



Trout Talk

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**Bennett Spring State Park
ready for opening day
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March 2024

Bennett Spring State Park ready for opening day

LCR STAFF
EDITOR@LACLEDERECORD.COM

The 2024 Bennett Spring Opening Day Siren Ringer will be a longtime visitor to the park, Don Harbaugh, 93, of St. Louis.

Don has enjoyed fishing at Bennett Spring for 75+ years. He is a Navy Reserve Veteran serving 12 years during the early 1950s. It is around this same time he began making the trip down to Bennett Spring to trout fish.

He has mentored four generations of his family to become fishermen and women, including teaching his three daughters how to fish. Don and his wife of 69 years, Joan, not only fished during the regular trout season, but also during the winter catch and release season, taking advantage of the fishing opportunity during the quieter times of the year. Don made many memories for

his family camping out of the old station wagon, pulling a camping trailer, and then upgrading to the small cabins in the park and surrounding resorts. Over the many years, Don and his wife saved their money and always found time to make it to Bennett Spring as often as they could. As years passed and his family grew, he enjoyed time with his grandkids sharing his love of Bennett Spring. Don is proud to see the fishing tradition continues.

Don will sound the siren at 6:30 a.m. sharp on March 1 to start the 2024 fishing season.

Anglers may notice some construction activities during their visit this coming season as the hatchery begins renovation activities in the Winter of 2023, according to the Bennett Spring website.

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Submitted Photo/
 Don Harbaugh will sound the siren to begin this year's trout fishing season.

Opening Day

from page 2

"These renovations will breathe new life into the hatchery as certain infrastructure and components are replaced and renovated. During the 2024 season, the hatchery complex will be unavailable for public use. This includes feeding the fish and hatchery tours. Thank you for your patience during this time as we work on these much needed improvements," the website post said.

There are three fishing zones within Bennett Spring State Park. Zone 1 runs from the Hatchery Dam upstream to the spring area. Only flies are permitted in Zone 1. Zone 2 runs from the hatchery dam downstream to the Whistle Bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted in Zone 2. Zone 3 runs from the Whistle Bridge downstream to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait, natural and scented bait are permitted in Zone 3. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited in Zone 3, even if natural bait or scent has been added.

Each year the park hosts special events that encourage angling as a family activity and provide novice anglers the opportunity to experience trout fishing. Kids Free Fishing Day takes place on the first Saturday in May. For 2024, the event will be held on Saturday, May 4. This is an opportunity for the whole family to come out and spend the day fishing at the trout park. All children age 15 and under fish for free during this annual event. There will be a special kids only fishing area to ensure that they have a successful trip. This area will extend from the hatchery outlet in Zone 2 to the Suzy Hole in Zone

3. This area will be marked with signs and will be patrolled to make sure that children are the only anglers fishing in that area. Children need to observe the zone regulations, length limits for brown trout, and daily limits. There will be streamside volunteers to assist participants with knot tying, lure selection, and fishing advice. There will be several activities for the children and food will be provided for all participants. All anglers must abide by normal fishing hours for May, which are 6:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m.

Anglers can fish during the Statewide Free Fishing Days which are held in June on the first Saturday and Sunday following the first Monday. In 2024, this will be June 8 and 9. On these two days, no daily tag or fishing license is required to fish in the park. More great fishing events happening at Bennett Spring in 2024 include Veteran's Fishing Day held on Saturday, April 20 and also Ladies Free Fishing Day held on Sept. 28. Contact the hatchery for more information about these events.

Anglers also have the opportunity to catch and release trout during the winter fishing season. Bennett Spring Trout Park is open for catch-and-release fishing only from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday from the second Friday in November through the second Monday in February. The last day of the previous catch-and-release season was Feb. 12. The season beginning in the fall of 2024 will start on Nov. 8 and end on Feb. 10, 2025. During catch-and-release season, only flies may be used and all fish must be released unharmed immediately.



Submitted photo

Don Harbaugh goes fishing at Bennett Spring State Park.

Bennett-Spring.com

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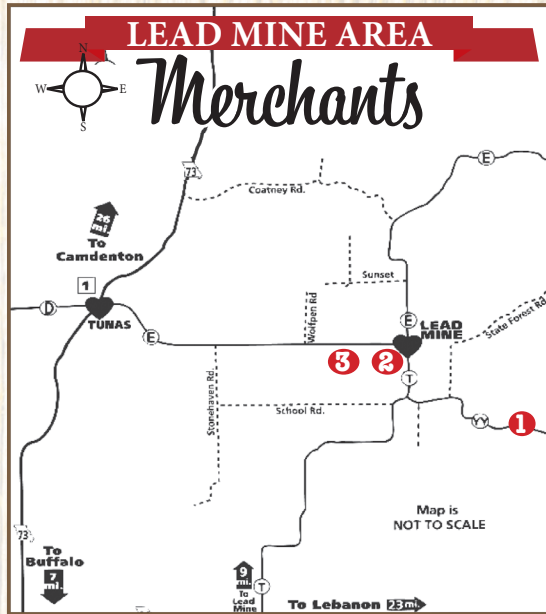
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Public safety improvement is coming to Bennett Spring State Park

STEVE SMITH
EDITOR@LACLEDERECORD.COM

A major public safety improvement is coming to Bennett Spring State Park this spring.

Plans call for two new emergency sirens to be installed in the park this year, Laclede County Office of Emergency Management Director Randy Rowe announced in January at a Laclede County Commission meeting.

The county is receiving a \$25,000 grant to cover the cost of the first storm siren in Bennett Spring Park.

The Laclede County Commission on Feb. 20 approved a bid of \$23,500 from Storm Sirens, Inc. of Norman, Okla. for the purchase and installation of the siren.

Rowe said the paperwork is in motion to begin the installation.

"I'm hoping we'll have it installed in the next two weeks after the trout season opens," Rowe said. "Our goal is to have it operational by the second Wednesday in March and then we can

test it with the other storm sirens in the city and county."

Rowe said OEM negotiated with the State of Missouri, SEMA and Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to assist in the grant process for funding.

He said Laclede County will be in charge of the installation, the maintenance, upkeep and insurance on the two units.

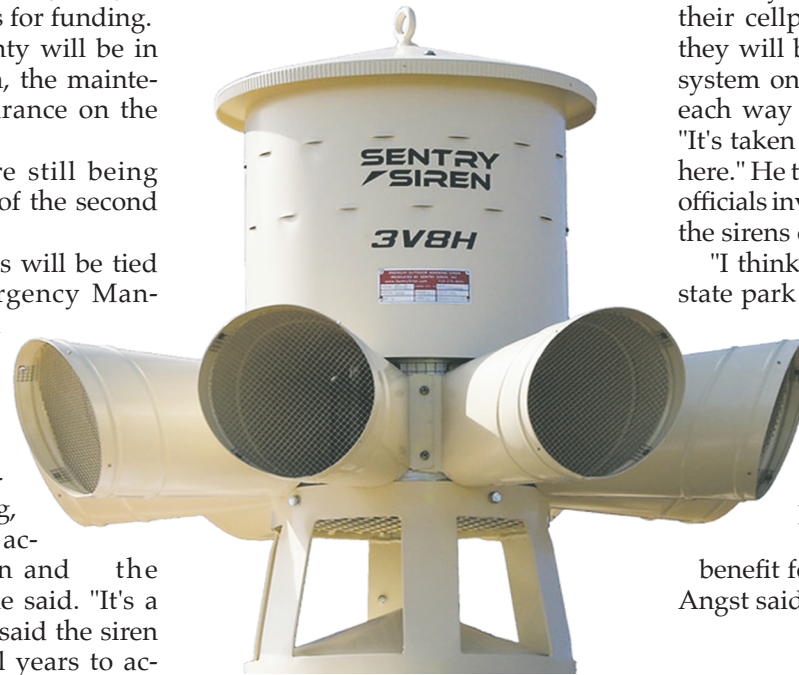
Rowe said details are still being worked out for funding of the second siren.

He said the new sirens will be tied into the Office of Emergency Management's existing storm siren system and will also be identified individually.

"So if for some reason, we need to activate the sirens on just Bennett Spring, we can do that without activating City of Lebanon and the county sirens as well," he said. "It's a nice new system." Rowe said the siren project has taken several years to ac-

complish.

"It's been a 12-year process, getting everybody on the team together," he said.



He said the sirens will protect about 6,000 people in the park in the summertime and help seven outfitters in the area and 2,000 people on the river.

"They won't have to only rely on their cellphones or NIXLE warnings, they will be able to hear this warning system on the river, maybe two miles each way from the park," Rowe said. "It's taken a long time to come, but it's here." He thanked SEMA, DNR and the officials involved in getting approval for the sirens on park property.

"I think we are going to be the first state park to have this quality of siren system in the state," he said.

Laclede County President Commissioner Randy Angst said the sirens will be a valuable asset for the park.

"This is going to be a true benefit for public safety at the park," Angst said.



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LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Charlie Patel is owner and operator of the Lil Country Store.

STEVE SMITH
EDITOR@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Three years ago, Charlie Patel moved his family to Laclede County where he bought the Lil Country Store, a rural convenience store at the junction of Highway 64 and KK. And it is fair to say, they've been busy ever since. Today, he and his wife, Ruchi operate the store which also offers breakfast and lunch that includes everything from biscuits and gravy and breakfast pizza to cheeseburgers with fries or tots, pizza, wings and a variety of cold cut sandwiches. They open at 5:30 every weekday morning and are open until 8:30 each evening. They are open 7 to 7 on Saturdays and Sundays. "We are originally from a small city in western India, about the same size as Lebanon," Charlie shared while relaxing for a moment at one of the tables set up in their store for

those coming by for breakfast or lunch. "We were in the state of Maryland for four or five years before coming here. It was a much smaller town, too small," he added with a smile. "Lebanon is a good size." Charlie has enjoyed running his store so much that he decided to do it again, so to speak. Last summer he bought the Ft. Bennett store, just east of Bennett Spring State Park, that had been closed for the past two years. "It's been a lot of work to get it up and going again," he explained. "Right now it is just a convenience store as we don't have the food for breakfast or lunch there. We have lots of plans for new things there, like putting in new gas pumps like we did here at the Lil Country Store and adding more fishing stuff. We have some things ordered already. We would also like to open up the camper spaces again, that are behind the store. It just takes time and so we have to do

it all, little by little. It's been a little slow there so far, but we need to get better signs letting everyone know that we are open there." Charlie and Ruchi live behind the Lil Country Store with their daughter, Kashvi age 14 and their son, Aarush age 10 who both attend Joel E. Barber school. Charlie's parents, Rajendrakumar and Kokilaben Patel also live with the family, and help out in the store when needed. And when he's not working, Charlie says he just enjoys spending time with his family. "Whatever they want to do, that's what I'm doing," he laughed. He continued. "We have a few gaming machines here in the back of the store, for people to enjoy and we also sell hunting and fishing licenses. "The community here has been welcoming to us so the best part of having a store here is meeting all different kinds of people, and they have been welcoming. They have been good to me, to us."

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Bennett Spring Hatchery renovation work continues



LCR Photo

Renovation work is underway for the fish hatchery at Bennett Spring State Park.

LAURA L. VALENTI

The renovation of the Bennett Spring Hatchery continues and is on schedule, despite some weather delays, according to Ben Havens, Bennett Spring Hatchery manager.

Havens is operating out of a small temporary building which is serving as his office, currently located in the parking lot that once served fishermen and those visiting the hatchery pools.

"They are busy working on the original hatchery building where our offices have always been," he explained. "That building was built in the 1920s and while it has been remodeled over the years at other times, they are now putting in new plumbing and electric, a second bathroom, and upgrading the offices to make them more accessible for visitors. Basically, they are bringing

everything up to code.

"They are also putting in new windows and an improved larger viewing deck on the spring branch side. It'll have better lighting so I'm looking forward to that. There will also be more space for our programs and fly tyers who meet there regularly," he said. "Right now the construction crew is also working on the new head gate area. They've removed some of the old concrete structure that was around there that will no longer be in use. They had to first build a better platform for the use of some of the heavy equipment that was needed to do the work. They've been drilling for the installation of footers that will support the new head gate. It will include rotating screens and be under a roof so it will be better protected from the weather. This will all make a great deal of

See 'RENOVATION'/page 11

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Renovation

from page 9



LCR Photo

Bennett Spring State Park is open for fishing despite renovation work that will continue this year.



difference during flood times.”

Havens explained that a great deal of planning time has been spent up to now for pumps, pipes, and other equipment and parts that needed ordered. Some items have long lead times so it is important to get those ordered so they can keep the project moving forward as planned.

“This is a two-year construction project,” he added. “The construction began on July 31 so we are close to six months in at this point. They are moving along and progress is being made.

Further renovations include new piping that will go under the hatchery pools which are currently sitting dry. “We have no fish on site at the moment. They still have to retrofit the raceway pools and the raceway transitions will be re-done in the coming months. We plan on having water and moving fish back in the pools by the middle of February, about two weeks before opening on March 1. This will allow us to prepare for the fishing season and have fish stocked and be ready by Opening Day.”

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