

Watauga Lake Recreation Zone



Watauga Ranger Station



4400 Unicoi Drive
(off I-26, Exit 23)
Unicoi, TN 37692
(423) 735-1500

The Watauga Lake Recreation Zone is a study in contrasts, from highly-developed recreation facilities along Watauga Lake to dispersed backcountry opportunities on White Rocks and Walnut Mountains and in Pond Mountain Wilderness and Doe River Gorge Scenic Area.

Water is abundant with TVA's 6,400-acre Watauga Lake, Doe, Elk and Watauga rivers, several streams including Laurel Fork and seven waterfalls.

The area is easily accessed by US 19E, US 321, TN 67 and TN 167. Nearby communities include Elizabethton, Mountain City and Roan Mountain, TN and Elk Mills, NC.

Boat, Swim or Go Fishing! Spend the day sailing or motor boating on Watauga Lake, surrounded by forested mountain. Launch your craft from public launches at Rat Branch, Little Milligan, Sink Mountain and Watauga Dam Observation Area or from private marinas. Swim in designated areas at Shook Branch and Watauga Point. Fish for rainbow and brown trout, bluegill, walleye, and bass. Cantilevered over the lake, the pier at Rat Branch offers accessible fishing. Below Dennis Cove Recreation Area, Laurel Fork Creek is stocked with rainbow trout; above, it is managed as a natural fishery for brown, brook and rainbow trout.

Picnic in the Woods! Enjoy lakeside scenery from Watauga Point's grassy knoll and the coves at Shook Branch, where picnic tables, pedestal grills and flush toilets are available. A group of tables can be reserved (for a fee) at Watauga Point for day-use gatherings. Cook your catch from picnic facilities at Dennis Cove Recreation Area, located along Laurel Fork Creek.

Follow the Trail! Hike eight miles along scenic Laurel Fork Creek on Trail #39. Fish for trout and look for beaver dams near Cherry Flats and take in waterfalls near the stream. Mountain bikes can use a portion of Laurel Fork Trail, as well as nearby forest roads. The Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.) runs through the heart of this zone. Laurel Fork, Coon Den and Jones waterfalls are a short distance off the A.T.. Major trailheads are located off US 321/TN 67 in Hampton and off Dennis Cove Road. Two shelters provide lodging for weary hikers.

Sleep under the Stars! Listen to the lake lapping the shoreline from your site at Cardens Bluff, where paths and steps lead into your 15' x 30' site. Amenities include picnic tables, fire rings, lantern posts and camping cupboards. Flush toilets and water are located in each loop and shower facilities are in the middle of the campground. Dennis Cove Recreation Area offers camping in a remote wooded area.

