




United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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Memorandum

To: Regional Directors

From: Deputy Director, Operations
Exercising the Authority of the Director 

Subject: Managing the Second Century of Campgrounds in the National Park Service

Campgrounds provide a low-cost and unique opportunity for visitors to experience National Park Service (NPS) sites across the country. More than 330 million visitors explore parks annually, with tent, RV, and backcountry campers spending an estimated 7.9 million nights at National Park System campgrounds in 2018.

Growing interest in expanding and supporting public recreational access supports the need to fully understand, optimally manage, and strategically invest in campgrounds throughout the NPS. To this end, the NPS has undertaken several initiatives to ensure our second century of NPS campgrounds supports both visitors and employees.

Enhancing Transparency and Consistency in Decision-Making

- The NPS must ensure its investment, modernization, and campground operating models appropriately reflect parks' unique circumstances, markets, and visitor expectations. To better understand these factors, the NPS is undertaking a study to generate an industry analysis, financial strategy, and operating model decision framework.
 - *Industry analysis*: Two campground industry trends reports will summarize current and developing expectations for camping and provide an overview of national and regional camping markets. The reports inform the financial and operating model strategies outlined below.
 - *Financial strategy*: This analysis and framework identifies financial factors parks must consider when investing in campgrounds.
 - *Operating model decision framework*: This framework provides a consistent approach to determine the appropriate operating model (such as NPS or concession-operated) to manage specific park campgrounds. The NPS does not intend to emphasize one operating model over another but would benefit from standardized process and criteria to make the determination.
- Six pilot parks are participating in the study to inform the development of the two frameworks. Field-testing will ensure that the recommendations are feasible, comprehensive, and create a better campground experience for both staff and visitors.
- This study will highlight the fiscal and operating realities of campgrounds and the need to balance current trends with the long-term stewardship of NPS resources.

Strengthening and Streamlining National and Local Campground Management

- As a consolidated solution used across the NPS and other Federal land management agencies, Recreation.gov provides a modern digital interface and reduces visitor frustration with the unpredictability of campground availability. In addition, the platform provides improved decision support for managers and leaders who rely on aggregated and on-demand reporting. To better leverage these benefits, the NPS set a goal of onboarding 1,500 new campsites and implementing digital site-specific park passes at 50 park units through Recreation.gov by Founder's Day.
- The NPS is working to develop a standard for campground reservations to improve its understanding and use of occupancy rates in decision-making. The reservation standard will be implemented at NPS-operated campgrounds and could be included in concessions prospectuses.
- A collaborative, cross-Directorate work group is identifying how campground information can be shared, validated, and improved throughout the NPS. The work group will establish standards that streamline campground data entry, integrate systems, and create a comprehensive campground dataset to reduce data calls to the field and better respond to external requests for information.
- Finally, an NPS technical team will develop standard design elements for campground amenities. This process will consider best practices from other Federal agencies, States, the private sector, and others to inform value-based decision-making. Standard design elements will contribute to a more streamlined project execution process.

The NPS has undertaken this multifaceted approach to concurrently highlight and address potential improvements across our campgrounds while achieving a Secretarial goal and priority. We will continue to solicit your help in promoting a 21st century campground management program and visitor experience.