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Sand Hollow: Popular park is beating expectations

Deseret News (Salt Lake City), Mar 22, 2007 by Ray Grass Deseret Morning News

WASHINGTON, Washington County -- Early projections were that Sand Hollow Reservoir and State Park would, one day, become one of Utah's most popular parks.

It came onto the state-park scene four years ago with all the necessary features -- water, sand and sun.

The park has become popular. In fact: "We're seven years ahead of projections," said Laura Melling, park manager. "We are now among the top three parks in annual visitation. But we have an advantage. We have boating in the summer, OHV riding in the winter and both boats and OHVs in the spring and fall. There's never a quiet moment.

It's hard to get some things done because we get so many people."

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remind me of our humble beginning."

The park, located directly south of Quail Creek Reservoir and State Park and 15 miles southeast of St. George, was officially dedicated in April of 2003.

When it opened, recalled Melling, "We had a parking lot, a ramp that barely made it to the water, and we worked out of a portable trailer and a cash box. It got so hot that summer the cash box melted. I keep it to

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On site now is a new entrance station with offices and large open area being used as an all-purpose room. There is also a paved parking area, paved roads and a concrete launch ramp with docks.

Inside the park there is a 50-unit campsite with full service hook-ups, two restrooms, with hot showers and some primitive campsites around the reservoir.

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Construction will begin soon on a maintenance building and an education and multimedia center with classrooms. Grant money is also available to improve camping at the sandy area along the shoreline, put in restrooms and down the road add more campsite along the eastern shoreline.

There is also money available to put in some pavilions, picnic tables and barbecue grills along the beach.

Plans for the park go back more than a decade. Its location was carefully researched.

The reservoir sits in the middle of a natural bowl filled with sand. Feeding into the reservoir, which covers 1,500 surface acres, is 16,000 acres of fine, granulated sand, perfectly suited for off- highway vehicle riding.

Positive magazine coverage of the park and its sand has brought in riders from all over the world, said Melling.

"We get a lot of visitors from Las Vegas, California and Salt Lake, and from the Rocky Mountain area. But we also get a lot of people from out of the country. One man, from France, brought his own OHVs. He wanted to ride his own machines," she noted.

"One thing riders find is the sand here is so fine that it changes from day to day. It also makes things dangerous because people think they know the dunes ... and they don't. The sand has been here for a long time, but it seemed that people really didn't know about it. Few locals came here before the reservoir."

At the heart of the recreational use area is Sand Mountain, which is, as the name implies, a big mountain of sand with a few rock outcroppings.

There are also a number of trails leading from the park. One unimproved trail goes from the park to the town of Hurricane.

"I'm not sure how long it is. But when we rode it," said Melling, "it took about 3 1/2 hours and offered some great riding and some great views into Warner Valley. When complete, I think the trails will become a destination by itself."

As planned, Sand Hollow is a conjoined sister to nearby Quail Creek Reservoir, joined by large water pipes. The purpose is to move water where needed between the two reservoirs.

It was also the plan that water in Sand Hollow would seep down and be held in aquifers, where there is almost no evaporation loss during the hot summers. The water was then to be recovered by wells dug around the reservoir.

That, too, has worked better than expected said Melling.

The sand filters out all the impurities and when drawn out of the wells the water will go directly into the culinary water system.

"So far, it's passed all the test and has been certified as culinary grade. When all 14 wells are in operation, the reservoir is expected to go down between two and five inches a day," she said.

Another popular activity is fishing. Catch-of-the-day includes largemouth bass and bluegill, with an occasional catfish.

One concern park officials have is the same being expressed by those at Lake Powell and Quail Creek, which is protection from the zebra mussel. The mussel has been found roughly 100 miles southwest of the reservoir in Lake Mead.

Those using their boats on waters on or below Lake Mead will be asked to wash off the boat in scalding-hot water. A location for the washes is currently under review.

Future plans call for more improvement, small communities around the perimeter of the park, schools, businesses and churches ... "One day we'll be just one big city park," Melling projected.

E-mail: grass@desnews.com

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