoing trail maintenance and improving trail signage, and providing sewer hookups at additional sites in the campground.

Key Attractions

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

- Hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding trails
- RV and tent camping
- 18-hole disc golf course
- Access to picnicking facilities and covered pavilions
- Cherokee Lake access for fishing, recreational boating, and watersports
- Rental venues
- Tennis, pickleball, sand volleyball and basketball courts
- Field sports including baseball, softball, soccer, and football
- Playground access for children
- Opportunities to participate in organized athletic events, races, and competitions

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 Panther Creek State Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present but provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site's current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

Site and Facility Assessment

Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	**General Description**
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in 'excellent' condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in 'good' condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in 'fair' condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.
Poor	Facilities/amenities are in 'poor' condition when they show significant, on-going maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Panther Creek State Park and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in May 2023.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Baseball Court	1	Good
Bathhouses	2	Good
Boat Ramp	1	Good
Bridge (aluminum)	1	Excellent
Bridges (small, foot bridge)	5	Fair
Bridges (wooden)	2	Good
Campsites	50	Good
Camp Store	1	Good
Equipment Sheds	4	Excellent
Equipment Storage Bay	1	Fair
Maintenance Building	1	Good
Picnic Shelters	5	Good
Playground	1	Poor
Ranger Residences	2	Good
Restrooms	5	Good
Roads / Paving	3.02 Miles	Fair
Seasonal Staff House	1	Poor
Sewage Treatment System	1	Poor
Tennis Courts	2	Good
Trails	28 Miles	Good
Visitor Center / Park Office	1	Good
Volleyball Courts	2	Fair

Trail Inventory and Assessment

Trail Name	Mileage	Condition
Campground Connector Trail	0.22	Good
Deer Run Trail	0.82	Good
Horse Connector Trail	2.54	Good
Hunt Knob Trail	3.62	Good
Inner Old Farm Trail	0.99	Good
Lost Road Trail	2.10	Good
Maple Arch Trail	3.14	Fair
Norris Blackburn Trail	0.51	Good
Old Wagon Trail	0.28	Good
Ore Mine Trail	1.47	Good

Outer Old Farm Trail	0.78	Good
Panther Path Trail	1.06	Good
Piney Cove Trail	0.59	Good
Pioneer Trail	2.36	Good
Point Lookout Trail	2.21	Good
Ridge Crest Trail	0.63	Good
Road to Recycling Trail	1.11	Fair
Seven Sinkholes Trail	0.42	Fair
Trout Lily Trail	1.74	Good
Grand Total	**26.59**	Good

There is a well-established 28-mile trail system distributed among 17 official trails within the park. While hiking is permitted on all trails, horseback riding is restricted to two trails (9.5 miles), and mountain biking is restricted to eight trails (10.2 miles). The trail system is the park's most popular public recreation amenity and special care is taken to maintain all trails in a condition that is safe, accessible, and enjoyable for users. Several athletic events and races are held on park trails each year, and countless visitors take advantage of the trail system for exercise, exploration, relaxation, seclusion, and nature observation. Maintenance activities on park trails include the removal of litter, removal of downed limbs, trees and overgrown vegetation, the construction and installation of trail structures (bridges, boardwalks, erosion control structures, signs), obstruction of illegal spur or connector trails, and installation of trail surface hardening materials (gravel, tri-lock). Potential impacts on the park's natural resources from careless or inappropriate trail use can be extensive and include soil compaction and erosion, decreased water quality, destruction of vegetation, litter, and the establishment of illegal spur or connector trails. To mitigate these negative impacts, ranger staff work diligently to educate the public on the appropriate use of park trails and enforce trail system rules when violations are discovered. It is not recommended that any additional trails be constructed on park grounds given the elaborate trail system that already exists.

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
Recreation Lodge	Currently, the only fully enclosed space available for public gatherings at the park is the small foyer / gift shop at the visitor center. Construction of a modest recreation building designed to accommodate approximately 100 people would significantly increase program offerings in the winter months and increase revenue by establishing a popular rental venue for meetings, family reunions, weddings, and other events.

Prioritized Facility Needs

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

Facility Need	Priority	Assignment
Replace seasonal staff house	1	High
Replace existing sewage treatment system	2	High
Replace playground	3	High
Demolish Swimming Pool	4	High
Replace visitor center roof and support structure	5	High
Renovate maintenance building storage bay	6	Medium
Improve campground water drainage system	7	Medium
Upgrade buildings, sidewalks, and parking lots to ADA standards	8	Medium
Repave and reline park roads and parking lots	9	Medium
Replace drain tiles under roadways throughout park	10	Medium
Upgrade additional sites in campground with sewer hookup	11	Low
Pave horse trailer parking lot	12	Low

The table below provides brief descriptions and solutions for current and foreseeable facility maintenance needs in priority order.

Facility Need	Description
Replace Seasonal Staff House	Housing for Seasonal Interpretive Rangers is essential to recruit talented personal from throughout the state. However, the residence formally used by seasonal staff is over five decades old and has not been used since 2019 due to black mold discovered in the building. The park is in critical need of a new residence. This project will soon be underway with funding provided by the park and the East Tennessee Regional Maintenance Office.
Replace Existing Sewage Treatment System	The park's current sewage processing system is decades-old and in poor condition. The system was poorly designed which, consequently, has resulted in tens of thousands of dollars in repair costs over the last decade. Replacing the sewage processing system, while expensive initially, would ultimately save the state money, and improve overall sanitation and public safety at the park.
Replace Playground	The park playground is extremely popular but has endured over 20 years of heavy use and is in poor condition. Repairs are difficult because replacement parts are oftentimes unavailable or cost prohibitive. A new, fully accessible playground would significantly improve safety and the experience of young visitors at the park.

Demolish Swimming Pool	It has been determined that the park's swimming pool will remain permanently closed. The facility is falling into greater disrepair, is aesthetically displeasing, and poses a significant risk to public safety. The swimming pool should be demolished, and the site should either be restored to a natural condition or used as a location for a more suitable facility.
Replace Visitor Center Roof and Support Structure	The beams supporting the visitor center roof are rotting due to water exposure caused by insufficient gutter flashing. The exterior walls of the building are also rotting due to water exposure. Replacing the support beams and exterior siding and installing new flashing and gutters in the very near future will be necessary to correct this problem and prevent much more significant damage.
Renovate Maintenance Building Storage Bay	The storage bay at the maintenance building is in desperate need of a new roof and exterior walls. This structure is very important for protecting park equipment, tool, vehicles, and construction materials from the elements which extends their service life and prevents weather related damage.
Improve Campground Water Drainage System	The water drainage system in the campground was poorly designed and installed during the capital renovation in 2014. As a result, water runoff is eroding the asphalt RV pads and campground road. This issue will only get worse with time. To resolve this problem, approximately 1,000 feet of tile and appropriately placed bulkheads should be installed in the exposed drainage ditch then backfilled with topsoil to return the trench to its original contour.
Upgrade All Buildings, Sidewalks, and Parking Lots to ADA	In consistency with the department's goal to improve access to state parks, a project to renovate all non-compliant park buildings, restrooms, shelters, sidewalks, and parking lots to ADA standards is much needed and highly desired to eliminate barriers for a significant number of existing and potential park users.
Repave and Reline Park Road and Parking Lots	Repaving and relining the roadways and parking lots throughout the park to eliminate potholes, cracked and eroded sections of asphalt, and significant depressions in the lanes of travel would be the most beneficial project to improve visitor access to park resources and facilities.
Replace Drain Tiles Under Roadways Throughout Park	The water drainage tiles under the main park roadway are beginning to collapse due to extreme pressure. Many of the bulkheads on either side of the drainage tiles have also broken. Replacement tiles and bulkheads should be installed in these locations to prevent the roadway from subsiding or collapsing.

Upgrade Additional Existing Sites in Campground with Sewer	There are currently nine premium sites in the campground that provide sewer hookups. These sites are frequently booked to capacity and generate more revenue than the non-premium sites. Overnight guests frequently request the park upgrade additional sites to provide sewer hookup. To accommodate public demand and increase revenue, it is recommended that 10 additional existing sites in the campground be upgraded to include sewer hookups.
Pave Horse Trailer Parking Lot	Paving the gravel access road leading into the horse trailer parking lot from TN-342 and adding a small asphalt parking lot in the area would improve safety and appearance, increase use of the area and create a favorable impression among visitors.

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 <u>must</u> provide and/or are essential in order to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

➤ The services are mandated by the agency's law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
➤ The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public's health and safety.
➤ The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
➤ The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers, and partners.

➢ The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
➢ The services provide a sound investment of public funds.

The following programs and services offered at Panther Creek State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Support the mission of Tennessee State Parks which is, "To preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources while providing safe, quality outdoor experiences."
- Provide for public access to the park, the facilities, and the grounds.
- Provide public safety for visitors and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for maintenance of grounds, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Maintain facilities developed through the LWCF program to required standards.
- Provide for basic day-use activities informational signage, 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 <u>should</u> 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 Panther Creek State Park have been identified as **important services**:

- Provide a full range of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs.
- Offer park-specific information at the Visitor Center and Camp Store.
- Provide educational programs for schools and organized groups.
- Provide ongoing marketing, maintenance, and access to the park's 18-hole disc golf course.
- Maintain aviary and Birds of Prey program at the park in compliance with TWRA rules and regulations and TSP policy.
- Conduct annual Junior Ranger and Sprit of America camps to educate youth on outdoor skills and boating safety.
- Provide for basic day-use activities (such as hiking and picnicking) with trails, informational and picnic tables.

CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor supported programs, services and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency <u>may</u> 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 Panther Creek State Park have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Operate and provide retail support services for the gift shop and camp store.
- Provide support services for 50 tent/RV campsites and bathhouses.
- Provide support services for picnic shelters and other rentable venues.
- Fee-based recreational and interpretive programs that are designed to generate more revenue than operating costs to provide.

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Panther Creek State Park represent the largest area of budgetary expense at an average of 68.7% of the total operating budget each year for the last three complete years, which is slightly more than the target of labor costs not exceeding 65% of total operating expenditures. The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

Full Time Equivalent Employees

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager 1	1	*
Park Ranger 2	2	*
Administrative Assistant 1	1	$42,504
Clerk 3	1	$30,204
Building Maintenance	1	$42,924
Conservation Worker 2	1	$34,236
Conservation Worker 1	2	$61,008
TOTAL	9	$385,920

Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.

Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Lifeguard 1	2	$27,495
Laborer	1	$27,495
TOTAL	3	$54,990

Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	1,511
Community Service Workers	49
Engineering and Construction Crews	3,953
Resource Management Crews	372
TOTAL	5,885

Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	$385,920
Part Time Employees	$54,990
TOTAL Annual Labor Expense	$440,910

Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Park Ranger	1	FTE	FY2024	Several hundred thousand people visit Panther Creek State Park each year to participate in a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities including hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, picnicking, disc-golf, soccer, tennis, basketball, volleyball, fishing, boating, and camping. In addition, the park hosts numerous events including two youth camps, four signature hikes, a fall festival, triathlon, approximately 10 foot and bicycle races, and countless programs for school groups and community organizations each year. Limited park staff are charged with the upkeep, maintenance, and operation of a 28-mile trail system, 18-hole disc golf course, aviary, apiary, 50-site campground, six reservation venues, camp store, gift shop, three landscaped areas, and a highly popular boat ramp providing access to Cherokee Lake. The population of Morristown and the surrounding communities have grown significantly in the last decade which has resulted in increased park visitation. While this is desirable, rising demand for services coupled with certain negative consequences such as resource degradation, visitor conflict, and increasing medical and law enforcement emergencies, has tremendously overburdened ranger staff. For decades, Panther Creek has operated with two full-time rangers but each year park visitation and public demand for services and programs continue to increase. As a result, the park has long past the tipping point where a staff of two rangers could effectively address the countless resource management, public safety, programming, and administrative tasks for which they are tasked. The

				single greatest action that could be taken to improve the quality and quantity of public services provided by the park, and the single greatest action that would serve to help preserve park resources and maintain public safety would be to establish a new full-time park ranger position at Panther Creek. Without this critical addition, current ranger staff may be unable to maintain public safety, protect park resources and meet the needs of visitors to the standard of quality and effectiveness expected by the department and the public.
Conservation Worker 1	1	FTE	FY2024	Park maintenance has always been understaffed and overburdened with an increasing number of responsibilities each year. While the staff makes a tremendous effort to maintain the park in the best condition possible, they are only able to complete the most pressing tasks due to limited manpower. The anticipated addition of a new recreation lodge, and replacement playground will only increase the workload on maintenance staff. The single greatest action that could be taken to maintain and improve the overall quality and condition of park facilities, grounds and trails would be to establish a new, full-time Conservation Worker 1 position at the park.
TOTAL	**2**	**FTE/2**	**FY2024**	The addition of the Park Ranger and Conservation Worker 1 positions at Panther Creek are necessary to maintain public safety, protect valuable cultural and natural resources, and assure facilities, grounds and essential services meet the standard of quality expected by the public.

Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit **(Rev Per Unit)** for the last four years in park facilities is detailed in the table below.

Current Rev Per Unit

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit	Day Use Rev Per Unit
2019	10.42	5.62
2020	11	3.33
2021	16.06	5.23
2022	16.45	4.77

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

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit	Day Use Rev Per Unit
2023	17.58	5.02
2024	18.01	5.34
2025	18.91	5.61
2026	19.86	5.89

NOTE: Past and projected Rev Per Unit values calculated using figures provided. The charts below highlight revenue differences between those provided and Itinio Workspace for fiscal years 2019 through 2022.

Net Sales for Campsites	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022
Itinio Workspace	201,368.25	195,914.15	331,453.60	297,169.70
Rev Per Unit data provided	192,489.94	177,073.90	290,333.50	298,240.80
Difference	**8,878.31**	**18,840.25**	**41,120.10**	**-1,071.10**

Net Sales for Day Use	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022
Itinio Workspace	16,212.50	8,725.00	15,484.50	13,577.00
Rev Per Unit data provided	16,297.50	9,575.00	15,200.50	12,890.00
Difference	**-85.00**	**-850.00**	**284.00**	**687.00**

Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Facebook	2022	4.70
Google	2022	4.80
Yelp	2022	4.50
Trip Advisor	2022	4.50
NPS (Events)	FY22	95
NPS (General)	FY22	63
NPS (Reservations)	FY22	86

Professional Development and Training

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

- Park staff shall complete Title VI and Cyber Security training annually.
- Ranger staff shall complete all CEU, refresher, and training courses required to maintain law enforcement commission, Interpretive Guide and Emergency Medical Responder certifications.
- The park will ensure that one or more rangers participate in GIS, IPE, RMS, Go Green and Resource Management workshops and training events each month or as scheduled.
- The park will continue to participate in annual Maintenance Manager and Administrative conferences, Quarterly Administrative Meetings and Gift Shop Vendor Shows.
- Spanish Language Certificate training designed to teach English speaking professionals basic Spanish communication skills provided by Walters State Community College is being explored for the park ranger staff.
- Law Enforcement Leadership Certification training provided by the University of Tennessee is being explored for park ranger staff.
- Search Operations, Basic Visual Tracking, GPS/Land Navigation and Managing Search Operations courses provided by the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency is being explored for park ranger staff.
- Playground Inspector Certification training course offered by the National Recreation and Park Association is being explored for the park safety and security officer.
- A Rapid Green Events training course offered by TDEC is being explored for all park staff members.
- Conflict Management, Planning and Priority Setting, Organization and Time Management, and Customer Service training courses provided through Edison are being explored for all park staff members.
- Digital Literacy Course provided by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development is being explored for park maintenance staff.
- Chainsaw Safety Course provided by STIHL Outdoor Power Equipment or TDEC is being explored for park maintenance and ranger staff.

- Adult and Child First Aid, CPR and AED Certification training provided by the American Red Cross is being explored for park administrative and maintenance staff members.
- Commercial Applicator Certification (herbicides and pesticides) training provided by the University of Tennessee is being explored for the park maintenance manager.
- Note: All park staff members are encouraged to take advantage of the state employee Tuition Fee Waiver Program to participate in postsecondary educational opportunities.
- Routine management training.

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. Replace existing dilapidated, uninhabitable staff house to accommodate seasonal employees and other support personnel.
   b. Replace sewage lift station. The magnitude of the ongoing problems with the sewage lift station cannot be overemphasized. The state has spent well over one hundred thousand dollars in the last decade to repair the lift station without success. The system was poorly designed initially and continues to be an ongoing maintenance issue. When the system fails, raw sewage is spilled onto the ground posing a major threat to public health, and the water quality in Panther Creek which is located approximately 100 feet from the station. Plans to reinstall a more efficient, reliable system should be implemented immediately.
   c. Replace tile under cul-de-sac at the terminal end of the park road to improve water drainage.

2. **Operations and Staffing**
   a. Create a new Park Ranger position and hire an employee to fill new position.

3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
   a. Improve the quality of the Wi-Fi service for camping guests (project in progress).
   b. Repair, clear and reopen Maple Arch Trail to horseback riders.

Mid Term Recommendations (2–5 years)

1. **Site and Facilities**

   a. Demolish existing swimming pool (funded).
   b. Construct new recreation lodge on old swimming pool site (funded).
   c. Replace visitor center roof support beams and exterior walls.
   d. Renovate maintenance building storage bay.
   e. Improve water drainage system in the campground.
   f. Replace drain tiles under park roadway.

2. **Operations and Staffing**

   a. Create a new Conservation Worker 1 position and hire an employee to fill new position.

3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**

   a. Construct new playground on existing playground site (funded).
   b. Complete upgrades of all park buildings, sidewalks, and parking lots to ADA standards.
   c. Provide electric vehicle charging stations for visitors.

Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. **Site and Facilities**

   a. Repave and reline park roadway.
   b. Repave and reline Spoone, Smallman and playground parking lots.
   c. Pave and line horse trailer parking lot.
   d. Investigate potential need for establishing a lake-access swimming location on the park.

2. **Operations and Staffing**

   a. No long term operational or staffing recommendations.

3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**

   a. Convert an existing trail loop or segment to a paved, ADA accessible trail.
   b. Upgrade ten additional existing campsites to include sewer hookups.

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 overall goal of Panther Creek State Park is to provide recreational opportunities for the visiting public while also protecting the delicate natural and cultural resources in the park. Great emphasis is placed on monitoring the activities of park users and correcting behaviors that are detrimental or destructive to park resources. Educating the public, enforcing park rules and policies, and taking law enforcement or legal action when necessary are all methods rangers use to fulfil this goal. However, fostering public appreciation for and stewardship of the park's resources through education and interpretation is, by far, the preferred and most effective method to gain compliance and support for resources protection. The park's holistic approach to resource management has many other important elements including administrative oversight, maintenance, resource restoration and enhancement, research, inventory, monitoring and public relations, but education and interpretation are paramount to success and thus the primary focus of park resources and energy.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment
3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

Resource Management Objectives

Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

Objective - *More and better stewards:* Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

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

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

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

Strategies

A. **Natural Resource Management Strategies**

1. **Administrative Oversight**
   a. Report resource management activities and issues to Area 6 Regional Parks Manager each month.
   b. Update Resource Management Plan every six months.
   c. Update Interpretive Action Plan yearly.
   d. Improve system for identifying, prioritizing, conducting and documenting resource management activities.
   e. Assure ranger and maintenance staff engage in ongoing resource management activities by incorporating this requirement in Individual Performance plans.
   f. Participate fully in the department's Go Green program.

2. **Training**
   a. Rangers shall participate in all departmental GIS training events.
   b. Encourage staff participation in resource management training opportunities provided by the department, other agencies, and organizations.
   c. Ranger staff shall maintain CIG certification.

3. **Natural Resource Restoration, Maintenance and Enhancement**
   a. Conduct yearly park boundary inspections to identify and correct problems.
      i. Replace missing park boundary signs.
      ii. Fence areas if appropriate to address specific encroachments.
      iii. Utilize game cameras, increased ranger patrols and other methods for identifying offenders as necessary.
   b. Conduct yearly inspections of rare, threatened, or unique species to identify, document and address any issues discovered.
   c. Continue to compile inventories of plants, animals, and ecological communities to improve management of natural areas and ecological resources.
      i. Work with volunteers to update park floral and faunal lists.
      ii. Periodically monitor state listed species.
   d. Enforce park rules related to firewood, fires, metal detectors, ATV's, backcountry travel, camping, hunting, fishing, geocaching, and other regulated activities that have potential for direct, negative impacts on park resources.
   e. Take immediate, appropriate action when threats to park resources such as vandalism, encroachments, and illegal harvesting, dumping, or camping are encountered.
   f. Develop and implement management strategies to control or eradicate invasive pest plants.
   g. Comply with the guidelines and requirements set forth in the park's Hazardous Tree Management Plan
   h. Proactively investigate land acquisition opportunities and proposals from adjoining property owners that might serve to protect or enhance the park's natural resources.

      i.   Panther Creek
- i. Enforce TWRA fishing regulations.
- ii. Address inappropriate activities such as illegal dumping, littering, or harvesting aquatic wildlife.
- iii. Remove log jams, litter and sediment accumulated in tiles as needed.

      j.   Panther Creek Riparian Zone
- i. Repair areas of soil compaction, vegetation loss and erosion.
- ii. Remove illegally developed trail.
- iii. Provide ongoing maintenance for designated public creek access points.
- iv. Correct inappropriate activities such as littering, damaging, or harvesting vegetation.

      k.   Lake Shoreline
- i. Conduct monthly inspection to address issues such as illegal camping, campfires, hunting, swimming, and dumping.
- ii. Remove rope swings and diving platforms.

      l.   Deciduous Forest
- i. Remove hazardous trees along trails, park boundary, campground and other heavily visited areas.
- ii. Locate and remove unofficial trails.
- iii. Collaborate with US Forest Service and TN Department of Forestry on tree disease and pest insect studies.
- iv. Remove invasive plants and shrubs growing in pockets within and along margins of park forested areas.
- v. Enforce firewood and campfire policies.
- vi. Address illegal activities such as hunting or harvesting wood or valuable plant species.

      m. Fescue Grass Fields
- i. Maintain fields in mown and kempt conditions for appropriate public recreational activities.
- ii. Repair areas of soil compaction and vegetation loss.
- iii. Develop mowing plan to prioritize, schedule and reduce mowed acreage.

      n.   Native Wildflower Fields
- i. Monitor for and remove undesirable plant species.
- ii. Prepare for future controlled burns.

      o.   Caves
- i. Monitor yearly for destruction or damage.
- ii. Collaborate with TDEC and TWRA on bat population studies.

      p.   Scenic Observation Points
- i. Annually remove overgrowth obstruction view.
- ii. Remove litter around and below observation points as necessary.
- iii. Assure observation deck is well maintained and safe for visitors.

4. **Labor, Research and Technical Support**
   a. Provide ongoing opportunities for individual and group volunteers to participate in safe, appropriate, and beneficial natural resource maintenance or enhancement projects.

b. Collaborate with departmental GIS staff to develop a database inventory of the park's valuable natural and cultural resources.

c. Utilize mapping and distribution databases of invasive, rare, threatened, and endangered species to inform and guide natural resource management activity.

d. Encourage and facilitate departmental approved scientific research on park flora and fauna.

    i. Maintain records of scientific research results.

    ii. Implement resource management strategies and practices provided by professionals conducting research on park resources.

e. Solicit input from other land management agencies, educational institutions, and other professionals to help inform and guide natural resource management activity.

f. Employ the use of drones for park resource management activities.

5. **Interpretation and Education**

a. Full-time interpretive staff.

    i. Conduct a minimum of four high-quality interpretive programs each month.

    ii. Promote awareness and appreciation for the park's natural and cultural resources during school programs, field trips, signature hikes and volunteer events.

    iii. Participate in local and regional fairs, festivals, and other highly visited special events to promote and encourage responsible use of the park.

    iv. Conduct Junior Ranger and Spirit of America Youth Boating Education camps each summer.

    v. Promote and participate in regional and statewide conservation events.

    vi. Develop and conduct an ongoing series of high, quality, park specific programs designed to promote TSP's core values, foster awareness and appreciation for the park's unique natural and cultural resources, and educate the public on the responsible and sustainable use of the park.

b. Promote and fully participate in TSP's Junior Ranger program.

c. Increase access to park interpretive programs using digital platforms such as MS Teams and Facebook.

d. Develop additional interpretive displays and signage that promotes appreciation for and stewardship of park resources.

B. **Cultural Resource Management Strategies**

1. **Cultural Resource Inventory, Research and Monitoring**

a. Locate and inventory any unidentified cultural resources on park property.

    i. Review historical maps and documents and conduct interviews with long-time residents to locate and identify cultural resources.

    ii. Obtain GPS locations for all known cultural features and enter locations into park GIS database.

b. Conduct research to collect historical data on cultural resources on park property.

    i. Obtain available data on cultural resources by researching local historical archives, TVA records and conducting interviews with family members of former park residents.

  ii. Compile data collected on park cultural resources into a reference document for use in the development of future interpretive displays and signage.

 c. Springhouse Foundations

  i. Open access by mowing and trimming around springhouses.

  ii. Monitor for vandalism or damage.

  iii. Remove litter around foundations.

 d. Graveyards

  i. Monitor for vandalism or damage.

  ii. Conduct research to obtain more information about graveyards.

 e. House Foundations

  i. Monitor for vandalism or damage.

  ii. Conduct research to obtain more information about house foundations.

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 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
Panther Creek	1 Mile	Good	Panther Creek is a small, perineal stream that flows within the park boundary for approximately one mile before emptying into Cherokee Lake. Water quality is generally good and aquatic life including reptiles, amphibians, aquatic insects, and fish are diverse and abundant.
Panther Creek Riparian Zone	1 Mile	Good	Panther Creek's riparian zone is healthy with densely vegetated banks consisting of diverse plant, shrub, and tree species. The riparian zone is resilient during high stream flows and functions effectively to mitigate the negative effects of extreme weather such as flooding or drought.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Lake Shoreline	13.8 Miles	Good	The shoreline of Cherokee Lake serves as a natural, 13.8-mile border on the northwestern side of the park. Most of this shoreline consists of steep rocky terrain with heavily wooded areas beginning just beyond the lake's high-water mark. Numerous remote and secluded coves serve as refuge for waterfowl, amphibians, and fish. While damaging park encroachments sometimes occur along the shoreline, such incidents are relatively rare and shoreline integrity is generally good.
Deciduous Forest	1,366.4 Acres	Good	There are approximately 1,366.4 acres of relatively healthy deciduous forest within the boundary of Panther Creek State Park. The forested areas of the park are for the most part second growth hardwoods. However, there are areas throughout the park where very large specimens of cedar and Virginia Pine can be found, especially on River Ridge. The hardwoods are quite typical of eastern Tennessee with several varieties of oak, sycamore, tulip poplar, elm, hickory and maple. Willow and persimmon grow along the edges of Cherokee Lake and Panther Creek. Smaller varieties of trees include dogwood, redbud, Carolina hornbeam and serviceberry.
Fescue Grass Fields	59.2 Acres	Good	There are 59.2 acres of fescue grass fields within the boundary of the park. These fields are in good condition and provide space for recreational activities such as soccer, disc-golf, and softball. However, the fields require a tremendous amount of maintenance attention during the summer months and add very little ecological value to the park. Efforts are underway to restore portions of these fields to natural conditions while also maintaining adequate space for recreational activities.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Native Wildflower Fields	6 Acres	Good	A project to establish six acres of native wildflowers in two fields near the park entrance was initiated in March 2022. The primary purpose of this ongoing project is to establish native wildflower communities in two fields on opposite sides of Tennessee State Route 342 to beautify and enhance the approach to the park. The goal is to create a "Wow Factor" for visitors traveling along TN-342 as they approach the main park entrance. The second objective of this project is to establish an area of host/nectar plants for butterflies and other pollinating insects. While expensive and labor intensive, this project is progressing well and a healthy, diverse array of native wildflowers are expected to bloom in these fields in 2024.
Caves	2	Good	There are two caves located in Panther Creek State Park. The first cave, known as Panther Creek Park Cave, is relatively small and is located adjacent to the Seven Sinkholes Trail. The second cave, known as the Staircase Cave, is much larger in size and is located approximately 500 feet from the Point Lookout Trail. Tri-color Bats have been observed in both caves. The caves are in relatively good condition given their secluded locations and difficulty to access.
Scenic Observation Points	2	Good	There are two scenic observation points in the park that provide impressive views of Cherokee Lake, Clinch Mountain, and Poor Valley Ridge. The first is located approximately four tenths of a mile along the Point Lookout Trail at an elevation of 400 feet above Cherokee Lake. The second observation point is located on Hunt Knob at an elevation of 280 feet above the lake. This second viewpoint is located directly beside the park road and features an observation deck and interpretive signage.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Springhouse Foundations	2	Fair	Two springhouse foundations are located within and serve as reminders of the park's cultural history. The first foundation is located near the entrance to the Self-Guided Nature Trail and is made of cinderblock. It is unknown who constructed the springhouse, but the remaining foundation is in fair condition and is often used during interpretive programs to discuss park history. The second foundation is located close to Panther Creek and the Hunt Knob Trail entrance. This foundation is made of brick and belonged to the Spoone Family. This foundation is also in fair condition and used as a subject during interpretive programs.
Graveyards	2	Poor	There are two small, primitive graveyards located in relatively secluded areas of the park. Both graveyards are in areas of thick overgrowth and most of the markers are severely worn with illegible etchings. It is unknown how many people are buried in each graveyard, but one of the sites has been identified as having belonged to the Spoone Family.
House Foundations	4	Poor	There are four house foundations located within Panther Creek State Park. These foundations are relatively close to public use areas but are hidden from sight. The foundations are constructed of brick and stone. Other remnants including metal siding, barbed wire, fence posts and rotten fragments of painted lumber are also located within the vicinity of the foundations.

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
Panther Creek	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – access limited to segments where creek flows parallel to Panther Path and Old Wagon trails. **General Management:** General management of Panther Creek consists of assuring fishermen comply with TWRA fishing regulations, monitoring for inappropriate activities such as illegal dumping, littering, or harvesting aquatic wildlife, removing log jams, and clearing sediment and obstructions from tiles as needed.	High
Panther Creek Riparian Zone	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – access limited to segments where creek flows parallel to Panther Path and Old Wagon trails. **General Management:** General management Panther Creek's riparian zone consists of repairing soil compaction and vegetation loss due to excessive public use, repairing areas damaged by soil erosion, obstructing illegally developed trails, maintaining designated public access points in conditions that are safe an inviting for visitors, and monitoring for illegal activities such as littering, damaging, or harvesting vegetation.	High
Lake Shoreline	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – access limited to boat ramp and designated points along the Ridgecrest, Point Lookout, Hunt Knob, Deer Run and Trout Lily trails. **General Management:** General management consists of inspecting the shoreline monthly and addressing issues such as illegal camping, campfires, hunting, swimming, and dumping, removal of rope swings and diving platforms, and yearly inspections and installation of replacement park boundary markers as needed.	High

Deciduous Forest	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – forested areas can be accessed throughout the park's extensive trail system. However, traveling off trail into undeveloped forested areas is strictly prohibited. **General Management:** General management consists of removing hazardous trees along trails, park boundary, campground and other heavily visited areas throughout the park, locating and removing unofficial trails, collaborating with the US Forest Service and TN Department of Forestry on tree disease and pest insect studies, removing invasive vegetation growing in pockets within and along the margins of the park's forest, enforcing the park's firewood and campfire policies, and monitoring for illegal hunting or harvesting of wood or valuable plant species.	High
Fescue Grass Fields	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – park fields are open to the public for all appropriate recreational activities. **General Management:** General management of park fields consists of routine mowing and trimming during the summer months and repairing soil compaction and vegetation loss due to excessive public use. Future action includes the establishment of a mowing plan to identify priority areas to be mowed, establish a consistent mowing schedule, and, if possible, reduce the acreage mowed throughout the park.	High
Native Wildflower Fields	**Public Use:** No public access. **General Management:** General management of the park's native wildflower fields includes monitoring for and removing undesirable plant species, protecting the area from public access, and future controlled burns.	High
Caves	**Public Use:** No public access. **General Management:** General management of park caves consists of periodic monitoring for destruction or damage and collaborating with researchers from TDEC and TWRA to conduct studies on bat populations.	Moderate
Scenic Observation Points	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – the park's primary scenic observations points are accessed from the Point Lookout Trail the park roadway on Hunt Knob. **General Management:** General management of the park's observation points consists of removing overgrowth obstructing the views, removing litter that frequently accumulates at these locations, and assuring the observation deck is well maintained and safe for visitors.	High

Springhouse Foundations	**Public Use:** Managed access with infrastructure and regulation – springhouse foundations are accessible only from the Self-Guided Nature Trail and a short spur trail leading off the Horse Connector Trail. **General Management:** General management of the park's springhouse foundations consist of opening access in the summer months by mowing and trimming around springhouses, periodic monitoring for vandalism or damage, a litter removal.	Moderate
Graveyards	**Public Use:** No public access. **General Management:** General management of the park's graveyards consist of periodic inspections for vandalism or damage. Future research is desire to gain more information about the graveyards within the park.	Moderate
House Foundations	**Public Use:** No public access. **General Management:** General management of the park's house foundations consist of periodic inspections for vandalism or damage. Future research is desire to gain more information about the house foundations within the park.	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**
Land acquisition adjacent to the park to improve park buffering and to protect additional areas of Panther Creek.	Short 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 statement of Panther Creek State Park is to: utilize proven and effective forms of interpretation to help visitors understand, appreciate, and emotionally connect with the park's rich natural and cultural heritage and gain public support for the protection and preservation of park resources.

Primary Interpretive Theme: Panther Creek has served as a natural meeting place, shaping human activity throughout history from the earliest activities of Native Americans, long hunters, and settlers, through the establishment of peaceful farming communities, to the conflicts and wars that gave rise to our modern age. It has served as a faithful and constant witness to the struggles, conflicts, hopes, failures, and successes of people from many cultures set amidst the inevitable changes of time.

Secondary Interpretive Themes: There are many secondary interpretive themes related to the park's interpretive mission and primary interpretive theme. Intangibles and universal concepts prevalent among the topics below include survival, exploration, discovery, danger, fear, conflict, violence, hope, change, progress, opportunity, economy, and financial gain.

- Native Americans
- Long Hunters
- Early Pioneers and Settlers
- Panther Springs Community
- Mining Operations
- American Civil War
- Farming Communities
- Tennessee Valley Authority
- Holston River
- World War II
- Cherokee Lake

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:

A. Interpretive staff shall utilize the guidelines and strategies obtained in the Telling Full Stories: Understanding Bias workshop when developing and conducting programs with the overarching goal of promoting and facilitating diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.
B. Interpretive staff shall conduct further research and participate in future training opportunities to gain a better understanding of the best interpretive methods and practices for providing equitable and inclusive programs for diverse audiences.
C. The park will partner with guest presenters and interpreters capable of telling the park's story from different unique perspectives to promote diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogs.
D. Park interpretive staff shall develop, market, and conduct a series of ongoing interpretive programs specifically designed for visitors with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities that provide the best possible experience and exposure to park resources utilizing proven and effective forms of interpretation for those target audiences.

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

Action Plan:

A. Collaborate with IPE staff to develop a high-quality brochure for the park's Self-Guided Nature Trail and create an interpretive display detailing the history, importance, and aquatic life of Panther Creek.
B. Collaborate with GIS and IPE staff to create a high-quality, new park map that combines the map, trail descriptions and interpretive information about the park in a single document.
C. Create or adapt a series of video programs for audiences to view on YouTube, Facebook, or the park's webpage to reach a broader segment of the public and those with limited or no access to the park.
D. Develop, market, and conduct live programs using digital interpretive platforms such as Facebook Live, Webex or MS Teams.

E. Explore the prospect of interpretive programming through audio-based formats such as self-guided CD park tours and podcasts.
F. Increase the use of the park's digital projector for interpretive and educational programming.

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:

A. Program outlines and transcripts will be developed and formatted as specified by IPE, stored digitally, and organized in the categories of natural, cultural, or historical programs.
B. Interpretive staff will maintain a master list of both free and fee-based programs offered by the park from which audiences can select desired programs that meet their interests or educational objectives.
C. Interpretive staff will utilize tools and resources provide by IPE to identify suitable fee-based programs and determine appropriate fees for those programs.
D. Interpretive staff will seek to obtain previously developed program outlines and transcripts from IPE and other parks that can be successfully adapted to Panther Creek State Park.
E. Interpretive staff will differentiate between audiences consisting of children and those consisting of adults and develop programs tailored to the unique needs, characteristics, and interests of those audiences.

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:

A. Increase the number of both free and fee-based programs and workshops designed to enhance participant experience and confidence in outdoor skills.
B. Encourage appropriate use of the park by external groups such as athletic, civic, school and youth organizations and clubs for races, sports events, recreational activities, and camps.
C. Consider re-establishing a non-motorized boat rental concession at the park.
D. Partner with local organizations such as the Morristown Disc-Golf Association, Five Rivers Cycling Club, and the Greeneville Chapter of Trout Unlimited to conduct specialized outdoor recreation workshops and programs at the park. Continue to conduct Junior Ranger and Spirit of America Youth Boating Education camps at the park each summer.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- ➤ Nonpersonal 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 proving 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.

FINANICAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2022)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2023	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2024	Target Cost Recovery: FY: 2025	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2027
Park Overall	49.15%	39.63%	40.97%	42.31%	43.65%	44.99%