



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT of NATURAL and CULTURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION
172 Pembroke Road Concord, New Hampshire 03301
Phone: (603) 271-3556 Fax: (603) 271-3553
Web: www.nhstateparks.org

January 25, 2023

The Honorable Andrew Renzullo
and the Resources, Recreation and Development Committee
Legislative Office Building, Rm 305
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

RE: HB 488 relative to state park campground reservations for New Hampshire residents

Dear Chair Renzullo and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (“Department”), Division of Parks and Recreation (“Division”) regarding HB 488 relative to state park campground reservations for New Hampshire residents. **The Department appreciates the concern of the bill’s sponsor, but we respectfully OPPOSE this bill.**

We recognize the concern with respect to the having the opportunity to reserve camp sites, especially when taking into consideration the desire to book a number of sites for family gatherings or in some cases specific sites on specific dates as trips and family plans often become tradition. Often times these dates end up being around holiday weekends when our occupancy rates are higher and often site inventory may be limited.

We also acknowledge that during the height of COVID the call center, which has specific times of being open which are incorporated into our contract with the provider, were less than satisfactory. As was the case with virtually every industry, a myriad of factors contributed to longer lines, wait times, staffing shortages, closures, etc. which both the park system and our vendors all experienced.

Our team worked extraordinarily hard to keep parks and campgrounds open during COVID and had to create innovative ways to keep visitors and staff safe all while experiencing record visitation as the outdoors was the one place people felt some comfort.

In consideration of the bill’s language seeking to create a mechanism for New Hampshire residents to have an advanced window to reserve campsites, we would not be able to support such an effort as it would violate federal law under the Land and Water Conservation Act administered by the National Park Service. Each of our campgrounds and most of our parks have had Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funds that have come through the federal program for either the acquisition of or for improvements on the properties. Through this program, there are many restrictions on use, for perpetuity, that DNCR must comply with. One such restriction is discrimination on the basis of residency. Specially, the LWCF Federal Financial Assistance Manual cites:

January 25, 2023

Chair Renzullo and the Resources, Recreation and Development Committee

Page 2

“Chapter 8 Section D. Availability to Users

2. Discrimination on the basis of residence. The Prohibition of Discrimination section of the LWCF Act (54 U.S.C. § 200305(i)) provides that, with respect to property acquired and/or developed with LWCF assistance, **discrimination on the basis of residence, including preferential reservation, membership or annual permit systems is prohibited except to the extent that reasonable differences in admission and other fees may be maintained on the basis of residence.** This prohibition applies to both regularly scheduled and special events (36 C.F.R. § 59.4(a)). Fees charged to nonresidents cannot exceed twice the amount charged to residents. Where there is no charge for residents, but a fee is charged to nonresidents, nonresident fees cannot exceed fees charged for residents at comparable State or local public facilities. Reservation, membership, or annual permit systems available to residents must also be available to nonresidents and the period of availability must be the same for both residents and nonresidents. Recipients are prohibited from providing residents the option of purchasing annual or daily permits while at the same time restricting nonresidents to the purchase of annual permits only (36 C.F.R. § 59.4(c)). These provisions apply to whole recreation area within the LWCF boundary area. Nonresident fishing and hunting license fees are excluded from these requirements (36C.F.R. § 59.4(c))” (*emphasis added*).

The Division has made great strides in improving the camping reservation process over the years. This trend includes a greater emphasis on online reservations, which accounts for 94% of all our reservations, versus 3% that the call center fulfills. Additionally, the Division began working on a lottery reservation system which levels the playing field with respect to opening of inventory and many savvy campers knowing to reserve the very minute inventory becomes available. We have seen this program be very successful at Hampton Beach State Park Campground and Jericho Mountain State Park, which have some of the highest level of demand across our system. This lottery still treats residents and nonresidents equally, as required by law.

We pride ourselves on customer service and would not want a negative past experience to prevent anyone from considering future camping opportunities with us. Lastly, we are very excited to be underway with a camping expansion project where we are currently studying the viability of adding additional sites and amenities to several of our most popular campgrounds. We are strategically planning projects across the park system that would provide additional room where it is in most demand. While this process may take a few years as funding and project implementation allow, we are constantly evaluating and improving the camping experience for both residents and nonresidents.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **OPPOSITION to HB 488**. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,


Brian J. Wilson
Director

C: Sarah L. Stewart, Commissioner, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

BJW/ttl-012323