



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## Wishes and Dreams for Almost Heaven

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Brad Reed is Deputy Chief of the West Virginia State Parks and Recreation Section of the Division of Natural Resources, an agency which he has served for over 30 years. Reed's commitment to West Virginia State Parks began with his first job in 1987 as a seasonal naturalist and college intern at Beech Fork State Park in Cabell and Wayne Counties. With a degree in Parks and Recreation Management from Marshall University, he has served as superintendent to multiple parks throughout the state.

Wishes and dreams. Most human beings, regardless of creed, country or religion, have common wishes and dreams. Common examples might include good health, longevity, love, family, respect and wealth. Many people across the Mountain State have a common dream of owning a little piece of "almost heaven" – a peaceful and scenic retreat in the woods or along the waters they can call their own. A place that they can share with family and friends and pass on to their children and grandchildren. Fortunately, every single citizen has such a place in West Virginia's State Parks.

West Virginia State Parks grew out of a national preservation and park movement that took place in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s. Our parks were formed with the legislated mission to promote conservation by preserving and protecting natural areas of unique or exceptional scenic, scientific, cultural, archaeological and/or historical significance, and to provide outdoor recreational opportunities for the citizens of the state and its visitors. Simply put, parks belong to the people. Like national parks, our state parks are there to make sure that pristine natural and historic wonders are held



in undisturbed reserve forever. Like county and city parks, our state parks are there to provide recreation to the public at large.

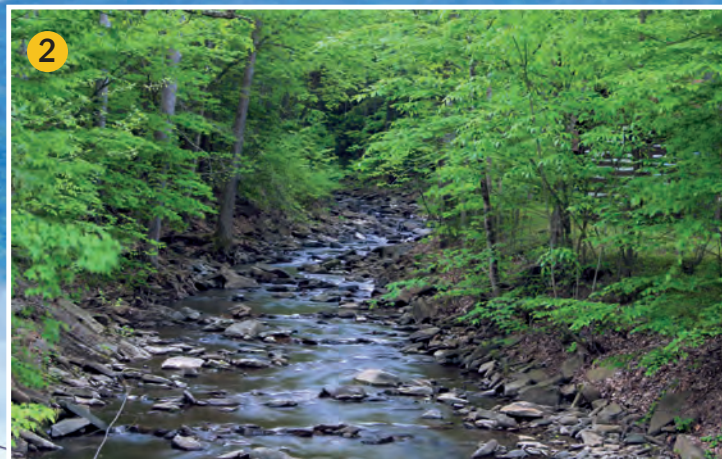
Over the decades since the park system's formation, significant facility development has occurred to offer a multitude of recreational opportunities, provide guests with a variety of lodging options and to defray the cost of preserving and protecting some 162,000 acres of public land located across 35 counties of the state. When a guest pays for lodging in a state park, plays golf on one of its numerous courses or has dinner at a state park restaurant, they are contributing to a legacy that will be passed down through the generations.

Today's state parks have grown into being one of the cornerstones of West Virginia's robust tourism industry, offering features and facilities



*Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park is located on a small island in the Ohio River near Parkersburg, West Virginia, and is accessed by a sternwheeler river boat. The park features a Palladian mansion and museum as well as horse drawn carriage rides and walking tours of the plantation's grounds.*





**Image 1:** Sitting on the east rim of the Bluestone River Gorge, Pipestem Resort State Park is West Virginia's premier family adventure resort located on the border between Mercer and Summers Counties; **Images 2 & 3:** As the largest state park in West Virginia, Watoga State Park has 10,100 acres of land and is open year round.

for both home-grown citizens and out-of-state vacation travelers. The system has several parks that have evolved into full-service resorts. Cacapon, Pipestem, Twin Falls, Blackwater Falls, Canaan Valley and Stonewall all have features and facilities that rival those found in private sector resorts across the state and country. Hotel-style lodging, cabins, golf, winter activities, camping, on-site dining, shopping and a variety of recreational opportunities bring thousands of visitors to these resorts each year. At both Cacapon and Pipestem, major construction is underway to further enhance guest experiences.

State parks like North Bend, Tygart Lake, Hawks Nest and Chief Logan feature many of the same facilities as the resorts, such as lodging, dining and shopping, but on a smaller scale and with a feel more like home. More traditional state parks provide cabins and campgrounds as overnight lodging opportunities. Parks such as Babcock, Bluestone, Holly River, Watoga and others feature cabins, camping and a variety of recreational options, making them a favorite of families who often return year after year. Cabin renovation is ongoing across the park system, with millions of dollars currently being spent to transform the rustic into the luxurious. Some parks, such as Audra, Beech Fork, Camp Creek and Moncove Lake, were developed to cater specifically to campers and their unique recreational needs.

A rich, diverse history is alive and well in the West Virginia State Parks, including a historic logging train and town at Cass; Civil War Battlefields at Droop Mountain and Carnifex Ferry; Blennerhassett Island, with its sternwheeler and notorious former owner; and Tu-Endie Wei at Point Pleasant, thought by some to be the home of a battle that precipitated the American Revolution.

West Virginia State Parks are focusing on guest services at unprecedented levels. Once devoted primarily to regulation, park managers and staff now strive to “protect and preserve” by providing the highest level in quality product, service, hospitality and customer care to their seven million annual visitors. Innovation is the key word, with new technology, such as online reservation systems and electric car charging systems, being added to improve customer service and promote efficiency. Parks is also partnering with farmers, artisans and businesses across the state to showcase West Virginia products to its guests. Additionally, \$60 million in recently released bond funding will create major improvements and enhancements to facilities across the system.

West Virginia State Parks continue to evolve and improve. The beneficiaries are the citizens of West Virginia. ▽