

The Many Faces of James Gray

Harmonie State Park Manager



I was born on January 17, 1950 in the small town of Monongahela, Pennsylvania, and lived there until my father was transferred to US Steel Works in Gary, Indiana when I was ten years old. My formative years were spent growing up in Ogden Dunes along the shores of Lake Michigan in Portage, Indiana. I graduated from Portage High School in 1967, then headed off to Vincennes University where I earned my Business Administration degree in 1971.

Lois has been my one and only wife for 36 years and we have two sons, Michael, 31, and Martyn, 27. Martyn is married to his high school sweetheart Ashley and they have three children, Zoey, 4, Adam, 2, and Hannah, 11 months.

I became interested in working for the Park Service when I was laid off from Bethlehem Steel Corporation in the fall of 1971. I had a friend that was working at Indiana Dunes State Park; he told me that there was an opening for a labor position and I applied. I was hired and have never looked for another type of job since. I enjoyed working in the outdoors and serving people that were visiting the park to have a good time, and I knew I'd found my perfect fit. I worked my first Park Service job as a Labor/General Forman at Indiana Dunes State Park until 1974 when I accepted the position as Assistant Property Manager of Spring Mill State Park. In 1981 I left Spring Mill to assume the position of Property Manager of Harmonie State Park. I am still with Harmonie State Park to this day. On August 21, 2012 I attended a reception with Governor Mitch Daniels for long terms employees (35 years +) - I have now reached the 40 year mark!

I think the most significant change in Harmonie State Park in the last 30 years is the trees. There was only one campsite in the campground that had shade 30 years ago when I first began my career here at HSP—and that was site 17. That tree has long since died, but now there is an abundance of shade all over the campground. I would say I am most proud of the Family Cabins and my Assistant Managers. The Family Cabins are the one facility that was totally developed while I have been here, and they have really been a great addition to HSP. I am also very proud of the Assistant Managers who have been under me, they have all moved on to become successful Park Managers. I am also very proud of the revenue the park collects for the state. Thirty years ago HSP struggled to collect \$50,000/year, and were on the bottom of the list of 22 parks. This year we are on track to take in a possible \$500,000 and are toward the upper middle of the list of 33 parks. My biggest disappointment is that I could not get a 9- acre lake developed in the middle of the park. Lastly, I would have to say that my favorite area of the park is hard to choose, but I would say I really enjoy the northern area up behind the assistant's house along the creek and the river area. I really enjoy driving the roads in the park to see the wildlife.

I enjoy my family, and when I was growing up and even now I enjoy automobiles. We have a 24 foot speedboat that was great for family life—it kept us all together on week-ends and allowed us to develop great friendships with other boating families. I am also a model railroader, I have tried to work on an N scale layout throughout the years, but many more hours were devoted to my family, friends and the park.

I am looking forward to retirement in May 2013. I am hoping to devote some time to my grandchildren and get at least one of them interested in model railroading. I will have a new home to get situated in and a new lake to go fishing in. I am sure I won't be a stranger to the park—I'll have to stop in and see what the workers, Chastity and Janet are up to once in a while. The two things that will be the hardest to leave behind when I go are my three dogs that are buried under the Walnut tree beside the park residence, and my wonderful drive to work everyday- which has been outstanding for 40 years!

James Gray, Harmonie State Park Manager