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# State parks director takes tour of Chatt-Bend with eye toward promotion

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Becky Kelley, director of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites, was in Coweta Friday for a site visit at Chattahoochee Bend State Park.

Kelley, along with State Rep. Lynn Smith, R-Newnan, got a tour of the park from new Park Manager Tim Banks.

Banks, who came on-board Oct. 15, replaces Trint Wicklund, who was the park's first manager.

As they rode along the park's main road, Bobwhite Way, Banks said one of the challenges is getting grass established along the shoulders, following road construction. Once grass is established, the silt fence can be removed.

A group of road cyclists visited the park last week and said they enjoyed the hilly, winding road into the park, Banks said.

Getting more and more people interested in the park is part of the state's strategy of making state parks self sustaining, according to Kelley.

The "Adirondack" group camping area is very popular, Banks said. The two main RV and tent camping areas are popular, too, but there is a serious need for some shade trees in the campgrounds.

The park currently has a small collection of "Nucanoes" and standard canoes, but a mechanism hasn't been set up yet for them to be rented. The boats were provided by the Friends of Chattahoochee Bend State Park and Dick's Sporting Goods.

Banks said he's thinking about setting up a rack at the visitor center so the boats can be rented. Park visitors can then launch the boats from the Hwy. 16 bridge or from McIntosh Reserve, but will have to get out of the river at the park's boat ramp. There is a boat launch, platform camping, and picnic tables located at the northern end of the park, where paddlers can stop for lunch or to camp.

Banks hopes to have the rentals available by the end of the month.

Volunteers have built several miles of hiking trails at the park, and volunteer groups have designed and "flagged" mountain bike and horse trails. But before any further action can be taken, those trail routes have to be approved by the botanist and archeologist at the state office.

Banks said one big factor in getting the horse trails built and open is all the supporting infrastructure — which is expensive. "It is not just building trails," Banks. And "the facilities have got to be sustainable." The trails have to be built in a way that will not create erosion, and the equestrian facilities have to pay for themselves.

Though it might be a while before there can be regular horse trails open to the public, Banks hopes to take advantage of the many miles of logging roads crisscrossing the park in the interim. He said by next spring he would like to offer equestrian events with limited use of the logging roads.

"We don't want to dampen their enthusiasm," Banks said of the equestrian and mountain bike volunteers.

A restricted fund can be set up for those who would like to donate to equestrian facilities.

Banks would also like to see the park host a "paddlers' rendezvous."

Banks, Smith, and Kelley then traveled to the northern end of the park. Park visitors can currently only access that area by hiking trail or the river. Eventually, plans are to move and improve the existing dirt road that leads to that area of the park, which includes two large fields.

The existing road cuts very close to nearby homes and will have to be rerouted for permanent access. But the fields can still be used for some special events, Banks said. "We can do events for 400 to 500 people here now."

Kelley said the state parks division is trying to find ways to get people excited about Georgia parks. When the division started seeing budgetary challenges several years ago, it started asking each park to do a site business plan, she said. And each park's plan should be

something that can be presented to the county commissioners, the business community, and others, she said.

There's no problem retaining people that already like state parks, she said. It's recruiting the new people that is the challenge.

She'd like to see things such as "camping 101" classes, and events with the first-time campers club to help people get involved in camping and other outdoor activities.

"All it takes is one hook," Kelly said.

Events taking place this weekend include a guided hike at 11 a.m. today, starting at the visitor center. There will be a Geocaching Adventure at 1 p.m., and primitive fire building skills will be taught at 3:30 p.m. There will be an arts and crafts session at 5 p.m., and there will be an 11 a.m. guided hike on Sunday.

Banks "is a great asset," Kelly said. "He's bringing such a broad perspective, of understanding the community and being a part of the community."

Chattahoochee Bend State Park is located off Flat Rock Road in western Coweta County. Take Hwy. 34 West to Thomas Powers Road and follow the signs.

For more information, call 770-254-7271 or visit [www.georgiastateparks.org/chattahoocheebend](http://www.georgiastateparks.org/chattahoocheebend) .

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