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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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CAMPGROUND MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Outdoor camping in the undisturbed natural surroundings of the great scenic areas of the National Park System is a memorable experience enjoyed each year by thousands of visitors. The management of these campgrounds must meet a dual objective--to promote the memorable experience of the park visitor while at the same time preserving the area and the park atmosphere.

The National Park Service considers camping to be one of the most appropriate and beneficial uses of the parks, however, the Service does not have authority nor an obligation to provide for camping as a purely diversionary activity, except in those areas administered by the National Capital Parks or in the National Recreation Areas.

POLICY

Therefore, the overall development program as well as management of campgrounds must keep in mind the National Park Service's Camping Policy: CAMPGROUNDS WILL BE PROVIDED WHEN THEY ARE ESSENTIAL FOR THE PROPER USE AND ENJOYMENT OF THE PARKS. Due to the increasing number of trailers using park facilities the NPS has adopted the following policy for TRAILER VILLAGES: WHERE TRAILER VILLAGES ARE DETERMINED TO BE NECESSARY, THEY MAY BE PROVIDED BY PRIVATE CAPITAL, OR THE SERVICE, AND OPERATED AND MAINTAINED BY A CONCESSIONER. (Special Park Uses Handbook, Part 2, Chapter 1, Campground Planning.)

DEFINITIONS

Before developing this subject further certain terminology used should be defined to avoid misconceptions.

Camping - For park management purposes, camping is defined as any overnight occupancy by visitors of facilities or space provided and maintained by the Government for such use plus overflow usage. This definition excludes overnight occupancy of any concessioner-provided (paid) facilities or accommodations including tent houses and sites in concessioner operated trailer villages.

Honor Camping - A term referring to a type of camping management, usually in remote areas wherein campers are placed on their honor to keep camping facilities clean and in good condition, dispose of refuse properly, etc.--in other words, given the responsibility themselves for care, operation and upkeep, so far as possible, of campgrounds or camping areas used. This is a management device to reduce the load of campground maintenance, patrol and supervision work, to give better protection to outlying areas, and give those who want to get away from crowds an opportunity to do so. A camping permit or fire permit system is usually necessary to its effectiveness. A campground so administered may be termed an "honor campground."

Day Camping - A type of use common in recreation areas near centers of population, and in a few parks similarly located. Families or groups occupy a campsite or camping facility for the day only, cook and eat meals in the camp and use it as a base for hiking or other recreation. A use not entirely distinct from picnicking, but generally involving use of a site over a longer period during the day, full scale cooking of camp meals, etc.

Camper - Any occupant of a campsite, space or area within a park regardless of the mode of camping, whether it be in a tent, service trailer, trailer coach, station wagon, car, bus, Government provided shelter or shelter cabin or in the open with sleeping bag or other minimum camping equipment. Occupants of concessioner's accommodations including sites in concessioner-operated trailer villages, are not considered campers.

Camper Day - A statistical unit of park use which consists of the passing of one night by one camper in a park. One camper day results in two visitor days. Thus, for one camper, the number of visitor days is always one more than the number of camper days.

CAMPING ACCOMMODATIONS

This is a general term applying to all areas authorized for camping.

Camp - 1. An occupied campsite or camp space.

2. A place provided with camping facilities such as tents, buildings, or other accommodations for recreational or temporary use; e.g., a Boy Scout Camp, CCC Camp. "Camp" is not generally a synonym for "campground," though occasionally it is used as such by the Service, as in the term "group camp," or to indicate sections in a large complex of campgrounds, as Camp 7, Camp 14 (Yosemite), Camp 1, 2, 3, etc. (Kings Canyon).

Campground - An area with an organized layout having well defined

roads, parking spaces, and campsites. Drinking water and sanitary facilities, including toilets and refuse cans, are furnished on a community basis. Each campground has a designed capacity based on the number of campsites therein.

Campsite - A campsite is defined as a clearly marked plot or location within a campground which provides accommodations for camping by an individual, family or party. A typical campsite in a campground would include a parking space, fireplace, table and bench combination and a tent space; however, in the case of a walk-in campground, or walk-in section of a campground, the parking space is provided but not as an integral part of each campsite.

Trail Campsite - A convenient term used by some parks, on informational-folder maps, etc., to designate places along park trails or back-country routes where camping by hikers or horseback parties is permitted. A public information term only, not used in a design and construction or a statistical sense, and not to be confused with the meaning of the term "campsite" when used alone.

Camping Areas - (The facility formerly referred to as an undeveloped campground or primitive campground.) An area (other than a campground) designated and regularly used for camping by individuals, families, and parties. Camping areas may be accessible by either road or trail. Facilities provided are minimum, generally being limited to access roads, basic sanitary facilities, and a limited number of fireplaces and tables. Trailside camping places in the back-country also fall within this category and shelters of either the Adirondack or fully enclosed type may be provided. Each camping area has an assigned, as differentiated from designed, capacity based on the number of camp spaces therein.

Camp Space - The space in a camping area normally occupied by an individual, family, or party.

Group Camps - An area designated for use by organizational groups such as Boy Scouts, school groups or other large parties. Comprised of one or more group sites or spaces each of which is provided with a large fireplace, several tables and parking space for buses or a number of cars. Capacity of group camps is rated on basis of number of group sites or spaces within the camp and the number of persons each can normally accommodate.

Overflow Camping - The condition which occurs when (1) the designed or assigned capacity of a campground or camp area is exceeded; (2) individual, family or party usage is made of group camps, sites or spaces, or (3) other locations in the park not regularly used for camping.

Trailer Village - An area of organized layout for travel trailers and mobile homes, containing as minimum facilities roads, car-and-trailer parking spaces, walks, lights, individual connections to water, electricity and sewer, and community toilet facilities. Trailer villages may be provided for visitors or for Service or concessioner employees. The term "trailer court" is synonymous with "trailer village"--the latter being the preferred term.

Trailer Site - An individual site in a trailer village, including a car-and-trailer parking space with utility connections. A campsite with parking space for both car-and-trailer, in a campground, may be referred to as a trailer campsite.

Trailer Coaches (housetrailer) - 1. Travel trailer. A mobile housekeeping unit having living facilities additional to those required for sleeping, such as cooking and heating devices, sinks, and refrigeration, but no toilet or shower facilities. Depends upon community toilet and shower facilities in campgrounds or trailer villages. 2. Mobile home. A mobile housekeeping unit having living facilities additional to those required for sleeping, such as cooking and heating devices, sinks, and refrigeration, and including toilet and shower facilities. This is an independent unit which does not depend upon community toilet and shower facilities in campground or trailer villages, if sewerage and water facilities are available.

Service trailers - One- and two-wheeled trailers, luggage trailers, collapsible trailers, etc., which are without utility facilities, used almost exclusively for carrying camping and recreational equipment and for sleeping, requiring the occupant to prepare and serve food outside.

(These definitions come from Handbook - NPS Glossary of Commonly Used Terms)

It should be carefully noted, however, with respect to trailer definitions that in the 36 CFR house trailer is defined as "a non-collapsible trailer specifically designed and built to provide sleeping accommodations for one or more persons." This definition is used in connection with fee charges.

CAMPGROUND PLANNING

Some of the guidelines for planning of campgrounds are:

Site Selection - The site should not encroach on any outstanding natural, scenic, aesthetic, scientific, or historical values. Well drained, gently sloping, rock-free sites are preferred.

Entrance - Campgrounds that are accessible by park roads should have a single access road with a campground Ranger Station near it to maintain such controls as are necessary for proper campground use. Trailer villages should likewise have a single entrance with complete circulation and a registration office located for control of ingress and egress.

Layout and Facilities - The first principle of layout is to confine vehicles and fires to specific spaces. Barriers should be provided only where they are necessary to confine the vehicle in order to preserve the natural features, and to mark camping limits. Barriers when provided should be as simple and unobtrusive as possible. Each campsite should be numbered and contain a parking space, a tent area, one table and bench combination, and one camp stove. In desert areas ramadas should be provided. Construction of separate campgrounds for tents and trailers or separation of trailers from tents in different sections of a campground is recommended. In tent areas, if not naturally smooth and reasonably level should be made so by grading. Wooden tent platforms or curbed and graveled tent spaces will not be provided. For good management, large campgrounds should be composed of a number of integrated though independent sections. The number of campsites per section will be influenced by topographical conditions, but should also be reconciled with the most economical distribution of comfort stations.

If preservation of park values within a campground site requires the spacing of parking areas and campsites at a considerable distance apart, a different campground site should be sought. The reason for this is the cost of constructing roads and utility lines increases as the space between campsites increases. A range of about four to seven campsites per acre has generally been realized. However, each campground should be given individual attention to obtain the maximum number of sites per acre, consistent with preservation of park values and consideration of the visitor's camping experience.

Where visitor use warrants, campgrounds should have a minimum size of about 90-120 campsites for efficient operation. Small units of 10, 20 or 30 sites should be avoided generally in the future, although existing small campgrounds should not be eliminated if there is real need for the kind of service they provide, or if visitor use does not require a large size, as is the case in certain parks.

Sanitary facilities shall be in accordance with standards approved by the U.S. Public Health Service. All such facilities will be provided on a community basis with no individual water, sewer, electrical connections nor sumps for kitchen waste provided in campgrounds. Shower bath facilities will not be provided by the Government. When such a service is required it will be furnished by

a concessioner and will be combined with other services or sales items to provide an economical operation.

Comfort stations shall provide flush toilets and lavatories. Pit toilets will be provided when the cost of water supply and sewage disposal is excessive. Chemical toilets are to be discouraged. One comfort station per 30 campsites, containing 2 water closets and one urinal for men and 3 water closets for women and 2 lavatories for each sex, shall be the standard. Comfort stations should provide facilities for sites within a radius of approximately 300 feet. Comfort stations will be heated only when they are used during freezing weather conditions. One flushing rim service tank should be provided in a separate compartment in each comfort station for disposal of night pail contents, wash water, and other liquid waste for campgrounds with more than 20 sites.

Water hydrants are to be spaced about 150 feet from campsites and shall be provided with nonthreaded, self-closing faucets and a drain or sump. In addition, a number of risers should be provided with threaded hose bibs located strategically throughout the area for fire protection. Hose shall be furnished in houses or carts, centrally located. When water is not provided such campgrounds should be limited to not more than 20 sites.

Garbage cans are to be placed in nontip racks above ground near the circulation road, a maximum of 150 feet from any campsite but not near a water hydrant.

Electricity should be provided for lighting of comfort stations, ranger stations and residences. Outside lights on the comfort stations are to provide the only permissible campground lighting.

Each campground should have an adequate number of bulletin boards, as well as directional maps and signs along campground roads and trails associated with it. Location and arrangement of bulletin boards should be considered. Near comfort stations may be a more effective location than at the campground entrance. Keep extraneous posters and faded, lengthy or poorly worded instructions off them. Use to inform the visitors about opportunities for worthwhile experiences and to assist in protecting park values. Sometimes a wayside shelter housing an exhibit pertaining to a feature near the campground. A self-guiding trail leading from the campground may be worthwhile but it will frequently require extensive upkeep. Campfire circles (accommodating up to 250 people), amphitheaters (capacity of 250 to 750 people), or small family fire circles (for 10 to 40 persons) will frequently be provided nearby. Recreation facilities such as swings, seasaws, and game areas are not to be provided.

Organized Group Campgrounds - Campgrounds for organized groups should be provided in a separate campground or in a separate section of the campground. Tent areas should be clustered near multicar parking areas so that various small organized groups can use the unit at the same time, yet will permit occupancy of several clusters by large organizations. Comfort stations should provide facilities for sites within a radius of approximately 300 feet. Each cluster of tent areas should be provided with a water hydrant, picnic table and bench combinations, garbage cans, and a large camp stove or fireplace.

Trailside Campgrounds - These will vary in the types of development depending on location and the amount of use.

Campgrounds for little used trails in open country may consist only of a designated area set aside in which camping is permitted. These will have no facilities other than simple fireplaces or bare ground area prepared and marked for campfires, thus obviating the possibility of multiple scars. In heavily used trailside campgrounds facilities may include tentsites, pit toilets, tables, drinking water, fireplaces and refuse disposal facilities. Trail shelters in special locations will be given consideration.

MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

1. In usual circumstances campsites will be assigned on a "first come - first served" basis. Reservations should be required for group campgrounds.
2. Wood fuel will be provided when reasonable to do so within the limits of available funds and when consistent with the Service's wood-utilization policy. Beyond these limitations the National Park Service is not obligated to provide fuel for camp fireplaces. In cases where wood is not available, necessary steps must be taken to protect the natural plant life by making arrangements for a commercial supply of fuel.
3. Camping will be permitted only in designated areas unless authorized elsewhere by the Superintendent. This has for some time been applied to camping anywhere in the park--whether access is provided by hiking or by auto or other device. Recently (1964) the Director emphasized that people would not be denied the opportunity to camp at locations in the back-country unless specific regulations delineating the location were published or if due to temporary conditions of fire danger, sanitation, or safety to the person were involved. Lacking these the person in the back-country is at liberty to camp where he pleases.
4. It has been the trend in the past to try to segregate the tent

camp and trailer sites if it was feasible without serious waste of space or without creating a limitation on the number of sites available to tent campers. It has been the feeling that trailers, especially the large ones, detract from the traditional camping atmosphere, and frequently require quite different layouts. Furthermore, there has been the tendency to provide a reasonable proportion of trailer and tent sites based on probable normal needs, but if a choice must be made then priority was given to the nontrailer site. However, this has led to a feeling in some quarters that trailers are being excluded. In answer to this the Service has made it clear that trailers are welcome in all parks and that space would be available in virtually all camping areas. They will be permitted under conditions which comply with Public Health Service requirements. Only where location and access rule against accommodating trailers will they be excluded. No utility connections will be provided for trailers in campgrounds and trailer sanitary systems must be used so as not to cause a nuisance.

5. Camping by any one person or group during the normal intensive public use season within any of the intensively used campgrounds and within any Park shall be limited to a single period, or combined separate periods, of not more than 14 days within any one year. In campgrounds where pressure of concentrated use does not exist at any time this rule may be relaxed, but continuous occupancy of any site for more than 14 days is not to be permitted except upon unusual justification.

Designation, by signs, at the entrance to each campground, with the applicable restrictions, will be promptly provided. Observance of this rule will assist in the maintenance and recovery of vegetation and reduce operation and maintenance costs.

When the demand for campsites exceeds the number available it shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent to limit the length of occupancy of any campground to a shorter period of time, so as to fairly share these areas among all who wish to use them. In these circumstances the length of time a camper may stay in a campground should be sufficient, usually not more than one week, to permit the camper to obtain a beneficial Park experience.

6. In order to protect trees, shrubs, and other vegetation, and in order to provide an enjoyable camping experience, overcrowding of campgrounds beyond the capacity for which they were designed should be avoided.

In planning and operating campgrounds an effort should be made to provide a choice of camping conditions. The majority of sites must conform to standard spacing, but there is also a demand for groups

of or multiple sites where several families can be close together. It is also important that every advantage be taken of opportunities to provide isolated or at least semi-primitive sites. "Walk-in" sites should be given a fair trial.

7. When a campground is filled to capacity it is unwise to permit overflow campers to use undeveloped areas immediately surrounding the campground unless it is planned to use this area for development of additional campsites. When an adjoining area is used additional temporary sanitary facilities should be provided, in order not to overload existing toilet facilities and utilities.

It is preferable to select another site, preferably one that is scheduled for future development as a campground. These overflow campgrounds should be provided with only minimum facilities for sanitation, vegetation and site protection, and water.

Those occupying overflow campgrounds should be given first priority for any campsite vacated in the regular campgrounds.

Picnic areas may be used for late arrivals with the understanding that the site is to be vacated by 10 a.m. the following morning.

8. It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent to control and regulate the use of all campgrounds, large, small, or in the back-country. The frequency of inspection and the application of regulatory controls should be sufficient to provide for the health and safety of campers, for the protection of Park features and aesthetic values, and to assure that the welfare of the camper and his enjoyment of the Park have been safeguarded.

A campground Ranger Station should be provided at the entrance to each major campground to be manned 16 hours per day, 7 days a week, during the camping season.

9. It is suggested that Park Superintendents aim for a standard for interpretive services of a campfire program in each amphitheater and campfire circle on an average of not less than five out of seven nights a week during the busiest season, and at a reduced level when seasonal personnel are not available. It is recognized that for major amphitheaters and circles the standard should be seven nights a week and that for small or remote installations it may drop to two or three.

Campfire programs can attract campers to a center when there are attractive facilities and good programs. By developing equally high standard facilities and programs at camps away from "precious" areas in the Park, campfire programs may contribute to Park preservation.

10. Cooperation of all levels of government should be sought, and private enterprise encouraged, to construct campgrounds near National Parks.

(Reference - Special Park Uses Handbook)