

YMA Annual Meeting, May 2020 – Historic Yates Mill County Park Report

The beginning of 2019 saw many changes in our division in how we deliver programs and other services. While these changes did not directly affect mill tours there were concerns, they could indirectly.

As of January 1, 2019, Wake County Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PROS) no longer charged a fee for its public, group and outreach programs. As part of this transition, we no longer accepted cash as payment. The division kept charging a fee for summer camps and facility reservations.

At Yates Mill, tour fees for the general public and groups were the exception and were kept in place because of the importance of this revenue to Yates Mill Associates and the upkeep of the mill.

Even so, there were legitimate concerns about going free for all programs, except mill tours. As it turned out, visitors and groups still came. We hardly missed a beat. The 2019 mill tour season (all mill tours) generated \$20,764 in revenue. While not a record year it was very good year and better than 2018 which generated \$20,015 in revenue. Other visitation numbers for 2019.

Number of Tours Offered:	432
Number of Participants:	4,793
Overall park visitation:	135,593

Fast forward to 2020. The new tour season starting in March promised to be even better. We were headed for an extremely busy spring with group tours until the pandemic shut down almost everything.

Suddenly Wake County PROS was faced with tough decisions of how to balance public safety while remaining open to the public. Eventually we cancelled all programming and facilities reservations and closed visitor centers, restrooms and playgrounds while keeping trails and park grounds open. We also promoted social distancing to our visitors.

For safety of its employees, the County implemented a work from home strategy which meant no more than two people working a shift at the park. So, staff is currently rotating working from home and operating the parks. At any given time, only 2 staff members will be in the park.

Despite all this, the park just had the busiest single month (visitation) ever in April 2020. Over 19,500 visitors came to the park. Amazing considering, we are not programming, not providing tours and overall limited services. Part of the reason for the large increase in visitation is that many parks operated by other agencies have been closed since early March.

So, a lot of people in our community have discovered our parks which is great, but they are only seeing/experiencing a small sample of what the park has to offer. As a park staff, we feel like we've made a lot of new friends and we continue to promote mill tours and other programs that we'll offer when it's safe to do so.