

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

Lamar Alexander Rocky Fork State Park

Management Direction Statement
Updates and Revisions

501 Rocky Fork Road
Flag Pond, TN 37657

January 2, 2019

Prepared by the Division of External Affairs



This document contains the department's response to written comments received during the public comment period for the proposed updates and revisions to the Lamar Alexander Rocky Fork State Park (LARFSP) Management Direction Statement (MDS). The MDS planning document exists for all new state park units and is a precursor to what will become the Lamar Alexander Rocky Fork State Park Management Plan (the "Plan"). Please review the Plan online at tnstateparks.com/about/planning-process for more information and details not otherwise described below.

TDEC received written comments at the public meeting that was held in Flag Pond, TN on November 12, 2018, and via the TDEC Public Participation webpage up until December 12, 2018. Oral comments and statements received during the public meeting are not included in this document.

The mission of Tennessee State Parks is, ***"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 mission of Lamar Alexander Rocky Fork State Park is ***"to protect, preserve and improve the natural and historical resources of the state park and the Rocky Fork Watershed."*** All decisions made about developing and managing Rocky Fork have been made with Rocky Fork's mission and the Tennessee State Parks' mission in mind.

Many of the comments received during this comment period reflected on the rural, wild beauty of LARFSP, the uniqueness of the park and its value as a natural resource. Maintaining Rocky Fork's ecosystem is a priority for TDEC. The department is planning to use mitigation to offset some of the park's development plans. TDEC and Tennessee State Parks are grateful for each comment received since public feedback is valuable and critical in our decision making processes. Several comments in this document express concern for lack of public input. Since 2006, TDEC in collaboration with other conservation agencies, have engaged in multiple public input processes and methods related to acquiring, preserving and managing Rocky Fork. For approximately two and half years after the establishment of the state park in October of 2012, state park leadership facilitated the Rocky Fork Trail Users Group. Meetings were held every two months in Unicoi County, TN - from May, 2013 to February, 2016 - for the purpose of developing immediate access to the park for all citizens and user groups, and discussing collaborative planning between all agencies. The committee included representatives from TDEC-State Parks, TDEC-Division of Water Resources, US Forest Service, Unicoi County Commission, Town of Unicoi, Town of Erwin, Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association (SORBA), Backcountry Horsemen of East Tennessee, ETSU, and Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA).

In addition, TDEC hosted two public input/work sessions in November of 2015 to gather feedback and input on amenities people wanted to see in the park. From those reports, the department began developing tentative plans for what the park could offer the citizens of the state, its visitors and local area.

Several comments were received about developing a road within the park, state parks agrees that any road construction should be done with the utmost care. The planned road follows an existing

road pathway, that project is .7 of a mile. Any unavoidable impacts to streams or to a lesser extent, wetlands that will occur as a result of park development will require mitigation for the specific resource type in accordance with state and federal rules protecting water quality. Neither degradation nor a net loss of resource value can occur as a result of permitted activities in accordance with state rules. Past logging and forestry practices have resulted in the modification and diversion of several streams from their original channels in the park area. These streams are Exceptional Tennessee Waters because they are within a state park and are naturally reproducing trout streams. TDEC and its contractor, in consultation with TDOT are proposing to restore several of these streams. For every foot of stream impacted through stream crossings by the access road project, the mitigation plan is proposing to restore 1.5 feet within the park.

Thank you for your comments and input. Your feedback assists in our decision making process.