



LAKE JAMES STATE PARK IS PARK OF THE YEAR!

Hot off the press - Lake James State Park in Burke and McDowell counties has been named the North Carolina 2014 State Park of the Year by the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation!

The park was chosen for its "exemplary contribution to the North Carolina state parks mission of stewardship, public service and education," and specifically recognized for initiatives in natural resource management, volunteerism and expanded recreation opportunities.

"Lake James State Park is fulfilling the promise it has held since 2004 when it was expanded with 2,900 acres of property acquired from Crescent Resources Inc. Its staff has been adept at balancing exciting new recreation opportunities with careful protection of natural resources on that property," said Mike Murphy, state parks director. "This exemplary performance led to its selection as Park of the Year."

During the year, Lake James State Park opened a 15-mile network of mountain biking trails and staged multiple special events including an ultra-marathon and the popular Catawba Riverfest. The park's

rangers reached more than 4,000 visitors with special interpretive programs, and guided volunteers for more than 1,100 hours, a 400-percent increase over the previous year. The maintenance staff continued trail construction and launched a project to build 30 boat-in campsites on the Long Arm Peninsula (see related story). The division's natural resource staff and park rangers initiated a prescribed burn program and a kudzu management program, and staged a 24-hour "Bioblitz" to inventory hundreds of plant and animal species in the park.

"It is an incredible honor to be chosen Park of the Year," said Superintendent Nora Coffey. "This award is an acknowledgement from the rest of the division of a truth that I've known since I came here, that the maintenance mechanics, rangers, seasonals and volunteers at Lake James State Park make up one of the hardest working, innovative, knowledgeable and friendliest staffs of any facility in North Carolina. We will continue to strive for excellence in the coming years to make our visitors safe and comfortable to experience the natural beauty and recreational opportunities Lake James has to offer."

The state parks system began choosing a Park of the Year in 2010 with nominations from each of four districts. Each of 40 state parks and recreation areas submits an annual report that is objectively scored on progress in recreation, natural resource protection, sustainability, public safety and environmental education. Final judging is by senior and peer administrators. To honor the Park of the Year, a medallion is attached to a hiking staff that is passed to the current award recipient each year. Crowders Mountain State Park in Gaston County was honored in 2013.

"It probably comes as no surprise that the Friends of Lake James State Park thinks this prestigious award is well-deserved," said group president Eric Jenkins. "The park staff is second to none and the communities around Lake James are so lucky to have such a wonderful facility. The Friends group is committed to supporting the park in any way it can to continue its record of excellence."

Lake James State Park was authorized in 1987, encompasses 3,515 acres and reported 398,148 visitors in 2013.

If you would like to receive our monthly events list, contact Nora Coffey at nora.coffey@ncparks.gov. Please note: In an effort to reduce idle time, please make a reasonable effort to arrive a few minutes before the times set for programs.

MOUNTAIN BIKE NIGHT RIDE – Wednesday, Dec. 31

Back by popular demand, the Lake James State Park mountain bike trails will once again be open late for experienced riders to run the track after the sun has set. Park staff and volunteers will be on hand to sign-in and sign out participants from 5 – 7:30 p.m. there will even be warm refreshments provided by the Friends of Lake James State park and an educational program for family members who are not going to ride but wish to experience the park at night. Riders must bring their own light source and an understanding that the park cannot be held liable for any injuries or damage to equipment that may occur during this activity.

1ST DAY HIKE – Thursday, Jan. 1

Come and take part in a growing tradition at North Carolina state parks by participating in the annual 1st Day Hike. What better way to start the year than with an invigorating trek along a beautiful trail at the reigning Park of the Year? Join Ranger Clay Veasey on the Paddy's Creek Trail and bring the whole family for what promises to be a morning of camaraderie and learning. Ranger Veasey will be pointing out wild, edible plants along the way. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 10 a.m. Wear clothing appropriate for the weather and bring a clean slate.

WINTER BOAT TOUR – Saturday, Jan. 3

Lake James plays host to many species of waterfowl during the winter months, as well as the critters that stay here year-round. As an added bonus, winter offers some of the most majestic views of the Linville Gorge and the Black Mountain Range of the year. Ranger Clay Veasey will be your captain and guide aboard the park patrol boat as we search for loons, otters, eagles and scenic vistas. The weather could be blustery, so be sure to dress warmly if you are one of the eight lucky participants. Registration is required and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Call the park office at 828-584-7728 to reserve your spot. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area East Picnic Shelter at 1:45 p.m. for a briefing and prompt 2 p.m. departure.

SCOPING OUT WATERFOWL – Sunday, Jan. 4

Lake James is a winter stopover for many ducks, grebes, loons and other migratory waterfowl. These birds are once again massing for their northward migration in anticipation of the spring breeding season. Park Ranger Clay Veasey will have his field guide and a spotting scope to help participants enjoy viewing some of these colorful travelers before they go. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 10 a.m.

Continued Next Page

COLD-BLOODED CRITTERS – Saturday, Jan. 10

Some of the most misunderstood and often feared animals of Lake James are the resident reptiles and amphibians, but do you really know what makes them tick and why they're so important to the environment? Come to the Catawba River Area basement classroom and help us kick-off the Year of the Amphibian in style. We'll talk about the differences between reptiles and amphibians and which ones can be found in the park. Meet staff reptile and amphibian expert, Ranger Kevin Bischof at 3 p.m. and be prepared to meet a real, live cold-blooded critter. This program will be held indoors.

SEARCHING FOR EAGLES – Saturday, Jan. 17

Easily the nation's most iconic and easily identified birds (at least the adults), the bald eagle is the cherished symbol of our great country, but what do you know about its life cycle and habits? Lake James hosts a healthy population of eagles throughout the year – including a nest site that has been active for more than a decade. Join Ranger Jamie Cameron on a quest to spot one of these majestic birds at one of several lookout points within Lake James State Park. Learn about the inspiring comeback of eagle populations, how to identify them and how they fit into the ecosystem. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. Meet at the Catawba River Area office building at 10 a.m.

**DISCOVER THE HOLLY DISCOVERY TRAIL – Sunday, Jan. 18**

The Holly Discovery Trail is an award-winning trail that offers 18 interactive stations, specifically designed for young people. Meet Park Ranger Jamie Cameron as he leads a hike along this ¾-mile trek and introduces the wonders of Lake James to the next generation of nature lovers. The hike starts at 10 a.m. from the Holly Discovery Trailhead, located in the Paddy's Creek Area of the park. Bring warm clothes and your imagination and be prepared to discover the Holly Discovery.

PADDY'S CREEK HIKE – Saturday, Jan. 24

The Paddy's Creek Trail is a favorite among park visitors and staff and for good reason. This gently rolling 1-mile track follows the shoreline of the Paddy's Creek cove at Lake James and offers a wonderful opportunity to observe wildlife, visit the remains of an old home site and take in the beautiful vistas of the lake. Park Ranger Earl Weaver will lead the hike. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 9 a.m. Please wear clothing appropriate for the weather.

Continued Next Page

LAKE CHANNEL OVERLOOK HIKE – Sunday, Jan. 25

Check out one of the best views on the lake with Park Ranger Earl Weaver. The Lake Channel Overlook Trail is a moderate, 1.5-mile route through a section of the park that received a restorative prescribed fire in late 2014. Come see for yourself the amazing habitat improvement that can be achieved through a thoughtful prescribed burning program and bring your camera to record the awesome overlook view of Lake James. Meet at the Catawba River Area parking lot at 2 p.m.

JUNIOR RANGER BOOT CAMP – Saturday, Jan.31

Do you think you have what it takes to join the prestigious ranks of the North Carolina State Park Junior Rangers? If you do, the rangers at Lake James State Park want you! The Junior Ranger program is for kids ages 6-12 who have an interest in nature and stewardship. Join Park Ranger Jamie Cameron to receive your Junior Ranger workbook and participate in several activities that will put you well on your way towards earning your Junior Ranger certificate at patch. We'll meet at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 3 p.m. You must pre-register for this program by calling the park office at 828-584-7728.

VOLUNTEER TRAIL DAY – Sunday, Feb. 1

With nearly 25 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails and expanding, Lake James State Park's staff has its hands full when it comes to keeping the trail system in pristine condition. To those who use the trails for recreation and exercise, here's your opportunity to give back; Park Ranger Jamie Cameron will coordinate volunteers with marching orders and clean-up materials to do a little mid-winter housekeeping. Meet at the Catawba River Area office building at 2 p.m. Please call the park office at 828-584-7728 to let them know you plan to attend.

LAKE CHANNEL OVERLOOK EXPEDITION – Saturday, Feb. 7

Check out one of the best views on the lake with Park Ranger Kevin Bischof. The Lake Channel Overlook Trail is a moderate, 1.5-mile route through a section of the park that received a restorative prescribed fire in late 2014. Come see for yourself the amazing habitat improvement that can be achieved through a thoughtful prescribed burning program and bring your camera to record the awesome overlook view of Lake James. Meet at the Catawba River Area parking lot at 10 a.m.

**PREDATORS OF LAKE JAMES – Sunday, Feb. 8**

Predators come in all shapes and sizes; those with feathers, those with scales and those with fur – each is unique in its own way. Meet Park Ranger Kevin Bischof to learn about some of the predators of Lake James and their adaptations that make them so effective in the hunt for prey. This will be an indoor program and includes a craft activity to design and create your very own predator. Bring your creativity and enthusiasm to the Catawba River Area basement classroom at 10 a.m.

Continued Next Page

LAKE JAMES BOAT TOUR – Saturday, Feb. 14

Lake James plays host to many species of waterfowl during the winter months, as well as the critters that stay here year-round. As an added bonus, winter offers some of the most majestic views of the Linville Gorge and the Black Mountain Range of the year. Ranger Earl Weaver will be your captain and guide aboard the park patrol boat as we search for loons, otters, eagles and scenic vistas. The weather could be blustery, so be sure to dress warmly if you are one of the eight lucky participants. Registration is required and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Call the park office at 828-584-7728 to reserve your spot. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area East Picnic Shelter at 1:45 p.m. for a briefing and prompt 2 p.m. departure.

LAKE JAMES BOAT TOUR – Sunday, Feb. 15

Lake James plays host to many species of waterfowl during the winter months, as well as the critters that stay here year-round. As an added bonus, winter offers some of the most majestic views of the Linville Gorge and the Black Mountain Range of the year. Ranger Earl Weaver will be your captain and guide aboard the park patrol boat as we search for loons, otters, eagles and scenic vistas. The weather could be blustery, so be sure to dress warmly if you are one of the eight lucky participants. Registration is required and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Call the park office at 828-584-7728 to reserve your spot. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area East Picnic Shelter at 1:45 p.m. for a briefing and prompt 2 p.m. departure.

BIRDING THE RIVER SECTION –**Saturday, Feb. 21**

Most birdwatching tours of Lake James State Park stick to well-worn trails and lake overlooks. This field trip promises to be different, as Park Ranger Jamie Cameron leads an intrepid group of explorers down into the inaccessible “River Section” of the park. Scouting forays have shown the area to be a haven for winter sparrows and there's no telling what we'll turn up. There are no trails and the birding will be fast and furious so be prepared for a challenging, but potentially rewarding experience. Meet at the Canal Bridge Boat Access parking area at 8 a.m.

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SCOPING OUT WATERFOWL – Sunday, Feb. 22

Lake James is a winter stopover for many ducks, grebes, loons and other migratory waterfowl. As winter draws to a close, these birds are once again massing for their northward migration in anticipation of the spring breeding season. Park Ranger Jamie Cameron will have his field guide and a spotting scope to help participants enjoy viewing some of these colorful travelers before they go. Bring binoculars if you have them and dress for the weather. Meet at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 9 a.m.

WINTER BIRD HIKE – Saturday, Feb. 28

Hermit thrushes, cedar waxwings, American goldfinches and brown creepers are among the many species of birds that spend the winter at Lake James. Ranger Earl Weaver will be on hand to lead the hike, spot and identify birds along the way. The hike will take place on the ¾-mile Holly Discovery Trail. Dress appropriately for the weather and meet at the Paddy's Creek Area, Holly Discovery Trail parking lot at 9 a.m.

SANDY CLIFF OVERLOOK EXCURSION – Saturday, Feb. 28

Check out one of the best views on the lake with Park Ranger Clay Veasey. The Sandy Cliff Overlook Trail is an easy, 1/2-mile route through a section of the park that received a restorative prescribed fire in late 2014. Come see for yourself the amazing habitat improvement that can be achieved through a thoughtful prescribed burning program and bring your camera to record the awesome overlook view of Lake James. Meet at the Catawba River Area parking lot at 10 a.m.



NATURE NOTES

As we bid adieu to the Year of the Lepidoptera, we brace ourselves for the excitement of North Carolina Parks and Recreation's new annual theme. Across the state in 2015, our parks will be celebrating the Year of the Amphibian.

But what is an amphibian? Amphibians are a group of cold-blooded animals that include salamanders, frogs and toads. The word is derived from "amphibia," which is the Greek term for "both life." In this case, "both life" references the aquatic and terrestrial stages all amphibians go through during their lives. A perfect example of this is the frogs and toads that call Lake James State Park home. During their life cycle, frogs and toads start as an egg and quickly hatch into tadpoles. Depending on the species, these larval stages vary in length, but both the terrestrial toad and the aquatic frog transform into their adult forms from tadpoles.

Other cold-blooded animals are reptiles, including snakes, turtles, lizards and crocodilians. Reptiles are very similar to amphibians and both are ectothermic, meaning their body temperature is completely dependent on their surroundings. If you see a frog on a cold 40-degree day, its body temperature will be 40 degrees. By comparison, that same frog on a hot, 90-degree day will have a body temperature of 90 degrees. There are also some significant differences that separate amphibians from reptiles. Amphibians require water for their reproductive cycle. Simply, tadpoles can't exist without water. Other differences occur through physical characteristics. One of the hardest differentiations to make is whether an animal is a lizard or a salamander. Amphibians have smooth skin and lack scales and claws. If the little "lizard" you found under a log in your backyard has smooth skin and doesn't have claws, you have, in fact, found a salamander and not a lizard - simple as that!

In support of amphibians as our annual theme, park rangers will be offering an increase in amphibian-related programs. These will include Toad Treks, Salamander Soirees and various other amphibian programs. These will be listed on the park's calendar of events as well as our bimonthly newsletters (see related article) which will also include a new amphibian spotlight in each issue.

As the winter temperatures keep Lake James' cold-blooded residents dormant, make sure to keep your eyes and ears open for the park's amphibians during warm spells. Even in January and February, a warm day could bring the Spring Peepers to a chirping roar and the park's salamanders to an exploratory crawl. Enjoy the winter, but look forward to the warmer months and helping Lake James celebrate the Year of the Amphibian. See you in the woods!

WHO WE ARE

A group formed in 2010, made up of dedicated people work together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

BOARD MEMBERS

Eric Jenkins - President

Robert Hunter - Vice President

Mike Sewell - Secretary

Bob Bielitz - Treasurer

Paul Braun - Member at Large

Annette Bryant - Membership Coordinator

Brock Hall - Member at Large

George Milner - Member at Large

Greg Norell - Member at Large

Alan Scholl - Member at Large

Wendell Shelton - Member at Large

Jim Williams - Member at Large

Ashley Wooten - Member at Large

To contact the Friends of Lake James State Park Group please email info@lakejamesstatepark.org

STRANGE BIRD VISITS PARK



Our park rangers spend a lot of time outdoors and are pretty observant of things that seem out of place. Those observation skills came in handy during the first week of December, when rangers Earl Weaver and Clay Veasey noticed a bright yellow bird in the trees next to the Catawba River Area office that neither of them had ever seen before.

Later that day, they sought the opinion of Ranger Jamie Cameron, who has been birdwatching nearly all his life. Based on the description they gave, Jamie ventured to guess the bird could be a western tanager.

Western tanagers are not native to the Southeast, but they do have a habit of going off course during their fall migration and turning up in unexpected places. The state of North Carolina has around 75 documented records of the species, with the vast majority of those being at or near the coast. In western NC, only about six western tanagers have been recorded.

It took a week of intermittent sightings by other park staffers before Jamie finally got a look at the mystery bird, but when he did, his suspicions were immediately confirmed. The bird was indeed a male western tanager and represents the first sighting of the species in McDowell County. The word of the discovery spread quickly to the birding community and it wasn't long before groups of curious onlookers with binoculars and cameras with telephoto lenses were crowding around the dogwood trees that the tanager was visiting. One enthusiastic birder drove all the way from Atlanta to see it.

As of this writing, the western tanager was still being seen on a regular basis at the park office.

It just goes to show, you never know what you'll turn up when you visit Lake James State Park.

FIRST DAY HIKE FOCUSES ON EDIBLE PLANTS



Make sure you keep your New Year's Eve celebrations tame enough to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for what is quickly becoming a cherished family holiday tradition at Lake James State Park – the First Day Hike, Jan. 1, 2015.

Park Ranger Clay Veasey will shepherd this year's event, with a special emphasis on recognizing edible plants in winter. Whether you're interested in making a wild greens salad to celebrate the New Year or looking to start a resolution of fitness, nature appreciation or learning about the environment, make a visit to Lake James State Park part of your holiday tradition. The hike will start at the Paddy's Creek Area bathhouse breezeway at 10 a.m.

FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK

SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Have you always wanted to work outside in a beautiful setting on a staff of dedicated people who are committed to excellence? Lake James State Park might be just the place for you this summer.

The park is currently accepting applications for its seasonal staff for the summer of 2015. Jobs include concessions stand workers, swimming area lifeguards and general grounds keeping crewmembers.

If you would like to be considered for a position at the park, go online to www.ncparks.gov/Jobs/seasonal for detailed descriptions and applications. Once you've filled out your application, send it to the Lake James State Park office at P.O. Box 340, Nebo, NC, 28761 or deliver it in person.

NEW YEAR'S EVE; NIGHT RIDE IS BACK

The staff at Lake James State Park will end the year with a special event for all of the mountain bikers who have made the 15 miles of new trails such a resounding success. On Dec. 31, New Year's Eve, the park will host its second ever night ride, from 5 – 7:30 p.m. That's two extra hours of riding from the normal, 5:30 p.m. trail closure time and a unique chance to experience the mountain bike trails from a new perspective.

Park Superintendent Nora Coffey will be on hand to lead an educational program (astronomy or a nocturnal hike, depending on cloud cover) for non-cycling family members who wish to join in the fun, but lack the experience and skill to negotiate the biking trails in the dark.

Riders must provide their own lighting systems and be honest with themselves about their abilities. Night riding adds another level of hazards that many cyclists simply aren't ready for. For those who are up to the challenge, there will be a mandatory sign-in/sign-out sheet. Neither the park nor NC Department of Natural Resources accepts responsibility for injuries or damages sustained during this activity. As always, riding the mountain bike trails when they are closed is a violation of park rules.

The Friends of Lake James group will also be there to provide hot chocolate to all the participants and their families.

Come on out and ring in the New Year in a way all of your friends will envy.

LJSP TRAILS



CATAWBA RIVER AREA:

- Fishing Pier Trail (0.3 mile, easy)
- Fox Den Loop Trail (2.25 miles, moderate)
- Lake Channel Overlook Trail (1.5 miles, moderate)
- Sandy Cliff Overlook Trail (0.5 mile, easy)

PADDY'S CREEK AREA:

- Holly Discovery Trail (0.75 mile, easy)
- Mill's Creek Trail (3.6 miles, moderate)
- Overmountain Victory Trail (2.0 mile, moderate)
- Paddy's Creek Trail (2.0 miles, moderate)
- Tindo beginners' mountain bike trail (4.0 miles)
- Wimba intermediate mountain bike trail (11.25 miles)



RANGERS ON PATROL

During 2014, rangers at Lake James State Park issued 27 citations for violations within the park boundary, including;

- Exceeding safe speed - 11
- Driving without a license - 6
- Driving while license revoked - 1
- Child seat belt violation - 1
- Expired vehicle registration - 1
- Expired vehicle license - 1
- Open container (alcohol) within a vehicle - 2
- Fire in an undesignated area - 1
- Riding bike trails when closed - 1
- Entering the park during posted closing hours - 2

The park was also the site of a one-day license check operation in cooperation with the North Carolina Highway Patrol and Burke County Sheriff's Department on June 21. The results of that effort are as follows;

- Driving without a license/driving while license revoked - 12
- Expired vehicle registration - 11
- Seat belt violation - 1
- Underage consumption of alcohol while operating a vehicle - 1
- Possession of drug paraphernalia/simple possession - 5

Lead law enforcement ranger Clay Veasey said the purpose for enforcing park rules and state laws is to make Lake James State Park as safe as it can be for the many hundreds of thousands of people who visit each year.

"Considering our most charged offenses were exceeding a safe speed and driving without a license, we ask that folks pay special attention to the 25 miles-per-hour speed limit on all park roads and to make sure they have a valid operator's license before they get behind the wheel," continued Veasey. "We are looking forward to ensuring everyone has a safe and enjoyable time at the park in 2015."

FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Do you have an interest in Lake James State Park? Whether you enjoy hiking the trails, swimming at the beach or just picnicking with your family, there is some part of the park for everyone.

Join the Friends of Lake James State Park group and learn about all the opportunities to help make the park a better place for everyone to enjoy. The Friends of Lake James State Park focus on working together to help Lake James State Park meet its mission of providing opportunities for public enjoyment and education while still protecting the natural beauty and historic integrity of the State Park.

There are a variety of opportunities to get involved from trail work days, to volunteering at RiverFest and other festivals. Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

PARK GENERAL INFO

- Gate hours during January and February are 7 a.m. until 6 p.m.
- The campground opens March 1
- Canoe, paddleboard and kayak rentals have ended for the season.
- Hidden Cove Boat Access will re-open March 1

HOW TO JOIN THE FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK GROUP

Become a member of Friends of Lake James State Park, and know that you are helping to preserve the natural beauty and historic resources of Lake James for generations to come.

For more information please visit www.lakejamesstatepark.org or email info@lakejamesstatepark.org.

FRIENDS OF LAKE JAMES STATE PARK - MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Be a Friend of Lake James State Park

Select class of annual membership:

- Individual \$10
 Family \$25
 Corporate \$50
 Patron/Industry \$100 - \$999 \$_____
 Lifetime \$1000 (or more) \$ _____

I would like to be contacted about volunteer opportunities with the Friends of Lake James State Park

Where did you hear about us? _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

Phone _____

**Return to:
Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 1327
Nebo, NC 28761**

Friends of Lake James State Park, Inc. is a registered 501(c)3 charitable organization. Receipt of membership will be supplied upon request.