



Senate Press Office

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Heath: State Park Changes Unfortunate but Necessary to Protect Vital Services

BREMEN (May 28, 2009) – Three of northwest Georgia’s state-run historic sites will see significant changes this summer as part of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) restructuring efforts. As part of this restructuring, the Pickett’s Mill Battlefield site in Dallas, Etowah Indian Mounds site in Cartersville and Red Top Mountain Lodge in Cartersville are on the list of affected parks.

“We had to make some tough decisions in cutting Georgia’s budget for 2009 and 2010. In considering the fundamental role of state government, we gave top priority to vital services that should be provided in terms of education, transportation and commerce,” said State Sen. Bill Heath (R-Bremen). “While this restructuring was an unfortunate necessity due to current budgets, this could be an important opportunity for local communities to become more involved with the parks’ operations and management.”

In the wake of almost 40 percent in appropriation reductions and almost 25 percent in projected loss of revenue, DNR announced this week a major restructuring of state park and historic site management which will take effect this year throughout the state. Beginning July 1, Pickett’s Mill and Etowah Indian Mounds will see reduced operating hours with management being transferred to state parks. DNR noted that they are exploring possible operating agreements with communities to make up for any reduced services at all state parks and historic sites affected by the restructuring, and these sites could face future closings if no viable solutions are found.

“These decisions were heart-wrenching but were made using a business case analysis,” said DNR Commissioner Chris Clark in a recent press release. “We are exploring every avenue to manage budget reductions and revenue shortfalls, to properly care for our state parks and historic sites, and to minimize the impact on Georgia citizens and communities.”

DNR announced that their reorganization will include: reducing services at five state parks (Bobby Brown, Hart, Providence Canyon and Sprewell Bluff); reducing operational days and/or pursuing community support at 12 state historic sites (Dahlonge Gold Museum, Chief Vann House, Etowah

Indian Mounds, Fort Morris, Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation, Jarrell Plantation, New Echota, Pickett's Mill Battlefield, Robert Toombs House, Traveler's Rest, Jefferson Davis and Lapham-Patterson House); and eliminating 12 percent of the workforce and implementing furloughs. Earlier this month, the DNR announced that swimming pools will open only at High Falls, Victoria Bryant and Magnolia Springs state parks and at George T. Bagby, Little Ocmulgee and Red Top Mountain lodges.

DNR was also forced to increase fees for accommodations, recreational activities, interpretive programs and parking starting several weeks ago at their facilities and announced other changes including limiting swimming pool operations and pursuing alternative operation of their lodges and golf courses.

For more information, visit www.GeorgiaStateParks.org or call 1-800-864-7275.

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Sen. Bill Heath serves as Chairman of the Retirement Committee and Governor Sonny Perdue's Floor Leader in the Senate. He represents the 31st Senate District which consists of Haralson and Polk counties and portions of Bartow and Paulding counties. He may be reached at 404.651.7738 or by email at bill.heath@billheath.net.