

Seven Islands State Birding Park Strategic Management Plan

2023 – 2033



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Park Purpose, History and Description | 3 |
| Goals, Objectives and Action Plans | 3 |
| THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship | 3 |
| THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All | 4 |
| THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities..... | 5 |
| THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence..... | 6 |
| | |
| Park Overview | 7 |
| Site Fact Sheet..... | 7 |
| Key Attractions | 7 |
| | |
| Site and Operations Assessment | 8 |
| Site and Facility Assessment..... | 8 |
| Operational Assessment..... | 12 |
| Summary of Key Recommendations | 16 |
| | |
| Resource Management Plan | 18 |
| Resource Management Objectives | 18 |
| Resource Inventory and Assessment | 19 |
| Management Strategies | 20 |
| Land Management Strategies | 21 |
| Supplemental Information | 21 |
| | |
| Interpretive Programming and Education Plan..... | 22 |
| Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals | 22 |
| Strategic Programs and Services | 22 |
| | |
| Financial Performance Goals..... | 25 |

Park Purpose, History and Description

The diverse natural landscape of aquatic and grassland habitats makes Seven Islands State Birding Park a premier birding destination with more than 222 species of birds sighted. The park encompasses 416 acres along the French Broad River in Knox County, approximately 19 miles east of Knoxville. This peninsula of land features more than eight miles of natural trails, rolling hills, and views of the Smoky Mountains. In addition to being a wildlife refuge popular for hiking and wildlife observation, the park is a research and educational facility for schools and other groups and a demonstration area for land use and habitat management techniques. Songbirds, hawks, and waterfowl can be seen along the meadow trails, and several old barns are a favorite refuge for barn owls. For paddlers and anglers, there are two boat launches that provide access to the French Broad River.

The mission of Seven Islands State Birding Park is to manage diverse bird habitat and to create unique opportunities for the public to observe and learn about the conservation of birds and their critical habitats.

The Vision of Seven Islands State Birding Park is to be a World Class Birding Destination. The park was created in 2014 to meet the needs of growing sector of the recreating public. Bird watching (birding) is the fastest growing hobby among Americans. At the same time bird habitat is in sharp decline. An estimated three billion songbirds have been lost over the past 30 years. The populations in the sharpest decline are the grassland birds. Seven Islands State Birding Park aims to address both the increased interest in birding as a pastime and the need to preserve and protect critical habitats for imperiled birds.

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 Park's core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan:

- Maintain a minimum of 50% of total park property in native grassland habitat.
- Offer informative and engaging programming related to birds and their habitats.
- Maintain safe and inviting facilities.
- Use social media platforms to engage a wide audience.
- Actively and intentionally engage with segments of the population that have not historically been park users.
- Interpret the roles of women, and people of color in avian conservation and research.
- Work with the Friends of Seven Islands to encourage user engagement and stewardship.

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

Action Plan:

- Identify adjacent properties that support the park’s mission and vision and pursue land acquisition to expand park boundaries and resources.
- Manage a variety of habitats with a focus on early successional.
- Restore native grassland habitats as needed.
- Maintain the integrity of pre-1900s buildings.
- Interpret the significance of the French Broad River both culturally and ecologically.
- Maintain and expand Wild Yards Garden with supplemental plantings as needed.

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

Action Plan:

- Develop habitat management applications to plan and record natural resource management activities.
- Map and monitor prescribed burn efforts using TN Smart Parks.
- Map and monitor invasive species control using TN Smart Parks.
- Monitor birds using MOTUS tracking technology.

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:

- Create quality interpretive, educational, and recreational experiences for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities through the guidance of the Telling Full Stories process. Include both free and fee-based opportunities.
- Use technology, such as virtual tours, QR codes, and social media, to enhance the visitor experience and increase access to interpretive and educational programming.

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

Action Plan:

- Develop a variety of interpretive, educational, and recreational programs that can be repeated on a seasonal basis.
- Develop and maintain program descriptions, outlines, and materials for all our core programs. Outlines and descriptions will be uploaded to SharePoint as well as stored in a park database. Materials will be well organized, labeled, and stored on-site for easy access by staff.
- Maintain a calendar for scheduling and presenting our core programs.

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

Action Plan:

- Develop and provide resource-based opportunities including birding, hiking, and boating.

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:

- Add full-time maintenance staff position(s).
- Use HIPPO to track and monitor facilities maintenance.
- Work with regional maintenance team to identify and address ‘Top 5’ and deferred maintenance projects.

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

Action Plan:

- Construct adaptive kayak/canoe launches and fishing piers at Seven Islands Landing and Mutton Hollow Landing.
- Maintain memorial benches and add additional benches where needed.
- Construct an ADA accessible bird blind(s).
- Construct an ADA pedestrian bridge from Newman’s Island to Mutton Hollow Landing.

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

Action Plan:

- Construct (or retrofit existing building) a visitor contact station with office space for staff.
- Redesign main parking area for greater sustainability and efficiency.
- Construct a pavilion at the entrance of the park to provide shade and shelter for programming and for visitors as they check out the trailhead kiosk and wait for the restrooms. The pavilion should include a storage room for restroom maintenance items.
- Install shade structures along ADA trail.
- Install water bottle refill station.

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:

- Schedules that prioritize work/life balance and downtime.
- Manager support for professional development and training.
- Establish clear and reasonable job duties and responsibilities.
- Provide all staff with challenging work assignments and SMART IPP objectives.
- Encourage interdisciplinary 'teamwork'.
- Plan and schedule 'Forced Fun' days for team-building activities and outings.
- Ensure staff is properly trained and outfitted to avoid injury whenever possible.
- Let our staff know that they are assets, not commodities through words and actions.

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

Action Plan:

- Work with the Friends of Seven Islands to fundraise, coordinate volunteers, and foster community and political support for the park's goals and objectives.
- Work within our department's purchasing guidelines to source cost-effective materials and products.
- Use volunteer labor, when possible, to accomplish park goals and objectives.
- Set revenue goals to improve the fiscal sustainability of the park.
- Provide value-added programming at reasonable rates that generate revenue.
- Establish concession agreements to provide valuable services and generate park revenue.
- Operate within the annual budget.

Park Overview

Site Fact Sheet

| | |
|--|---|
| Park Name | Seven Islands State Birding Park |
| Site Manager | Justine Cucchiara |
| Area Manager | Veronica Greear |
| Park acreage | 416 |
| Total number of visitors (FY 2022) | 397,500 |
| Total expenses before CO (FY 2022) | 384,889 |
| Total revenues (FY 2022) | 24,879 |
| Retail cost recovery % ¹ | |
| Park cost recovery % | 6.5% |
| Average expense per visitor (FY 2022) | \$1.03 |
| Average revenue per visitor (FY 2022) | .06 |
| Gross profit or loss | (\$360,010) |
| Total full-time available positions / filled | 3 |
| Total part-time available positions / filled | 2 |
| Primary feeder markets | Knoxville, Atlanta, Nashville, Asheville |
| Primary reasons people visit | Hiking, birding, photography, river access, programming |
| Opportunities for improvement | Visitors Center/ Office |

Key Attractions

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

- Bird habitat
- French Broad River
- Quality programming and interpretation
- Bobwhite ADA Greenway & Pedestrian Bridge
- Wild Yards Garden
- 8+ miles of trail
- Two boat launches on the French Broad River
- Bluebird Barn, Maple Leaf Barn, Green House

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

Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Seven Islands State Birding Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present but to 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 different 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, ongoing maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the results 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 major repair or replacement. |
|------|--|

Facility Inventory and Assessment

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

| Site Asset / Amenity | Quantity | Condition |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Bluebird Barn | 1 | Good |
| Restrooms | 1 | Poor |
| Kelly House | 1 | Good |
| Swallows at the Window Barn | 1 | Poor |
| Green House | 1 | Fair |
| Maple Leaf Barn | 1 | Excellent |
| Linda & Pete Claussen Pedestrian Bridge | 1 | Fair |
| Ginnie Rogers Memorial Viewing Platform | 1 | Excellent |
| Seven Islands Landing Boat Launch | 1 | Good |
| Mutton Hollow Landing Boat Launch | 1 | Poor |
| Hickory Ridge Learning Center | 1 | Good |

Trail Inventory and Assessment

| Trail Name | Mileage | Condition |
|---------------------------|-------------|--|
| Bobwhite Accessible Trail | 0.88 | Pavement in good condition, shade needed to be used safely during the summer months |
| Hickory Ridge Loop Trail | 0.80 | Erosion present at the base of the steps at the steepest section of the trail tread improvement and de-berm in areas |
| Island Loop Trail | 1.01 | Good condition |
| Kelly Lane Greenway | 1.32 | Paving in good condition, under road drainage needed in two locations |
| Seclusion Bend Trail | 2.65 | Sections flood during winter months high-water events consider rerouting sections prone to flooding |
| Seven Islands Loop Trail | 1.02 | Reroute low-lying sections along the creek, and shift low-lying trail into the adjacent hedgerow |
| Upland Trail Inner Loop | 1.15 | Good condition, reroute the steep section that leads the Seven Island Loop Trail. |
| Grand Total | 8.83 | |

The most recent trail assessment reflects that approximately 40 hours of labor are required to address maintenance issues. Issues include erosion under steps along the Hickory Ridge Trail and rerouting sections of the Seven Islands Loop Trail, and Upland Inner Loop Trail.

In addition to trail improvement and reroutes some trail corridors require old dumpsite removal and extensive invasive species control.

New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve the visitor experience and operational efficiency.

| New Asset & Amenities | Description |
|--|--|
| Pedestrian Bridge | A pedestrian bridge spanning from Newman’s Island to Mutton Hollow Landing. Construction of this bridge would connect the north and south sides of the park (currently a 30-minute drive from each other). |
| Visitor’s Center | A visitor center with office/meeting space for staff, a gift shop, and indoor programming space. |
| Adaptive dock/piers at Seven Islands Landing & Mutton Hollow Landing | Accessible fishing piers and adaptive canoe kayak launch to improve access and allow multiple user groups (fisherman, motorized and non-motorized watercraft) to use the landing sites. |
| Programming pavilion/shelter and storage facility | A covered area across from the restrooms for visitors to orient themselves and wait for restrooms. Space for outdoor programming during in-climate weather. Landscaping around the pavilion. |
| Maintenance facility | Retrofit of Swallows at the Window (maintenance) Barn with adequate and safe workspace and storage for staff including climate-controlled areas and restrooms. |
| Restroom | Additional restroom facility at the end of Kelly Lane. |

Prioritized Facility Needs

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

| Facility Need | Priority Assignment |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Pedestrian bridge | High |
| Maintenance facility | High |
| Visitor center/office | High |
| Shelter/Pavilion | High |
| ADA Launch and Pier | High |
| High-Speed Internet Access | High |
| Restroom | Medium |

Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) Core or Essential Services.**
- 2) Important Services; and**
- 3) Value-added or Visitor Supported Services.**

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services, and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential 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 Seven Islands State Birding Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Law Enforcement
- Safety/first aid
- Resource Management
- Potable water
- Restrooms
- Access to passive use activities; hiking, biking, birding
- Parking

CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services, and facilities are those the agency should provide and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers, and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency’s ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance or support identified core services.
- The services are broadly supported and utilized by the community and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon how the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all the operating costs and/or are deemed to provide economic, social, or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Seven Islands State Birding Park have been identified as **important services**:

- River access/boat launches
- Programming /Interpretation
- Shelter

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

Visitor-supported programs, services, and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category 3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor supported are:

- The services expand, enhance or support Core Services, Important Services, and the quality of life of the visitors, community, or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued, and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees, or other sources that offset some or all of their cost and/or provide a meaningful return on investment.
- The Services can possibly be provided through outsourcing or the 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 Seven Islands State Birding Park have been identified as **visitor-supported services**:

- Mowing
- Wild Yards Gardens
- Free programming
- Outdoor meeting spaces
- Outdoor classroom

Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Seven Islands State Birding Park represent the largest area of budgetary expense at an average of 55% of the total operating budget each year for the last three complete years, which is less 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 I | 1 | * |
| Ranger II | 2 | * |
| Interpretive Ranger | 1 | \$47,496 |
| TOTAL | 4 | \$234,816 |

**Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.*

Part-Time Employees

| Position / Title | Quantity | Compensation Total |
|------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Job share | 1 | \$3849.3 |
| SIR | 1 | - |
| UT Intern | 2 | \$0 |
| TOTAL | 4 | \$3,846.3 |

Labor Support

| Labor Support | Annual Hours |
|--|---------------|
| Volunteers | 843 |
| Community Service Workers | 30 |
| Engineering and Construction Crews | 230 |
| Resource Management Crews | 40 |
| AmeriCorps | 14,000 |
| Other: Friends of Seven Islands | 1,168 |
| TOTAL | 16,311 |

Total Labor Compensation Expense

| Labor Type | Labor Expense |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| Full Time Equivalent Employees | \$234,816 |
| Part Time Employees | \$3849.3 |
| TOTAL Annual Labor Expense | 238,665 |

Additional Future Positions Needed

| Position / Title | Quantity | FTE or PT | Year Needed | Justification |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|--|
| BUILDING MAINTENANCE WORKER 2 | 1 | FT | 2024 | <i>To maintain safe, functional, and attractive public-facing facilities such as restrooms, barn shelters, visitors center, and trail system. To properly maintain machinery and tools so that they can be available for trail maintenance and habitat management.</i> |
| ADMIN SERVICES ASSISTANT 2 | 1 | FT | TBD | <i>To meet the needs of a growing park with records and reporting of operations including programming and operational revenue, purchasing, inventory of state assets, special projects, onboarding, seasonal employees, giftshop and online retail sales.</i> |
| PARK RANGER 2 | 1 | FT | TBD | <i>To meet the needs of a growing park for law enforcement, interpretation, and lands management. To provide adequate coverage for a medium-sized park operation.</i> |
| PARK MANAGER 2 | 1 | FT | TBD | <i>Upgrade Park Manager I position to oversee and develop a growing park and park staff.</i> |
| Natural Resource Management Specialist | 1 | FT | 2024 | <i>To plan and execute natural resource management objectives such as habitat restoration, management, and the monitoring of keystone species. To work with external partners such as the University of TN ag extension, Southeastern Grassland Initiative, Quails Unlimited, etc.</i> |
| TOTAL | 5 | | | |

Customer Service

Limited data set. Only 17 responses. Net Promoter Score: 71

| Platform / Site | Year | Customer Satisfaction Level |
|-----------------|------|-----------------------------|
| Trip Advisor | | 4.5 |
| Google | | 4.8 |
| Facebook | | 4 |

Professional Development and Training

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

- Medical responder training
- Swiftwater Rescue
- Search and Rescue
- Burn Boss Certification
- Red Card (prescribed fire)
- Habitat management training
- PMTI
- Understanding Bias Training
- Trail Master Builder
- Routine management training
- Routine law enforcement 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. High speed internet
- b. Add adaptive ramp/piers at boat launches
- c. Upgrade staff workspace at 'maintenance barn', including restroom and work/break area separate from tools and chemicals
- d. Riverbank stabilization
- e. Storage solution for restrooms
- f. Water bottle refill station
- g. Fence replacement at Kelly House
- h. Acquisition for boundary integrity
- i. Park hours sign (custom)

2. **Operations and Staffing**
 - a. Full-time maintenance position
3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
 - a. Bluebird Barn retrofit as programming space
 - b. Trail re-routes at Upland inner trail
 - c. Trail bridge
 - d. ADA bird blind at Wayne's Pond

Mid-Term Recommendations (2-5 years)

1. **Site and Facilities**
 - a. Pedestrian Bridge from Newman's Islands to Mutton Hollow Landing
 - b. Park offices
 - c. Shade along ADA trail
 - d. Pavilion/shelter at main trailhead
 - e. Grassland observation deck along 'hedgerow trail'
 - f. Restroom at the end of Kelly Ln.
2. **Operations and Staffing**
 - a. Full-time administrative position
 - b. Natural Resource Management Specialist position
 - c. Manager I position upgrade to Manager II
3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**

Long-Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. **Site and Facilities**
 - a. Replace CTX restroom with stick built
 - b. Improve (widen) the road to Seven Islands Landing
2. **Operations and Staffing**
 - a. Additional maintenance position
 - b. Natural Resource Management Specialist
3. **Customer Service / Visitor Experience**
 - a. Visitor center/office/ gift shop
 - b. Birding Discovery Center

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 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.

Native grassland restoration and management is the primary focus of the management efforts at Seven Islands State Birding Park. The Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) has been identified as a target or "umbrella" species at the park. Habitat management is geared toward providing quality habitat for the Northern Bobwhite. By doing so, habitat is made available to a host of other grassland obligates, such as Dicksissel (*Spiza americana*), and Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*). Early successional habitat ten (native grasslands at Seven Islands) is managed primarily by prescribed burning on a rotational basis.

Native pollinators are a secondary focus at Seven Islands. To improve the availability of pollen, nectar, and host plants for native pollinators, native forbs, legumes, and wildflowers are maintained in the native warm-season grass fields. These plants increase biodiversity in the grasslands and attract a multitude of insects that serve as food for birds. Woodlands, riparian areas, ponds, and wetland habitats are also present and actively managed at Seven Islands to maintain biodiversity and species composition. Current objectives in these areas include invasive species eradication, wetland expansion, stream bank stabilization, and improving woodland habitat for owls and other avian species.

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. Prescribed burns
- B. Land acquisition
- C. Invasive species removal
- D. Develop/use habitat management App
- E. Cultural resource management plan
- F. Natural resource management plan
- G. Interpretive management plan
- H. Dumpsite mitigation

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 |
|----------------------------|-----------|--------------------|--|
| Grassland habitat | 260 acres | Fair | Most of the grassland habitat provides an adequate structure for supporting the needs of grassland birds and other associated wildlife. Some fields are overstocked and in need of mitigation. Some areas show encroachment from invasive/non-native species and woody vegetation. |

| | | | |
|------------------------|-----------|------|---|
| Upland hardwood forest | 78 acres | Good | The structure is improved following midstory removal efforts and prescribed burns. and supporting a variety of ephemeral plant species and woodland birds. Some invasive species are present. |
| Riparian corridors | 21,765 ft | Poor | Riparian corridors have severe erosion and significant invasive plant species, notably, microstegium. |
| Wetlands/wet meadow | 3 acres | Fair | Wetland and pond areas require continued management to remove invasive and undesirable species. |

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 |
|------------------------|---|----------|
| Grassland habitat | Public Use: <i>Managed access limited to trails.</i> General Management: <i>The grasslands are managed as to remain in an early stage of succession</i> | High |
| Upland hardwood forest | Public Use: <i>Managed access limited to trails.</i> General Management: <i>Midstory removal and prescribed burns have been applied to the upland hardwoods around the Hickory Ridge Trail to great effect. These techniques should be applied to the rest of the woodland habitat in the park. In some areas, topography makes this challenging. Continue collaboration with the University of Tennessee Wildlife and Fisheries program to achieve goals.</i> | Moderate |
| Riparian corridors | Public Use: <i>Managed access limited to trails and boat launch areas.</i> General Management: <i>The riparian areas are managed with prescribed fire to suppress invasive species and maintain viewsheds. Pursue collaboration with TVA to address erosion issues where needed. Mitigate erosion using native plantings where feasible.</i> | High |

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|------|
| Wetlands/ponds/wet meadow | <p>Public Use: <i>Managed access limited to trails.</i></p> <p>General Management: <i>The wetland area at Wayne’s Pond is being expanded by holding more water in the pond with the water control structure. Continue to manage the area for invasive species and undesirable vegetation (such as Box Elder). Reroute flooded section of trail with new trail bridge.</i></p> | High |
|---------------------------|---|------|

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 |
|---|-------------------|
| Boundary integrity/habitat restoration management/viewshed management | Short – Long Term |

Supplemental Information

All management practices and land use must be compliant with an existing conservation easement. The conservation easement is held by the Foothills Land Conservancy and enforced by the Seven Islands Foundation which restricts the development and use of the land.

Proper habitat management is critical for Seven Islands to deliver on its brand promise as a ‘birding’ park.

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 mission of Seven Islands State Birding Park is to manage diverse bird habitat and to create unique opportunities for the public to observe and learn about the conservation of birds and their critical habitats. The purpose of interpretive and educational programming at Seven Islands State Birding Park is to support this mission by guiding visitors in making connections with the birds and other natural resources of the park. It is also to help visitors form an understanding of the importance of habitat management and the tools and techniques used in the park.

The primary interpretive theme of Seven Islands State Birding Park is habitat management through maintaining native plant communities. The Secondary theme is to promote and create recreational birding experiences. All interpretive and educational programming conducted in the park should relate to these interpretive themes.

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 the 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:

- Develop partnerships with underrepresented, misrepresented, and unrepresented communities in our local area. (Afro-Outdoors Knoxville, Birdability, Catalyst Sports, etc.)
- Participate in outside initiatives, such as Black Birders Week & Birdability Week, whose goals are to make outdoor opportunities more inclusive.
- Provide outreach programming in underserved communities and/or assist with funding and logistics for transportation needed to bring people from these communities to the park.
- Develop interpretive programs and materials that allow all people to relate or ‘see themselves’ in the ‘story’ of birding and habitat restoration, preservation, and management.

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:

- Use technology such as social media, virtual tours, and QR codes to make content about the resources in the park more accessible.
- Use of ‘apps’ by volunteers to collect data for community science projects.
- Use nest cameras to monitor nesting birds and share nesting stories with the public.

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

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

Action Plan:

- Develop a program outline for all the core programs presented at the park. Include programs meeting the criteria above. Upload outlines to SharePoint to make them accessible to all park staff.

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

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

Action Plan:

- Provide a variety of birding programs led by park staff and other local birding organizations. Include “Birding Without Barriers” programs for accessible birding opportunities.

- Contract with local boating organizations to offer kayak rentals and shuttle services at Seven Islands Landing.

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 providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represents the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

| FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE GOALS | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Current Cost Recovery (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 | 6.5% | 6.18% | 6.43% | 6.68% | 6.96% | 7.18% |

