

**BURGESS FALLS**  
**CLASS I SCENIC-RECREATIONAL STATE NATURAL AREA**

**COUNTY:** Putnam, White

**7.5' QUADRANGLE:** Burgess Falls

**PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE:**

Eastern Highland Rim

**ACREAGE:** 350

**OWNERSHIP:** State of Tennessee

**DESIGNATED:** 1973

**DESCRIPTION:** Burgess Falls is a 350-acre natural area in Putnam and White Counties and is located approximately thirteen miles southwest of Cookeville. It is managed by Tennessee State Parks. Burgess Falls lies on the rugged dissected eastern edge of the Eastern Highland Rim resulting in the occurrence of sheer bluffs, narrow ridges, waterfalls, and diverse forest communities. It was named for Tom Burgess, an American Revolutionary War veteran, who was deeded the land in 1793 by the U.S. Government as partial payment for his services. For many decades the Burgess family provided settlers with meal and cut lumber from their gristmill and lumber mill on Falling Water River above the falls.

Burgess Falls is most noted for its scenic value as Falling Water River drops nearly 250 feet over three waterfalls. The last of these falls is the most spectacular and begins where the water comes to the sharp edge of the riverbed and plunges more than 130 feet into the gorge. Protruding rocks halfway down break the curtain of water and spread a mist around the base of the falls. The bluffs rise on each side of the gorge framing the falls in rough gray rock. A steep trail leads to the edge of the falls, and a stairway leads into the gorge.

There are three major geologic periods represented in the natural area that contribute to formation of these falls. The falls are created where resistant cherty limestone from Mississippian Period Fort Payne Formation sits above Devonian and Mississippian Period Chattanooga Shale. A lesser resistant limestone has dissolved and eroded to form the scenic gorge and surrounding escarpment. The deposition that forms the gorge is from the Ordovician Period and is represented by Liepers and Catheys formations. This is an excellent example of the geologic process that formed the Highland Rim and the Central Basin. Chattanooga Shale is often present and delineates the two subunits

The geologic features that create the scenic value, also supports diverse forest communities. The mixed mesophytic forest is particularly interesting. It includes eastern hemlock, umbrella magnolia, and the cucumber magnolia tree. These are species more often found in similar forests in East Tennessee. This forest also supports basswood, buckeye, sugar and red maple, numerous oaks and hickories, white ash, tulip poplar, and beech. Several showy spring wildflowers include bloodroot, two species of toothwort, wood poppy, numerous trillium species, trout lily, white dogtooth violet (*Erythronium albidum*), Solomon's seal, columbine, foamflower, rue anemone, goldenseal, dwarf crested iris, and shooting star.

**SITE MANAGEMENT:** Burgess Falls State Natural Area, 4000 Burgess Falls Drive, Sparta, TN 38583-8456 (931) 432-5312; Division of Natural Heritage, 401 Church Street, 7th Floor L&C Tower, Nashville, TN 37243-0447 (615) 532-0431.

**PUBLIC ACCESS:** Public access is provided, hiking trails and picnic areas are available. Burgess Falls is operated by Tennessee State Parks. The park is open daily from 8:00 am Central Time until 30 minutes before sunset.

**DIRECTIONS:** Approximately 12 miles southwest of Cookeville on Highway 135 at the White County line.