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Opening Day

Every year, thousands of anglers flock to Bennett Spring State Park to celebrate the first day of trout season on March 1

A little cold weather wasn't enough to keep anglers away from Bennett Spring State Park on Opening Day 2019.

Missouri's catch-and-keep trout fishing season officially began at 6:30 a.m. March 1, 2019.

By 11 a.m. that day, a total of 1,560 fishing tags had been sold, according to the Missouri State Parks website. Of that total, 1,449 were adult tags and 111 were child tags.

This is an increase over last year's numbers, which saw 1,255 adult tags and 78 youth tags sold by 10 a.m. Opening Day.

Temperatures were in the 20s Opening Day morning, but there was still plenty of fishing activity to be seen.

"I love it, makes it even more fun," said Joe Jones of Kansas City, referring to the cold. "I started coming a few years ago and it's become kind of a tradition now, regardless of the weather."

Jones was not alone in his appreciation of fishing at Bennett Spring.

"I love to catch trout, I love to eat trout," said William Ballantyne of Independence.





"It's a beautiful place to come and fish and hang out with friends. The weather doesn't bother me at all, I love it down here all times of the year."

Gene Huelskamp of the Kansas City area said he considered not coming this year because of the snow forecast, but ultimately changed his mind because of his love of fishing.

"I came down here last year one day and it got cold and icy so I was like, I don't need this, but I came Opening Day, mostly for tradition," he said.

Huelskamp said he is a frequent visitor to Bennett Spring.

"I fish down here a lot," he said. "I come down a couple of times a month and usually stay for three days down here."

Last year, more than 4,600 adult and youth tags were sold at the three state parks on opening day. State Parks Department says the season boosts the economies of nearby communities, such as Lebanon.

"Although trout fishing occurs in the parks, the surrounding communities reap economic benefits during

the fishing season with busy hotels, restaurants, quick shops and other retail stores."

Catch-and-keep trout season runs from March 1 through Oct. 31 followed by a catch-and-release season.

Video streaming from the Bennett Spring trout cam can be viewed on the Missouri State Parks trout season opening day website at <https://mostateparks.com>.

Gov. Mike Parson was on hand to kick off trout season at 6:30 a.m. at the hatchery building.

Opening Day photos and trout tag sales information from all three state trout parks are available on the trout season Opening Day website.

Trout season in Missouri is a cooperative effort of Missouri State Parks, which manages state parks, and the Missouri Department of Conservation, which operates the hatcheries and stocks the streams with trout.

For more information on the trout season, visit <https://mostateparks.com> or call Bennett Spring State Park at 417-532-4338.

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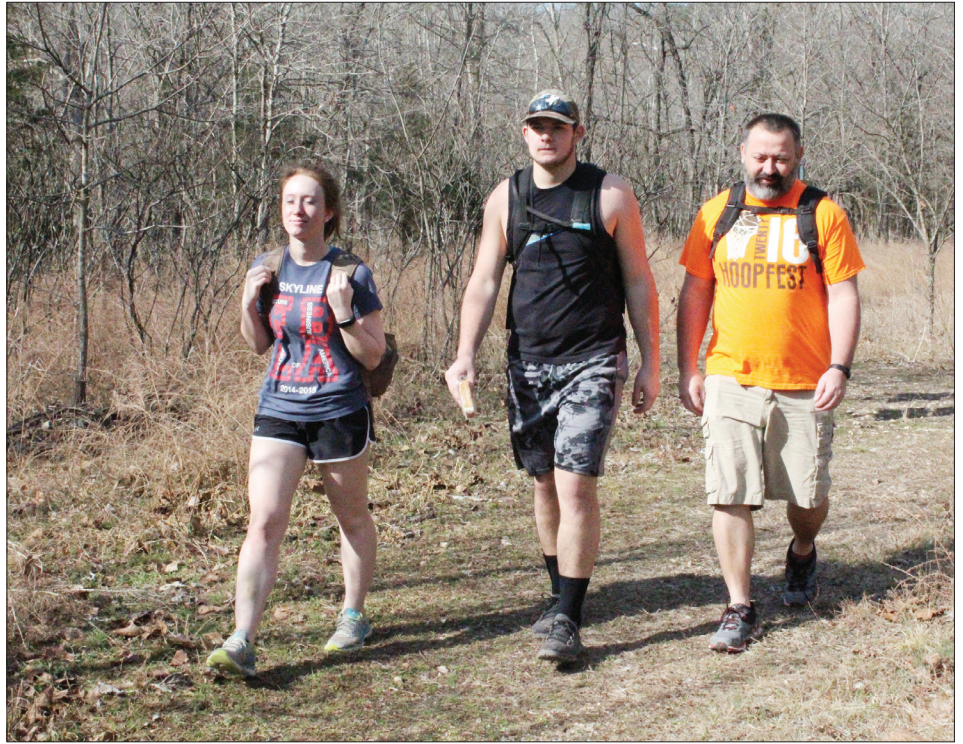
Bennett isn't just for fishing

From hiking trails
to camping out,
there is a ton to do
at Bennett Spring

Centuries ago, the “Eye of the Sacred One” first drew the Osage Indians to its banks. The clear blue waters are now known as Bennett Spring, the centerpiece of one of Missouri’s oldest state parks.

Bennett Spring continues to entice nature lovers of every description. Situated in the Niangua River valley, the park offers many opportunities for trout fishing, camping, hiking, bird watching, swimming and picnicking. Not only are the recreational options diverse and intriguing, but the scenery is enchanting and breathtaking — no matter what the season might be.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) completed many of the improvements and additions to the park during the 1930s. The rustic hiking trails carved out of the woods, the old stone bridge that arches over the waters of the spring, and the cozy park cabins welcoming weary fishermen all resulted from their efforts. The serenity of



the park, however, was perfect from the beginning.

A leisurely walk along the shaded Stream Trail reveals a stunning view of the clear spring waters. Fitness enthusiasts can opt to brave the rigorous seven-mile hike to the Natural Tunnel, while less-determined hikers may tread the two-mile Savanna Ridge Trail, which winds through

the woods and atop bluffs overlooking the picturesque Ozarks mountains.

Nature walks guided by park naturalists at the Nature Interpretive Center guarantee an authentic outdoor experience. The nature center also houses exhibits explaining the history of the spring and describing the natural environment of the park.



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The image shows the exterior of a large, single-story commercial building with a light-colored facade and brick accents. Several signs are visible on the building, including 'FACTORY OUTLET WALNUT BOWLS OZARK MADE', 'CASE POCKET KNIVES', 'Chicago Cutlery', and 'WÜSTHOF CUTLERY'. A 'TOUR BUS PARKING' sign is also present. In the foreground, there is a parking lot with several cars and a truck. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a row of logos and a large red banner.

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Bennett Spring's most popular attraction is the fishing. Although the rainbow trout is not native to Missouri, it has become the state's most popular sport fish since its introduction to the area.

Until they are large enough to be released into the spring branch, the trout are raised at the recently renovated hatchery in the park. The regular trout season extends from the beginning of March to the end of October.

In November, the "catch-and-release" period begins and continues on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through February. Year-round the rainbow trout beckon fisherman from the Midwest and beyond.

Although Bennett Spring State Park is most widely known for its fishing, its other amenities are readily available to those living within a day's drive. When local swimming pools become overcrowded, the park's impressive swimming pool can serve as an ideal alternative. When dinner at the same old restaurants seems unappetizing, the park's dining lodge can impress dinner guests with its "down home" cooking. When the town's event calendar is less than full, Bennett Spring area outfitters can provide thrilling float trips on the Niangua River.

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Get in the zone



Take a look at Bennett Spring 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. Permits are available at the park store. 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

April: 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.



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

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily

DINING LODGE HOURS

7 a.m. to one hour after the whistle during trout season

NATURE CENTER HOURS

Feb. 25 through Oct. 31

10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday

Nov. 1 through Feb. 24 - Closed

PARK OFFICE HOURS

SUMMER HOURS (On-Season)

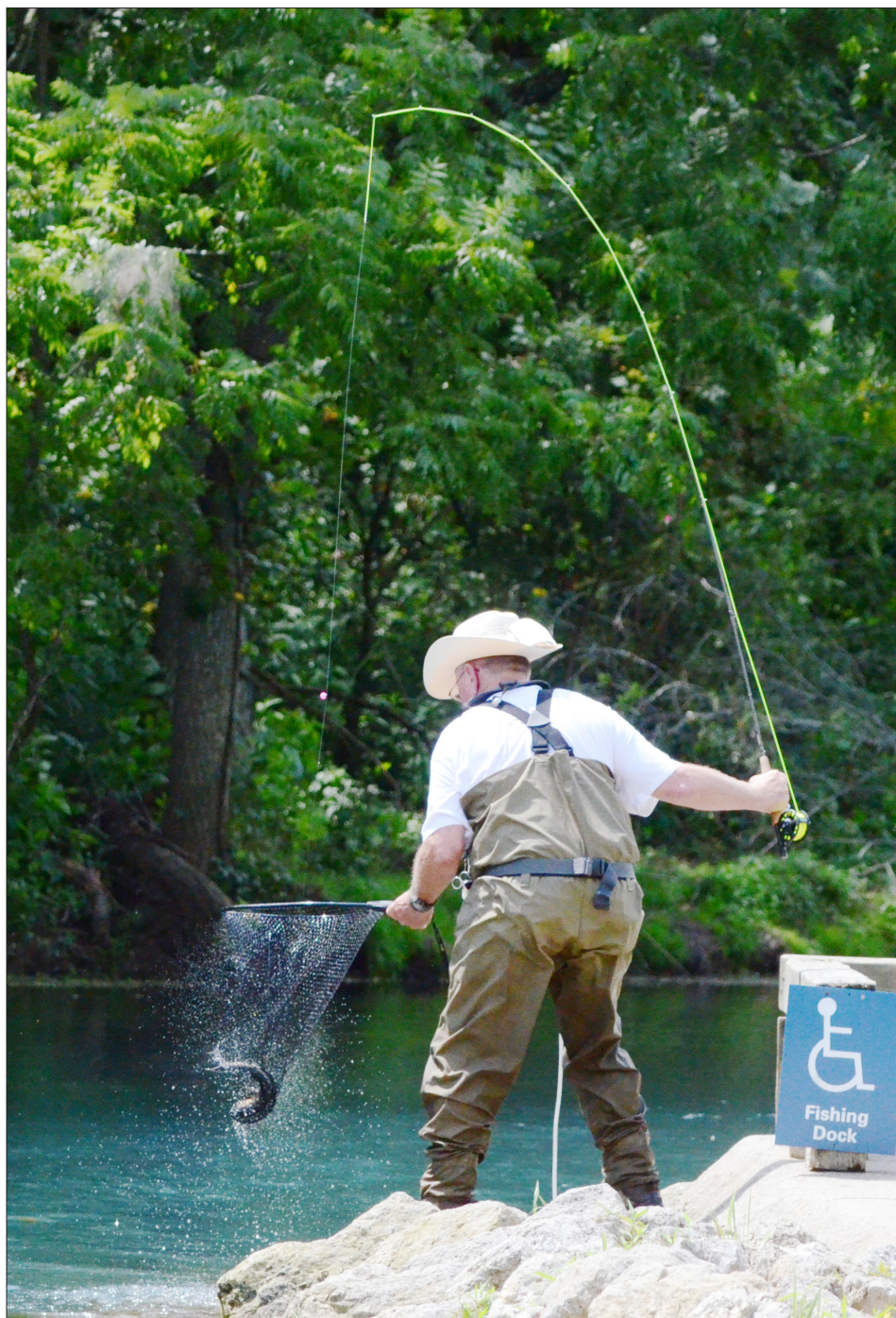
Feb. 25 through Oct. 31

8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday

Closed on state holidays

STORE HOURS

One hour before fishing officially starts through one hour after the regular fishing day ends according to the regular schedule daily during trout fishing season at the park

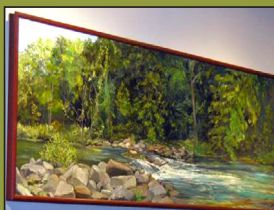
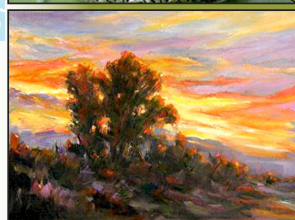


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From Brice to Bennett

Bennett Spring State Park is one of Missouri's first and most popular state parks, attracting a growing number of tourists every year.

The third largest natural spring in the state of Missouri pumps 100 million gallons of water each and every day. Anglers from around the nation wade in the spring's waters in search of lunker-sized trout, and those looking for adventures in camping and canoeing come in droves each year, but there was once a time when Bennett Spring State Park was simply known as Brice, Mo.

During the 1920s, when America was enjoying prosperity following World War I, Bennett Spring (then known as Brice) was one of many areas considered by state planners to be preserved as a state park.

A Dec. 12, 1924, article in the Laclede County Republican newspaper stated that Lebanon Chamber of Commerce President O.A. Mayfield requested that the state consider Bennett Spring as a park site. It said the first parcel of land, 8 1/2 acres that belonged to Josie Bennett Smith, would become a part of Bennett Spring State Park. The land was purchased from Mrs. Smith on Dec. 27, 1924.

Several weeks later, another contract was signed between William Sherman



Bennett, Mrs. Smith's brother, and the state for the sale of 565.33 acres. Of that land, 427 acres can be traced as belonging to James Brice, who settled there in 1837. The land where today's park store, office, dining lodge and hatchery buildings stand once belonged to the Bennett family.

James Brice first came here while traveling in Missouri from Illinois in search of productive land and a healthful climate. He decided to stay at the beautiful spring area, which reportedly teemed with wildlife. Elk, deer, wild turkeys and buffalo, even panthers, were said to drink from the enormous spring.



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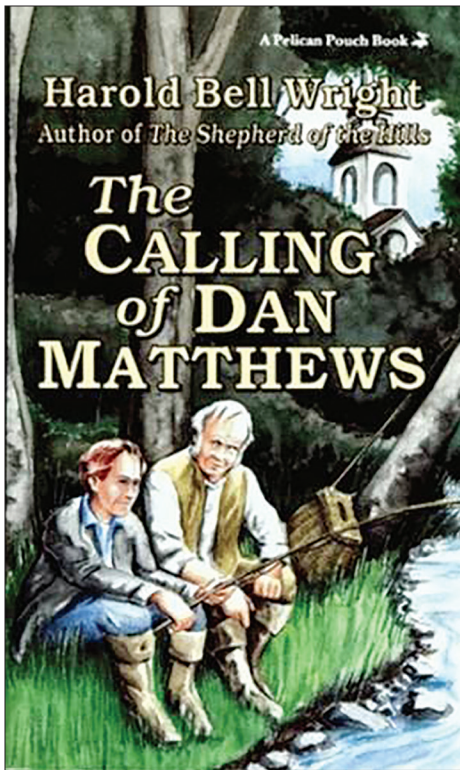


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Brice homesteaded 160 acres, which included the spring, and eventually homesteaded additional acreage that included all of the land and the spring branch area.

He built the first mill in the vicinity where early farmers brought their corn for grinding. The mill eventually was washed away during a violent rainstorm and flood. Brice, the first permanent settler in the Bennett Spring area, died in 1855 and is buried in the Bennett Cemetery.

The Bennett family later settled at the spring area on land known as the Elmer Conn farm, site of the present Sand Spring

Resort.

The enterprising Peter Bennett built a mill at the spring outlet and Niangua River, which also was washed away in a rainstorm and flood.

Bennett built a second mill, known as Bennett's Mill, during the Civil War years. It became a center for tradesmen and farmers. The mill was too small to accommodate the increase in business, so Bennett built a third mill and included a carding machine that prepared wool for the spinning wheel.

He also built a sawmill in one section

of the mill.

As business continued to grow, Bennett decided to construct a three-story building, and he purchased equipment for it in St. Louis. Since the railroad track went only to Rolla, Bennett and his employees had to meet the train there and haul the equipment to Brice in ox-driven wagons — a slow process over the rocky fords of that time.

Peter Bennett married Anna Brice, the daughter of homesteader James Brice. After Brice's death, Peter and Anna inherited the property.



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When Peter Bennett died in 1882, his son, William Sherman Bennett, continued to run the mill. Bennett's daughter, Josie Bennett Smith, operated a hotel at Brice for many years.

The Bennett Mill was destroyed by fire in 1895. Dr. John B. and Freeman Atchley built the last mill at Brice. Others who operated the mill in later years were J.E. Kelly, Mr. Runge and B.J. Usery. The mill stood as a landmark at Bennett Spring for sightseers and tradesmen alike. The Civilian Conservation Corps, which worked in the area during the 1930s, improved the mill. However, it later was destroyed by fire.

According to a Missouri Department of Natural Resources, campers would fish, hunt or visit with local townspeople to pass the time.

By the turn of the century, recreation was gaining in importance at Brice. According to the DNR, in 1900 the Missouri fish commissioner introduced 40,000 mountain trout into the spring, and a privately owned fish hatchery was built in 1923, the year before the state bought the spring and some of the surrounding area for a state park.

The Brice Post Office was originally built as a log building on the riverbank and named after James Brice. In later years,



it was located in a general store operated by William Sherman Bennett and his wife, Louie.

The name of the post office was changed to Bennett Spring in 1939 and finally was discontinued in 1965. Arlie Bramwell was the last postmaster at Bennett Spring.

It was reported that in the early 1900s that William Sherman Bennett had a number of cans of young trout emptied into the spring. The trout thrived in the cold waters, attracting many fishermen.

Brice was the location where famed author Harold Bell Wright completed work on his classic novel, "The Shepherd of the Hills." Wright also wrote "The Calling of Dan Matthews," while he lived in Lebanon. In that book, Wright's "Gordon's Mill"

actually was Bennett's Mill.

Today, one off the oldest original buildings at Bennett Spring in the Bennett Spring Church of God, organized in 1917 through the influence of William Sherman and Louie Boles Bennett, who donated land for the church site. It is the only original building that was in old Brice.

In 1933, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Project Administration (WPA) were two new programs implemented by the U.S. government to put people to work during the Great Depression. Much work was done at Bennett Spring starting in November of that year. They built a new dam, a bridge, a dining lodge, six cabins, a store and post office building, shelters, houses, roads and trails. They

also renovated the old Atchley Mill.

The men also constructed a second set of gravel-bottomed hatchery rearing pools and in 1935 built a new section onto the hatchery building. After the men left in 1938, they dismantled all but one of their barracks.

In 1969, Arlie Bramwell sold his wood and stone cabins to the state. Ralph Usery's cabins were razed. Splan's Resort was once a very busy place there. Vogel's Resort was acquired by the state in 1980.

In 1969, the Nature Interpretive Center opened at the park with George Kastler as the first naturalist, and in 1982 the park dedicated a new office and store building close to the dining lodge on the site of the original Brice. Later the park's Niangua entrance was renamed the Bramwell Entrance in honor of Arlie Bramwell.

An additional 1,650 acres of land to the south of the current state boundary was purchased in November 1988 to provide watershed protection for Bennett Spring itself as well as the park area. Each year has brought more improvements.

Now, at 3,216 acres, the state park that arose around Peter Bennett's spring continues to delight all comers.

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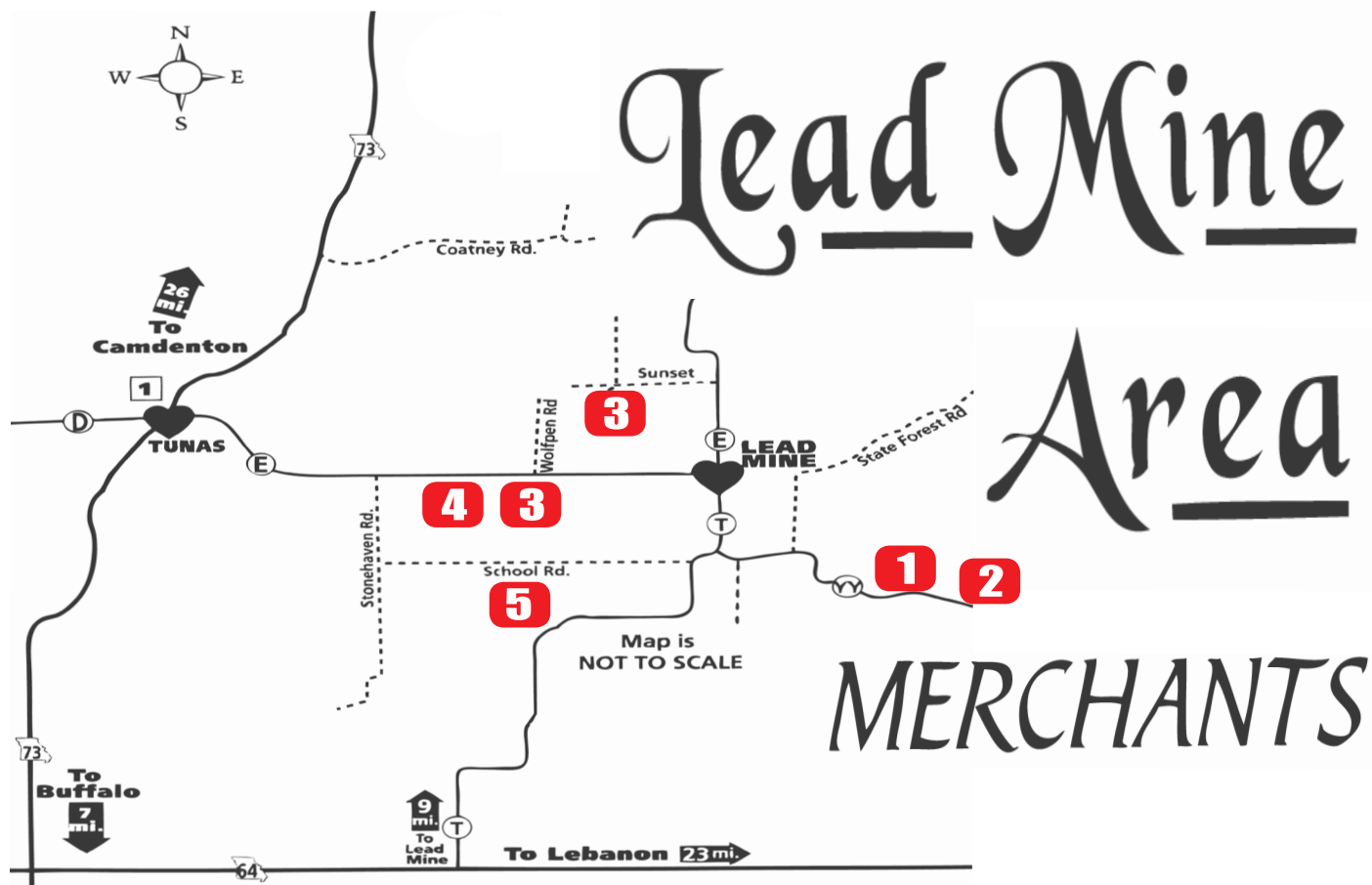


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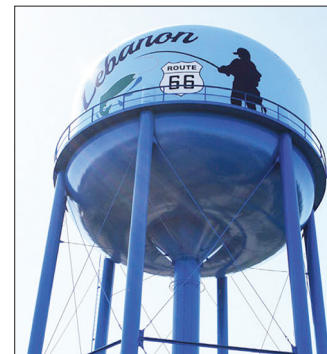
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Friendly people, friendly place



Visitors may wonder why the folks they meet at Bennett Spring State Park are so friendly. Well, that's kind of a thing around here.

Just a few miles east of the park on Missouri 64 is the city of Lebanon, which is proud of its motto: "Friendly people, friendly place."

Lebanon also celebrates its history with Route 66, the "Main Street of America." Historic Route 66 brings travelers from throughout the world to Lebanon, eager to "get their kicks on Route 66."

Visitors can learn more about the Route 66 era with a visit to The Route 66 Museum and Research Center, which has been featured in Best of the Midwest Travel Magazine.

This fascinating 3,500-square-foot museum is located in the Lebanon-Laclede County Library and has an extensive map collection and vignettes about the diners, gas stations, motels and communities built along Route 66. Admission is absolutely free.

Lebanon also offers a variety of restaurants and unique shopping opportunities. It is home to the Shepherd Hills Factory Outlet, the world's largest



dealer of top-selling Case Knives.

The huge store also offers so much more, including Ozark walnut bowls, Mikasa china and Denby pottery.

There's outstanding outlet shopping at The Mall, which offers jeans, shoes, housewares and other must-have items. Visit one of our many family-owned antique shops and be sure to stop in at the Heartland Antique Mall, which

has more than 250 dealers and 40,000 square feet of antiques, a Russell Stover Candy Outlet and crafts mall.

The Kenneth E. Cowan Civic Center is the pride of Lebanon, a state-of-the-art, multipurpose facility with a 46,000-square foot exhibition hall, meeting rooms, a 675-seat theater, outdoor arena and grand foyer.



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In addition, NASCAR short-track racing has returned to Lebanon's I-44 Speedway with racing every weekend from April through September. You can also be sure to catch some mudslinging fun at our premier dirt track, Lebanon Midway Speedway. Golf is available at our GreatLife Golf and Fitness Center, a semi-private, 18-hole championship golf course located between Lebanon and Bennett Spring.

The kids will love spending time at the beautiful parks and the Boswell Aquatic Center or visiting Whirlwind Ranch, an alpaca ranch where you can purchase hand-knit items made of soft alpaca yarn.

Stay at a comfortable national chain hotel, a family-owned motel, a neon-lit Route 66 landmark, or a charming bed and breakfast. Whatever lodging you choose, you can count on Lebanon's famous, friendly hospitality. You won't go hungry when you visit. Whether you're into Ozark barbecue, pizza, ethnic offerings, down-home comfort food or upscale cuisine, we have you covered.

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For more information, please contact City of Lebanon Tourism Department toll free at (866) LEBANON, or visit the website at www.lebanonmo.org.



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Kids get hooked on fishing



Bennett Spring hosts Kids Free Fishing Day every year in May

Murky waters and a muddy bank did not dissuade young anglers from taking part in Kids Free Fishing Day at Bennett Spring State Park on May 4, 2019, when 2,500 regular stockers and 20 bunkers waited for them.

Some 540 free tags were given out to kids.

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens said the water was eight to nine inches higher than usual. However, kids still caught fish.



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"There were a lot of fish caught. Obviously, conditions were a lot tougher than normal, but I think the kids who stuck it out and gave it a fair shot were successful. It was definitely a lot tougher than normal," Havens said.

Havens commented on the reason for Kids Free Fishing Day and for Ladies Free Fishing in the fall.

"The purpose of Kids Free Fishing Day is to give youth anglers as well as their families a chance to come out and have a day that's just for them. The stream is stocked. They know the fish are ready and waiting for them and they can come out, under normal conditions, have a little extra expertise there to help them to be successful. Hopefully, by coming out and fishing with us and learning about how to do it, they can come back on their own time and know what's going on and how to fish and make it something that they do other than just one day a year," Havens said.

He said certain age groups frequent the park in much smaller numbers. Grandparents are often the ones teaching youngsters to fish in the park. Free fishing days are designed to be the incentive to encourage all age groups to visit Bennett so a generation of potential anglers is not lost.

Grandparents Debbie and Greg Block from St. Louis watched their grandkids catch their limit off the whistle bridge.

Two year fishing veteran Eleanor, 4, caught a fish bigger than her brother, Terry, 6, but said he was the better angler. Out-fishing him was her favorite part of fishing.



Terry is in his fourth year of fishing. "We got him started up fishing, and he loves it. We're kind of making it a tradition. Their mom and dad don't fish, and it was up to us to teach them how to fish and keep it going. Those kids love fishing so we'll keep it going," Block said.

Hayden Perkins, 11, also has a tradition associated with Kids Free Fishing Day.

It was Hayden's eleventh year of trying his luck. He was supposed to play in a baseball tournament. When it was postponed until the afternoon, his dad, Tim, brought him to the park Saturday morning to try his luck.

This year, Kids Free Fishing Day coincided with Star Wars Day. However, the Force was not with young Perkins.

"I haven't caught a fish here in 11 years," Hayden Perkins, 11, said.

Still, he kept on casting.

"I've got a bite on every single cast, but they keep coming off. It's disappointing," he said.

His dad noticed that his son's disappointment had not depleted his interest in trout fishing.

"He likes to come back. We've been here a couple hours, and he's tried just about everything, but he just doesn't have the luck," Perkins said.

However, Tim saw a character trait in his son that fishing reinforced.

"He's persistent though. He enjoys to fish. It gives him a chance to unwind," Perkins said of his son.

Five-year-old Jacob's angler's vest was adorned with tools he could not identify. At age 5, his favorite part of fishing was casting.

His dad, Frank Dalton, is a big fan of Missouri's trout streams and family traditions.

"For me to take them down to the same spots with my dad and pick out the same type of bait, a little old gummy worm that I started out with just so I could have some fun and switch out some colors, that's what we're really enjoying," Frank Dalton said.

He was happy to have his dad Dave on the bank sharing tips and traditions with his kids.

"I'm trying to teach them the same stuff that my dad did, and I'm proud to see that he gets to come down here and teach them just as well too," Frank Dalton.



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From Eggs to Lunkers

Bennett Spring Hatchery raises about 350,000 trout every year

In the wild, only one percent of trout eggs survive long enough to grow into trout.

At the Bennett Spring State Park Hatchery, the percentage is much higher but still not 100 percent.

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens said he and Assistant Manager Mike Perry and their crew would be ecstatic if 40 percent of the eggs successfully made it out the door to the raceways.

It is a cycle that begins each fall when spawning happens in the hatchery.

Havens said he keeps a couple thousand brood stock on hand, a mix of three-year-old females weighing in at three to five pounds and two-year-old males at a pound and a half.

The females produce an astonishing number of eggs, one thousand for each pound of body weight.

"A three pound female can give us 3,000 eggs," Havens said.

Consequently, a season's egg harvest is impressive.

"We look to take somewhere between one million and a million and half eggs during a production season," Havens said.



Photo by Chris Roden

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens points to some trout eggs in his hand. As they begin developing, the eggs are placed in upwelling jars that stir the eggs much as the current would in a stream. Some of them have both eyes and will soon hatch.

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That helps him meet his commitment of 350,000 12 and a half inch fish for stocking the park, the Niangua and some urban areas.

Of the 350,000 fish he must produce, 315,000 go to the Park, 30,000 goes to Kansas City for urban fishing and about 10,000 into the Niangua.

Spawning begins in September and runs through December. In January through April, he receives spring spawn eggs from other partner hatcheries.

Thanks to the spawns and existing fish, Havens said the park could have somewhere around 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 fish of different sizes from an inch to stocker size at any given time.

How many trout are stocked in the stream is determined by a simple formula.

The anticipated number of anglers times 2.25 pounds of fish determines how many stocker fish of a certain weight are needed.

The anticipated angler total is figured by looking at the average number of anglers in years past.

Weather and area events may make hitting the correct number of fish difficult. However, short-falls are corrected the next day while anglers get to enjoy any overstocking.

After the March 1 opening, Havens and his crew prepare for the year's three big fishing events: Veterans' Fishing Day in April, Kids' Day on the first Saturday in May and Ladies' Fishing Day on the last Saturday



of September.

"Most of the season is pretty laid back. We're just in kind of a groove. We stock every night for the next day, we move fish, we clean fish, we take of the fish growing in the building until they're about four inches and are ready to come outside," Havens said.

They are placed in the raceways where they have ample space, feed and water. As they grow and crowd the raceways, the park crew moves them to other raceways for more space.

How much feed the fish receive is based on their weight.

"If they're not growing enough, we feed them more. If they're getting too fat, we might cut them back and put them on a little bit of a diet. It just depends on what's going on," Havens said.

From Memorial Day to Labor Day, Havens has hatchery tours on the first and third Saturdays of the month for individuals and

groups.

The heaviest stocking months are in the summer when from June until August the crew stock from 45,000 to 60,000 trout.

Once the fishing season ends on October 31, the "trout harvest" begins with urban area stocking.

Warm water hatcheries bring in stocking trucks and the park uses its own stocking truck for the harvest.

"Over the course of a day and half, we'll bring the trucks in, we'll load them up with stocker size trout and they'll disperse those fish in the mid-Missouri and Kansas City areas of the state," Havens said.

Havens said the trucks have oxygen and aerators to distribute the oxygen throughout the tank.

"We can haul about 2,500 big stocker size rainbow trout on that truck. I'm sure it's a wild experience for them,"

Havens said.

Havens said because the fish are in complete darkness, they are not agitated by passing cars and trees and lights that a windowed truck would allow.

"There's things we can do to calm them down. You can put a little salt in the water at a certain percentage. It's kind of like an aspirin. It calms the nerves a little bit," Havens said.

Havens said the trout are transported once or twice a month November through March for the urban winter fishing season.

Friday through Monday beginning the second weekend in November to the second weekend in February, the winter fishing season happens in the park.

In those cooler months, catch and release fishing with a fly rod is allowed from 8 a.m. through 4 p.m. in any zone in the park.

The Niangua River continues to be stocked twice a month the whole year round with 500-900 fish per month. The trout that avoid park anglers' lures join them.

Havens said he trades fish with other cold water hatcheries as needed because of flooding and such.

"We work together and try to help each other out as best we can," Havens said.

Havens lives in the park and shares on-call duties with Perry. They respond to requests by the crew in the park.

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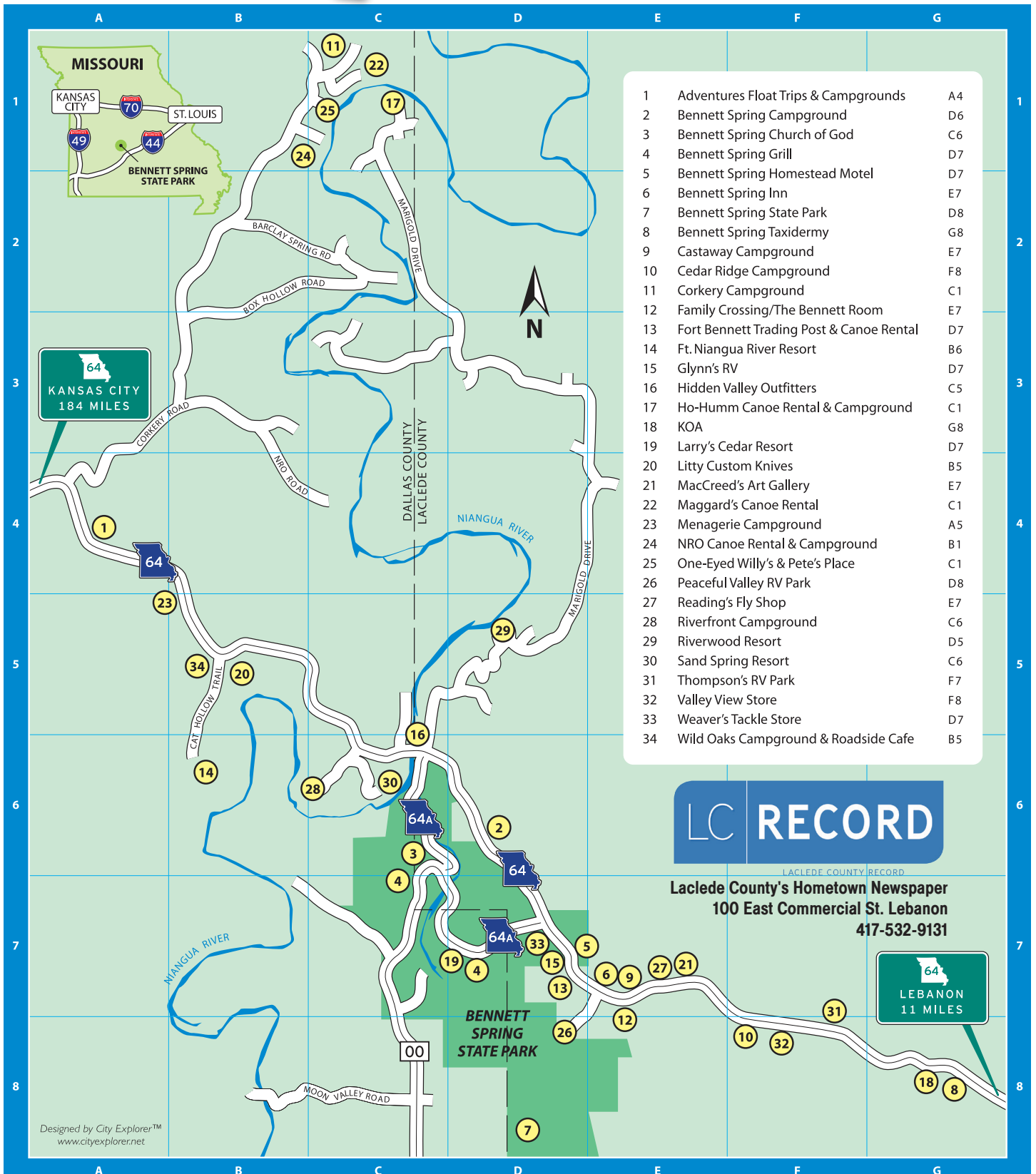
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