

POCAHONTAS STATE PARK



Park History: Built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and originally operated by the National Park Service (NPS) as the Swift Creek Recreational Demonstration Area from 1938 through 1942. From 1942 through 1945, it was a recreation area for soldiers returning from World War II. The NPS donated the facility to Virginia State Parks in 1946, making it the 7th and largest state park in the system.

Infrastructure: 115 buildings: 128 water/electric campsites, 7 shelters, 6 camping cabins, 4 yurts, 6 group cabin areas (48 associated buildings), boat launch, pool complex (4 pools, 2 slides, water playground), 5 state residences, 26 septic systems and fields, over 100 miles of trails, 31 parking areas providing entrance to the park, 6 miles of paved road, 1 amphitheater that hosts national touring acts, 3 lakes and associated dams, and 537 parking spots in the day use area.

Employment: 11 classified (full-time) positions, approximately 100 seasonal/wage positions, including lifeguard, snack bar cook, maintenance, interpreter, boat rental attendant, and office support and contact station attendant. (Of those, there are twenty 1,500-hour/wage employees.)

Annual Attendance: 1,250,000 **Annual Budget:** \$1,000,000 **Annual Revenue:** \$1,670,000

Economic Impact: Over \$25,695,000 to the local and regional economy.

Special Operational Considerations: Pocahontas State Park is located in Chesterfield County, just 20 miles from downtown Richmond. As part of the Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area the park is within a reasonable driving distance for over 1,250,000 people. Unlike most Virginia State Parks, Pocahontas is situated in an urban area with park property adjoining multiple housing subdivisions. The layout of the park is unique in that it has both a traditional park entrance as well as multiple exterior entrances.



Significant Uses/Impacts:

- Richmond Regional Ride Center: When completely built out, it will have 40 miles of single-track mountain bike trails in three systems: Swift Creek - 21 miles (when complete), Morgan - 9.4 miles, and Lakeview - 9.5 miles.
- Pool Complex: The only public pool in Chesterfield County, giving access to families, day-care and summer camp groups who are not members of private pools and clubs, a place to enjoy cool and safe waters on hot summer days.
- Heritage Amphitheater: Hosts national and local touring acts, from symphony to rock-and-roll groups, as well as family-friendly movies and theater productions.
- Swift Creek Lake: A major aquatic recreational area that features trophy fishing, competitive and leisurely non-motorized boating, and environmental protection.
- Visitor Center: Serves a key role in historical and environmental education to park guests, and as an important host to local school groups from urban areas. The newly renovated Discovery Center allows a park guest to sample all the sights and sounds that Pocahontas has to offer.
- Swift Creek and Powhatan Banquet Halls: Hosting nearly a total of 400 events per year, the halls serve as the settings for weddings, family reunions and corporate gatherings.
- Campground: Open year-round, it routinely has no vacancies every weekend from late April to early November.
- Volunteers: Over 30,000 volunteer hours recorded in 2017, the most of any park in Virginia.

Operational Challenges

- Maintenance issues are severely backlogged, especially in the group cabin areas where the majority of structures are located. Many structures are 80 years old.
- Access, patrol, and response to emergencies on a large and complex trail system. With over 100 miles of trails, vegetation management, erosion control and the complexity of the different trail types is challenging.
- Meeting expectations of visitors who have enjoyed parks with newer facilities and a more current lay-out. Examples: Absence of a welcoming center, aging bathroom facilities, and deteriorating group cabins.
- Bathhouses and restrooms are outdated and in need of expansion and major renovations.
- Swimming pools are in need of major upgrades, interior coating repair, updated pool features, and major tile renovation. Built in 2002, most structures have outlived their expected lifespan.
- Managing special events - The park hosts more special events than any other state park, from hosting 24-hour trail races with over 2,000 runners to military and law enforcement training, concerts, and community events such as car shows.
- Managed and permitted deer hunts. As one of the last large green spaces in the ever-growing Chesterfield area, there is a high demand for hunting. Pocahontas issued 100 archery permits in 2017 in addition to managed hunts that registered over 50 hunters. Educating citizens and ensuring public safety in preparing and closing the park for hunting is challenging, while continuing to manage a healthy deer population.