

Have you visited your state park lately?

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According to the National Park Service, corporate CEOs say quality of life for employees is the third-most important factor in locating a business, behind only access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor. Additionally, the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* reported that owners of small companies ranked recreation, parks, and open space as the highest priority in choosing a new location for their businesses.

Isn't it nice to know that we can actually increase our community's wealth and enjoy a spectacular quality of life by preserving and creating more parks and open spaces? It has been shown that space conservation, which is a one-time investment, can boost property values and increase the tax base long after the land is paid for. It is not just a concern for industry location. In surveys, homebuyers identify nearby open space and trails as among the top attractions for choosing a home. (See *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Spaces*, published by The Trust for Public Land.)

In addition, natural open spaces support fishing, hunting, and other wildlife-based tourism. By attracting both businesses and residents, parks and open spaces are clearly important to a community's economic future, guaranteeing both quality of life and economic health.

In a 1912 speech, Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, declared, "There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country." Roosevelt created his legacy as the "Conservation President" by establishing five national parks and promoting the enactment of the Antiquities Act of 1906 that enabled him to designate eighteen natural and cultural landmarks as national monuments. The Antiquities Act and Roosevelt's continued presence on the national scene had an impact on the National Park Service that extended far beyond his term in office.

Fortunately, states have also taken responsibility for the conservation of America's resources. The South Carolina State Parks system consists of more than 80,000 acres that protect and preserve some of South Carolina's most fascinating natural and cultural resources.

Our state park system began with the Civilian Conservation Corps ("CCC"), part of President F.D. Roosevelt's New Deal which came to our state in 1933. According to the SC Department of Archives and History website, the CCC provided jobs to thousands of unemployed young men and World War I Veterans. Part of the work they performed in SC included soil conservation, reforestation, fire prevention, and the development of recreational areas. South Carolina's first state park opened at Myrtle Beach in July 1936, and by 1938 fourteen state parks had opened.

When the CCC was officially disbanded in 1942, 16 state parks had been created and were operated by the SC Forestry Commission. Today, there are 46 state parks operated under the authority of the SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism.

The park system not only maintains and preserves some of the state's greatest natural and historical resources, but it adds tremendously to the state's tourism industry. According to the South Carolina Parks, Recreation and Tourism Accountability Report for Fiscal Year 2004-2005, in 2004, the total economic impact, both directly and indirectly, of the travel and tourism industry in South Carolina was \$14 billion. This demand generated jobs for 167,000 South Carolinians.

Tourism brings in visitors from out-of-state as well as in-state travelers that economically benefit the communities through which they travel. State Parks are significant destinations and create tourism traffic for South Carolina communities. In 2005, there were 6,700,000 visitors to all SC state parks. State and local tax revenues from travel and tourism totaled one billion dollars, equivalent to \$664.00 per household in SC. Tourism creates a positive return for our state as the ratio of tax revenues from tourism to public funds spent due to tourism was \$2.46 to \$1.00.

In Kershaw County, we have a tremendous asset in our N.R. Goodale State Park. The park was dedicated in 1955, and named for a local forester and prominent political figure. In 1973, the county donated the park to the state.

Picnic shelters and the Claytor Arrants Community Building are located at the park. These facilities are available for rent and may be perfect for your next gathering. The 763-acre park features a lake and natural areas. On the Grist Mill Lake there is a 3-mile canoe and kayak trail beneath the shady canopy of cypress trees. Additionally, a nature trail traces the perimeter of the lake. The lake also offers excellent fishing either from the shore or from a private boat (electric trolling motors are allowed).

The park also includes the historic 9-hole Pickett-Thomas golf course. While there is a lack of state funding for upkeep, members of the community are stepping up to the plate to revitalize this course for public use. Because Goodale State Park fights for every dollar it gets from the state, the park is fortunate to have dedicated volunteers that help maintain and improve the park.

In his book, *On Walden Pond*, Henry David Thoreau reminds us that, "We can never have enough of nature." I hope that the citizens of Kershaw County will never take its precious natural resources for granted, and that we will cultivate our appreciation of the natural wealth and beauty that we are blessed to have in our area. Our Goodale State Park is a major component of that wealth, and deserves our appreciation and attention.

For more information on Goodale State Park and our other South Carolina State Parks, visit www.southcarolinaparks.com.