



OCCONEECHEE STATE PARK  
1192 Occoneechee Park Road  
Clarksville, VA 23927-9449

# Occoneechee State Park

## MASTER PLAN

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### 2018 UPDATE

Department of Conservation and Recreation  
Division of Planning and Recreation Resources  
600 East Main Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219



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# OCCONEECHEE STATE PARK

## MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 2018 UPDATE

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*Presented for review at a public meeting on November 30, 2017, then recommended  
for adoption by the Board of Conservation and Recreation on May 10, 2018,  
and then reviewed for 30 days by the Virginia General Assembly.  
A letter from the U.S. Corps of Engineers approving this master plan update is on file*

### Adopted:

        /S/          
Clyde E. Cristman, Director  
Department of Conservation  
& Recreation

July 17, 2018  
Date



# OCCONEECHEE STATE PARK MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 2018 UPDATE

### **Park Purpose Statement**

*"The purpose of Occoneechee State Park is to provide now and conserve for future generations, the opportunity for visitors to experience and enjoy this 2,690 acre park, while providing access to and recreation opportunities on and along Virginia's largest lake and interpreting Southside Virginia's Native American Culture and Living History."*

### **Introduction**

Occoneechee State Park (2,690 acres) is situated on the north shore of Virginia's largest lake, Buggs Island Lake. The lake, which is also referred to as the John H. Kerr Reservoir covers approximately 48,000 acres. Occoneechee State Park was brought into the Virginia State Park System by execution in 1968 of a lease with the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The park is situated on the south side of U.S. Route 58, approximately 1.5 miles east of Clarksville, in Mecklenburg County, in Southside Virginia. It is 100 miles southwest of Richmond, 160 miles west of Virginia Beach, and 75 miles east of Martinsville. It is located near the North Carolina border and is approximately 50 miles from Durham and 70 miles north of Raleigh.

### **Resource Management Plan**

The resource management plan consolidates all known resource information for a park and provides management direction for maintaining and enhancing those resources. The plans identify the physical, abiotic, and biotic characteristics of the park, and historic and archaeological resources, as well as a description of the legal constraints and limitations of the property. The park is delineated into undeveloped areas based on the ecosystems found in these areas; unique management areas which are undeveloped areas with a specific purpose or function such as a historic battlefield or open field; and developed areas where park facilities are located yet have natural and cultural resources requiring specific management. The plan has defined management objectives and action recommendations that guide resource management and allow for continuity over time.

The acreage of Occoneechee State Park includes 133 developed acres and 2,313 undeveloped acres with an additional 244 acres classified as unique management areas. The undeveloped area that is dominated by hardwoods consists primarily of acidic oak –Hickory Forest, basic oak-hickory forest, mesic mixed hardwood forest, Coastal Plain / Piedmont floodplain forest, and Piedmont Oak/Beach/Heath forest.

The park is host to a large number of plant and animal species, including 456 potential animal and fish species. Invasive plants include tree-of-heaven, Japanese stiltgrass, wisteria, Japanese honeysuckle, non-native lespedezas, autumn olive, and princess tree.

Natural resource management at Occoneechee State Park focuses on ecosystem preservation and restoration. Ecosystem restoration will continue to involve transitioning forest land manipulated

impacted negatively by past forest management into the appropriate hardwood stands through ecosystem management. It will also continue to include invasive species management. Prescribed fire is utilized as a resource management tool at Occoneechee State Park.

The park is completely leased from the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Kerr reservoir is controlled by the USACE. This is the largest reservoir in the state and nearly surrounds all of Occoneechee State Park.

The cultural resources of the park are focused on 2 primary areas the Native American tribes that once inhabited the area and the antebellum era Occoneechee Plantation. In 1996, the Occoneechee Plantation site as well as ‘Historic Archaeological Sites within the John H. Kerr Reservoir Area’ were listed on the Virginia Landmarks Register. These nominations are still pending for the National Register of Historic Places. Much of the archaeological research on the site was initiated by the USACE.

### **Visitor Experience Plan**

The visitor experience management plan provides a park-wide vision for the future of interpretation, education, recreation and other visitor experience opportunities. The plan addresses all elements of a park that affect visitor experiences, including personal services, media, facilities, and landscapes. It is a conceptual document that lays a foundation for subsequent phases of comprehensive interpretive planning: facility and media planning, design and production; organization of staff and activities into annual visitor experience implementation plans. Multiday planning workshops are held with park staff and individuals with select interests from the surrounding community to identify and develop the components of the overall plan.

The plan consists of three parts; the foundation, the experience areas, and when combined the resulting overall visitor experience. The foundation presents information needed to make decisions concerning how visitor experience opportunities will be planned, developed and managed. Each element of this foundation describes an essential criteria that must be considered to create appropriate actions for inclusion in the overall experience. It identifies essential stories and aspects of the site, specific audience types and their wants, needs, and expectations, interpretive themes (essential messages), issues and influences, goals and objectives that tie to park purpose and mission of the agency. Experience areas may be categorized by resource type or condition, social environment, type and extent of park development, level of management, or kind and density of visitor use. This component of the plan will delineate, map and name geographic visitor experience areas based on distinct resource character and interpretive opportunities. The final overall section of the visitor experience management plan describes the mix of personal service, media, facility, and landscape conditions that can effectively communicate park significance to guests and facilitate established visitor experience objectives.

Occoneechee State Park does not have any VEP. However, there are narratives that should continue to be addressed. These include the Occoneechee Indians, colonial settlement and land use, slavery and plantation life, and lake, forest, and meadow ecology.

## **Master Plan**

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Planners and State Park Staff conducted this master plan update in accordance with §10.1-200.1 of the *Code of Virginia*. This plan outlines the desired future condition of the park during a 30-year planning horizon. As required by the *Code of Virginia*, it must be revisited every ten years to ensure that the development objectives outlined in the plan continue to meet the recreational and conservation needs of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

This comprehensive master plan provides revisions and updates to the original Oconeechee Master Plan. The original plan was prepared by the Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, and approved in January 1965. The 1965 plan allowed for the development of day-use and overnight facilities on approximately 600 acres of land. This included the establishment of campgrounds, picnic areas, interpretive facilities, administrative headquarters, and the necessary maintenance facilities, roads, utilities, and other infrastructure. The first master plan developed by DCR in 2003 provided for a full range of overnight and day-use facilities on the entire 2,690 acre park site.

This 2018 Oconeechee State Park Master Plan Executive Summary is an update to the official unabridged master plan document developed by DCR. This master plan for Oconeechee State Park was adopted on June 9, 2003, by Department of Conservation and Recreation Director, Joseph H. Maroon. The master plan was then amended on March 14, 2005, and September 15, 2009, by Director Maroon. The plan was reviewed and updated on December 20, 2011, by DCR Director David A. Johnson. On December 29, 2015 the master plan was amended to relocate the proposed sprayground and related amenities by DCR Director Clyde E Cristman. These plans were reviewed as a part of the 2018 master plan process. Both DCR Director and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers are required to approve any plan update or amendment.

As a part of the 2018 master plan process, it was determined that significant changes occurred in the master plan to warrant an update to the master plan at this time. The phased development plan and costs have been revised to reflect projects that have been completed and the park staffing and operations costs data have been also updated to reflect current conditions. This executive summary follows a newly adopted format, while the master plan map was updated with current park information and reflects the projects in the park's phased development plan.

The draft 2018 executive summary and map were presented to the Board of Conservation and Recreation at their May 10, 2018 meeting and were recommended for adoption. The documents were then placed on the DCR website for a 30-day review by the Virginia General Assembly. Following that review, the updated plan was presented to the DCR Director Clyde E. Cristman for adoption. Following adoption, the updated executive summary and map were placed online <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/masterplans> for the public to review.

## **Attendance, Economic Impact and Park Revenues**

The table below reflects fairly stable park attendance over the last ten years:

### **Park Visitation – Occoneechee (Calendar Year<sup>1</sup>)**

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
196,337	202,925	202,471	192,448	198,460	189,672	185,933	185,096	195,173	206,725

<sup>1</sup>Note that the calendar year ends 6 months after the fiscal year.

In 2017, Occoneechee State Park had 206,725 visitors; 19,197 were paid campers, 13,429 were paid cabin guests, 51,054 were paid day use visitors, while 122,982 were non-paying day use visitors.

Visitor revenues for FY2017 totaled \$1,467,678 (not including reservation fees paid online or to the customer center), with the main sources of revenue being: Cabins (\$351,424), Camping (\$123,177), Merchandise and Marine Fuel (\$99,899), and Parking (\$67,891).

Estimate economic activity derived from visitation, park budget, and capital outlay projects for Occoneechee in 2017 were:

- \$6.3M Total Economic Activity
- \$4.9M Total Economic Impacts
- 72.1 Total Jobs (Direct, Indirect, and Induced)
- \$3.7M Value Added
- \$439,000 State and Local Taxes

### **Existing Facilities**

17 Miles of Trails  
Office/visitor center  
Staff Residences (3)  
Maintenance complex  
Contact station  
Picnic Area and 2 Picnic Shelters  
Campground C with two bathhouses 35 sites  
Camping cabin  
Yurts (3)  
Campground B with one bathhouse and 14 sites  
Equestrian campground with stalls and 11 SITES  
Cabin area (13 cabin)  
Boat ramp (main) with three launching lanes, restroom and concession.  
Boat Ramp #1 (2 additional lanes)  
Boat Ramp #2 (2 additional lanes)  
Hiking, equestrian, and bike trails.  
Marina (52 Slips)  
Fuel dock  
Concession/boat rental with 4-slip dock

Additional concession 6-slip dock  
Splash Sprayground  
Archery Range

The location of proposed Native American Interpretive Sites requires additional study to determine the number of sites and the best location in the park.

### **Connectivity**

This 2018 update places value on connecting Oconeechee State Park to other resources in the community. Aside from Kerr Reservoir, the park is in close proximity to the Staunton and Dan rivers, part of the Southern Virginia Wild Blueway. Also along the Blueway, Staunton River State Park sits at the confluence of the Dan and Staunton rivers. The DGIF Dick Cross Wildlife Management Area is available for hunting and fishing along the Roanoke River just below the Kerr Dam. Lake Gordon near South Hill also offers fishing and boating. Two Corps of Engineers wildlife management areas are along the Lake southeast of Clarksville. A section of the Tobacco Heritage Trail, the Carter Lane Trail, is in Boydton, and the East Coast Greenway and U.S. Bike Route 1 are nearby. Sites along the Birding and Wildlife Trail in the area offer scenic walks, local history or agritourism. The Oconeechee State Park regional connectivity map is an attachment to the full master plan document.

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund**

Oconeechee State Park received Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) in 1978 for support facilities, 2001 for boat ramp facilities and in 2006 for park utilities. In compliance with the LWCF Act of 1965 and amendments thereto, the Commonwealth of Virginia is required to maintain the park for public outdoor recreation in perpetuity.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act**

To the greatest extent possible, Virginia State Parks strives to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### **Land Acquisition/Viewshed Protection**

Additional land acquisition is recommended to enhance park offerings, establish connective trail easements/corridors, buffer the park from inappropriate development or protect valued viewsheds. Future land acquisitions will only be negotiated with willing property owners. The placement of conservation easements on adjacent property to preserve the natural resources, cultural landscapes, and scenic resources in close proximity to the park will be encouraged. In working cooperatively with neighboring landowners, the park will be enhanced and protected over time.

## **Environmental/Design Guidance**

This 2018 master plan update describes both proposed facilities and improvements to existing facilities. New facilities are sited to minimize impact to the park, and in keeping with the prescriptive management areas as defined by the Park Resource Management Plan and the guidelines of the Park Visitor Experience Plan, when available. New facilities at this park should be designed and built with consideration to the original design and layout of facilities. These facilities will be carefully sited to minimize impacts to the views in the park and of the park from adjacent lands and water bodies. Consideration will be given to eliminate excessive, misdirected or obtrusive artificial light in the park in order to maximize the dark sky effect and encourage astronomy and night-sky viewing.

Building and site design will implement green energy standards using energy-efficient and sustainable materials and process to the greatest extent possible. Green design initiatives will be considered during the design process for park renovations and new construction. Development activities will comply with requirements set forth by the Department of Environmental Quality's best management practices for erosion, sediment control and stormwater management in order to protect water quality. A setback guideline of 100 feet from the shoreline has been established by DCR, and trails and water dependent facilities such as fishing stations, piers and other water access facilities will be the only developments permitted within the 100-foot setback.

There are potential challenges of overuse and crowded conditions, which may require management actions to protect the resources and the quality of the park experience. Issues related to resource carrying capacity and social carrying capacity should be evaluated prior to developing new facilities.



## **Phased Development Plan**

The proposed development phases for Occoneechee State Park are presented in priority order. Completion of all of the projects in this list will represent total build-out (completion of the master plan) and covers a 30-year timeframe.

### **Phase I**

Expand Marina Facility (10 slips)  
Develop a conference center  
Construct park office/welcome center  
Construct seven (7) cabins in cabin area  
Construct two (2) dock facilities at Cabin Area (20 tie-ups)  
Construct a 30-site campground  
Construct bathhouse for equestrian campground  
Expand internal trail system and connections to external trails.  
Develop a paved multiuse (hike/bike) trail parallel to park road that connects park facilities.

*The total estimated cost for Phase I development is \$16,079,731*

### **Phase II**

Renovate park visitor center  
Construct staff residence  
Enhance the Occoneechee Plantation interpretive site  
Expand internal trail system and connections to external trails.

*The total estimated cost for Phase II development is \$2,705,789*

### **Phase III**

Construct amphitheater/performance center  
Construct Discovery Center/Native American support center with boat landing.  
Develop Native American Village and Interpretive Area with a Settlement Site  
Develop Native American interpretive signage along the Panhandle Multiuse Trail  
Expand internal trail system and connections to external trails.  
Widen main park roads

*The total estimated cost for Phase III development is \$10,628,561*

**The total cost to complete the Occoneechee State Park master plan is \$29,414,081**

## **Staffing and Operations**

Staffing and operational costs at Occoneechee State Park are presently budgeted at \$804,000 annually, including salaries for 6 staff positions. With the current facilities and operational requirements, the park has an identified need for 9 additional positions and \$494,000 in funding. At complete build out of the proposed 3 phases of development, 6 additional staff will be needed and an additional \$595,000 in operating funds. In order for the park to operate effectively and efficiently at full build out, the park requires the projected staffing and operating costs identified as “existing additional needs” and the projected costs for the 3 development phases. The total budget for Occoneechee at full build out is projected to be \$1,893,000 with 21 staff positions.

See Chart on next page.

**OCCONEECHEE STAFFING AND OPERATING COSTS**

<b>EXISTING (FY 18)</b>	<b>EXISTING ADDITIONAL NEEDS **</b>	<b>PHASE 1</b>	<b>PHASE 2</b>	<b>PHASE 3</b>	<b>FULL BUILD OUT</b>
<b>STAFFING</b>					<b>STAFFING</b>
Park Manager					Park Manager
Asst. Park Manager					Asst. Park Manager
	Chief Ranger		Chief Ranger		Chief Ranger (2)
	Education Specialist		Education Specialist	Education Specialist	Educ. Specialist (3)
Park Ranger (3)	Park Ranger (3)	Park Ranger		Park Ranger	Park Ranger (8)
	Housekeeper (2)	Housekeeper			Housekeeper (3)
Office Manager					Office Manager
	Prog. Support Tech. (2)				Program Support Tech. (2)
<b>SALARY TOTAL*</b>					<b>SALARY TOTAL</b>
\$366,000	\$440,000	\$97,000	\$101,000	\$98,000	\$1,102,000
<b>WAGE TOTAL</b>					<b>WAGE TOTAL</b>
\$142,000	\$10,000	\$78,000	\$1,000	\$27,000	\$258,000
<b>OTPS TOTAL</b>					<b>OTPS TOTAL</b>
\$296,000	\$44,000	\$112,000	\$6,000	\$75,000	\$533,000
<b>TOTAL BUDGET (FY18 dollars)</b>					<b>TOTAL BUDGET (FY18 dollars)</b>
\$804,000	\$494,000	\$287,000	\$108,000	\$200,000	\$1,893,000

NOTE – All costs (salary, wage, OTPS (Other than Personnel Services)) are based on FY18 budget projections.

\* Salary estimates include associated personnel costs.

\*\* *Existing additional needs* represents new facilities and staff positions and operating costs not fully funded.