

Trout

Talk

**Bennett Spring hatchery
now slated for completion
by late next year**

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by Steve Smith

October 2026



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Bennett Spring hatchery now slated for completion by late next year

STEVE SMITH
EDITOR@LACLEDERECORD.COM

The long-awaited hatchery renovation at Bennett Spring State Park is now set for completion by the end of next year.

This was part of a report presented at a Missouri State Parks town hall meeting July 28 at the park.

Hatchery Manager Ben Havens presented an update on the project at Friday's Bennett Spring town hall meeting.

Construction on the \$40 million project – which included a new intake structure, office, raceway reconstruction, improvements to water quality and other upgrades – was paused Sept. 10, 2025, after originally breaking ground in 2023 with Cahills Construction as the contractor. Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Cahills reportedly disagreed over construction plans. MDC announced in January that construction had resumed

with Crossland Construction Company. Work is continuing on the project and Havens said completion is now set for December 2027.

"So hopefully on the opening day off 2028, we'll be back in action," Havens said.

Currently, Bennett Spring is relying on other coldwater hatcheries, including Montauk and Shepherd of the Hills for its trout. They are also getting fish from Crystal Lake Fisheries. He said he hopes to learn more about the project schedule at a meeting in September.

Havens said the current renovation is more about improvements than increasing production.

"I think the possibility of bigger fish or more production is a byproduct of taking a hatchery that's 60 to 70 years old and just giving it a facelift, and making improvements to it and just the different things we're changing as far as the alignment of the raceways to make it more functional, and make it easier for us to do our job," he said.

According to Havens, the park has had a good season so far this year.

"The hot weather is keeping people away just as much as all the rain did earlier in the year, but compared to the other parks, the construction and the renovation projects and all the things that that DNR (Department of Natural Resources) has going on doesn't seem to be keeping people away," he said. "Our numbers are right in line with the other parks. That's encouraging and we're looking forward to getting things back online and getting things moving as we look to next year."

Also at Friday's town hall meeting, Bennett Spring State Park Superintendent Gabe Dumond presented park updates on park projects.

He said these included a new shop building, a new roof on the nature center, cabin renovations and splash pad shelters. American Recovery Act funds also helped pay for water line improvements for the campground.



LCR Photo/Steve Smith

Bennett Spring State Park Hatchery Manager Ben Havens presents an update on the hatchery renovation project at a town hall meeting at the park.



LCR Photo/Steve Smith

A crowd of Bennett Spring area residents attended the Aug. 28 Bennett Spring Park town hall meeting. They heard updates on park projects and construction of the hatchery renovations.



LCR Photo/Steve Smith

Fishing has continued this season at Bennett Spring State Park even as construction continued on a renovation project for the hatchery.

Catch-and-keep year in review

Trout Talk looks back at previous issues

JACK SILBERBERG
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

From March to October, Trout Talk has covered various goings-on in and around Bennett Spring State Park. For our last issue of the year, Trout Talk reflects on stories from each month's issue.

March

Warren Valenti, former assistant hatchery manager at the park, was named honorary starter for the opening day of the catch-and-keep trout fishing season. Current Bennett Spring Fish Hatchery manager Ben Havens had been excited to honor both Valenti and his wife Laura L. Valenti, longtime locals. *Trout Talk note: Laura Valenti has been a contributor for Lebanon Publishing Company and Trout Talk.*

April

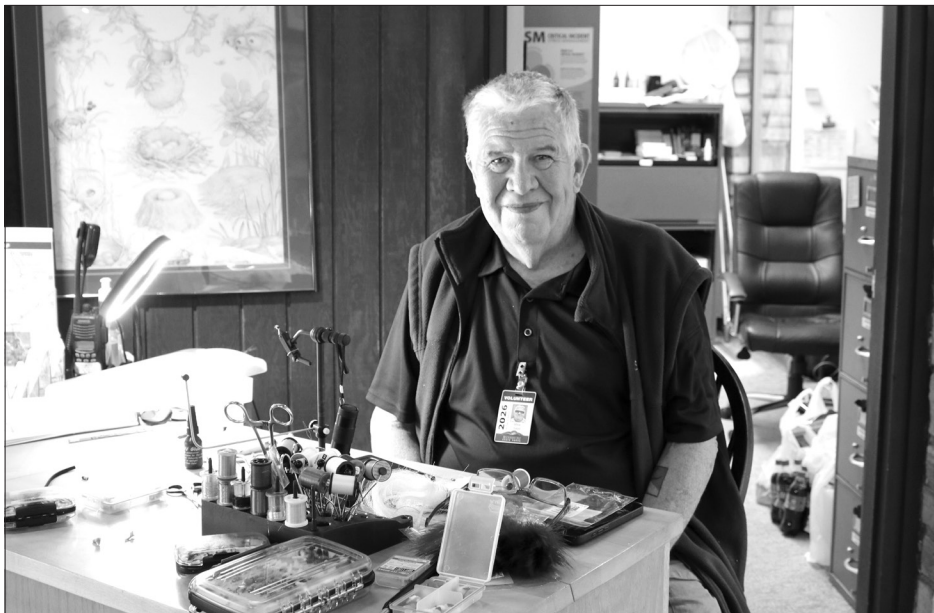
This issue highlighted the opening day of catch-and keep season with several photos from that day. The issue also featured a story on a new app for



LCR File Photo

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Anglers fish in Zone 1 of Bennett Spring State Park during the March 1 opening day of catch-and-keep trout season.



LCR File Photo

Volunteer Mike Sapp has been volunteering at Bennett Spring State Park as a campground host and nature center volunteer for the past three years. He enjoys teaching fly tying at the nature center and has made and taught special flies for the 250th birthday of the United States of America.



LCR File Photo

Laura L. and Warren Valenti. Warren Valenti was the honorary starter for Bennett Spring State Park's opening day of catch-and-keep trout season March 1.

Senior naturalist and interpreter prepares for off-season



LCR Photo/Jack Silberberg

Work in the Savannah Ridge Trail is one of several tasks Bennett Spring State Park Senior Naturalist and Resource Interpreter Sam Grove is looking towards during the off-season after catch-and-keep trout season ends. The Record discussed the removal of a bridge on that trail, the significant time needed for completing burn units, and other off-season work in a September interview.

JACK SILBERBERG
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The end of catch-and-keep trout season does not equal months off for Senior Naturalist and Resource Interpreter Sam Grove.

When the Record talked with her in early September, Grove said she ready for the off-season, having switched out of a summer-mindset.

"Everyone thinks, 'Oh, park people don't anything in winter,'" Grove said. "No." Sometimes, she said, she felt busier in the winter.

The last day of catch-and-release season is Oct. 31, according to Missouri State Parks. Typically, Grove begins to plan for the off-season in mid-summer.

Overseeing the completion of burn

units, which she explained in the interview were sections of the park intentionally burned in rotation for

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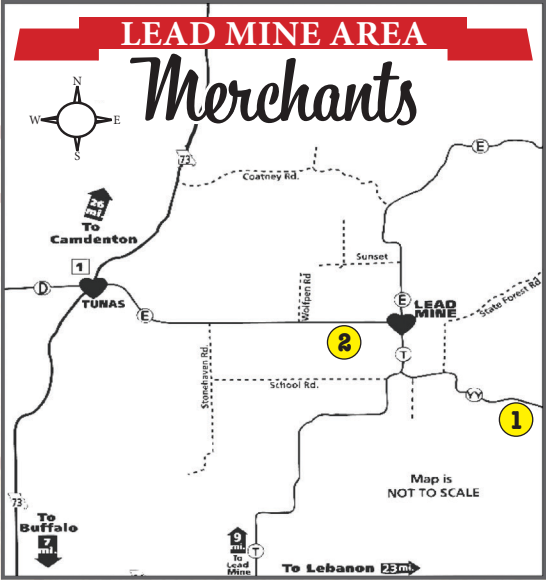
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NATURALIST

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stewardship purposes, would take a significant amount of her time in the off-season.

There were two burn units, Jennings and the Fen, that would hopefully be completed this off-season, but Grove said that while the actual burn itself might take a day, preparation takes several months.

Jennings was the main goal, and Grove said that it would probably take until the end of February to complete it.

She said in September that the end of that month or October would be for looking at burn plans. Afterwards, preparation would continue until likely the end of the year.

November or December are the busiest months for Grove during the off-season, because when she is in the park during the holiday season, she is walking the woods daily preparing the fire line, a laborious task that she would take care of by herself this year.

Afterwards, she watches the weath-

er and consults with others to get their opinions to find a good day to burn, and then the final call to proceed takes place moments before the burn starts with all those involved.

Once the burn units are done, Grove "takes a big sigh of relief," and she begins helping the park's maintenance team.

Grove mentioned that there would be no managed deer hunt this year like there had been last year, with deer management moving towards a deer hunt every other year dependent on the population. February was the time to start looking at whether a deer hunt should take place that fall.

She said that perhaps in October she would perform salamander surveys, which she usually performs in the fall and spring. The park has species that migrate during autumn.

Grove also performs dark sky

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Trout catch-and-release season starts in November

JACK SILBERBERG
REPORTER@LACLEDERECORD.COM

Bennett Spring State Park is one of four trout parks (the others being Maramec Spring Park, Roaring River State Park and Montauk State Park) to have the trout catch-and-release season open, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation.

The department notes on its website that the season takes place Nov. 13, 2026-Feb. 8, 2027, and that both trout

and fishing permits are needed. Only pole and line with flies are allowed for fishing, the department also notes.

The Missouri State Parks website notes that during the season, anglers can fish 8 a.m.-4 p.m. on Friday-Monday.

Readers can find more information on trout fishing regulations in the park on the Missouri State Parks website.



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readings to measure the park's light pollution to aid with a potential certification as an Urban Night Sky Place.

There was also a planned parkwide hazard tree survey that takes place by the end of October, Grove noted, with cutting taking place in the off-season.

Trail maintenance was also a fall activity, with the maintenance team's

assistance needed on the removal of a bridge on the Savannah Ridge Trail.

She was also hoping to establish a mile mark system on the Natural Tunnel Trail.

Divers arrive in off-season for the spring, which Grove schedules.

Winter is also when Grove typically cleans the park's nature center (which

Missouri State Parks notes is closed Nov. 1-Feb. 24). She usually tries to conduct summer seasonal interviews in February or March. Sometimes there are conferences and trainings in the off-season as well. Grove also manages the park's Facebook page.

For opening day of catch-and-keep season, the nature center does not see

many people after fishing starts, so Grove roams the park managing social media and taking photos. She was also planning a first day hike.

As for what she was most excited for in the off-season, Grove looked forward to 70 degree days and no ticks.



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REVIEW

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angler connection.

May

Trout Talk featured an article on maintenance at Bennett Spring State Park:

"From taking care of the park's buildings, cleaning shower houses to maintaining its sewer system, Park Specialist Mitchell Lawson discussed the scope of the work the Department of Natural Resources maintenance staff performs at the park.

"It's like running a little city, essentially, is what it is," he said."

June

This issue featured a photo tour through some of the state park's 1772 Civilian Conservation Corps-built structures.

July

July had a feature story on campground host and

nature center volunteer Mike Sapp. Sapp liked to teach fly-tying to children at the Bennett Spring State Park Nature Center.

This month also featured a story on the Hollywood premiere of Lebanon native and filmmaker Dusty Dale Barker. His short film had vintage Bennett Spring farm footage.

August

August's issue had a feature by Laura Valenti on a Highway 64 business called The Farme, run by Laurie and Brian Bennett.

September

September's issue included a fishing weekend column by reporter Jack Silberberg and a story by Laura Valenti featuring anglers at the park.



LCR File Photo

The Gauge House – next to Shelter House A – had its purpose, measuring water flow from the spring, superseded by more modern equipment.

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TroutTalk

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LUNKER CATCHES



Kevin Mitchell,
Warrinton, Mo—Yellow Bait
Zone 3 Weight 4.11 pounds



Weston (Age 8),
Orange Power Bait, Zone 3
Weight 3.8 pounds



Tyler Percy,
New Castle, Mo—Pink Mini Jig
Zone 1 Weight 4.13 pounds



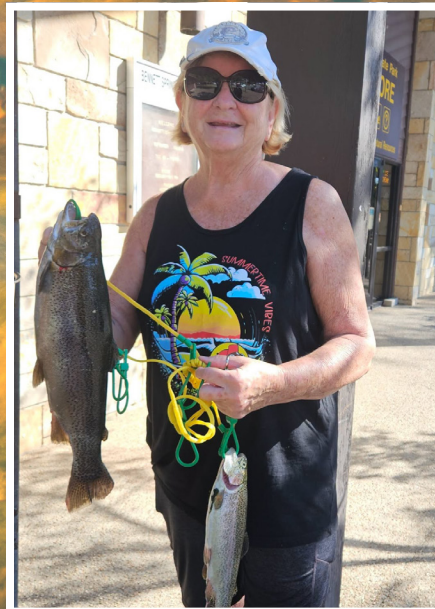
Craig Bauer,
St. Louis, Mo—Power Bait
Zone 3 Weight 3.25 pounds



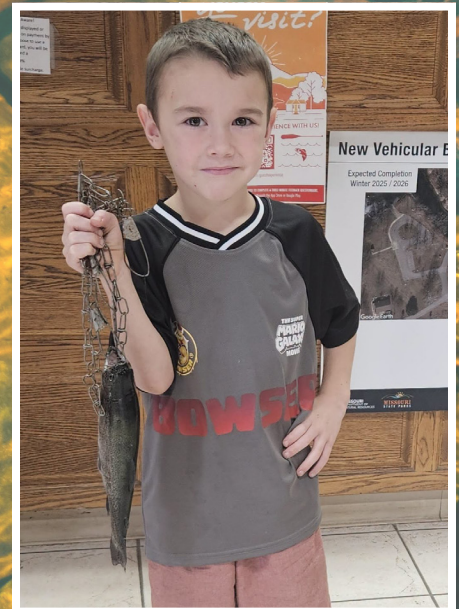
Luke Thurston,
Dexter, Mo—Mega Worm
Zone 2 Weight 4.5 pounds



Ahan Zukie,
Power Bait, Zone 3
Weight 3.75 pounds



Debbie Hedrick,
Marion, IL—Power Bait
Zone 3 Weight 3 pounds



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