

TENNESSEE STATE PARKS

Department of Environment and Conservation
Division of State Parks

POLICY DIRECTIVE: 139

CLIMBING MANAGEMENT PLAN, POLICY & PROCEDURES

First Issue Date: July 1, 2017

I. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to establish a necessary means of managing rock climbing activities in Tennessee State Parks to protect the natural resources while providing park patrons with rock climbing opportunities.

II. SCOPE:

This policy shall apply to all Tennessee State Parks that offer rock climbing activities.

III. AUTHORITY:

Tenn. Code Ann. § 11-1-101; Rules of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of State Parks: 0400-02-02.

IV. BACKGROUND:

Tennessee State Parks carries out its Mission “to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic areas and provide a variety of safe, quality, outdoor experiences through a well-planned and professionally managed system of State Parks.” The Tennessee State Parks system includes 56 State Parks, which offer a variety of rock climbing opportunities. This Climbing Management Plan (“CMP”) outlines a strategy for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Bureau of Parks and Conservation (“TDEC”) to protect the natural and cultural environments of the State Parks while providing climbing opportunities to park visitors.

This plan has been prepared to:

1. Meet the TDEC mandate to provide a variety of quality outdoor recreational experiences and manage recreational use;
2. Protect the natural and cultural environment;
3. Provide rock climbing opportunities; and
4. Protect the experiences of other park visitors.

V. GENERAL:

1. Objectives

The following are the objectives of the CMP:

- a. Protect natural resources, especially sensitive, threatened, or endangered plants, animals and ecological communities;
- b. Provide for a diversity of recreational experiences, including climbing;
- c. Engage the climbing community in cooperative stewardship of natural resources and the climbing experience;
- d. Build a foundation of data (status of natural resources, climbing routes and use patterns, and visitor effects on resource values) as a basis for future decision making;
- e. Provide a clear decision-making framework and action timetable;
- f. Initiate a continuing planning process that responds to new data and changes over time; and
- g. Assure regular monitoring of use and resources.

2. Management Actions

- a. **Inventory and Mapping of Climbing Areas and Routes:** Each State Park should create an inventory of climbing activity and map current climbing and bouldering routes including number of climbers, routes used, and the effect on the natural environment. State Parks should also study the types, amount, frequency, and seasonality of rock climbing that occurs in each park as well as socio-demographic information on rock climbers using the park. State Park staff should work with the climbing community to identify climbing routes and areas. This information will assist in understanding the relationship of climbing to resource impacts and will help guide future management prescriptions.
- b. **Inventory of Sensitive Habitats and Rare Species:** Each State Park, with help from The Division of Natural Areas, should also conduct a resource inventory of important ecological communities and all species, especially rare, threatened, and endangered species. A detailed inventory will allow the park to develop appropriate management prescriptions for climbing routes. Because some cliff lines are being used by climbers, a concentrated inventory, focusing on rare and sensitive resources, is necessary to adequately assess potential threats in the impacted area.

3. Existing Climbing Routes

- a. **Routes:** Climbing involving ropes, harnesses, and other equipment will be allowed on

existing established routes as defined by State Park staff. State Park staff should work with the climbing community to identify established routes.

- b. **Replacement of Existing Fixed Anchors:** Climbers must contact Park Management prior to replacing existing fixed anchors. The Park may involve local climbing organizations prior to any climber replacing existing hardware. TDEC or Park Management will provide information on ecologically sensitive placement and camouflaging of the anchors.
- c. **Establishing New Climbing Routes:** TDEC has the sole discretion to determine whether a new climbing route is appropriate. Bolts, fixed anchors, and new climbing routes will be allowed by TDEC permit. Permits for new routes will be based on whether sensitive natural or cultural features exist in the area, the recreational opportunity, the quality of the climbing experience, and the density of the routes in the area. TDEC may terminate permits for any reason.

The following criteria will guide and direct the decision on whether to allow new climbing routes based on natural or cultural resource factors:

- i. Are sensitive, threatened, or endangered plant communities, animal communities, or cultural features present near the proposed climbing route?
- ii. If present, are climbing activities likely having an adverse impact on these communities?

If the answer to either question is "no", then further routes may be allowed by permit and Park Management discretion.

If the answer to both questions is yes, TDEC will determine if the impacted resource(s) can be avoided through climber education or temporary or permanent closures of selected climbing routes. If permanent closure is the selected option, appropriate restoration efforts will be conducted. In addition, new routes could be allowed by permit in areas where the species of concern do not exist or are not being impacted.

If the answer to the first question is yes and the second question is unclear or indeterminate, TDEC will conduct further research to determine if climbing activities are having an adverse effect on the species or communities of concern.

VI. POLICIES:

1. Fixed Anchors and Hardware

A TDEC permit is required to install a new bolt, fixed anchor, or establish a new route that requires new bolts or anchors. Climbers must contact Park Management prior to replacing existing fixed anchors. TDEC requires all bolts and other fixed anchors, slings, quick draws, and any other piece of equipment that will be left on the wall for an

extended period to be of a color that blends with the rock in the area. Power drills may be used to install or replaced fixed hardware and must be a part of the TDEC permit, which may establish additional requirements on when and how a power drill may be used. Park Management may require removal of any hardware at any time.

2. Bouldering:

Bouldering is a type of rock climbing defined as climbing on cliffs and boulders at heights low enough to not require ropes or other technical equipment for safety. Bouldering is allowed. Park Management may close any bouldering area if Park Management determines that the activity results in damage to natural resources or if Park Management otherwise deems closure necessary for proper park operations.

3. Rappelling:

Rappelling is the method by which a climber descends a rope, usually by using a mechanical friction device. In State Parks, rappelling is usually practiced by the following users or for the following reasons: 1) search and rescue training by groups such as local police and TDEC; 2) climbers wishing to access the bottom of the cliff; 3) groups practicing climbing and rappelling techniques (i.e., climbing clubs, Boy Scouts); 4) climbers establishing new routes; and 5) as a purely recreational activity. People wishing to rappel often have to use trees for safety anchors, and staging at the top of the cliff can impact sensitive vegetation and erode thin soils. Organized rappelling will be restricted to areas designated by TDEC and proposals for fixed rappel anchors will need to be permitted like new climbing routes Section V, 3(c).

4. Prohibited Activities:

The following activities will be prohibited:

- a. Climbing, rappelling, or bouldering outside designated climbing routes and areas;
- b. Climbing, rappelling, or bouldering on, under, or within a restricted area closed for protection of a known archeological resource, protected feature, or sensitive area as determined by Park Management
- c. Chipping or gluing;
- d. "Gardening" or the intentional removal of vegetation to "clean" a route;
- e. Using trees as climbing anchors without ensuring nominal impact on the tree;
- f. Fires and camping anywhere other than a designated campsite; and
- g. Leaving fixed ropes for extended periods for the purpose of ascending and descending (rappelling) rock walls. The amount of time that constitutes an extended period is solely in Park Management's discretion.

5. Chalk:

TDEC encourages climbers to use the minimum amount of chalk necessary to climb safely. Climbers should clean up chalk and tick marks. TDEC will work with climbers and climbing groups to coordinate chalk clean-ups for high visibility climbing and bouldering areas.

6. Route Top-Outs:

TDEC encourages climbers to continue the environmentally-sensitive practice of preventing top-outs by stopping climbing and bouldering routes below the cliff or boulder rim. This provides a degree of protection for the rim ecosystem. Should routes top-out in the future, TDEC may prohibit the practice or require route top-anchors to protect the cliff line ecosystem.

7. Trails, Parking, and Access:

TDEC will eliminate duplicate, braided, or unnecessary trails. TDEC discourages parking, crossing, camping, climbing, or bouldering on private land. Use of private land for these or any other activity must be with the express permission of the landowner. Climbers are encouraged to respect private land, private property rights, and TDEC boundaries.

8. Closures:

TDEC discourages multiple social trails and heavily impacted zones at the base of climbs and will employ signs, barriers, revegetation, and possible specific route closure as a means to prevent these impacts. TDEC reserves the right to close any area, rock feature, or climbing route to protect wildlife, natural or cultural resources, and visitor experiences. Permanent closures will result in site restoration by TDEC.

TDEC may temporarily or permanently close or remove existing routes for reasons such as emergencies, substantiated impacts to natural or archeological resources, or other management reasons. Alternatives to closure or route removal may be taken prior to full closure including educational signage, or temporary seasonal closures. Prior to closure, TDEC may work with the climbing community on any closures under consideration. Climbing outside these routes shall require a written permit from TDEC.

9. Safety:

Using the park is not a risk-free experience, and climbing is an inherently dangerous activity. TDEC cannot guarantee the safety of climbers or other park visitors. TDEC will not maintain any climbing routes or associated climbing hardware and software. TDEC makes no warranty as to the suitability or safety of climbing routes or using the Parks for climbing.

TDEC will not assume responsibility for the condition of climbing terrain, routes, or the acts or omissions of climbers. TDEC explicitly disclaims all responsibility for the safety

of equipment, bolts, or other anchor systems in the park. See T.C.A. 70-7-101 through -103.

10. Organized Groups or Commercial Guide Services:

Organized groups of 10 (ten) or more must register at a Park office or online pursuant to Section 13 below prior to climbing.

11. Climbing Impact:

All climbers must follow all TDEC rules and regulations and ensure minimal impact to the Park and environment.

12. Climbing Practices:

Climbers are expected to comply with climbing industry standards and best safety practices.

13. Registration:

All climbers should register with the Park or online as described below prior to climbing in any Tennessee State Park.

Climbers may register in-person at the Park's office or they may register online.