

Information about Clark Center Park

7620 Bull Bluff Rd, Oak Ridge, TN 37830

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Summarized by Virginia Dale

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Clark Center Park is located on Bull Bluff Creek Road in Oak Ridge, Anderson County, and is owned by the US Department of Energy (DOE). It was established as an 80-acre parcel (half of which was put underwater upon completion of the Tennessee Valley Authority's [Melton Hill Dam](#) in 1963). A description and map of the Park's location can be found at [Clark Center Park](#). The Park offers opportunities for birding, boating, biking, fishing, hiking, paddling, picnicking, star gazing, swimming, and wildlife viewing. The newly improved boat ramp is a favorite of local anglers, and the wheelchair accessible fishing ramp allows everyone to enjoy fishing. Clark Center Park is the gateway to the [Gallaher Bend Greenway](#) and provides access to Solway Bend and Freels Bend – part of DOE-owned Three Bends Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area¹, which has important scientific, historic, habitat, and biodiversity attributes. While access to protected areas on Solway and Freels Bends are limited, the public is invited to participate in occasional guided walks. The Park adjoins [Pellissippi Blueway](#) on Melton Hill Lake.



Clark Center Park is a hidden gem. One recent example of its value was a youth fishing tournament held there on February 9 for the group Beast of the East, which is part of the Tennessee Bass Federation (TBF). More than 100 people came from middle and east Tennessee and launched 33 boats on Melton Hill Lake in pursuit of elusive bass. To his delight, a 14-year-old from Overton County caught a 50 pounder. The top winners were awarded prizes including reels, rods, and contributions to their college funds. Even if they did not catch a fish, the TBF gives each child a prize. Most of the people participating in Saturday's tournament had never heard of Clark Center Park. The group enjoyed their visit so much that they voted to return for a tournament next year.



The DOE is interested in donating Clark Center Park to an entity that will maintain it as a public recreation area. The City of Oak Ridge has had discussions with DOE regarding the possible transfer of Clark Center Park but has never been able to reach terms acceptable to both parties.

¹ [The Three Bend Scenic and Wildlife Management Refuge Area was established in 1999 on 3,000 acres of the Oak Ridge Reservation consisting of Freels, Gallaher, and Solway Bends on the north shore of Melton Hill Lake in Anderson County](#)

The City evaluated the conditions of the Park about a decade ago and found substantial needs for infrastructure and accessibility improvements. Also, current annual operating costs for the Park are about \$300,000 given the large area of grass being mowed and paying an onsite park manager for 16 hours each day.

Now \$42 million is available for restoration of natural resources at the Oak Ridge Reservation (ORR) under the [Office of Restoration and Damage Assessment | U.S. Department of the Interior](#) (NRDAR). To date, 7 projects totaling \$10 million have been approved (see attached file: NRDA Grant Project Announcement).

Two local non-governmental organizations, [AFORR | Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation](#) and [Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning](#), have long been interested in Clark Center Park and became aware of the opportunity to update the Park via the NRDAR funds, if an eligible entity would assume ownership and management responsibility for the Park.

To help facilitate transfer to a new owner and operator, these two organizations have engaged with the East Tennessee Community Design Center to craft a conceptual design for the future of the Park. [Lose Design - Spaces For Life](#), a member of the Design Center, is working on a volunteer basis to explore options for improving the Park and decreasing operating funds (for example, by reducing the area that requires mowing, adding revenue generation, or having vetted volunteer hosts take on some oversight duties in place of paid onsite managers – see [Campground and Park Hosts](#)). Lose Design held a charette focused on future opportunities for Clark Center Park on February 12, 2026. Attendees included representatives from

- Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA)
- City of Oak Ridge Recreation Department
- Greenways Oak Ridge
- National Park Service
- Oak Ridge National Laboratory Communications and Community Engagement Directorate
- Advocates for the Oak Ridge Reservation (AFORR)
- Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP)

It was a lively and informative discussion, and Lose Design is preparing a design for Clark Center Park that will take advantage of its amenities and reduce operating costs. No one from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) could attend, but AFORR representatives met with April Johnson of TDEC the following week to inform her of the success of the charette.

Now Tennessee Representative Scarbrough and Lieutenant Governor McNally have filed amendments to the budget legislation for potential appropriation for future operation of Clark Center Park by the State. AFORR and TCWP strongly support this acquisition.