

Bicycle Travel Best Practices & Report For State Park Campgrounds



Adventure Cycling Association

INTRODUCTION

Adventure Cycling is the largest bicycle nonprofit in North America with over 50,000 members, and our mission is to inspire and empower people to travel by bicycle. In addition to providing bicycle travel resources and assistance, we work to improve bicycle travel conditions across the country. We frequently hear from cyclists in our member survey responses, on our social media channels, and through member correspondence regarding their experiences on the road. Bicycle travelers often camp at state parks and have brought several issues involving state park campgrounds to our attention, including:

1. Being turned away from campgrounds when they are full and alternative accommodations are unavailable or unreachable.
2. Making camping reservations, especially when there are two to three-day minimum stay requirements, is often a barrier for bicycle travelers who are unable to predict their estimated arrival time.
3. Lack of convenient, efficient or affordable bicycle-specific amenities such as bike parking, hiker/biker sites, and wildlife-proof lockers for food and valuables.

We have researched various state park systems to better understand the existing camping policies, services and accommodations that are available to bicycle travelers. We found that a handful of state park systems, including Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, [Nevada](#), [Virginia](#), and Wisconsin have adopted official policies guaranteeing space for bicycle travelers in the event of a full campground, referred to in this report as “no-turn-away” policies (see page 7 for examples). A few other state park systems indicated that while they have no documented policy, they would provide this service if needed in emergency situations. Some state park systems like Oregon and Montana have implemented other accommodations and services specifically for bicycle travelers, such as hiker/biker sites, wildlife proof lockers for food, and bike maintenance stations. We are glad to see that some state parks that are keeping bicycle travelers in mind; however, we encourage all state parks to provide for bicycle travelers’ needs by adopting no-turn-away policies and other bicycle traveler-friendly practices.

We realize that many state parks may be unfamiliar with the idea of providing specific services and accommodations for bicycle travelers. Therefore we have created a list of best practices recommendations for state parks to better understand what bicycle travelers need (page 5). This list incorporates recommendations for no-turn-away policies and hiker/biker sites as well as other ways for state parks to be more bicycle-friendly. We recognize that each state park is unique in the services and accommodations it offers, so there is no “one-size-fits-all” policy or set of practices that can be used. These best practices are intended to help state parks identify which recommendations would fit in best with their existing services and accommodations to effectively serve this demographic.

WHY DO BICYCLE TRAVELERS NEED SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS?

The majority of state park visitors travel by car, RV or other motorized transportation, and state parks tailor their accommodations and policies to this demographic. However, bicycle tourism has grown increasingly popular over the last decade, and bicycle travelers are becoming a larger percentage of state park visitors. The bicycle travelers referred to in this report carry their own gear and supplies, do not rely on motorized support, and travel in small groups of usually four or fewer people. They are distinct from motorized travelers in that their itinerary is often impacted by various unplanned factors, including weather, terrain, flat tires or other gear issues, illness or injury, etc. As such, it is difficult for bicycle travelers to predict exactly where they will be at a given time, which makes campsite reservations an impractical or impossible option. Also, having no motorized support means that they are limited in their ability to relocate to an alternate campground if the current one is full, especially if it is far away and/or there is limited daylight. Given that bicycle tourists tend to move on to their next destination quickly, they often only need accommodations for one night, as opposed to motorized travelers who often camp in one place for multiple nights. Non-motorized travelers also travel more lightly than motorized travelers, carrying less equipment and requiring less space for parking.

For these reasons, a no-turn-away policy is a practical and immensely helpful solution for bicycle travelers who show up at a full campground with no nearby alternative accommodations. Hiker/biker sites are also an efficient way to address this need, by providing first-come, first-serve shared-use sites outfitted for cyclists with a more affordable fee than the larger sites for motorized travelers.

WHY SHOULD STATE PARKS PROMOTE BICYCLE TOURISM?

Bicycle travel is a low-impact mode of travel requiring very little maintenance (i.e. road repairs), and bicycle travelers travel more slowly and require more frequent services (restaurants, camping, hotels, etc.) than motorized tourists, which means that they spend more money in local communities. [Studies](#) show that bicycle tourism can help boost economies, both statewide and in small rural towns, and these economic benefits are a significant reason why state park systems across the country are taking initiatives to promote bicycle tourism.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), for example, has made traveling in their state very easy for cyclists, and as a result Oregon is a hot spot for bicycle tourism. They have designated numerous [Scenic Bikeway](#) routes for cyclists and provide first come, first serve hiker/biker campsites at 20 of their state parks. According to their Bicycle Recreation Coordinator, Alex Phillips, OPRD is also improving their hiker/biker site locations and offering more bicycle-specific amenities, such as fix-it stations with bicycle tools, covered group shelters, food storage lockers, and electrical outlets for charging devices. It is because of efforts like this

that, according to a [2012 Travel Oregon study](#), bicycle travelers contribute more than \$400 million annually to the state economy.

Similarly, a [2010 Wisconsin study](#) estimated that bicycle recreation and tourism generates \$924 million for the state annually. Wisconsin has instituted a no-turn-away policy to attract bicycle travelers, which explicitly states their intention to be "thru traveler friendly, encouraging non-motorized travel, and accommodating non-motorized travelers overnight whenever possible."

Nevada is another state park system that has recognized the economic benefits of bicycle tourism and implemented a no-turn-away policy to attract bicycle travelers. Within their policy they state their motivations for bringing bicycle tourists to Nevada:

This [policy] would not have a significant impact upon State Parks, but it would be useful to promote Nevada as a bicycle-touring destination and positively impact the small towns and shops along the state's rural highways. Bicycle tourists tend to spend significantly more money than other cross-country tourists because they spend more time enjoying the areas they visit, and require more services.

State parks that go above and beyond to address the needs of cyclists are quickly recognized and promoted through word of mouth in the cycling community. Addressing and accommodating the needs of cyclists at state park campgrounds will help to attract cyclists, improve their experience, and promote the region as a bicycle tourism destination.

BICYCLE TRAVEL BEST PRACTICES – A STARTING POINT

These examples show why it is important for state parks to put into place bicycle-friendly policies and promote them as a way to welcome bicycle tourists. There is much room for improvement in the accommodations and services that state parks systems can offer bicycle travelers and doing so would open up new opportunities to broaden visitor demographics and increase the economic impact to state parks and their respective states. Due to the abundance of state parks along popular tour routes, bicycle travelers frequently include state parks in their tour plans, providing significant potential for state park systems to take the lead in promoting bicycle tourism in their home state. The following list of bicycle-friendly policy recommendations is proposed as a starting point for state park systems to understand how they can best accommodate bicycle travelers and develop bicycle tourism.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

If you know of other bicycle travel best practices that could be added to the list, or if you would like to learn more about accommodating bicycle travelers, please contact Saara Snow, Travel Initiatives Coordinator, at ssnow@adventurecycling.org or (406)532-2749.

BICYCLE TRAVEL BEST PRACTICES

1. Welcome bicycle travelers and keep their needs in mind when updating or creating policies, fee structures, amenities and services.
 - a. Keep staff informed of bicycle-specific policies, amenities and services to better serve bicycle travelers.
2. Communicate bicycle-specific policies, amenities, services, and other information to the public so they know what to expect and what's available.
 - a. Website ([Virginia](#), [Nevada](#))
 - b. Brochure for non-motorized travelers
 - c. Newsletters and emails
 - d. State park maps
 - e. Signs and bulletin boards
 - f. Social media
 - g. Other state park promotional materials
3. Make the reservation process as flexible and non-restrictive as possible.
 - a. Exempt bicycle travelers from two or three-day minimum reservations ([Vermont](#)).
 - b. Allow cancellations 24 hours before the reserved time, as opposed to multiple days in advance.
4. Provide hiker/biker campsites that do not require reservations ([Oregon](#), [California](#)).
 - a. First-come, first-serve individual or group sites
 - b. Only for visitors arriving by non-motorized transportation (bicycle, foot, boat)
 - c. Accessible from the road, not primitive sites located alongside a trail
 - d. Charge prices consistent with services and space provided, usually between \$5-10
 - e. Locate site near restroom facilities and water
 - f. Clearly mark with signs showing that these sites are available even if the rest of the campground is full.
5. Implement an official no-turn-away policy or directive.
 - a. If the campground is full and there are no available overflow sites, then designate a space near drinking water and restroom facilities for the bicycle traveler to camp in (see report for examples).
 - b. Policy instructions should be clearly outlined to maintain consistency in implementation.
 - c. Post no-turn-away policy on your website and let the public know it exists ([Nevada](#), [Virginia](#)).

6. Provide as many bicycle-specific amenities as possible or applicable:
 - a. Bicycle maintenance tools/fix-it stations ([Oregon](#))
 - b. Bicycle parking
 - c. Covered facilities or group shelters ([Oregon](#))
 - d. Lockers for valuables with inside electrical outlets for charging cell phones
 - e. Wildlife-proof storage for food
 - f. Showers

7. Provide bicycle infrastructure and safety markings as appropriate when developing or improving state park roads.
 - a. Safe passing signs
 - b. Sharrows
 - c. Separated bicycle infrastructure like bike paths or lanes

8. Count how many cyclists are camping at your campground to compare year-to-year use.

9. Survey cyclists or conduct a study to gather information on bicycle facilities and services, what is working, and what needs improvement ([Massachusetts](#), Oregon).

10. Partner with tourism, transportation, bicycle/trail groups, business and other interested parties on statewide bicycle tourism initiatives and promotion ([Oregon](#), [Minnesota](#)).

**Examples of state parks that have implemented various best practices are hyperlinked in parentheses.*

Best Practice Examples No-Turn-Away Policies

Massachusetts

Michigan

Minnesota

Nevada

Virginia

Wisconsin

Massachusetts State Parks



MassParks Program Guidance

Camping Program

Date: May 9, 2013

Subject: Touring Cyclists and Backpackers

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation will accommodate "self-contained" touring cyclists and backpackers who arrive at DCR campgrounds without a reservation even when the campground is full.

Background

Most bicycle tourists plan their trip in advance and make camping reservations ahead of time to accommodate their stay. All bicycle tour organizations plan ahead and make reservations when planning a tour. Nonetheless, there are times when mechanical issues or weather impedes a touring cyclist or hiker's schedule and they must seek alternative camping accommodations at the last minute. Whereas, the touring cyclist may not have the capacity to find alternate accommodations, MassParks campgrounds will accommodate these stranded cyclists or backpackers as outlined in the procedure below.

MassParks procedure for touring cyclists and backpackers:

When our campgrounds have available sites, MassParks campgrounds welcome cycling tourists or backpackers with or without reservations.

When our campgrounds are **full**, in the interest of public safety, MassParks campgrounds will accommodate "self-contained"* cyclists or backpackers in an area that provides the cyclist or backpacker "reasonable accommodation" for their needs.

- The area need not be a designated campsite but should provide reasonable space, privacy and access to normal campground amenities (toilet facilities, showers, etc.) provided to other tent campers.
- MassParks shall not routinely block reservations or hold a site or sites for such emergency accommodations.

- Applicable fees shall apply.
- The camping accommodation shall be provided for one night only unless extenuating circumstances require otherwise.
- Campgrounds may limit this accommodation to groups of four or fewer if public safety is not a significant concern and a larger group would have a negative impact on the camping environment.

*"Self-contained" means that the individual is travelling with all of their gear, (tent, clothing, sleeping equipment, etc.) on their bicycle, in a bicycle trailer or in their backpack.

"Supported" tours, where camping gear is carried by a van or other motorized vehicle, have the alternative to transport their riders to an alternate location. Therefore, the public safety concerns are diminished. MassParks is not required to accommodate supported bicycle tourists or backpackers when our campgrounds are at capacity.

This guidance establishes a framework for decision-making at the field level. It is rare that a touring cyclist or backpacker arrives at an already full campground without a reservation and no alternative camping option. And, the circumstances of each incident will vary with the weather, time of day, number and age of travelers seeking accommodation and other factors that have aligned to produce the situation. MassParks is confident in its field managers to consider these unique factors in the context of public health and safety concerns for the travelers and other campers, the overall campground environment, and MassParks' spirit of hospitality and support for healthy transportation in Massachusetts.

This accommodation is not a substitute for good trip planning. Cyclists or backpackers planning to visit one of MassParks' popular campgrounds by foot, bicycle or car can get the best choice of campsites and services by reserving their site through our reservations service provider ReserveAmerica at www.reserveamerica.com or by calling ReserveAmerica at 866 422 6762.

Michigan State Parks

Department of Natural Resources

Parks and Recreation Policy #8.1

Revised May 12, 2009

Camping Policy

POLICY

It is the policy of the Parks and Recreation Division to provide limited-term recreational camping opportunities. Camping is permitted only in established campgrounds on designated sites, or in designated areas, following payment of established fees. Camping is prohibited in any other area of State Parks or Recreation Areas. According to State Administrative Rules, campgrounds shall not be used as places for permanent or semi-permanent residence, or as a base for the operation of commercial business.

PRD Policy 8.1

A. Backpack and Bicycle Camping

For a camp entering the park on bike or hiking.

1. When all designated campsites are full, backpack and bicycle camps will be accommodated in the Group Use Area or in some other location in the park or recreation area. The intent is to accommodate backpack or bike camps.
2. These camp permits (in locations other than standard campsites) are to be written for one night only, and entered into CRS on an auxiliary site.
3. The campers may be required to leave by 10:00 AM the next morning or register to a standard campsite.
4. The camping fee will be determined by amenities available to the campers and up to four persons per camp.

Minnesota State Parks

Department of Natural Resources

Parks and Trails Division's Camping Policy (#011), last updated Feb. 24, 2011:

Emergency Camping

Park Managers have the authority to allow emergency overnight camping, for one night, in excess of the normal camping capacity of a park. The park manager has the authority to assign the camping location, the fee to be charged based on services provided, checkout time, and any other requirements necessary for efficient implementation of this emergency camping process.

Nevada State Parks

(Original at: <http://parks.nv.gov/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/00-23-No-turn-Away-Campgrounds.pdf>)



Division of State Parks

General Title #00-23	General No Turn Away from Campgrounds	3/2010	Page 1 of 1
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REFERENCES: Nevada Bicycle Advisory Board memo, dated November 11, 2009

PURPOSE: It is the policy of the Division of State Parks to help promote bicycle touring within Nevada. This policy should guarantee that touring bicyclists would not be turned away from a park should they be full, especially since campgrounds are sometimes the only option these riders have after a long day.

ORGANIZATION: This policy provides guidelines for employees to follow when touring bicyclists are looking to camp in our parks.

PRIOR POLICY: New policy.

PROCEDURES:

- I. Park supervisors should make every attempt to accommodate touring cyclists who are seeking camping facilities in parks that allow camping even if the campground or the overflow campground are full. Park staff will recommend alternative locations for overnight use if the campgrounds and overflow areas are at maximum capacity. These bicyclists travel long distances, typically carrying their gear with no vehicular support. It would guarantee touring bicyclist a campsite in areas where they might not typically be able to check into a hotel and find other accommodations especially during periods of peak visitation. All applicable park fees and regulations would apply.
- II. This would not have a significant impact upon State Parks, but it would be useful to promote Nevada as a bicycle touring destination and positively impact the small towns and shops along the state's rural highways. Bicycle tourists tend to spend significantly more money than other cross-country tourists because they spend more time enjoying the areas they visit and require more services.

Virginia State Parks

(Original at: <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/biking>)

Narrative of policy inserted into the Virginia State Park Campground Management and Operations Manual, Chapter 4 Reservations and Registration.

In an effort to promote the use of Virginia State Parks by touring bicyclist, park managers of parks that provide overnight camping and associated support facilities are to designate an area in which ride-in bicyclists can camp. Unlike other campers using RV and tents arriving with vehicles, bicyclist travel long distances, carrying their gear with no vehicular support. Under normal circumstances, the camping bicyclist will either possess advance reservations made through Virginia State Parks Reservation Center or utilize the honor camp system in place at each of the parks.

However, in the event that the bicyclist(s) arrive without a reservation and all designated and developed campsites in the park campgrounds are full, the manager should designate a nonintrusive area for the touring bicyclist(s) who requires camping for the night. This special accommodation shall only apply under the following conditions:

- 1. There are no reasonable alternative camping accommodations available, such as a nearby private or public campground that can be reached within the time allowed before darkness*
- 2. The bicyclist(s) is not accompanied by or joined by a motor vehicle that could transport the bicyclist to other accommodations*
- 3. The bicycle camping party is not larger than four individuals. If the bicyclist camping stay extends beyond the period of full capacity, the bicyclist must then relocate to a standard campsite. This special bicycle camping area may not be able to provide standard campsite amenities such as a fire ring, lantern post, and picnic table, but must be located within the legally required distance of 500 feet from bath houses and drinking water sources.*

This policy does not supersede the use of Virginia State Parks Special Use Permits being issued for organized bicyclist events or situations where large groups of bicyclists stage an event adjacent to a state park site and plan to camp overnight within the state park. All applicable fees and regulations shall apply.

The Virginia State Park standard camping site fee established in the annual Virginia State Park fee document established under Virginia Administrative Code 4VAC5-36-90 shall be utilized for touring bicyclist visiting Virginia State Parks.

DCR-Campground Management Manual 4-10, 10/1/11

Wisconsin State Parks

Department of Natural Resources

NON-MOTORIZED CAMPER ACCOMMODATIONS

State park, recreation area, and southern forest lands with developed campsites welcome persons traveling through an area via non-motorized methods, i.e., canoes, kayaks, bicycles, thru-hiking. It is recognized that such travelers are susceptible to conditions that impact travel time, making it difficult to schedule daily stopping locations. As a result booking reservations in advance for campsites may not be possible.

It is the intent of the state park, recreation area, and southern forest program to be "thru traveler" friendly, encouraging non-motorized travel, and accommodating non-motorized travelers overnight whenever possible.

State park, recreation area, and southern forest properties that offer camping shall provide space designated for individuals or small groups traveling exclusively by bicycle, foot or non-motorized watercraft. If a fee is normally charged, it shall be no more than the current resident family campsite rate, for one night, in accordance with the following guidelines:

Non-motorized travelers (bikers, hikers, boaters, etc.) are encouraged to utilize the established campsite reservation system to ensure that a site will be available upon arrival.

. State park, recreation area, and southern forest properties that offer camping shall not turn away non-motorized traveling campers solely because the family campground or group camp sites are full. Properties with camping shall provide a space for non-motorized travelers, unless an appropriate location is not available within the property.

. If the family campground is full and a group campsite or equestrian campsite is available, the individuals should be accommodated and registered as family campers at the resident rate, (up to six people per group for one night only) and allowed to camp on a group or equestrian campsite. These campers shall not have exclusive use of a group campsite unless they pay the normal group campsite rate.

. If a group or equestrian campsite is not available, non-motorized travelers shall be assigned to camp in an area designated for such specific use, for a maximum of one night. Each group of up to six persons shall pay the current resident family campsite rate.

.The non-motorized traveler camping area shall meet the following criteria:

A "common area" shall be provided to set up camp in place of individually marked campsites.

If possible, the camping area shall be located away from designated day-use areas.

If possible, the camping area shall be located near or adjacent to an existing family campground or group camp area.

The camping area shall have access to drinking water and restroom facilities.

The camping area may provide other amenities, as deemed appropriate or available, such as picnic tables, fire rings, etc. At a minimum a flat, cleared or mowed area for placing tents should be available.

Properties that do not have locations meeting the above criteria are not required to provide overnight camping areas designated for non-motorized travelers. In such cases staff should be trained to refer them to the nearest state or local park, or private campground.

Due to capacity limitations, it may not be possible to accommodate large groups in a non-motorized traveler area.

Each property should pre-determine a capacity for the non-motorized traveler camping area. Except in emergency situations, potential campers may be turned away when capacity is reached.

(Emergency is defined as a situation where non-motorized travelers arrive near nightfall; where personal exhaustion, injury or equipment breakdowns exist, or when alternate accommodations cannot be readily obtained at nearby parks or private campgrounds.)

Property staff may turn away persons who abuse the intent of this policy by parking motor vehicles away from camp areas and bike, walk or boat short distances to the campground. For attendance reporting purposes, non-motorized travelers camping on these specialized camping areas shall be report resident family campers.