

The public comments on the transformation of Savage River Lodge into a state park reflect diverse perspectives and suggestions:

1. **Name Suggestions:** Popular names include "Savage Highlands State Park," "Savage River Lodge State Park," and "Mt. Aetna State Park."
2. **Food Services:**
 - Strong demand for a food concession, often rated as "5" in importance.
 - Preferences for simple, healthy, and affordable options with diverse dietary accommodations.
 - Mixed opinions on whether to continue a full-service restaurant or explore alternatives like food trucks or pre-packaged options.
3. **Accommodation Services:**
 - High interest in maintaining amenities like linen service, toiletries, and recreation equipment rentals.
 - Recommendations to add basic kitchen facilities to cabins or yurts.
 - Suggested pricing varies, often between \$100-\$300 per night, influenced by amenities and competitive rates.
4. **Activities and Recreation:**
 - Enthusiasm for cross-country skiing, hiking, fishing, sledding, and other outdoor activities.
 - Suggestions for expanded trails, winter activities, and youth/family programs.
5. **Management and Policies:**
 - Requests for 24/7 on-site management and dedicated staff.
 - Calls for affordability, local engagement, and preserving pet-friendly policies.
 - Concerns about road conditions and access, with frequent calls for improvements.
 - Mixed views on hunting and motorized vehicles, with some advocating restrictions to maintain serenity.
6. **Cultural and Environmental Values:**

- Many hope to preserve the lodge's unique, serene atmosphere, avoiding excessive commercialization or family-focused activities.
- Suggestions to sustain the high-quality upkeep of cabins, trails, and natural surroundings.
- Emphasis on maintaining the park's exclusivity and quiet charm.

7. **Additional Feedback:**

- Some concern about the cost of the state's acquisition and transparency in decision-making.
- Requests for inclusive public access, family-oriented enhancements, and educational opportunities.
- Recommendations for sustainability and minimal ecological impact during development.

Deeper Analysis:

1. **Food and Dining Services**

Key Insights:

- **Essential Service:** Many comments emphasize the importance of food options due to the park's remote location.
- **Options Desired:**
 - Affordable, simple meals such as sandwiches, soups, or grab-and-go options.
 - Vegetarian, gluten-free, and healthy choices are often requested.
 - Full-service restaurant and bar received mixed opinions, with some favoring its return for both guests and the public, while others suggest more casual options.
- **Management Suggestions:** Outsourcing food services or contracting with local businesses was a common recommendation to ensure cost efficiency and quality.

Recommendations:

- Offer a hybrid model combining grab-and-go options and periodic full-service dining.
 - Ensure food offerings cater to diverse dietary needs.
 - Consider hosting seasonal food events or food trucks to enhance variety.
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2. Accommodation Services

Key Insights:

- **Linens Service:** Bringing one's own linens was seen as inconvenient by many, though some were willing to forgo this for reduced costs.
- **Kitchen Facilities:** A frequent suggestion was to equip cabins and yurts with basic cooking amenities, such as microwaves and small refrigerators.
- **Pricing:**
 - Target range: \$100–\$300 per night depending on season, amenities, and competition.
 - Suggestions to offer local discounts and tiered pricing for residents and tourists.
- **Pet-Friendly Policies:** Strong support for continuing to allow pets, with some advocating for pet-specific cabins.

Recommendations:

- Retain linen service as a standard feature.
 - Equip accommodations with basic kitchen setups to reduce reliance on centralized dining.
 - Offer flexible pricing tiers and discounts for locals, families, and long-term stays.
 - Keep pet-friendly policies intact for select accommodations.
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3. Activities and Recreation

Key Insights:

- **Winter Activities:** High demand for cross-country skiing, sledding, and snowshoe rentals.
- **Trails:** Many value the existing trails and want improved connectivity with other trail systems (e.g., Great Allegheny Passage).
- **Family & Youth Programs:** Calls for playgrounds, family retreats, and youth-focused outdoor programs like scouting or school trips.
- **Hunting and Fishing:** Opinions are split, with some advocating expanded opportunities and others seeking limitations near public areas.

Recommendations:

- Expand and maintain trails, ensuring year-round accessibility for activities like skiing and hiking.
 - Create structured family programs while preserving the retreat-like atmosphere for couples and adults.
 - Consider designated hunting zones with clear boundaries to balance recreational use and safety.
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4. Management and Maintenance

Key Insights:

- **Staffing:** Strong demand for full-time, on-site staff to handle maintenance, guest services, and emergencies.
- **Access Road:** The poor condition of the access road is frequently mentioned, with calls for paving or better maintenance to ensure safety, especially in winter.
- **Transparency:** Some expressed concerns over the state's acquisition cost and requested more openness in planning and operational decisions.

Recommendations:

- Employ dedicated on-site staff, including a ranger and maintenance team, to ensure smooth operations.
- Prioritize road improvements to enhance accessibility.
- Hold regular public updates and meetings to address transparency and build community trust.

5. Cultural and Environmental Considerations

Key Insights:

- **Preserving Atmosphere:** Many value the lodge's peaceful, secluded vibe and oppose over-commercialization or excessive family-oriented activities.
- **Sustainability:** Suggestions include eco-friendly practices, minimal ecological disruption, and preserving wildlife habitats.
- **Name Suggestions:** Names like "Savage Highlands" or "Headwaters State Park" reflect a desire to honor the area's natural and cultural heritage.

Recommendations:

- Implement eco-friendly practices (e.g., renewable energy, waste reduction).
- Preserve the rustic charm and quiet ambiance to attract repeat visitors.
- Consider a name that reflects both the lodge's legacy and the region's natural features.

6. Special Features and Feedback

Key Insights:

- **Event Hosting:** Many envision the park as a venue for weddings, retreats, and educational events.
- **Historical Value:** Longtime guests expressed a deep emotional connection to the lodge and urged the state to preserve its essence.
- **Unique Offerings:** Suggestions for niche additions like massages, yoga, or spa facilities to enhance the retreat experience.

Recommendations:

- Develop infrastructure for small-scale events while balancing public access.
- Offer wellness amenities like guided meditation or nature walks to cater to diverse visitors.
- Highlight the area's history and ecological significance through interpretive programs.

The comments on the transformation of Savage River Lodge into a state park are a mix of positive, constructive, and critical, but they lean slightly more toward **positive and constructive** sentiments. Here's a breakdown:

Positive Themes

1. Appreciation for Preservation:

- Many commenters expressed gratitude for the state's acquisition of the property, valuing its preservation for public use.
- Longtime visitors cherish the lodge's serene environment and are optimistic about its future as a state park.

2. Specific Suggestions for Improvement:

- Suggestions like adding basic kitchen facilities, improving the access road, and ensuring full-time staff demonstrate a proactive, solution-oriented mindset.
- The emphasis on maintaining trails, pet-friendly policies, and sustainable practices reflects strong support for preserving the lodge's unique charm.

3. Excitement for Accessibility:

- There is enthusiasm for making the property more inclusive and affordable while retaining its upscale and nature-focused vibe.
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Critical Themes

1. Concerns About the Acquisition:

- Some commenters questioned the cost of the purchase and transparency in the decision-making process.
- Criticism regarding the financial feasibility of the project and concerns over potential resource diversion from other state parks were noted.

2. Road Conditions and Maintenance:

- The poor state of the access road was a recurring issue, with many emphasizing it as a critical area for improvement.

3. **Skepticism About Changes:**

- Fears of over-commercialization or losing the lodge's tranquil atmosphere were prevalent.
- Some worried that making the park too family-oriented could alienate its traditional visitor base.

4. **Mixed Feelings About Food Services:**

- While food services were seen as important, opinions varied on whether to retain a full-service restaurant or adopt simpler, more affordable options.

Overall Sentiment

- The tone of the comments suggests a general appreciation for the opportunity to provide input and a shared desire to see the property thrive.
- Concerns are largely constructive and revolve around maintaining the lodge's essence, ensuring operational efficiency, and addressing logistical challenges.

While critical voices exist, they are often accompanied by practical recommendations, indicating that most contributors hope for a successful transition that balances new opportunities with the preservation of the lodge's legacy.