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Trout Talk

**Veterans fish for
free at MDC event
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Water rescue saves 14 from May flood

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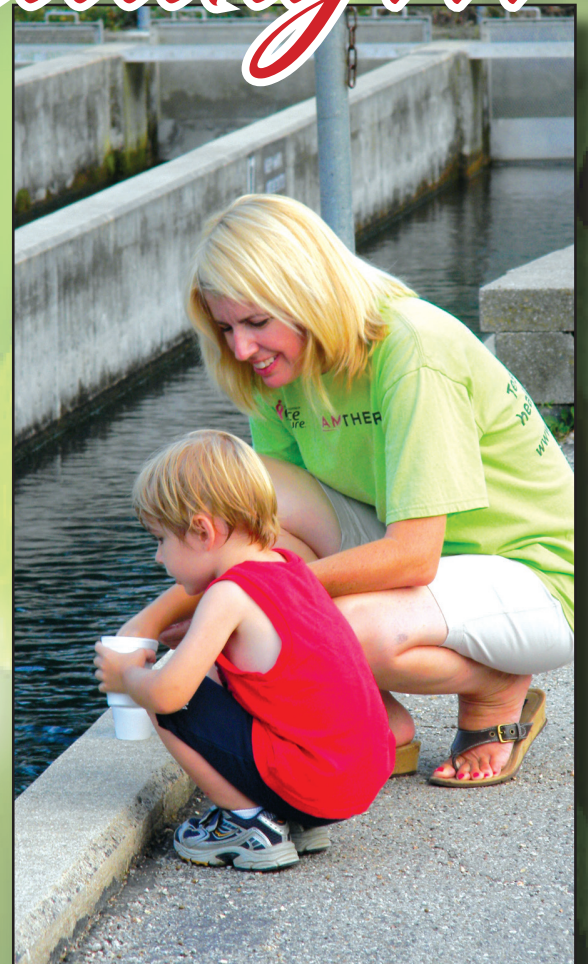


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Veterans fish for free thanks to MDC



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Bob Gay, of Buffalo, served in the Army and in Vietnam. He enjoys the calming nature of trout fishing, which was a common theme among the veterans fishing for free in Zone 2.

Servicemen and women enjoy angling, camaraderie at 6th annual event

FROM THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

To once again thank America's veterans for their service, the Mis-

souri Department of Conservation sponsored the sixth annual Veterans' Free Fishing Day on April 23, at Bennett Spring State Park.

Ben Havens, manager of the park's hatchery, said 190 daily tags were given free to veterans of the armed services while 1,800 trout were

stocked throughout the park, 600 of which were released into Zone 2, which was reserved for veterans.

See 'VETERANS' / page 7

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Veterans

from page 3

He was happy to see some familiar faces among the Project Healing Water Fly Fishing members who volunteered to help with the event.

"The same great group of folks and the same good faces came out to volunteer their time. It's just a good day out here," Havens said.

Although flooding from rain earlier in the week and a 20 mph wind at times made fishing conditions less than ideal, veterans were still catching a few trout.

"We had that two and half inches of rain in town the other night, and we had about an inch and a half out here. We were still up a bit anyway and that just dropped all that water on us. We actually raised another foot from that. It's slowly coming down," Havens said.

The rain and wind affected other aspects of the free event but not the spirits of Havens and the angling veterans.

"We didn't get to put our tents up like we normally do because the stakes were pulling out of the ground with all this crazy weather, but it's a good day. The sun's shining and it's pleasant, we've got good company, everything seems to be on the up and up, so everybody's happy for sure," Havens said.

Veterans were issued special event light blue tags for free and even a fishing license was optional. While they could fish anywhere in the park, Zone 2, the veterans-only area, saw the highest veteran concentration as



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Mick Bretz with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing tells a group of anglers about his experiences with trout flying.

expected.

Water was high and over the whistle bridge a few inches and not as clear as usual, giving the trout a chance to hide out.

This did not stop the veterans from enjoying their day.

Almost as many anglers were near the river simply talking and enjoying the camaraderie as there were veter-

ans actively fishing.

Greg Schellert, of Fenton, brought his family to Bennett Spring State Park and got a nice surprise.

See 'VETERANS' / page 7

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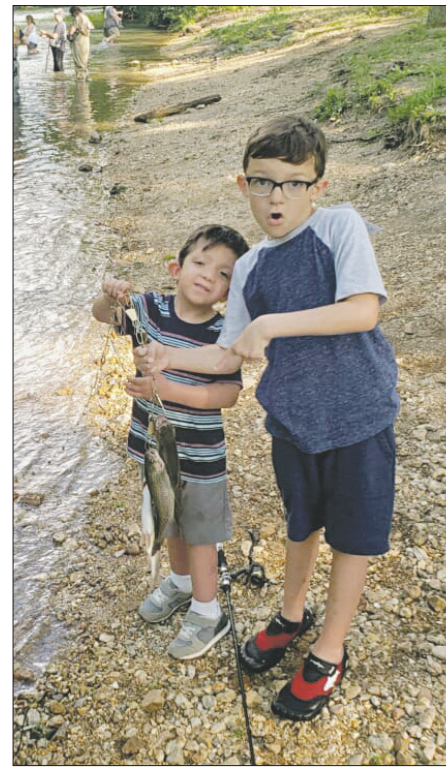
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Photos courtesy of the Bennet Spring State Park Store

Young anglers are gearing up for summer and were caught showing off a whole reel of trophy fish at Bennett Spring State Park last month. (Left) Brenden, 11, shows off his trout that he caught in May. (Center left) Avery, 6, caught these trout at Bennett

Spring State Park in May. (Center right) Cruz, 7, and Victor, 3, hold up their first trout. The boys caught the fish on May 14. (Right) Brantley, 8, and Owen, 6, caught these lunkers on May 15.

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Veterans

from page 3

Twenty lunkers were also added to the stream.

"I didn't know it was Veterans' (free fishing) day really. We just came down here to go trout fishing," Schellert said.

He was in the Air Force for four years during the Vietnam War and was stationed at a Strategic Air Command base in Grand Forks, North Dakota. He was lucky enough never to be sent to Vietnam.

"The closest I got was Hawaii for a week. That was rough duty," Schellert chuckled.

Trout fishing was a new experience for him.

"To be honest with you, this is just the second time I ever went, so I'm kind of new at it and I'm kind of learning. I can see right now I need a pair of waders," Schellert said.

Fishing near the whistle bridge, luck was not on his side or his stringer, but he was determined.

"Nothing yet, but I'm working on it," he said.

However, he was enjoying the other park activities like camping and being outdoors with his family.

"It's stress management. It's a break from the average day's grind and just a time to relax and regroup," he said.

Jayce Minner, of Kansas City, was also visiting Bennett Spring for the first time. He served in the Air Force and the Army National Guard. His dad and his brother came with him.

Minner caught one at about 8 a.m. before a three hour stretch of no trout. His primary experience had consisted of "cast, reel, cast, reel."

See 'VETERANS' / page 11



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Jayce Minner, of Kansas City, Air Force and Army National Guard veteran, caught one trout early in the day before a long dry spell ensued. The stream was still flooded from rain earlier in the week, which made conditions challenging.

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Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Greg Schellert, of Fenton, Air Force veteran, uses persistence in his trout fishing strategy. He did not find out he was fishing for free until he tried to buy his trout tag at Bennett Spring State Park.

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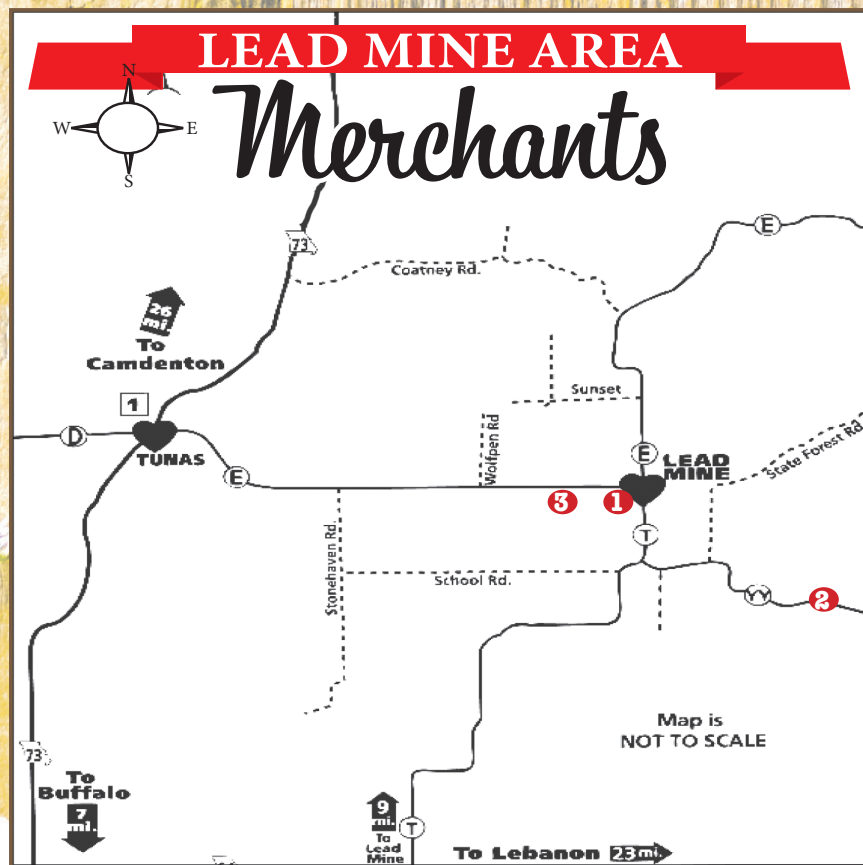


Photo courtesy of the Bennet Spring State Park Store

Owen, 7, caught a 2-pound rainbow trout on May 15.

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Veterans

from page 7

Nevertheless, he will bring his kids, 4 and 11, back in three weeks for another round and hopefully more trout.

The angling veterans were aided by Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing whose members always turn out to encourage their fellow veterans to explore the therapeutic side of trout fishing.

PHWFF members served as fishing guides and gave fly tying and fly fishing lessons that stressed the simplicity of the cast instead of trying to bullwhip the line.

They also provided food like hot dogs to the veterans.

Mick Bretz, of St. Charles, is the new regional coordinator for PHWFF. He is also the new program lead for St. Louis Veterans Association Medical Center, or VAMC, and began his new role about a month ago.

While giving fly tying demonstrations and sharing fishing tales, Bretz

enjoyed the natural setting of Bennett Spring where he had already spotted a bald eagle and an osprey.

"Where else can you see all this? You have the beautiful trout, the scenery, bald eagles. You can't say enough about Bennett Spring State Park," Bretz said.

He said PHWFF members also assist in the Mayfly Project mentored by Sarah and Ben Havens that ties flies to support children in foster care.

Bretz is enthusiastic about fly fishing and fly tying because he was a disabled veteran at one time due to anxiety and fly tying was therapy for him.

"This was a way to calm me down. There wasn't much of trying to go fast. It was just kind of taking a breath and doing it nice and slow, and it was a way of breaking away from the world," Bretz said.

See 'VETERANS' / page 13



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Members of Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing pass on some fly fishing tips to veterans in Zone 2, which was roped off as veterans only fishing.

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Veterans

from page 11

He brings many boxes of fly tying supplies with him and encourages veterans to join Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing and to enjoy the camaraderie and therapeutic nature of fly fishing.

This is what Bob Gay, of Buffalo, does. He brought his friend, Barry Jerkins, to fish at Bennett for the first time. Gay served in Vietnam in the Army.

It was also a first for Gay, his first Veterans' Free Fishing Day, although he has fished at Bennett many times.

"I like fishing because it keeps me calm. I just like to come over and hang out with other guys that have been in the service," Gay said.

His friend Jerkins, a Navy veteran, said he liked being near the water and fishing. He usually does his angling in Pomme de Terre Lake. He planned to make another trip to Bennett Spring with Gay on a day with better fishing conditions.

In the meantime, he was enjoying spending time with other veterans because of their shared experiences.

"We all got hit in the head with the same limb," Jerkins said.

They also were bitten by the same trout fishing bug. And they all had the opportunity to find relaxation and camaraderie while trout fishing together in the cool, slightly flooded stream at Bennett Spring.



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Navy veteran Barry Jerkins, of Buffalo, stops for a breather. He said several anglers around him had caught some fish although he had only a few bites. He plans to return to Bennett Spring with his fishing friend Bob Gay for another try for the trout.



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Trout Talk

BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA



Over a dozen rescued during spring floods

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Emergency agencies rescued 14 people who were staying at cabins at Bennett Spring State Park and became trapped by rising flood waters on May 5.

"Everyone came together for a successful evacuation," said Laclede County Office of Emergency Management Director Randy Rowe. "I want to thank everyone involved for making this a success."

According to Rowe, the Missouri State Highway Patrol and Missouri State Park Rangers helped rescue 14 stranded campers. They had to be taken by boat as the road leading into the spring cabin area was completely covered in water. Highway Patrol aided in the rescue, pulling boats filled with stranded campers through knee deep water in an area that is usually filled with parked cars and anglers. Rowe said the campers hailed from all over the county, including families and individuals from Iowa, New York, Illinois and Northern Missouri.

No one was hurt during the rescue mission. Rowe reported that one elderly woman was treated for anxiety related issues and released at the scene.

Bennett Spring State Park Natural Resource Manager Gabriel DuMond acted as the on-scene commander for the two hour evacuation.

OEM and Mercy Hospital Lebanon was on scene to transport displaced campers to new places to stay until the water recedes and they can return to the cabins to get their belongings and vehicles.

The Lebanon Fire Department brought a tanker to the evacuation in case the truck's long ladder was needed to help. However, it was not used during the evacuation.

Some campers opted not to evacuate. According to DuMond, two families, comprising about 10 people, decided to stay and shelter in place. DuMond explained that it wasn't uncommon during flooding for campers to stay, especially those in the cabins located higher up from the spring.

Rowe had no idea how long it would take for the water to recede and the park to open up fully.

"The water will go down eventually,



Photo courtesy of Laclede County Office of Emergency Management

A water rescue by Missouri State Highway Patrol and Park Rangers resulted in zero injuries.

but not nearly as quickly as it came up," he said.

The Missouri Department of Conservation reported Thursday that there were numerous water rescues across the southwest portion of the state in a matter of just a few hours. The department

reminded motorists to avoid driving into flood waters.

"Plan extra time to reach your destination as you may have to find alternate routes. If you encounter flooded roads, turn around, don't drown," the department wrote in a social media post.



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