

# Shawnee State Park Celebrates 75 Years

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SHAWNEE STATE PARK IN SCHELLSBURG is well known by locals. It's been a staple in the community since 1951, when the park opened to the public. Older generations remember when thousands of people visited the park each day, lining the beach that used to extend farther down the lake shore.

As a young girl, I grew up visiting Shawnee often. My siblings and I rode our bikes around the Lakeshore Trail while our parents walked behind us. We would load up our fishing poles and catch bluegills behind the dam.

Thousands of families share similar stories. This year, Shawnee celebrates 75 years of providing an abundance of activities for both locals and travelers.

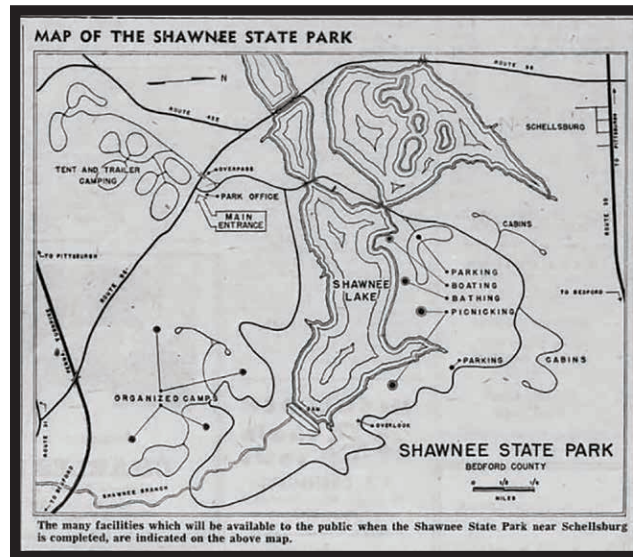
## Something for everyone

The 3,983-acre park has 15 miles of hiking trails, both for the avid hiker and leisurely walker. The Lakeshore Trail is a popular destination that winds around the lake and over the dam. The trails attract groups of walkers, joggers, bird watchers, and everyone in between.

More than 3,000 acres of the park are open for hunters to take down in-season game.

There are more than 200 campsites available, with or without electric hookups. Campers head to Shawnee each year to enjoy the beauty and peace the park offers. If popping up a tent isn't your preference and you don't own a camper, take advantage of one of the camping cottages available throughout the campground.

For those who prefer more luxury, the two-story Shawnee Lodge sleeps eight and is available to rent year-round.



**IN THE BEGINNING:** This map, published in the *Everett Press* on July 7, 1950, shows the proposed plan for Shawnee State Park.

Pavilions can also be reserved for your next family gathering. Picnic tables dot the park and are perfect for a meal in the woods or along the lake.

Speaking of the lake, you can't forget Shawnee Lake, the 451-acre warm-water reservoir that is one of the park's biggest draws. Fishermen line the shores and wander the lake throughout the year, looking for their big catch. Kids play in the water on hot summer days, while bird watchers gather to catch a peek at the plethora of land and water species that inhabit the area.

The beach is open for swimming from late May through mid-September. Bring the kids for a day of splashing in the water and playing in the sand.

## Things to do and see

Those familiar with Shawnee will also be well acquainted with Coach Ed's Bait and Tackle on the edge of the park's property. Mike Whitfield and Lisa Forsythe, who run the popular fishing supply store, won the bid to take over the boat rental area at Shawnee this year. The boat rental business has a little something for everyone as it offers single and double kayaks, canoes, paddleboats, paddleboards, hydro bikes, and the newest addition, a swan-shaped paddleboat. All the information can be found on Facebook by searching for "Shawnee Boat Rentals at Camdyn's Cove."

The park is also implementing a "Lawns to Meadows"

**CELEBRATING 75 YEARS:** Shawnee State Park in Schellsburg provides a place for nature enthusiasts of all ages.



program. For those familiar with the landscape at Shawnee, you may have noticed that areas that used to be mowed have now grown into small meadows, which have been seeded with a pollinator-friendly mix. The meadows are beneficial for wildlife, providing a habitat while bringing in native pollinators.

The park staff hosts multiple weekly programs during the spring and summer months, all of which are free and open to the public. Every Sunday, May through September, visitors are invited to the Sunday Night Program, which starts at 7 p.m. in the Historical and Interpretive Center at the park office. Ron Barlick started the program, drawing a large crowd of loyal, weekly attendees. When he retired after more than 50 years with the park, George Barner took over and continues the Sunday evening event.

In celebration of its 75th anniversary, the park is holding the Shawnee State Park 75th Anniversary Challenge, a virtual race that started in January and ends in October. Participants can choose their challenge level: 5k, 10k, or for the hard-core runners and walkers, a 75k. It's not too late to sign up to participate in the challenge.

## Conservation efforts

Visitors to the park may have also noticed a tall, thin, square structure near the beach house. Known as the Chimney Swift Tower, it went up in April and is part of a larger cavity nesting program. Park officials hope to improve conservation efforts by establishing nesting structures for purple martins, chimney swifts and prothonotary warblers.

Chimney swifts are thick-bodied birds that soar through the sky, feeding on insects. They like to nest in large, hollowed out tree trunks in older forests. Due to habitat loss, the birds moved out of the woods and into chimneys, earning their names. However, as older homes are torn down and newer chimneys are capped, their access to habitat is diminishing again.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission funds the statewide nesting project that began in July 2024. Shawnee currently has one tower.

The structures are all located on publicly accessible lands, such as state parks, game lands and local township/county parks.

"As of this spring, we have about 25 towers out, with another 10 to be built later this summer," says Stefan Karkuff, an avian recovery biologist with the game commission.

Stefan plays a role in choosing the location of the structures. When he is approached by a potential partner, he schedules a field visit to tour several potential sites. The state game commission provides the structure, and the partner is responsible for the installation, maintenance, and monitoring.



**PADDLING IN STYLE:** The swan paddleboat is available to rent at Shawnee Boat Rentals at Camdyn's Cove, which is run by Coach Ed's Bait and Tackle at the park.



**A HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE:** The Chimney Swift Tower was installed at Shawnee State Park in April in partnership with the Pennsylvania Game Commission. It's part of a statewide nesting program.

"I try to select a site for each tower that is open, close to a building and will have public visibility," he says.

Shawnee State Park is the perfect place for any outdoor enthusiast. Whether you choose to paddle a kayak, cast a fishing lure, stop by for some bird watching, attend a nature program or take a leisurely walk around the lake, there's something for everyone. 🐦