

# Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park Park History

## ***St. Francois Mountain Range***

The St. Francois Mountain Range is approximately 1.4 billion years old, making it one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world. The mountains within the area were formed by volcanoes erupting molten ash that cooled, quickly forming rhyolite, the rock of the shut-ins. When the magma chambers of the volcano were emptied, the space collapsed into calderas (large depressions) which influenced the topography of the region.



## ***Settlement***

Indigenous people have been inhabiting and hunting along the rivers of the area perhaps as long as 12,000- 14,000 years ago. They were attracted by big game hunting and depended on the rivers for small game and fish. After the advancement of white settlers into the area, indigenous people were driven west. The Trail of Tears moved directly through the region in the late 1830s, the forced march of tribes into Oklahoma.

As settlers began to move into the area in the mid-1800s, the Scots-Irish Johnston (the "t" later dropped) family established their homestead where Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park is now. Three generations of Johnstons worked this land with 36 members buried on the property in a small cemetery. By that time, the shut-ins were already well known for swimming and recreation. Later, St. Louis resident Joseph Desloge purchase much of the land, donating it for a state park in 1955.



## ***The Ameren Reservoir Breach***

In December 2005, the Ameren Reservoir, setting on the Peak of Proffit Mountain, breached. The 1.3 million gallons of water being held back by the reservoir's wall was unleashed down the side of Proffit Mountain and into the valley of Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park. The wall of water took with it trees, boulders, and sediment, some of which were deposited and still remain in the park. The entire park was damaged beyond recognition however there was not any loss of human life. Massive efforts were taken to bring the park back to life, re-opening to the public in 2010.

Thankfully, even though the majority of the park was changed forever that December day, the shut-ins remained the same. The park still attracts visitors from around the country and was voted "#1 campground for RVing in the nation" in 2022. The park sees an average of 220,000 visitors per year and is most well-known for swimming in "mother nature's waterslide."



***The mission of Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park is to preserve and interpret the outstanding natural features and wilderness qualities of this section of the St. Francois Mountain Region. Special attention will be given to protecting the resource while providing a quality recreational and educational experience to the visitor.***



# Taum Sauk Mountain State Park

## Park History

Taum Sauk Mountain State Park is shrouded in colorful folklore and history however one fact is definite. Many people, throughout the years, have devoted time to preserving the rich natural resources of the area. Efforts to protect and place the area in public ownership began in 1914 with the recommendation to acquire the Taum Sauk area as a national forest. These efforts continued throughout the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the establishment of Taum Sauk Mountain State Park in 1993, representing a glimpse of what the landscape was prior to the influx of settlers and the alteration of native ecosystems.

### ***Outstanding Features***

Described as the “Geological Phoenix of the Ozarks,” Taum Sauk Mountain State Park is part of the 1.4 billion year old St. Francois Mountain Range. The area is also part of the St. Francois Mountains Natural Area, designated in 1996 as one of the best remaining examples of the natural landscape. The park boasts the following outstanding features

- Highest Point in Missouri at 1,772 feet above sea level
- Mina Sauk Falls, Highest Wet Weather Waterfall in Missouri, at 132 feet
- Taum Sauk Valley, Deepest Valley in Missouri
- Taum Sauk Creek, designated as an Outstanding State Water Resource
- The Devil’s Toll Gate, an eight-foot-wide passage taking hikers through 50 feet of volcanic rhyolite standing 30 feet high



### ***Trails***

Taum Sauk Mountain State Park is one of the trailheads for the Ozark Trail, a nearly 400 mile trail that winds through the Missouri Ozarks. The 13-mile section of the Ozark Trail from Taum Sauk Mountain State Park to Johnson’s Shut-ins State Park is known as one of the most rugged, but beautiful trails in Missouri.

The park is also the start of the Mina Sauk Falls Trail which takes you past Missouri’s highest point and down the mountain to Mina Sauk Falls. Don’t let the short distance of 2.9 miles fool you as it has many others. The trail is rugged with slick rocks and a descent down the mountain and a heart pounding climb back up.

### ***Amenities***

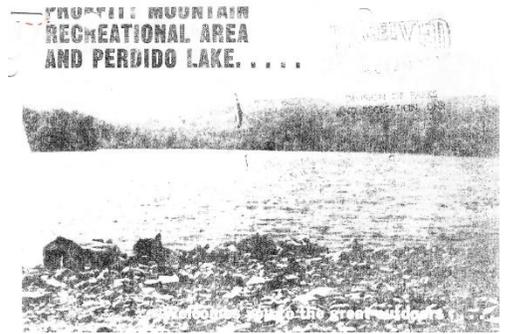
Taum Sauk Mountain State Park has remained less developed than others due to its mission. The park has 12 basic campsites with two pit latrines. The overlook at the park allows visitors to take in the surrounding landscapes.



***The mission of Taum Sauk Mountain State Park is to preserve and interpret the outstanding natural features and wilderness qualities of this section of the St. Francois Mountain region, while providing a quality primitive recreation experience to the park visitor.***

## Jay Nixon State Park Park History

In the 1970s the 1,231 acres now known as Jay Nixon State Park was branded as Proffit Mountain Recreational Area. A network of trails and campsites were developed around the 50-acre lake which was then named Perdido Lake, Spanish for Lost Lake. The lake has also been known as Firepit Lake. A brochure of the recreation area describes the lake as spring fed, built with the technical advice of the Missouri Department of Conservation and was completed in 1975. The area is also rumored to have been used as a Boy Scout camp.

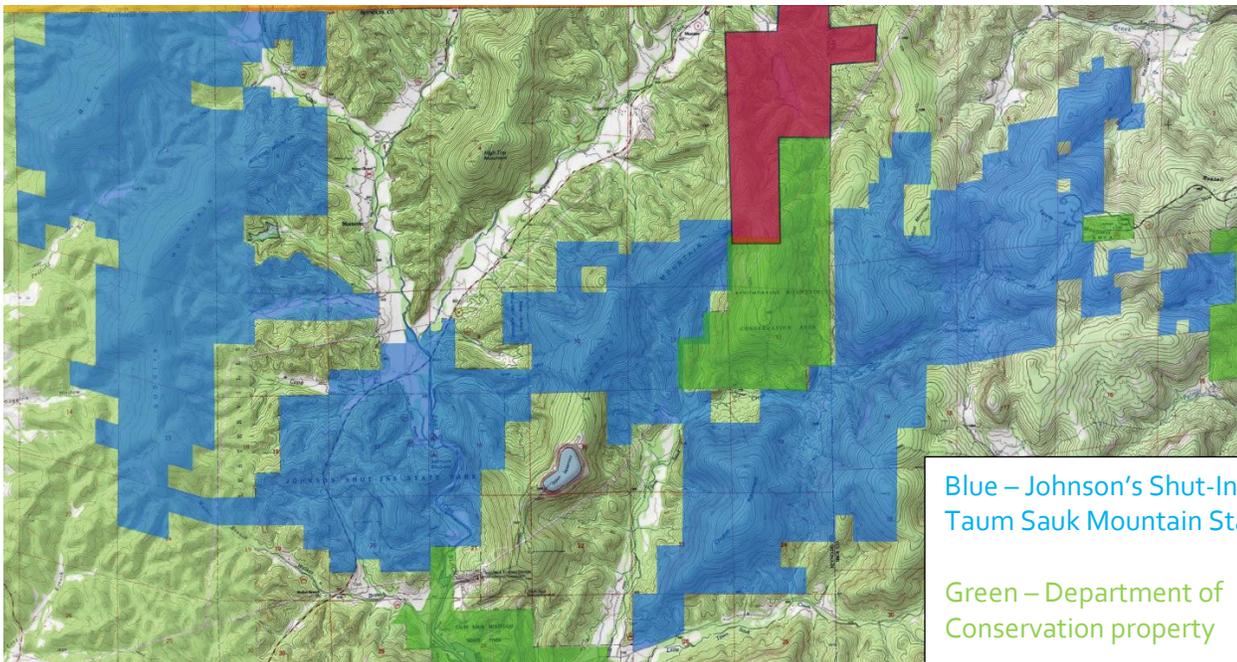


By the time the Department of Natural Resources purchased the land in 2016, all of the developed areas such as campsites, bathrooms, and shower facilities were either non-existent or in unrepairable condition.

Jay Nixon State Park connects to Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park and Taum Sauk Mountain State Park, which makes up a total 19,060 acres. The park also connects to the Ketcherside Conservation Area.

The conceptual development plan process for the park is scheduled to begin in the next 5 years. Examples of proposals for the property include trail connection to the Ozark Trail, lakeside campsites, and kayak/canoe rentals.

The acquisition of this property provides the opportunity for inclusion in the larger St. Francois Mountains Natural Area, an area which hosts a high degree of native integrity.



Blue – Johnson's Shut-Ins and  
Taum Sauk Mountain State Parks

Green – Department of  
Conservation property

Red – Jay Nixon State Park