

Bureau of Forestry Camping Reservation System FAQs

What is this system and why is the Bureau moving to a new camping reservation system?

The bureau will be using the [Pennsylvania State Park and State Forest Reservation System](#). Those who have camped at Pennsylvania State Parks will be familiar with the process. Self-registration will help the bureau to meet public demand and the modern-day expectation for the convenience and improved availability and information on state forest camping. It will improve the public's experience and help the Bureau manage the program more efficiently. Feedback from the public and staff have indicated the need for an improved process.

What are some benefits of the new system to me?

You will be able to view real time campsite availability and campsite information, location, and photos. The bureau has seen an increasing interest in state forest camping opportunities, and this will help those traveling to the area better plan their trips and find the experience they are seeking. Campsites will be available for reservation up to 11 months in advance to allow for better trip planning and can be reserved by the camper themselves, at their convenience, online up to noon the day of arrival. Transitioning to this system will also provide an understandable and uniform camping reservation process between the Bureau of Forestry and Bureau of State Parks.

What are some benefits of the new system to the Bureau of Forestry?

Electronic records and reporting will provide improved insight to use trends to better manage the camping program and demonstrate the benefits and demands of the state forest system to the public. Also, self-registration eliminates time spent issuing permits, providing potential net cost savings, and allowing staff to better serve the public in other ways. The point-of-sale system being used for the reservation system will additionally allow for the use of credit cards for other permits, such as fuelwood and ATVs.

The new reservation system will enable the bureau to efficiently control campsite availability and visibility on site for various management purposes and maintenance, and the system can provide site alerts about site specific conditions. It can provide alerts in the event of an emergency (e.g., flooding, road closure, etc.).

How has the state forest camping program changed over the years?

Permits issued have more than doubled in the past five years, demonstrating public interest and demand in this unique camping opportunity. More people are traveling from outside the local area to experience the many recreation opportunities in the state forests.

As a result, the bureau has also taken to designate and improve campsites over recent years to ensure a positive user experience and environmental sustainability.

Why is the state forest camping experience so unique?

Pennsylvania's vast state forest system provides camping opportunities in more remote and wild locations than state parks and the campsites are often distanced from other sites. There are minimal to

no amenities which helps maintain wild character. This primitive recreation experience is something that can only be found in areas of large forested landscapes and is sought for by many experienced campers and those who truly want to “get away from it all”. The Bureau of Forestry will continue to maintain and promote this type of opportunity for the public benefit.

Which sites will be available through the reservation system?

All designated roadside campsites, camping areas, and equestrian camping areas will be available through the reservation system. Non-designated motorized camping will no longer be permitted.

Why are roadside campsites designated?

Designated campsites help to provide a positive user experience by ensuring that the campsites are in areas that reduce conflict and ensure sustainability. They also help with tracking of use and locating of campers in the event of an emergency. The Bureau of Forestry will continue to assess existing campsites in order to provide a premier camping opportunity.

How will sites requiring reservation be determined and managed?

Forest Districts will conduct assessments and begin improvements, where needed, to campsites to ensure long-term sustainability. Campsite resting periods will be applied as necessary to minimize impacts to natural resources. Campsites at unsuitable locations will be closed. Assessments will consider use levels, proximity to other recreational opportunities, campsite surface and soil types, vegetation type and sensitivity, proximity to water and other vulnerable resources, and other localized considerations. The number of campsites offered will continue to remain approximately the same.

Can I still camp for free while backpacking on state forest lands and what exactly is backpack camping?

Yes, primitive backpack camping is still permitted. There will continue to be no fee for trailside, backpack camping (primitive) and water trail camping, which provide a backcountry experience. Backpack camping is often done on one of the 18 designated, longer-distance, [state forest hiking trails](#). Maps and more information can be found online or by contacting the forest district office. This type of camping is remote and removed from the camper’s vehicle. All gear is transported via non-motorized methods and the vehicle is not used as a base location or part of the camping experience. Campers are encouraged to use established sites along the trail and observe Leave No Trace ethics.

There will be a few, select, designated trailside campsites offered in the reservation system such as the camping areas along the Pine Creek Rail Trail.

How can reservations be made?

Designated campsites will be made available through the: [Pennsylvania State Park and State Forest Reservation System](#), ReserveAmerica Call Center 7:00 AM to 5:00PM Monday to Saturday (888-PA-PARKS (888-727-2757), and ReserveAmerica Camping [App](#)), and forest district office in which you wish to camp.

Will I still be able to reserve a site via phone?

Yes, through the ReserveAmerica Call Center(888-PA-PARKS (888-727-2757), 7:00 A.M. - 5:00 P.M. Monday to Saturday).

Will I still be able to reserve a site by walk-in at a district office?

Yes, (depending on availability) staff will work through the electronic reservation system as you provide information. Campers can pay by credit card, cash, or check. Please note that not all districts will be able to accept cash payments.

When will the reservation system go into effect?

The reservation system will tentatively be live and operational 11/3/2022. There will be a period from 10/13 through 11/2 in which forest districts cannot issue advanced permits for dates past 11/3. During that period campers must wait until 11/3 to use the new system to secure permits.

What will the fees be?

Nightly fees will be \$10/night for residents and \$15/night for non-residents. There is a transaction fee of \$6.50/reservation to cover the cost of operating the system. Fees are comparable to other state providers and there are some camping areas in state forests that have already required a fee.

Where will the money go from the fees collected?

Money is intended to return to the bureau of forestry camping program for maintenance, improvement, and conservation of sites and associated recreation opportunities.

Can fees be waived?

Fees can be waived for volunteers during work projects. Free camping is a potential benefit and recognition of volunteer hours.

Will existing reservations be honored after the reservation system goes into effect?

All existing reservations booked beyond 11/3/2022 will be transferred to the new system at no fee.

Who can I contact with questions?

Forest district staff will be available to assist with questions about camping in their state forest. If they are unable to provide an answer, they will forward questions to central office.

Is there data available about campsite use?

Yes, permits issued over they years are illustrated in the graph below. Additional more detailed analysis has been done in the past two years which have helped inform this decision.

Pennsylvania State Forest Camping Permits

