MINNESOTA FORESTRY NOTES

No. 160

April 15, 1965

A STUDY OF PRIVATE CAMPGROUNDS IN MINNESOTA 1/

W. G. Beardsley and D. P. Duncan 2/

During July, 1964, interviews were conducted with owners and a sample of campers at each of fifteen private campgrounds in Minnesota. Information was gathered concerning the use received by private campgrounds, the fees and charges for such use, their ability to compete with state-owned areas, the attractions of private campgrounds in relation to those in public ownership, and owner's opinion on the profitability of his enterprise. The areas are well distributed over the State and are quite diverse in such characteristics as type of area, facilities and services offered, amount of use and economic position, fees charged for use, etc. Fourteen owners and forty-four campers were personally interviewed.

Results of Interviews

Average capacity of the campgrounds for tents and trailers was 42 units, ranging from 15 to 76. All areas except one have been established since 1957, and the use each campground received in 1963 ranged from six to 3000 unit-days, one unit-day equivalent to one party staying for a 24-hour period. The amount of use was extremely variable, and many owners did not have accurate use records.

Sixty-four percent of all campers were Minnesota residents, with Iowa and Illinois residents being the next most numerous. Over 85% of all camping groups had travelled more than 100 miles from their home to the campground at which they were interviewed, and three-fourths of the campers were spending at least two nights at that campground. When asked the annual gross income class of their family, 61% of the campers indicated the \$5,000 to \$9,999 bracket, and 27% the \$10,000 and over class.

Fees and charges at the campgrounds were as follows:

TABLE 1

Facility or Service	Number	Range of Charges	Median
Camping	15	\$1.00 to 2.50/night	\$1.50
Camping	15	6.00 to 16.00/week	8.50
Picnicking	10	0.00 to 1.00/day	0.25
Swimming	7	(all free where offered, except one who charged 50¢ per person per day)	
Boat Launching	6	0.00 to 1.00/occasion	0.60
Electricity	6	0.25 to 0.50/day	0.25
Boat Rental	9	0.20 to 0.60/hour	0.60
Boat Rental	9	1.00 to 3.00/day	3.00

Five of the owners indicated that in their opinion, their campground enterprise was a profitable venture, but most of these did not consider as cost items such factors as their personal time and depreciation on equipment and facilities. One owner answered that

1/ This study was financed in part by the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission as part of a larger report on "Users Fees," MORRC Staff Report No. 1.

2/ Research Assistant and Professor respectively, School of Forestry, University of Minnesota.

Published by the School of Forestry, University of Minnesota, St. Paul 1, Minnesota, cooperating with the Division of Forestry, Minnesota Conservation Department, and Forest Industries of Minnesota

he was breaking even on the operation, and the remaining eight said that they were losing money. Almost all owners believed that increasing fees could not solve their economic problems, but would result in fewer campers, and that their primary problem was attracting more visitors. This view is inconsistent with the high value that both campers and owners place upon the "less crowded - fewer campers" aspect of private campgrounds, noted below. Several owners suggested that lack of tourist knowledge of private areas, reluctance of tourists to "try them out," and the lack of good advertising are the greatest obstacles to increased use.

Owners were questioned about competition from relatively inexpensive publicly-owned (especially state) areas in an attempt to determine whether state fees were keeping charges uneconomically low on private areas. When asked if they would be able to increase their fees if state fees and charges were increased, three owners said "yes," two said "no," and the remaining nine had no opinion or did not know. Most owners indicated that they did not feel direct competition from state-owned areas.

Owners and campers were asked to indicate, from a list of possible attractions that campgrounds might have, those items they felt were the most important to them as campers (or to their customers in the case of owners) in choosing the private campground in preference to a public one. The number, percent, and rank order of the five most often mentioned attractions are shown in Table 2:

TABLE 2

Possible Attraction	Camper's Answers			Owner's Answers		
(Several could be selected by each respondent)	No.	%	Rank	No.	%	Rank
Less crowded - fewer campers	15	34	1	8	57	1
Grass, trees better; not so much over-use	9	20	2	4	29	5
Better beach or water area	8	18	3	5	36	4
Better, more convenient facilities	6	14	4	6	43	3
Cleaner	5	11	5	7	50	2
Other (answers not on list)	19	43	-	6	43	-

The four least often mentioned attractions on the list were (for both campers and owners): less expensive; less developed and commercialized; better scenery such as trees, lakes, and wildlife; and friendlier atmosphere among campers. Typical responses of the nineteen answers in the "Other" category of camper answers included closeness to a city, recommendation of a friend, or an especially attractive facility such as a swimming pool.

Owners and campers were also asked whether or not in their opinion Minnesota's non-resident fishing licenses discouraged out-of-state tourists. One owner had no opinion, five answered "no," and eight answered "yes." Six of those answering in the affirmative added that there should be a short term, non-resident license available at lower cost. Of the campers, 68% answered "no," and 32% answered "yes," with half of these adding that we should have a short term, non-resident license. Resident and non-resident responses agreed very closely.

Interviewer observations made during the course of the study and results in Table 2 indicate that the successful and profitable private campground operations offered well-developed, convenient facilities; less crowding; or some special service or accommodation not available at public areas. They often charged and received fees somewhat higher than those on State areas; the greatest barriers to the expansion of these areas seemed to be lack of advertising and of acceptance by camping tourists.

Published as Sci. Jour. Ser. Paper No. 5663 of the Minn. Agr. Expt. Sta.