

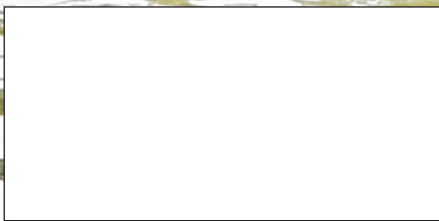
Trout Talk

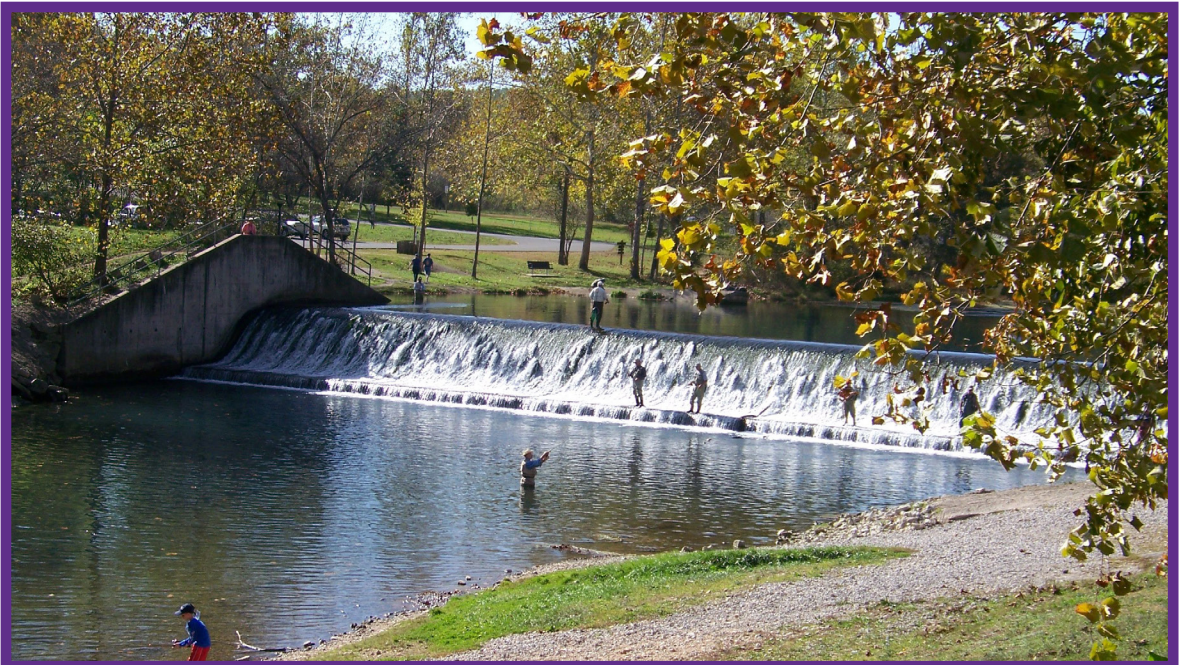


**The end of a
historic season**

Page 3

OCTOBER 2020





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Attendance up at park despite pandemic

Park concessionaire says season was one of the best in years

LAURA VALENTI FOR TROUT TALK

Just like the rest of the world this year, the Bennett Spring has had a 2020 fishing season like no other. Closed for 60 days at the beginning of the traditional trout season, those who depend on Bennett Spring and the fishermen and visitors who come each year feared they were looking at certain economic disaster, however, that has not been the case.

"We had to close down everything—the cabins, the park store and the dining lodge," said Jim Rogers, who has been the Bennett Spring park concessionaire for 40 years. "As all business owners know in this pandemic, when you close the doors, there is no income but the expenses go on. We have had such an incredible year because even though we were closed for two months this spring, people did not forget about us and we really appreciate that. The Department of Conservation sponsored Free Fishing for several weeks there in the spring and no tags were sold but once things opened back up, the people kept coming."

According to Rogers, Bennett Spring State Park, had its biggest attendance in the 1980s when it was common to sell around 180,000 trout tags in a year. Rogers said in recent years, the number has shrunk to an average closer to 130,000 tags per year.

"This year, the people have come back and we've seen numbers more like what we saw 30 years ago. I think people were just ready to get back outside, enjoying things like they used to," Rogers said.



Rogers has heard from many other outfitters that they're having a similar experience this season. Some of them have even told him they've "had their best year ever."

"It seems like we just see people being kinder and more patient with each other in the midst of all of this. And even in the middle of the week, now that school has started, we are still staying busy," Rogers said. "About half of the people now visiting us, use their masks when indoors. We have been so fortunate here. This is God's country, just one look around will tell you that. And once again, He has blessed Bennett Spring and we are so thankful for that."

And while the fishermen have returned in droves, others who don't carry a fishing rod have also made Bennett Spring their recreational destination. Inez Jorgenson and her husband, Dave of Madison, South Dakota, enjoyed a recent Saturday afternoon at Bennett Spring while attending a motorcycle rally at Lake of the Ozarks.

CONTINUED on page 5



Trout Talk photos/Laura Valenti
Above, anglers fill Bennett Spring just above the waterfall at the state park at the end of September. Bennett Spring State Park Concessionaire Jim Rogers says that attendance has been up at the state park this season. Left, Inez Jorgenson of South Dakota recently visited Bennett Spring for a motorcycle ride in the country with her husband, Dave, and their canine companions, Jack and Cinnamon.

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"We came here last year, but there was so much to do and not nearly enough time to get to it all," she said. "So we came back this year. This is such a beautiful place."

Her two tiny canine companions, Jack and Cinn, short for Cinnamon, both in their own individual black leather motorcycle jackets, seemed to agree as they, too, enjoyed their time outside.

Other traditional park visitors, the trout fishermen from Missouri as well as other nearby states, also enjoyed the park, many coming late in the season, for the first time this year. Eddie, a high schooler from the St. Louis area, who declined to share his last name, plays guitar and swims regularly, but still takes time to enjoy trout fishing. Others like Mel Kehr and his son, Geoff, have been coming to Bennett Spring for years but find it more difficult to get away than they once did in the 1980s, when Geoff and his brothers still lived at home. Still, they were happy to be back at Bennett Spring at the end of summer.

Marie Lorenz, manager of the Bennett Spring Dining Lodge for the past several years, is happy to be back at her post at the door of the famous local restaurant, welcoming visitors.

"We were closed for two months," she shared with her trout mask in place, "But since we've re-opened we have been very, very busy. It's been a surprisingly good season. I've seen lots of new folks this year as well as others I haven't seen in three or four years.



Trout Talk photo/Laura Valenti

Rebecca Alley, a teacher from Lebanon, Mo., and her family have dinner at the Dining Lodge at Bennett Spring.

It's been great."

Rebecca Alley, a teacher at Lebanon's Esther Elementary took advantage of the afternoon to get her children out for a relaxing midday meal.

"The weather was nice so we just thought we'd get out and find a good place to eat," she shared as they waited for their lunch at the Dining Lodge.

She and her family have just recently moved to

the area from the Farmington area.

"It's good to get out of the house and just get back to some sense of normalcy," she said.

The trout season ends on Oct. 31. A catch-and-release season follows from the second Friday in November to the second Monday in February on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday only. Trout season will kick off again on March 1.

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Take a look at the state park's rules and regulations

FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures.

For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle

bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited, even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

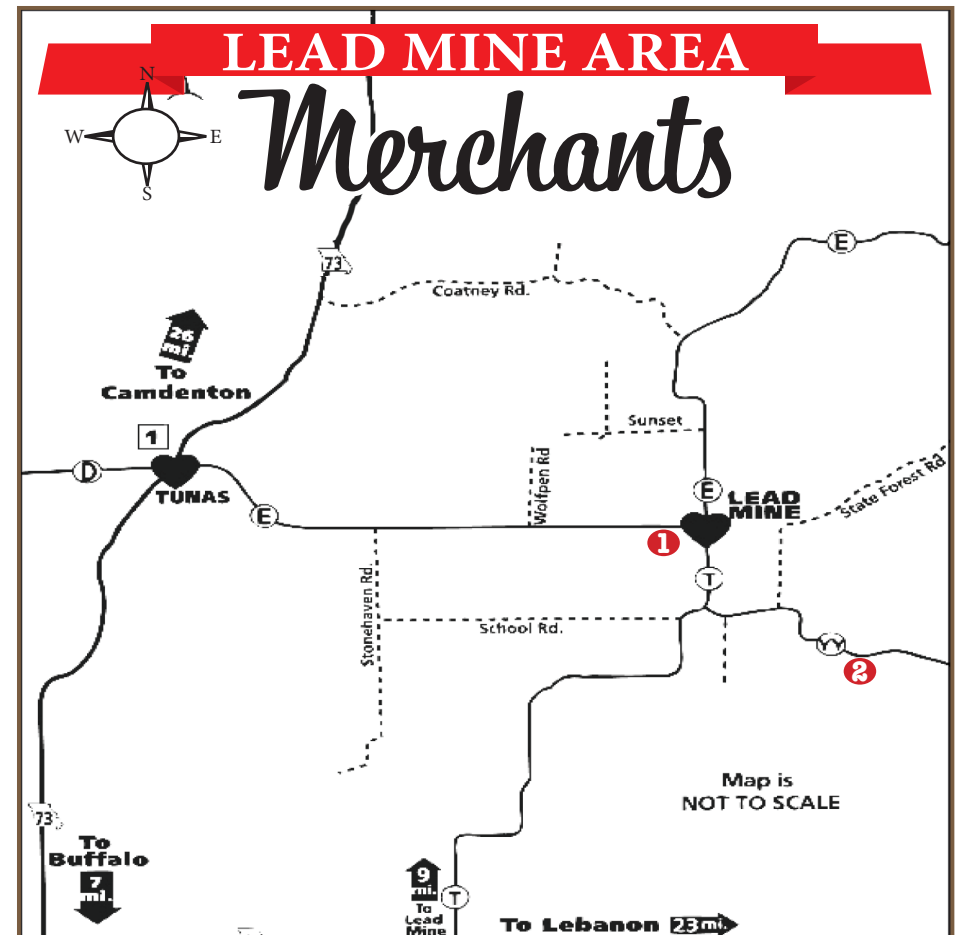
Trout Fishing Hours

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily



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