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Ryerson's 'Revisioning' project moving forward

By Steve Barrett For the Observer-Reporter newsroom@observer-reporter.com April 26, 2021 Publication: Observer-Reporter (Washington, PA) Word Count: 656

Ryerson Station State Park Manager Alan Johnson was not surprised when the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources announced earlier this month attendance at state parks across Pennsylvania continued to be strong.

DCNR reported February saw an estimated 1.461 million people visit the state parks throughout the system, which was about 156,000 more people than the same month in 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic took hold. DCNR spokesman Terry Brady said the visitor total count was "through the roof."

Johnson said Ryerson's attendance numbers reflects DCNR's statistical data. As the county's state park near Wind Ridge in western Greene County continues its ongoing and massive "Revision Ryerson" plan – which includes the modernization of its campgrounds and the construction of a new aquatics center – Johnson said he was encouraged by the attendance numbers over the past year, particularly for the campground.

"Although overall park attendance is hard to quantify for the 2020 season for a variety of reasons – most notably being the pool complex construction project – I can, however, report that even though the campground was closed from mid-March 2020 through late May (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), our attendance in the campground was 128.25% higher in the campground than it was in 2017 – the last full year of data we have prior to closing in mid-2018 for renovations," Johnson said.

"With regards to campground use, we have experienced greater wintertime use in late 2020 and early 2021 than in years past, which is directly related to converting from a rustic to a modern campground and the additional deluxe camping cottages that we constructed during the recently completed renovation project there," he continued. "In addition, looking forward, there are already substantially more reservations for the summer season than we have had in recent years."

According to Johnson, when comparing to attendance in January through March 2018 to the same time frame this year, campsite attendance was up approximately 155%, cottage use was up 110% and overall camping – or combined attendance – was up 127%. He added that he has seen many visitors from outside the county and state, traveling from areas such as South Dakota, South Carolina, Virginia and Montana.

The "Revision Ryerson" plan was announced in June 2015 after it was determined the dam at Duke Lake, which was suspected of being damaged by nearby longwall mining a decade earlier, could not be rebuilt due to continued ground movement.

A \$36 million settlement payment in 2013 from Consol Energy, which denied responsibility for the damage to the dam, is being used for a multitude of upgrades at the park for its campgrounds, pool area, trails and streams for fishing.

Johnson said construction of the new aquatics center – which will consist of an upgraded pool and a spray park – is expected to conclude in 2021, and he anticipates "heavy usage" of that facility when it officially opens to the public.

"We are making steady gains on that project," he said. "We had to temporarily halt construction last spring following state guidelines (due to COVID-19) but we resumed construction in May, and weather conditions this past winter forced us to shut down the project for about a month-and-a-half. However, we are now on track to hopefully have the pool complex open sometime this summer."

Johnson said a new parking area with solar panels is also being installed where the old pool was previously located.

He also said officials recently reviewed and provided comments on the 60% design of the DCNR portion of the overall site restoration being undertaken as part of "Revision Ryerson."

The park is in the process of seeking lifeguards to work at the new aquatic center when it

opens. Interested candidates are encouraged to apply online at www.employment.pa.gov.

Johnson said the park is planning to hire an environmental education specialist to coordinate different educational programs for the public.

Johnson said reservations for campsites and/or cabins can be made by calling 1-888-PA Parks or visiting <https://pennsylvaniastateparks.reserveamerica.com>.

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