

PROPERTY PLANNING COMMON ELEMENTS

COMPONENTS OF MASTER PLANS

RECREATION ACTIVITIES AND THEIR MANAGEMENT

Camping

Desired Experiences and Site Selection Considerations

Camping has evolved over the last several decades. In the first half of the 20th century, most campers slept on the ground in canvass tents, cooked over open fires, brought guitars and other musical instruments for entertainment, and arrived in cars. Today's campers increasingly sleep in RVs, pop-ups, and other hard-sided campers, cook on stoves, use various electric devices, and enjoy an experience that is partially "roughing it" and partially "comfort." To be sure, many people still approach camping as a way to take a break from being connected to the internet, cell phones, and other technological gadgets. But a growing number of visitors use various devices and internet connections while camping to keep up at work, find their location and sites to visit, watch movies, and access other forms of entertainment.

Because campers seek out interesting places to spend time and typically combine camping with other outdoor activities, most campgrounds are associated with waterbodies, particularly scenic areas, other areas of interest, and opportunities to participate in hiking, biking, riding horses, hunting, fishing, and other activities. The department offers four general types of camp settings:

Modern Campgrounds

These developed campgrounds can have many of the comforts of home including hot showers, flush toilets, and electric hook-ups. These campgrounds generally have 100 or more campsites with a separation distance of approximately 100 feet between sites. The department is limited by statute in the percent of its campsites within the state park system that can offer electric hook-ups in these developed campgrounds. People using modern campgrounds can expect to experience the sounds of surrounding campers and the camaraderie of others.

Rustic Campgrounds

These campgrounds have a simpler setting than developed campgrounds and typically provide just vault toilets, hand-pumps for water, picnic tables, and fire rings; and do not have electric hook-ups. This remains the most common type of camping the department provides. People using these campgrounds can expect to hear some sounds of surrounding campers, but with fewer campsites in these campgrounds and more space between campsites, they are less active and quieter than the fully-developed modern campgrounds.

Primitive Campsites and Dispersed Camping

These campsites are remote and isolated and typically have just a fire ring, a pit toilet, and a space for a tent. The campsites are not part of a conventional campground but rather are dispersed single sites or remote, small clusters of widely spaced sites. Clustered sites are considered semi-primitive. Campers expect to experience few sights and sounds from other recreational users at these sites.



Camping at sites with no facilities is also allowed from time to time (with a permit) on some properties. This type, often called dispersed camping because it occurs at variable locations on a property, is intended to be for a limited time period. Examples include hunting camps and backpack camping, which most commonly occur on state forests and along the Ice Age Trail. Special purpose camping permits are also issued for dog trials and other special events.

Group Campsites

These campsites typically accommodate up to 75 campers in relatively close proximity to each other (e.g., in a large grassy area) and provide a range of facilities similar to those in rustic campgrounds. Group camping is increasingly popular and draws both organizations (e.g., religious groups, scout troops) as well as family and friend groups.

Notable Differences in Participation or Opportunities Across the State

Highest participation in camping occurs from May through October with spikes on summer weekends.

Notable Times of the Year of High or Low Participation

Wildlife watching occurs throughout the year. Bird watching peaks during the spring and fall migration periods. Birding around the home, particularly associated with bird feeding, is popular with many people during the winter.

Participation

Participation Rate and Frequency

To simplify the identification of the types of camping Wisconsin residents participate in, the 2016 survey conducted for the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) asked about residents’ participation in tent camping and RV camping. It is estimated that 32% of adult Wisconsin residents participate in tent camping and 21% in RV/pop-up camping. These ranked #23 and #30, respectively, out of 64 activities evaluated.

Days/year	% of Tent Campers	% of RV/Pop-up Campers
1 to 2	47	33
3 to 9	39	37
10 to 29	10	19
30 or more	4	12
Total	100%	100%

In terms of frequency, participants that engaged in tent camping did so less frequently than participants in most other activities while participants in RV/pop-up camping did so more frequently (they ranked #59 and #25, respectively, in frequency out of 64 activities evaluated).

Estimated Trends

Camping is projected to see increase in participation. In the 2017 American Camper Report, the top three motivations for taking more camping trips were: more vacation time, an inexpensive option and preference to camping over staying at a hotel. As the population has more vacation time, one can predict they are likely to take more camping trips in conjunction with their other outdoor recreation activities.



Demographics

As can be seen from the SCORP survey results in the tables below, participants in tent camping in Wisconsin tend to be younger age groups while those pursuing RV/pop-up camping are well represented in older age groups. This aligns with other research that has indicated that as people age physical limitations make it harder and less desirable to sleep in tents on the ground.

Tent Camping

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	51	33
	30-39	45	25
	40-49	41	19
	50-59	24	14
	60-69	15	8
	70 and older	5	2
	Total	--	100
Gender	Female	30	47
	Male	35	53
	Total	--	100
Residence	Rural	31	48
	Urban	32	52
	Total	--	100

RV/Pop-up Camping

Demographic Category	Demographic Group	% Participation Rate Within Demographic Category	% Composition of Demographic Category (sums to 100%)
Age	18-29	24	24
	30-39	26	23
	40-49	24	17
	50-59	21	19
	60-69	17	13
	70 and older	9	5
	Total	--	100
Gender	Female	20	49
	Male	22	51
	Total	--	100
Residence	Rural	25	57
	Urban	17	43
	Total	--	100

