



State Encourages Citizens to 'Get Outdoors' this Summer: Go Stay Georgia!

ATLANTA, July 6, 2009 -- The state's "Get Outdoors Georgia" initiative encourages citizens to lead healthy, active lifestyles in the great outdoors. Coordinated by the Department of Natural Resources, the program includes hiking, biking and paddling clubs, as well as outdoor events. Now, a new series from DNR Commissioner Chris Clark highlights affordable getaways and outdoor activities close to home.

July's outdoor adventure tip from Commissioner Clark is "Go Stay Georgia," showcasing overnight accommodations in state parks. Future editions will highlight the many outdoor amenities Georgians can take advantage of including state parks, wildlife management areas, and the state's waterways.

Even some longtime Georgia residents do not realize the wide range of accommodations offered in the state's most scenic parks. While camping is what typically comes to mind, state parks also offer rental cottages, hotel-style lodge rooms, large group facilities, and even yurts -- canvas and wooden "tents" that are growing in popularity.

"With rising gas prices and families watching their budgets more closely than ever, a weekend at a state park is the perfect getaway," said Commissioner Clark. "Our state parks offer many different types of accommodations in an affordable and family-friendly atmosphere that encourages everyone to get outdoors."

Nothing says summer like falling asleep to the lulling hum of katydids. Nearly 40 state parks have modern campgrounds with hot showers, laundry facilities, and water and electric hookups. RV owners will appreciate the large pull-through sites, while tent campers can reserve for more private walk-in sites. Most state parks have campground hosts, who assist with maintenance and help fellow campers settle in. Rates are around \$23 per night. Prefer backpacking? Some of the state's most rugged parks offer backcountry tent sites as well.

For softer beds and spectacular views, nearly 30 state parks offer rental cottages complete with kitchens, private baths, fireplaces or woodburning stoves, and all the utensils and linens visitors need. Their style varies widely across the state, from barrel-shaped cabins on Unicoi State Park's mountainside, to Fort McAllister State Park's cottages perched on stilts above the saltmarsh. Rates range from around \$85 to \$160 per night, based on location and number of bedrooms. Can't leave without Fido? Some parks offer dog-friendly cottages that are available with advance reservations.

Five of Georgia's state parks offer hotel-style lodges where guests can enjoy on-site restaurants and meeting facilities. Amicalola and Unicoi state parks have mountain-view lodges, Red Top Mountain State Park's lodge provides access to Lake Allatoona, Little Ocmulgee State Park in middle Georgia has a popular golf course, while George T. Bagby State Park in southwest Georgia provides golf and boating on Lake Walter F. George.

New this year are cottage rentals at Smithgall Woods near Helen. Previously, overnight guests reserved individual rooms and dined together family-style. The park now allows guests to settle into private cottages and cook their own meals. Smithgall Woods features one of the state's premier trout streams, Dukes Creek, open for year-round fishing. A private trail leads to popular Dukes Creek Falls. During July and August, Smithgall Woods is offering 20% off their newly lowered rates.

Whether camping under the stars or relaxing in a lodge room, Georgians can find accommodations to suit summer vacation needs at Georgia's state parks. So pick a location, find a park and "Go Stay Georgia!" Reservations can be made by calling 1-800-864-7275 or online at www.GeorgiaStateParks.org. To learn more about outdoor recreation throughout the state, visit www.GetOutdoorsGeorgia.org.

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Media Contacts:

Kim Hatcher
Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites
404-657-9855
kimh@dnr.state.ga.us

Sally Winchester
Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites
404-656-0559
sally.winchester@dnr.state.ga.us