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Unstaffed parks invite littering

Saturday, August 29, 2009

By **TED LaBORDE**

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HUNTINGTON - The state's budget problems have left the cleanliness of some state parks, at least the rural ones like Charles M. Gardner State Park here, in the hands of those who use them for picnicking and swimming.

When it comes to removing their own trash, some do and some don't.

Several weekends have left the Gardner park littered with trash, according to nearby resident Ronald G. Craig. "Management has been great before this year. This year there is no control," he said of the park located off Route 112.

"Trash has been piled up on weekends, and sometimes it was just like a trashing of the park," said Craig.

"The absence of staff has been quite noticeable. I can't understand why people using the park can't pick up after themselves," he said.

State Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner Richard K. Sullivan Jr. said Gardner was one of several state parks not manned this year because of "financial challenges facing Massachusetts."

Those parks, which include Ashland State Park, Chester Blandford State Forest, Lake Lorraine State Park, Streeter Point Recreation Area and Windsor State Forest, remained open but without staffing.

Gardner has been a popular spot for picnicking and swimming for years, with hundreds visiting the wooded area on the East Branch of the Westfield River on summer weekends. A small sign at Gardner warns people that the park is not staffed and swimming is not allowed.

Several visitors were at the park last week for picnics, and several youngsters were swimming in the shallow waters.

Little trash was seen in the area, and Sullivan said the effort this year has been to have crews remove litter after weekend use.

"The park may not be staffed, but we do have a responsibility and we try to go in as often as we can," Sullivan said.

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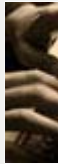
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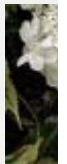
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Naomi Valle, of Springfield, traveled to Gardner Park Aug. 25 with son Alexander, 16, and daughter Aaliyah, 12.

"This is the first time in a long time that I have been here," said Valle. "We are here for a picnic and swimming, a getaway with the kids. The park is clean, and I am not disappointed."

Joshua Rodriguez, also of Springfield, was at the park with 6-year-old son, Joshua II. "This is our first time, and this place is really breathtaking."

Rodriguez said he also found the park clean but noted his visit was on a weekday. "Maybe more dumpsters would help eliminate any trash problem on weekends," he said.

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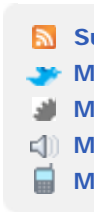
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