

Trout



Talk

**John Walther is this year's
honorary starter for
trout season at Bennett Spring
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by Jack Silberberg

March 2025

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Trout season opens at Bennett Spring



LCR File Photo

Anglers gather for Opening Day at Bennett Spring State Park in 2019.

JACK SILBERBERG
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Bennett Spring Hatchery Manager Ben Havens says there will plenty of fish for this year's trout season at the state park. Opening Day is March 1.

Havens reported that progress was steady on the ongoing hatchery construction, with crews working during the off season between bouts of weather. The Missouri Department of Conservation's website notes that the project is slated for completion in the summer of 2025.

Like last year, Havens said that the park will bring in trout from the state's coldwater hatchery system as the park's own hatchery awaits the com-

pletion of its renovations. The park will stock fish two to three times per week.

Havens expected a busier opening day due to it being on a Saturday. If weather permits, Havens believed there would be around 2,000 anglers in attendance.

"We're going to have a lot of nice fish this season, it's looking like. You know, good size and plenty of numbers, so I think that this season will be great, and we'll get opening day started and move forward," Havens said.

The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) operates trout hatcheries at four parks in the state, including Bennett Spring, and reports that it planned to stock about 20,000 trout among the four parks for opening day.

MDC will continue to stock the trout parks daily during the catch-and-keep season, totaling more than 600,000 trout annually at the four trout parks and about 1 million trout annually statewide. Due to ongoing construction, Bennett Spring State Park will be stocked three times per week.

"Despite production challenges due to historic flooding experienced last year, we expect to have a successful trout season with ample fishing opportunities for anglers," said MDC Hatcheries Systems Manager Clint Hale in an MDC press release.

Trout anglers need a daily trout tag to fish in Missouri's trout parks during the catch-and-keep season. The cost of a daily trout tag is \$5 for adults and \$3

for those 15-years-old and younger. Daily trout tags can only be purchased at each of the four trout parks. MDC encourages trout anglers to have the correct amount of cash for daily tags, if possible.

Missouri residents ages 16-64 and nonresidents ages 16 and older also need a fishing permit in addition to the daily trout tag. A state fishing permit is \$9. MDC encourages trout anglers to buy fishing permits ahead of time from numerous vendors around the state, online at mdc.mo.gov/buypermits, or through MDC's free MO Fishing app, available for download on the App Store or Google Play.

John Walther is this year's honorary starter for trout season at Bennett Spring

JACK SILBERBERG
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Though a Jefferson City native, John Walther has spent much of his life by the waters of Bennett Spring. Having visited and supported the state park since 1964, Walther has now been recognized as the honorary starter, or whistleblower, for the park's opening day of trout season on March 1.

Walther first visited Bennett Spring on a family vacation in 1964, where the "crystal-clear" water left a lifelong impression upon him.

"We didn't fish," Walther said, "but I was amazed at the clear water of the stream."

He next visited the park in 1966 with his McDonald's manager, who suggested that they fish there. Since then,

he has visited the park often, increasing his time there after retirement to forty to fifty times a year.

He has caught his share of fish during that time, but he still counts a day without a catch as a day spent in nature. He has gone with friends as a youth on Saturday trips and later with his wife, who does not like to fish but enjoys being in nature.

Walther is a member of several fly-tying groups, from the Capital City Fly Fishers to the park's Bennett Fly Tying Group. Walther helped found the latter group in 2020, which was originally met as an occasion for locals to gather once a week.

The Fly Tying Group began at the old hatchery, then moved to the nature center, and currently meets at Bennett Spring Church of God 52 weeks a year

on Wednesdays. Walther felt rewarded by the group's existence, citing a meeting where 51 people attended.

With the group, Walther has volunteered at park events like Veterans Free Fishing Day in April, where they hand out flies and cook hotdogs. The group also helps at other events like the Kids' Free Fishing Day.

Having gone down for so many years, Walther says that his trips to Bennett are now more social than purely for fishing. He still had some fishing tales to share, though. In one, he released a scarred lunker (three pounds or more) back into the water only to see a child catch the same fish the following day.

"That's kind of a fun story, because I was so tickled that he caught it, you know," Walther said.



John Walther



The bridge at Bennett Spring in 2025.

LCR Photo/Jack Silberberg

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Recalling past Bennett Spring Opening Days



LCR File Photo

Fishermen begin the season at Bennett Spring in 2017.



LCR File Photo


A scene from Opening Day in 2021.



LCR File Photo

Anglers at Bennett Spring Opening Day in 2024.

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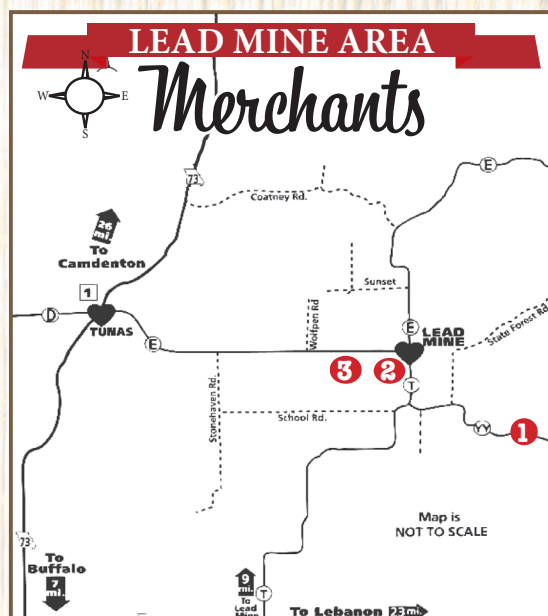
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Upcoming events set for park's nature center

LCR STAFF

Bennett Spring State Park will host a program on backyard birds from 3 to 4 p.m. March 22 at the nature center. Visitors will be able to learn about the basic backyard birds that are found in Missouri year-round. Afterward, they can test their identification skills by watching the park's feeders for these common birds. Visitors can bring binoculars if you wish to watch birds at the feeders.

A program will be held at the nature center to learn about the early spring wildflowers that bloom at Bennett Spring State Park. This event is free and open to the public, and there is no need to register.

A program will be held about animals, plants and fungi that naturally clean up human pollution from 2 to 3 p.m. April 12 at the nature cen-

ter. Nocturnal animals and plants rely on the night sky for survival. Visitors are invited to learn how these organisms are being affected by humans lighting up the night.

Visitors can stop in the nature center to pick up a trail trivia question sheet before heading out to hike Bridge Trail from April 18-20. Fill in the question sheet during your hike, and then submit your answers at the nature center before the end of the day to receive a small prize.

A program on how light pollution affects wildlife will be held from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. April 26 at the nature center.

For more information, call the nature center at 417-532-3925.



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Wednesday morning is fly tying time



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Paul Remarcke of Lebanon enjoys tying flies at Bennett Spring Church of God. Find out more about the Wednesday morning fly-tying club on page 9.

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Wednesday is fly-tying time for local group

LAURA VALENTI

Like so many other beginning jokes....old fly fishermen don't die, they just....well, at Bennett Spring, some may not be able to go trout fishing anymore due to health issues, but more than a few spend more time tying flies. And one of their favorite places to meet is at the Bennett Spring Church of God annex on Wednesday mornings.

Don Ohler, Wayne Simpson and John Walther are just a few of the gents who gather at the church. Danny Goldsmith, originally from Wright County now lives at Weavers just outside the park, blew the Opening Day whistle in 2023 and is yet another member of the informal group.

Don Ohler, one of the group's leaders, explained, "We are a group with no officers or no dues; in that we are not that formal. Many come to tie flies, all sizes, styles and colors and some just come to visit for a time."

Wayne Simpson, another of the group's organizers added. "Our tyers come from all over—St. Louis, St. Joseph, Springfield, Jefferson City, and even other states like Illinois. And of course, several now live here close to Bennett Spring having retired to the area from other locations."

Don Ohler continued, "We started out a few years ago at the Bennett Spring hatchery building. Hatchery manager Ben Havens has been very supportive of our group from the beginning. Of course, when we outgrew the space there, we had to move and we were meeting at the park's nature center. After we outgrew the space there, we came over to the Church of God, and they have been so welcoming to us. We really appreciate that."

He concluded, "One of the things we also do is we tie flies and have them available in little boxes to be given away on special fishing days here at Bennett, like Free Fishing Days for the



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Some come to tie flies and others just to visit with fishermen, who all enjoy fishing and tying the flies that bring in the trout.

kids and for ladies and other Free Fishing Days. We have them packaged up in little boxes that are labeled, showing they come from the Bennett Spring Fly Tying Group.

"Anyone interested in learning

more about fly tying," Ohler continued, "is welcome to join us at the Bennett Spring Church of God annex, on Wednesday mornings, beginning at 9 a.m."

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Trout Talk

BENNETT SPRING STATE PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA



Fly-tyers at work



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Tied flies and some of the many materials that are used in the hobby.



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Danny Goldsmith and Don Ohler are two of the fly tying enthusiasts who meet on Wednesday mornings at the Bennett Spring Church of God annex in Bennett Spring State Park.



LCR Photo/Laura Valenti

Cecil "Woody" Woodman ties some of the tiniest flies to be seen on a typical Wednesday morning amongst the Bennett Spring fly tying members. He often ties his flies on some of the smallest hooks, numbered 20 through 26.

Born in British Columbia, Woody stated that he has been trout fishing and tying flies all of his life. He currently lives in Willard and is a frequent visitor to Bennett Spring.

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