

## Veterans State Park opens new archery, air rifle ranges at Lake Blackshear

Officials hope to draw target sports participants from throughout area

By Terry Lewis  
November 16, 2017



A volunteer shows a participant how to pull a bow string at the opening of the new state-of-the-art archery and air rifle range at the Lake Blackshear Resort/Georgia Veterans State Park on Thursday. (Staff Photo: Terry Lewis)

CORDELE — The Georgia Department of Natural Resources cut the ribbon Thursday on new state-of-the-art archery and air rifle ranges at the Lake Blackshear Resort/Georgia Veterans State Park near here.

The park was established to honor Georgia's military veterans, whose acts of heroism are the subjects of exhibits at the park's museum. The museum displays medals, uniforms, weapons, vehicles, aircraft and other items that span the time from the Revolutionary War through the Gulf War.

The new 4-acre archery/air rifle facility features three practice ranges for guests, including air rifle, 3-D and static archery. All ranges are ADA (Americans with Disability Act) compliant.

State Rep. Buddy Harder, R-Tifton, cut the ribbon opening the new \$750,000 facility.

"I don't have the numbers right in my head, but the economic impact could be in the multiple millions of dollars," Harder said. "Seems like \$40 million comes to mind with the people we bring in. This is one of the top state parks in Georgia. As the gentleman with the North Georgia Mountains Authority said, this place is in the Top 5 state parks in visitors every year.

"This park does have an impact because it brings a lot of people in. And the thing about that is the people who come here, particularly the ones who use the campground, often volunteer to help do things in the park. It's been a really good public and private community effort."

Crisp County Chamber of Commerce Chairwoman Kimberly Reid offered comments about the new ranges during Thursday's opening ceremony.

"I think it gives our visitors and residents something else to do when they are here at the park," she said. "It is not only fun, but it will have an economic impact by bringing more visitors, which in turn generates more dollars for our community.

The park is situated adjacent to the 8,600-acre Lake Blackshear and is enjoyed by boaters, jet skiers, water skiers, fishermen, and swimmers. Private boats are allowed on the lake, and a variety of watercraft are available for rent at the Georgia Veterans State Park Marina.

Dignitaries Thursday said the state park is one of the hidden jewels of Southwest Georgia.

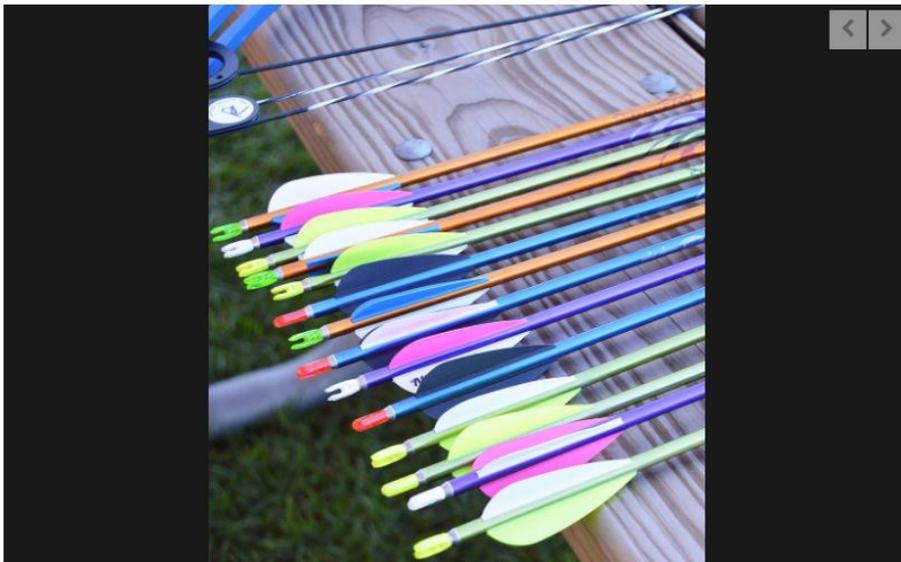
"It really is, especially if you have never been to the resort," Reid said. "You wouldn't know it was on a state park if you didn't see the name on the sign. They have wonderful food and dining. They recently remodeled the facility. But we want it to be fun, you can play golf, and we have the SAM Shortline train that runs from Cordele through here to Plains and Americus."

Walter Lane, who is the hunter development program manager of wildlife resources with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, said the facility would be used by many target shooters.

"There are approximately 600,000 recreational target shooters in the state of Georgia, and at least 100,000 youths who are participating in recreational target sports through their schools, in the Archery in the Schools program, their local 4H program or perhaps at their high schools' riflery program," Lane said. "We're offering those recreational target shooters a place to practice and enjoy the sport that they love.

"The park will also offer programs for people who have never shot an air rifle or bow and arrow. They will have the opportunity to experience that for the first time."

For additional information about the new facilities, call (229) 276-2371.



Walter Lane, the hunter development program manager of wildlife resources with the Georgia Department of Natural resources, said the new archery and air rifle ranges at Veterans State Park on Lake Blackshear will be used by many target shooters. (Staff Photo: Terry Lewis) Target arrows are laid out in a row at the opening of new state-of-the-art archery and air rifle ranges at the Lake Blackshear Resort/Georgia Veterans State Park on Thursday. (Staff Photo: Terry Lewis)



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