

SILVER FALLS

Lodge reopens under new management

BY JAMIE HALE
The Oregonian

More lodging at Silver Falls State Park is reopening following a six-month closure, and its aiming to serve a wider group of visitors than ever before.

The former Silver Falls Lodge and Conference Center will now be known as Smith Creek Village, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department announced Friday, and under new management, the group of cabins, cottages, lodge rooms and ranches is taking reservations for this summer and beyond.

Silver Falls Hospitality will be the new concessionaire at the lodge, taking over for California-based Urban Park Concessionaires, which had managed the state park's venues for six years before ending its contract nearly four years early in 2020, as state parks and hotels shut down across the state amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Brooke Gerken, co-owner of Silver Falls Hospitality, said her company aims to transform what used to be primarily a wedding venue and conference center into more of a hotel experience, offering lodging for individual families and guests alongside larger groups.

"What we're hoping to do here while we're here is to treat it more like a boutique hotel space and offer outdoor experiences," Gerken said, like workshops and outdoor activities. "Our goal is to introduce people to the outdoors in a way that makes them comfortable, and provide varying levels of accommodations to allow for that."

Guests can book any number of accommodations at Smith Creek Village, from tiny cabins to family lodges and a pair of "ranches" that can host up to 75 people overnight. Silver Falls Hospitality is



Boulder's Hideaway, LLC

Cabins at Smith Creek Village, formerly known as the Silver Falls Lodge and Conference Center, are found in Silver Falls State Park in Silverton.

inheriting not only the old contract to manage the lodge, but also the cabins and lodge rooms themselves. Gerken said those familiar with the old conference center won't see drastic changes overnight — aside from upgraded amenities in all the rooms — but noted her company plans on redesigning and redecorating the spaces over time.

Aside from upgraded rooms, Smith Creek Village plans to offer "signature experiences" like photography workshops and outdoor painting classes by 2022. Gerken said the ultimate goal is "to get more of the community up here and treat it more like a community hub."

Her company is also operating the Big Leaf Coffeehouse, a cafe that primarily serves guests but is open to the general public. The South Falls Cafe at the main day-use area in the park will now be run by the Oregon Commission for the Blind's Business Enterprise Program, the state parks department said.

On the south side of the state

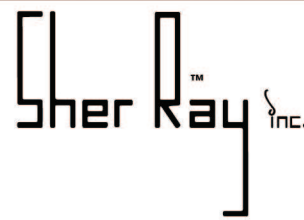
park near the campground, Smith Creek Village was originally built by the Works Progress Administration as a youth camp before it was turned into a conference center in the 1970s. Management has changed hands several times over the years, operating under contract with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

Gerken said because the previous managers typically rented out the entire property for large events, casual visitors had fewer opportunities to stay there. In operating the property as more of a boutique hotel, she said she hopes more people will discover the beautiful cabins and lodge rooms inside what is considered the crown jewel of Oregon's state park system.

"We're very happy that park visitors now have these overnight options and services once again," park manager Guy Rodrigue said in a news release Friday. "Silver Falls Hospitality has hit the ground running and we're eager to help them succeed in this new partnership."



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