

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LEADING IOWANS IN CARING FOR OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

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BRUCE TRAUTMAN, ACTING DIRECTOR

STATE PARK AND RECREATION AREA FEES 2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Background

Prior to April 26, 2018, Iowa Code section 461A.47 authorized the Natural Resource Commission to establish fees for camping and other special privileges in state parks, recreation areas and state forest campgrounds via administrative rule. The fees are listed in 571-Chapter 61 “State Parks, Recreation Areas, and State Forest Camping,” Iowa Administrative Code (IAC). During the 87th General Assembly, Senate File 2389 was passed and signed into law on April 26, 2018. Senate File 2389 repealed Iowa Code sections 455A.12 and 461A.47 and created new Iowa Code section 455A.14 that authorizes the Department of Natural Resources (Department) instead of the Natural Resource Commission to establish such fees. The legislation requires the Department to adopt administrative rules for the purpose of setting forth the methodology to be used in establishing fees.

As required in Iowa Code section 455A.14, the Department offers the following report which summarizes the work completed in 2018 and the proposed work plan for 2019.

2018 Work Summary

The Department spent most of 2018 compiling data required by Iowa Code section 455A.14 to use in its creation of new fee schedules for all state park and recreation area campgrounds and rental facilities. Information was collected through the use of surveys, website searches and phone calls. The data collection included:

- Creation of 60-mile radius maps for each state park and recreation area using GIS in order to identify potential comparable facilities.
- Information on federal, county and city public facilities that might be used as comparable facilities, including current fee structures and facility amenities and services.
- Compilation of 2018 registration data for state park and recreation area facilities through November.

The Department also began work on the administrative rules that need to be created and amended in order to implement the new legislation. The work included the following:

- Creation of draft Notice of Intended Action (NOIA) for proposed new 561 IAC Chapter 16 to establish the methodology to be used by the director when establishing fees for camping, use of rental facilities and other special privileges in state parks and state recreation areas.
- Creation of companion rule making NOIA to amend 571 IAC Chapter 61 as the Natural Resource Commission no longer needs to set the fees via rule making.
- Submittal of Executive Order 71 Pre-clearance paperwork to Governor’s Office for review and approval. Approval was received in December 2018.
- Requesting approval from the Natural Resource Commission to amend 571 IAC Chapter 61 “State Parks, Recreation Areas, and State Forest Camping”. Approval was received in December 2018.
- Submittal of both NOIAs to the Iowa Code Editor’s Office for publication in January 2019 Iowa Administrative Bulletin.

2019 Work Plan

The Department will continue with rule making which includes the following:

- Review by the Administrative Rules Review Committee (ARRC) for both the NOIAs and final rules.
- Conduct public hearings on February 7, 2019 in six different locations across the state.
- Request approval from the Natural Resource Commission to adopt the final rule for 571 IAC Chapter 61.
- Submit adopted and filed rule making documents to the Iowa Code Editor's Office for final publication.
- The first possible effective date for the rules would be in May 2019 which is dependent upon the public comments received and the required approval by the Natural Resource Commission.

The Department will review the data collected in 2018 in order to determine any fee modifications for state-operated facilities. The Department must also work with the reservation system vendor to update and test any fee schedule changes in the reservation system. It is the goal of the Department to have all new fee changes finalized in late fall 2019 in order to implement the new fees for the 2020 season.

However, the Department is interested in implementing the following fee modifications during the 2019 recreation season. Implementation of these fee modifications is subject to when rule making is complete and the final rules go into effect.

- 1) The Department is interested in suspending or eliminating the current camping coupon book program and pursuing short-term discount promotions. The camping coupon program currently in place discounts fees for camping in electric and full hook-up campsites in all modern campgrounds including weekends and holidays regardless of demand and occupancy use. The Department will work on the creation of short-term camping promotions in select parks to test the effectiveness of discounted fees to increase use one of two ways:
 - a) Attracting more users to camp in a campground.
 - b) Increasing the length of stay by current campers.
- 2) The Department is interested in creating short-term cabin/yurt promotions in select parks to test the effectiveness of discounted fees to increase use in one of two ways:
 - a) Attracting more users to rent cabins/yurts.
 - b) Increasing the length of stay by current cabin renters.
- 3) The Department is interested in extending the peak season pricing for camping in select fall destination parks. The peak season for camping is typically May 1 through September 30. During this period, the camping rates are at the highest amount. The winter season rates typically begin October 1 and run through April 30. However, there are a number of state parks and recreation areas which are popular camping destinations in the fall, including October, while shower and restroom facilities are still open and water is available. The Department is reviewing the occupancy rates of campgrounds in the month of October to determine which ones could justifiably continue to charge the peak season camping rates.
- 4) The Department is interested in implementing fee modifications for select high-demand rental facilities. Implementation of these fee modifications would depend when rule making is complete and the date the final rules go into effect, the time required to complete the fee review and analysis, and the amount of time needed to update the reservation system.