CAMPING RESERVATIONS REQUIRED FOR LAKE MCCONAUGHY AND LAKE OGALLALA

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LINCOLN, Neb. – Starting this summer, all campers will need a reservation to stay overnight at campgrounds and beach areas at Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala state recreation areas during the peak season.

The new reservation system will be in place starting in late April for the May 21 to Sept. 12 season.

The rollout is part of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's implementation of the Lake McConaughy/Lake Ogallala Master Plan, a five-phase plan to address management of the two state recreation areas.

After the Lake McConaughy Advisory Committee — a group of local stakeholders — and Game and Parks evaluated the first phase of the Master Plan rollout, they determined the most critical issue facing the parks was overcrowding, which placed exhaustive demands upon park infrastructure, law enforcement and emergency services that negatively affected the quality of visitor's experiences, public safety and natural resources.

Phase II of the Master Plan provides for a sustainable management plan that improves the quality and safety of the visitor experience and for protection of natural resources by implementing a carrying capacity on overnight camping throughout both areas. The Phase II Implementation Plan was developed through a collaborative effort with the Advisory Committee and was approved by the Commission during its March 17 meeting in Norfolk.

Changes park visitors need to know include:

- From May 21, 2021, through Sept. 12, 2021, overnight camping will be allowed at Lake McConaughy or Lake Ogallala SRAs only with a reservation.
- All overnight visitors should reserve an overnight campsite on the Game and Parks reservation system before leaving home.
- Once capacities are reached, no additional overnight camping will be allowed.
- Beginning in mid- to late-April, reservations may be made online, by mobile application, or by calling the Lake McConaughy Visitor Center. Game and Parks will release additional information when the

reservation system becomes available.

- All overnight campers must arrive and check in with park staff, in-person, at the Visitor Center or at a staffed entrance booth between 2 p.m. and 9 p.m. Mountain time.
- Same-day reservations may be made online until a yet to-be-determined time in the evening if sites remain available.
- Before and after the peak season dates of May 21 to Sept. 12, 2021, all camping will be available first-come first-served with the exception of half of Cedar View, Lone Eagle, Little Thunder and Lake Ogallala East campgrounds, which have reservable sites and currently have some existing reservations between May 15 and May 21.
- All existing reservations for 2021 at Cedar View, Lone Eagle, Little Thunder and Lake Ogallala East campgrounds will be honored.
- These changes do not impact camping reservations at privately managed sites within the SRAs or at nearby private campgrounds.
- Overnight camping fees for beach camping per night will include a non-peak season rate of $15, peak season weekday rate of $20 and weekend rate of $25. Fees for designated campgrounds will range from $10 to $40, depending on season and amenities provided.

Approximately 500 designated campsites will be available at nine campgrounds across both park areas. Depending on water levels, approximately 1,000 non-designated beach campsites, will be available across 16 beach areas of Shoreline Road and one beach area of Cedar View at Lake McConaughy.

To preserve recreational opportunities and maintain economic vitality, day-use activities do not have capacity limits. Vehicles will be allowed on beaches designated for them that also have a Commission-managed access point. Staff will continue to work with stakeholders and adjacent landowners to address unauthorized access points to park areas.

Across the nation, increasing use of outdoor recreation sites is leading management agencies to address overcrowding through reservation-based capacities on overnight camping. Similar actions have been taken regionally in surrounding state parks as well as at national- and county-managed sites.

For example, Lake Mead National Recreation Area outside Las Vegas, Nevada — the nation's first established and largest National Recreation Area and fifth most-visited National Park Service site — is 1.5 million acres and offers just over 900 campsites. Lake McConaughy and Lake Ogallala together, not even a quarter of Lake Mead's size, can offer about 1,500 campsites, making it one of the largest overnight camping opportunities in the West.

A robust information campaign will be initiated immediately to inform park visitors from across Nebraska and surrounding states. As Phase II continues to be implemented, Game and Parks, local stakeholders and the Lake McConaughy Advisory Committee will work to inform park visitors about the changes.

To learn more, visit OutdoorNebraska.org/lakemcconaughy or read the McConaughy/Lake Ogallala Master Plan at OutdoorNebraska.org/lakemcconaughyplan.