

# **Campers and Northern State Forests: Focus Group Results**

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# Executive Summary

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This report presents the results of focus groups conducted with those who camp in Wisconsin's state forests. The Division of Forestry initiated these discussions to supplement its larger study of state forest law enforcement. Topics of conversation included visitors' experiences in state forests, the amenities they expected, the problems they encountered, and the extent of their preparations for possible emergencies.

## The Study

These focus groups were designed, moderated and analyzed by Ed Nelson (of Science Services) and Stan Schneider (environmental and conservation warden, retired). They conducted five groups with campers who had visited one or more of the state's northern forests. A total of forty campers participated in these discussions. Two additional focus groups were conducted with Natural Resource Officers (NROs) who are responsible for policing the campgrounds and protecting the campers.

## Principal Findings

Campers praise the state forests for the recreational opportunities they provide and the natural resources they shelter. Visitors hike, bike, boat, swim, and fish. They value the forests for their clean air, clear water, and wildlife. Parents are pleased that their children have a chance to experience nature and praise the forests' nature programs.

Campers are divided in their preferences for developed and rustic campgrounds. Some require hot showers and flush toilets. Others are content to make do with swims in the lake and visits to vault toilets. This latter group believes that rustic campgrounds attract fewer people and provide more peace and privacy than their modern counterparts.

Campers in these groups reported remarkably few problems. To be sure, some complained about litter and others noted noisy neighbors and a lack of civility. They are also concerned that the number of campers is increasing while the number of campsites has remained fixed. Much of their distress, however, was directed at the system for reserving a campsite. Campers raised this issue at every meeting. They view the reservation system as inefficient and unfair. They can't get the sites they want yet they drive through largely vacant campgrounds where the reserved sites sit empty. In their view the system is easily manipulated. Those who want a specific site make a succession of reservations until they get that site when they want it. Some think that this state of affairs suits both Reserve America and the Department. The Department gets to collect its fees but doesn't have to provide services for the absent campers.

Campers rarely see rangers. They believe that a police presence is essential for a quality family camping experience. Rangers keep order and contain the handful of rowdy partiers whose behavior can roil the tranquility of an entire campground. Campers would like to rely on rangers to provide information and solve minor problems. Some described friendly conversations with rangers as a memorable part of their trip. Campers are concerned, however, that they are seeing fewer rangers than in the past and that there is a lack of enforcement in state forests. Those who are familiar with Peninsula State Park hold it up as a model of attentive policing to which state forests should aspire.

Finally visitors to state forests expect to have fun. They do not expect, nor are most prepared for, an emergency. Some have first aid kits but otherwise lack a plan for coping with an emergency. Campers pay attention to the weather but have given little thought to what they might do in the event of a violent thunderstorm or a tornado. Some say they would retreat to taverns or motels and ride out the storm. Others would hunker down in their tents. More disturbing, they say that they find little information in the campgrounds on what to do in the event of an emergency. Emergency numbers aren't posted. Phones are unavailable. Their comments suggest that neither they nor the campgrounds are adequately prepared to cope with a serious emergency.

# Introduction

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The Division of Forestry not only manages timber it also runs an enormous recreation program. People go to state forests to play. They hunt, fish, swim, camp, boat, hike, bike, snowmobile, ride ATVs, and otherwise just enjoy themselves. According to one estimate more than 700,000 of Wisconsin's residents visited one or more of the state's northern forests (UW Applied Population Laboratory, 2000).

## Prior Studies

These focus groups are the latest in a series of studies of forest visitors. Over the years Forestry has conducted various studies of those who visit the state's forests. These were often conducted in conjunction with master planning efforts. The most recent major exercise (1998) involved surveys and focus groups with visitors to the Brule River and Northern Highland/American Legion state forests. Where appropriate, this report draws on the results of those earlier efforts.

## Objectives of the current study

The Division Administrator for Forestry provided a number of questions to be explored during this study. These included but were not limited to campers':

- Concerns about law enforcement in state forests.
- Levels of preparation for possible emergencies.
- Awareness that they were actually in a state forest and not a "park."

Note: To anticipate, most of the campers in these groups think that state forests and state parks are the same:

- Preferences for amenities (e.g., such things as showers, flush toilets, electricity).
- Other issues and concerns related to their stay at a state forest.

## Study Methodology

This study relied on focus groups to provide feedback on the above points. Such groups consist of eight people sitting at a table discussing various topics under the direction of a trained moderator. The questions are open-ended and the conversations can be unpredictable. People bring a variety of issues to the table. Some have stronger opinions than others. Some are tight lipped while others talk at length. In the midst of this the moderator introduces the topics, guides the discussion, draws out the reticent and damps down the rambler.

As a method for collecting data focus groups have their limitations. They generate narrative rather than numerical data; insights rather than statistical projections. The findings from focus groups apply only to those present in the room, not all the campers in the state of Wisconsin. These are the standard cautions that accompany focus group reports. We would note, however, that certain themes and concerns recur in ways that suggest that they are widespread. And the findings in this study are consistent both with prior focus group and survey research. This suggests that the results of this exercise invite serious consideration.

## Participant Selection

Participants in these discussions had camped in one or more of the state's northern forests in 2004. A number had also camped at a state park. An effort was made to secure a broad cross section of state forest campers: however those who visited the Northern Highland/American Legion state forest were somewhat more numerous. A mix of men and women participated in these groups. In Eau Claire one of the groups consisted solely of women<sup>1</sup>. The content of this group was, however, no different from that of the mixed gender groups.

**Table 1: Focus groups with campers: 2004**

Location	Date
Madison	November 10
Eau Claire	November 16
Green Bay	December 9
Wausau	December 16

Participants in these groups were drawn from these state forests: Black River, Brule, Flambeaux, Northern Highland/American Legion.

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to acknowledge and thank Charlene Drumm of About Place Consulting for her brilliant moderation of the women's focus group.

# Attractions: the Natural Resource Base

## Families seek outdoor recreation in a natural setting.

People are drawn to state forests by the quality of the natural resources they offer. Participants noted the lure of the natural: clear water, undeveloped shorelines, big trees, abundant wildlife.

### Clear water

Visitors repeatedly remarked on the clarity of the water in northern forest lakes.

*The clarity of the water up there—in the Northern Highland and Minocqua area—that’s very attractive to us. We like to swim. And then the forests—it’s not scrub oak or pine, it’s nice tall trees.*

*The water is beautiful.*

*One of the biggest things with us is the water at Clear Lake or Crystal.*

### Wildlife

Visitors enthused about the opportunity to see wildlife. They are particularly excited by the chance to see birds that are emblematic of the north woods: eagles, ospreys and loons.

*As far as experiences: I think it’s the wildlife on Clear Lake—the eagles, the osprey, it’s just nice to see them.*

*For us it was exciting. We could hear the loons. That’s just amazing.*

*We enjoy the wildlife too. It’s nice to go up there and hear the loons. One of the first times we went up to Firefly there were three or four loons on the lake. There were eagles nesting in the trees, and you’d hear the loons whenever an eagle came over.*

*Very few places within a two-hour drive of Green Bay do you see crystal clear lakes and loons or bald eagles on a regular basis. But when you go up there, you can see that on a regular basis.*

## Undeveloped shorelines

Virtually all of the lake shorelines in the state have been developed. The lakes within the Northern Highland State Forest offer one of the few places where the shorelines are not choked by cabins, piers, and lawns.

*With Star Lake, for me, it is just phenomenal as far as the lack of building on that lake.*

*I think we fall in the biking, the boating, canoeing group. Just the undeveloped shoreline.*

*I like not seeing a shoreline so developed.*

## Solitude and silence

Visitors are drawn to state forests for another reason: the opportunity to experience a measure of peace and quiet.

*Just the solitude and quiet. It’s just beautiful to get up there and lay back and relax.*

*We like a quiet, wild place, if you can call wild quiet.*

*It’s so peaceful.*

*And the quietness. The campgrounds are usually quiet.*

## Large tracts of forest land

Others remarked on the size of state forests. State forests are typically larger than state parks or private campgrounds. They offer diverse opportunities and attract people who don’t want to feel hemmed in.

*But like in June we love to hike and bike and fish and just really go exploring. So a lot of space. Privacy. A big forest—not just a little campground where you’re done already. They [the children] like to keep trying new things.*

*My kids are big explorers. We love to hike. It has to be spacious and woodsy and a real campground. Some of the public campgrounds are so small and the campsites are on top of each other.*

# Attractions: Campgrounds and Programs

## Visitors are drawn by the campgrounds and programs they find in state forests.

Visitors also commented on the appeal of the campgrounds in the state forests—the campsites tend to be larger and more private than those they find in state parks. They appreciate the privacy such spacing provides. They are also attracted by the nature programs offered by the forests and value the education that children receive in such a setting.

### Larger, quieter campsites

*They're good size campsites but also quite private compared to commercial where you're right on top of your neighbor.*

*Nice, spacious sites: something that's big where we can put our boat and tent.*

*It's the privacy. Peninsula State Park, their sites are very close together. It's very noisy there. It's quiet at Crystal.*

*When you go to the Northern Highland you're in nice, secluded camp areas.*

*We are definitely looking for seclusion. The privacy, so you can go out around the fire in the morning in your pajamas.*

*Privacy in the campsite is a real drawing card.*

*Our family goes on an annual trip to Indian Mounds. We've gone there for the last 6 years. Mainly because it's beautiful. It's not like your typical campground where there are children and adults. The campground isn't packed.*

*I'm trying to better my odds by picking campgrounds that I'm pretty sure are going to be fairly calm. They seem to be more in state forests than in state parks.*

### Nature programs

A number of mothers commended the nature programs and the learning that their children experienced.

*I agree with you on the nature center. When my kids were younger they liked that and I know we've done the night trail walks that they have.*

*I love those—they're awesome. The nature programs are awesome. At Crystal Lake they are just neat. They learn so much. They know so much from just that.*

Some visitors even like the rangers.

*As strange as this is going to sound—in my experience—up at Brule—what made my trip the most memorable was getting a chance to talk to the ranger. He stopped by on his rounds and my wife and I chatted with him for a couple of hours. It was the most pleasant experience we've had.*

## Proximity

People select state forests as destinations because of their proximity to other attractions: towns where they can shop or trails where they can ride their bikes.

*Clear Lake is the choice. My wife likes it for the proximity of Minocqua and the closeness to Wausau.*

Ten years ago focus groups participants made no mention of biking and bike trails as draws to a state forest. In the current round of focus groups participants often commented on the opportunities afforded by the growing network of bike trails in the north.

*They have new bike trails at the Northern Highland. We trailered there many years ago and the only bike trails they had were in Firefly or Crystal. But now the trails are phenomenal.*

## Family tradition

Another reason families select state forests: tradition. They camp at a specific campground or campsite because their grandparents camped there.

*I think with some of the parks there are families that have had generations of family members that routinely go back to a site: grandparents, parents, and kids.*

*We're 5 generations of campers up in Clear Lake. We feel like it's ours.*

*I'm with them: Clear Lake is our home residence.*

*We saw that up in Northern Highland—people have little plaques that they hang on their sites—and have their names and the date [they first started visiting].*

# Comparisons with Other States

## Wisconsin offers better camping.

Explicit comparisons of state forest campgrounds with other states was not a formal part of the conversation but people made such comparisons anyway. They view Wisconsin's parks and forests as superior to those in other states. A few, however, hanker for the electricity that they found in some Michigan campgrounds.

*I'm originally from Iowa. There are not as many [parks] in Iowa. There are a lot more here in WI. Like everybody said here, there's more variety. It's nice. And you don't have to worry about going into a smelly shack that's either men or women. They've always been separated. There are always showers.*

*I think we've got it pretty good. We camped a lot in Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois. It's just not like Wisconsin state parks. The Mark Twain State Park was pretty nice but we had snakes everywhere. Black rattlesnakes. Other than that it was kind of nice.*

*Then you go south and it's awful. We've tried to camp, we have friends in Kansas city and we try to meet somewhere in between. It isn't possible to find a nice campground between Kansas city and Wisconsin. Anywhere in Iowa or Missouri. There's none.*

*Up in Michigan you're camping right next to each other. You're at risk of burning up your tent because they are so close together.*

*I personally go for the camping and not totally secluded but fairly secluded sites and some privacy. And to be quite honest the state parks are probably the best in the nation. They are beautiful and well kept.*

A few campers thought that Michigan parks provided superior opportunities. They were mainly impressed by the ready availability of electricity.

*Michigan is beating us bad.*

*You can go five miles over the border and fifty percent of the sites have electricity. And the shower houses are gorgeous.*

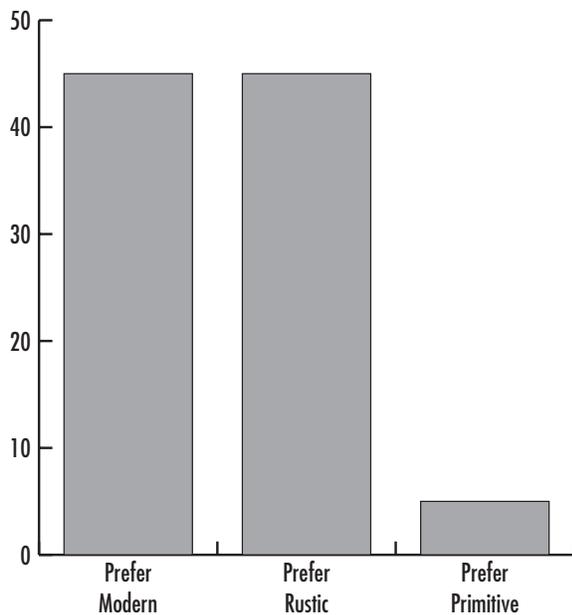
NOTE: This participant regarded the Brule River State Forest as a "state park."

# Preferences for Campgrounds

## Visitors are split in their preferences for rustic and modern campgrounds.

These discussions explored campers' preferences for rustic or modern campgrounds. Rustic campgrounds are smaller, with fewer sites, and no showers or flush toilets. Modern campgrounds tend to be larger (more than 75 sites) with showers and flush toilets. Participants were equally divided in their preferences for a given type of campground. This is consistent with earlier survey work which found that half of those who visited the NHAL favored modern sites while half favored rustic campgrounds (See Chart 1).

**Chart 1:** Preferences for type of campground, Northern Highland Campers, 1998



## Preferences for rustic campgrounds

The logic of those who prefer rustic campgrounds is simple: no showers or flush toilets means fewer people, less crowding and more quiet. They associate modern campgrounds with more people and people related problems. For those with this outlook the Brule River State Forest provides the perfect setting: a small rustic campground not subject to the campsite registration system.

*They don't have the restrooms and the showers and that keeps a lot of people away. It's small but you can always get in there.*

*Definitely not modern. The fewer people the better. You go on vacation to get away from people.*

*We had trouble in the more modern. More people, with drunks, the theft. We had no trouble at all in the primitive.*

*Modern campgrounds tend to have a lot more children. We don't want fifteen screaming children running around the camp at night. There was one modern campground we stayed at that had children everywhere and that's pretty much how it's going to be.*

## Privacy, seclusion, quiet

Those who favor rustic campgrounds feel that the sites are more secluded, that there is more privacy and less noise.

*I personally am between primitive and rustic. When I go out there I want to be away from everybody. You're there to get away. Like with the modern, you're right on top of somebody. Why have a village there?*

*We don't care if they have a shower or flush toilet. Places where campsites are not right next to each other so that you have privacy, seclusion. And ones that are quiet at night.*

*To me a camping experience does not go hand in hand with a lot of noise and radios playing. I'm less likely to find that in a rustic or primitive campground than I am in a modern one.*

*And they are usually nicer sites, more secluded sites, and then the ones with electricity they're pretty much on top of each other.*

## Preferences for modern campgrounds

Those who preferred modern campgrounds framed their responses in terms of the needs of women and children. Parents with children, for example, felt a greater need for showers and flush toilets. Likewise, men explained that their wives wanted these amenities. Some of the men admitted that they, too, wanted these features.

### Wives

*I'd be closer to the modern because of my daughters and wife. So a flush toilet is very important. And showers.*

*My wife and I do like to have a shower. We've gone to Peninsula and we've gone to Clear Lake and we do appreciate the shower.*

*When I go to a state park I usually have the wife along and she likes to use the amenities.*

## Children

*I think now with the younger kids I prefer modern. They get grossed out going to the vault type toilet.*

*With the smaller children, taking a shower is a lot easier than out in the woods. The flush toilets are a lot more convenient. It makes it more comfortable.*

## Mixed preferences

Some would prefer a mix of both types of campgrounds—a small campground, vault toilets, and a shower.

*My vote would be rustic and I'd like a shower also.*

*Modern—but I'd go rustic if it had a shower.*

*It would be perfect if it was rustic with a shower. I don't need a flush toilet but I sure like a shower once in awhile.*

In larger state forests some people will camp in a rustic campground and stroll over to an adjacent modern campground when they feel the need for a shower.

*My wife and daughter just go up to the flush toilets in the other part of the campground.*

*Indian Mound is rustic. Clear Lake is a mile down the road so we go to shower every couple of days. It's still convenient but you have less crowded.*

# Drawbacks: the Behavior of Others

## Participants were mostly concerned about crowding and various forms of recreational conflict.

Participants talked about some of the problems they experienced while camping in state forests. To stimulate discussion moderators supplied them with a list of possible problems and asked them to highlight any that they had experienced.

The problems on the list fell into the following categories:

- Problems related to other visitors,
- Problems related to the resource,
- Problems related to poor management, and
- Problems related to motorized recreation.

Overall, participants identified few significant problems. Behavior in the campgrounds was not out of control. They voiced few complaints about campground maintenance or operations. They were more concerned about noise and the behavior of a few rowdy groups of campers.

## Crowding and civility

Some think there is more crowding and less civility.

*People seem to be changing. Getting a little more aggressive.*

*The last couple of years I'm seeing more boldness on the part of other campers. It used to be you had a campsite and people didn't come into your campsite or come down to the beach in front of you. So privacy is being compromised.*

Another result of increased pressure is a growing sensation of crowding.

*Just in the last few years there, it seems like it's getting more crowded. Clear Lake itself.*

## Noise

Campers routinely complained about noise. Not only do their neighbors bring the trappings of civilization with them, they also bring noise. Those who want to get away from it all collide with those who brought it all with them.

*I do have a problem with noise when I camp. Anytime I camp. TVs, stereos going until all hours of the night. It's just strange. I just like to hear the crickets every once in awhile.*

*I have a problem with noise when I camp. TVs, stereos going all hours of the night. I just like to hear the crickets once in awhile.*

*I checked noise and boom boxes. When you hear that base pounding it can be very irritating.*

*To me if you go camping it should be to enjoy nature. Noise, boom boxes, boisterous parties, I've never understood why people go into the woods and bring more stuff than I've accumulated in my lifetime. I don't understand that. Why are you camping?*

Other campers noted raucous parties.

*There's a party place there on the corner and at night they would be drinking and doing shots. It's a bad thing for my children to see. We're not big complainers. It was just loud and crazy parties a couple of nights in a row and nothing was done (Clear Lake).*

## Litter

*There was a lot of litter on the trails. Some of the trails went on forest roads. That's where I noticed it more. So a lot of litter flying out of cars. The actual trails weren't that bad.*

*I put litter on the trails. There was more on the roads but a little on the trails.*

## Barking dogs

*It's the people who leave their dog on site and take off. The dog is going to bark and you can't blame the dog. So it upsets me when I hear all these dogs barking. And I'm a dog owner and lover.*

## Motorized recreation

### Boats

This camper voiced concern about fast boats and big wakes on one of the lakes in Northern Highland–American Legion State Forest (NHALSF). He felt that they threatened his child.

*To backtrack, a lack of consideration. Some of the lakes don't have no-wake zones around the beaches. At Clear Lake from 6 AM to almost 8:30 at night, water skiers non-stop. My boys are young and they want to go out and swim, and it's kind of scary when you get somebody that's got two 250 HP motors on their boat thinking they're the big hog.*

Others echoed this concern about the growing size and horsepower of boats and their use within the confines of northern lakes.

*The main problem is the boats are getting so big. And more of them.*

*The size of the boats has increased dramatically. And the wake that it puts out.*

Others regard jet skis as a nuisance.

*Jet skis. They have hours on that for most lakes. Some of them drive you nuts.*

*Jet skis can be very irritating. Boats I can handle but those jet skis with that whine. That made the weekend very unpleasant.*

*I don't mind motorboats but the jet skis go back and forth and back and forth and make all that racket all the time. I know that some people like them but I don't.*

### All terrain vehicles

*I would say ATVs. Every time I hear an ATV I grab my dog because they just roar right by. It's a peeve of mine because it kinds of ruins the experience while you're out there.*

# Drawbacks: Facilities and Management

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## Participants had only minor complaints about the quality of the facilities.

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Overall, there were comparatively few complaints about the quality of the facilities in state forest campgrounds. Tent campers are concerned about the compacted gravel surfaces on which they have to pitch their tents. Only one person complained about the bathrooms. There was some minor grumbling about the height and condition of the fire grates in the campgrounds. Given that people were handed a list of possible complaints this is suggestive of good maintenance in the campgrounds. In the words of one camper: "My personal experience has been just wonderful as far as facilities and maintenance."

### Tent pads

Dual use pads, i.e., pads that are shared by both vehicles and by tents are too compacted for comfortable tent camping. Tent campers complained about this. Some Forest Service campgrounds have solved this problem by providing areas of fine porous gravel that give campers a soft, level, well-drained site on which to pitch their tents.

*A lot of these other campsites are more set up for your RVs and it makes it kind of hard for tent campers. You need softer ground not just to lay on but to put your stakes in. It's very hard that way.*

*Campsites are more or less a gravel pad. There's really not much grassy area left for tent camping. Campsites should have a gravel area to accommodate somebody parking a car or a trailer, but it should also have a good tent site that's grassy.*

### Fire grates

*Fire grates are too high for cooking.*

*There was a metal grate and it was bent up and we couldn't cook on it.*

*You don't have nice fire rings. Fire rings are actually important. Sometimes you get into ones they got are too tall and that makes it hard for cooking.*

### Trash disposal

*There seems to be a few less recyclable places at some of the areas. What if some kids say "I don't see any place to put it," and just leaves it for the next guy or try to burn what shouldn't be burned. There's no place to put it and they're not going to make an effort to do something good with it.*

### Drinking water

Some are concerned about the safety and quality of the drinking water that comes from pumps in the campgrounds. Some campers equate discoloration and/or smell with contamination. To deal with this they bring their own water from home.

*I know that water isn't safe to drink because it stinks. [from the pump?] Yeah, all they do is put the handles back on in the spring. I would be so easy to put a pump jack on for 24 hours and pump that out and get the water cleared out. [so when you see turbid water you're concerned] Yeah, I'm really concerned because I know about pumps.*

*I bring bottled water up.*

*I do too. For the children.*

Others have no concerns.

*We use the water with no problem.*

*We also use the water with no problem.*

## Bathrooms

*Dirty bathrooms. It's amazing how filthy people can be.*

## Parking for boats and trailers

Several campers noted that some people simply leave their boat trailers in the parking lot for the duration of their stay. This makes it hard for day users to launch their boats.

*The only thing that I have on my list is, especially at Musky, they have very small boat landing for parking your boats and trailers. I would say three-fourths of the parking spots are filled up with people that just leave their empty trailers there for the whole week and there's no vehicles attached. It should be attached to your vehicle and you should park there just when you're using the facilities not because you don't want it in your campsite.*

*Clear is like that too. Especially at Clear. The boat landing and the swimming, the parking area is in the same spot. One day last year we drove over and we couldn't find a spot to park because it was full of boat trailers and not with vehicles attached to them. There were just trailers.*

# Drawbacks: the Reservation System

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## Many campers are furious about the reservation system.

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A surprising number of those who came to these meetings came prepared to talk about one thing: their dislike for the campground reservation system. It would be difficult to overstate their anger on this point.

*I talked to a couple of people who go camping and they said "make sure you tell them about the reservation system." Anybody I asked.*

## Campsites empty

Campers complained that the system allows prime campsites to sit empty during periods of peak demand. People who want sites can't find them and people who have reserved sites aren't using them.

*What upset me so much last year: these gorgeous lake sites and nobody is there. That's what's frustrating.*

*Some campgrounds have too many reserved sites. You come in there and I'd say half of the reserved sites are empty. You come in there and you can't get a campsite and the campground is half empty.*

*What irritates me is that you go into Clear Lake and find the campground "full" and you can drive around and half of the sites are empty.*

*People are reserving for twenty one days and then they are coming up and using it a weekend here and a day there and the site sits empty.*

## They can't get a site when they want one.

*It doesn't work. It just doesn't work. You can call when you want to get that eleven months ahead, you're not going to get in. You're not going to get a site. This one voice said: you have to call three weeks ahead. I did and I still didn't get anything.*

A fully reserved campground with sites sitting empty benefits the DNR.

*If their reservation system shows that they are booked, but there aren't many people there using the toilet paper or flushing the toilets, they don't have to clean up the trash. Those people in the parks like to have the sites sit empty. It's less work for them. I'm serious.*

*It's a beautiful situation. You got your money and nobody is using the campground.*

*You must be getting a lot of money since we're paying more.*

*To the DNR it's revenue. You're probably making more money off the sites than you ever have because everybody is doing it.*

Older people may be daunted by the system.

*I feel sorry for my parents. They've been camping for 70 years and don't understand the system. They used to drive up to Peninsula and get their site. They can't do it anymore and they are so frustrated.*

The system is inaccurate and not up-to-date.

*It's not accurate. They even told us. To be assured you have the site you should call. If you do it on the Internet and somebody calls they could bump you.*

*The ones that are booked on the web site, you call, and they're open. So maybe it's not up to date.*

*I tried online and didn't have any success.*

*That web site is terrible.*

## Rolling reservations

The system is easy to “game.” Campers are able to get the site and date they want by rolling (i.e., reserving, canceling, and re-reserving a site) their reservations forward. This means they’ll reserve a site early in the season and then roll that reservation forward until they get the date that they actually want.

*What occurs is that you can make a reservation eleven months in advance of your arrival date and you can make a reservation for twenty one days. So at the first opportunity you start to reserve. [...] They’ll hold that site for twenty one days and as they approach the end of that twenty one days they’ll move their reservation forward and so you can’t make a reservation.*

*They get the site they want for May 28th when no one wants it. Three weeks later they’ll roll it over until July 4th. They roll it over six times or four times.*

*The guys told me this little trick. We reserve three weeks and then cancel and keep the one week that we want.*

The relatively low cost of a camping site makes it reasonable for people to make reservations and then not fully use a site.

*Money doesn’t mean anything to them. If I had a place up north the taxes alone would be tremendous. Well, gee, this is cheap compared to paying taxes on a cabin.*

Reserve America benefits from this scheme.

*There’s a reservation change fee. You could spend twenty bucks making a reservation and canceling a reservation. So it’s turned into a very high profit area for Reserve America at the expense of the people of Wisconsin who are paying taxes to support the parks.*

The DNR only cares about money and not about campers.

*All they are worried about is money. The state is doing great. They are getting their money.*

Some have had no trouble making the on-line system work.

*I never had a problem making reservations. I think my biggest struggle was coming up with a password. I look for the dates that I want, put in my credit card, done.*

# Increasing Pressure

## Camping is becoming more popular but state properties are not expanding to meet this demand.

One of the underlying themes in these discussions was the perception that camping was increasing in popularity and that more people were going camping. This, in turn, was putting more pressure on the relatively fixed number of campsites in state forests and parks. One result: more competition among campers for a campsite.

### Increased popularity

*It seems to me that camping is becoming more popular. The state campgrounds aren't expanding to accommodate them. More people fighting for less sites.*

*We're getting more campers every year, too. Like he said, it's growing more. It makes sense. If you're going to have more campers you should have more people (rangers) out there.*

*Camping is becoming more popular. We're not making any more new campsites. I really don't see how you're going to alleviate our being able to get a campsite easier because there are more and more people competing for that campsite.*

### Recreational projections

Recent projections from the University of Wisconsin's Applied Population Laboratory provide support for participants' impressions. They show that the numbers of people camping increased over the past five years and that the state will continue to add campers

in the years to come. They also show that the number of campers in state forests could increase as well (assuming that campsites were available). It should be further noted that these projections apply only to in-state campers. It is logical to anticipate that the number of campers from states such as Illinois will also increase.

**Table 1: Projected increases in the number of visitors to Wisconsin's northern state forests: 1995–2020.**

Year	Projected number of visitors	Percent increase over 1995
1995	618,978	
2000	650,633	5%
2005	680,713	10
2010	705,963	14
2015	719,236	16
2020	722,026	17

Source: Wisconsin Recreation Projections. University of Wisconsin—Applied Population Laboratory (2003)

**Table 2: Projected increase in the number of campers in Wisconsin: 2000—2030.**

Year	Projected Number of campers	Percent increase over 2000
2000	1,399,206	
2005	1,454,804	4%
2010	1,488,650	6
2015	1,509,054	8
2020	1,519,736	9
2025	1,531,174	9
2030	1,547,228	10

Source: Wisconsin Recreational Projections. University of Wisconsin—Applied Population Laboratory (2003)

# Rangers

## Campers view rangers as a necessary and positive presence.

Campers in these discussions made the following points about rangers:

- Rangers are needed to keep order and deter trouble.
- There are too few rangers covering too much ground.
- Policing and protection falls off when rangers leave for the evening.
- Where rangers are lacking rules aren't enforced.

## Rangers keep order

Campers feel the need for a police presence in the campgrounds. This is particularly true for the larger campgrounds. As the number of campers increases so too does the likelihood of having at least one group of troublemakers. Campers want the rangers to deal with them.

Campers are reassured by the presence of rangers.

*Them having a presence and walking around and checking in, and making their presence known around curfew, checking in to see how the night's going, those kinds of things. Not just when there's a problem but having that presence.*

*Just see them in the morning and at night. If you have questions or problems, you know, so that somebody is around to take care of things.*

*I've heard someone say they don't like the warden coming around. But places where we camp it might be nice to have seen him. Drive through, walk through, listen.*

*When eleven o'clock comes at Clear Lake they clamp down and it's really nice. Quiet means quiet.*

*I would say where we camped there wasn't a problem with noise. Because of the rangers. They're really conscientious, making sure at eleven o'clock your campsite's quiet.*

## Rangers deter trouble.

*If people know the rangers are coming, if people know that they are scanning, then maybe they won't steal. Policing works.*

*The fact that there is a ranger system in place I'm assuming is a deterrent.*

*It's a great leveler for those who might be tempted to go a little crazy. There's always the presence of the state officer there.*

*When there's camping there's also a lot of alcohol involved. It's good to have an LE office. Or at least a presence where people will act responsibly. They'll know that someone is there holding them accountable.*

*Patrolling I can say actually did a good thing. When you go up with friends, and you're underage, you didn't want to drink because they were very firm about giving underage tickets. In my case it protected me from underage drinking.*

They further note that rules are meaningless unless there are rangers there to enforce them.

*There's a consideration of, either relax the rules or be there and be able to monitor and enforce them.*

*You can write all the laws you want but if you don't enforce them it won't do any good.*

*There's a lot of rules around animals but no one there to enforce them. Relax on the rules or be there and be able to monitor and enforce them.*

*If you don't enforce anything then forget it.*

Some campers note that the larger the campground the greater the potential for trouble. Smaller campgrounds are safer and more likely to be closely policed.

*At the smaller places—Brule—the numbers are in your favor. But you go to a larger place, the numbers are against you. If you have 500 campers it only takes one to be causing trouble.*

Others note the dangers inherent in a campground full of strangers. There are likely to be some troublemakers and possibly even some genuine criminals.

*There's a lot of out of state people and you never really know who you're dealing with. There are a lot of dangerous people. There are some serious things happen when you put that many groups together, especially weekends like July 4.*

## Rangers are helpful.

*At Brule, that's who you pay. The rangers. They come around and check. I pointed them out because they appear to be full-time DNR employees. At most of the campgrounds they are college students / Limited Term Employees (LTEs). But they've all been very, very helpful.*

*If I have a question about the trail, or what they would recommend, it's nice that they're around. Pick their brain for information.*

Visitors commended the rangers for their professionalism.

*They always do a good job. Whoever is training them is doing their job.*

*I'm impressed with the rangers. I think they are pretty professional. I think they are great role models for children to see. I'm just really impressed.*

## Predictable patrols

Some think that the late night patrols are too predictable. Once rangers have made their final patrol the parties start and the trouble begins.

*I had a couple of experiences where some of the other campers knew when they made their last route through the campground and that's when the party started. There'd be no noise at 11 o'clock at night but at midnight they'd be partying.*

*The one thing I noticed the ranger at least at Northern Highland at 11 o'clock and then you don't see them the rest of the night. And that's usually when the noise starts to pick up.*

## There are too few rangers on the Northern Highland.

Some campers believe that there aren't enough rangers in the Northern Highland / American Legion State Forest.

*There isn't a strong presence and I think it noticeably changed either 2 years ago or 3 years ago, it just seemed as though there were fewer rangers. And it is a very unseasoned group of folks performing those functions and it's very casual.*

*But I think too the staff there needs to be increased if you're talking 5 full-time people and 5 or 6 part-time and that's a huge forest up there. They are a lot of campgrounds. (Moderator: On a week-night you probably have 2 people.) Whew. That's not enough.*

*They're nice but they're not there.*

*They don't make many rounds. They've cut back.*

*They are not checking the way they used to.*

*Our experience with the rangers is that they are good. It seems that they aren't around as much as they used to be.*

*There was no police function at all. No presence at all. If you're going to have heavy usage, you understand not everybody is courteous, not everybody is a Boy Scout up there.*

Participants felt that rangers should be added to keep up with the growing number of campers.

*If you're going to have more campers you should have more [rangers] out there. It only makes sense in that respect. It's just like any large city. A city gets too large, pretty soon they got to add on more police. What's the difference here?*

# State Forest/ State Park Comparisons

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## Peninsula State Park sets a standard for policing.

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Participants who had visited both the Northern Highland and Peninsula compared the policing on both properties. They felt that the rangers at Peninsula set a standard for enforcement that state forests should aspire to. They described Peninsula's rangers as visible, vigilant and helpful.

### Visible and vigilant policing

I think Peninsula is run like a well oiled machine.

*Peninsula is heavily policed. You see them all over. At Clear Lake I rarely see them.*

*The rangers are right there. And they will help you. They will apologize. They will get rid of those people. There's a tendency for younger people, because of the whole Door County scene, it's a cheap place to stay for them. But the rangers are on it. I've never had a problem.*

*At Peninsula—you have three cars on your site they are there like an extra sense. But you go up to Clear Lake on a holiday, I've counted as many as 5 cars on one campsite. Nobody enforces the rules there.*

### Helpful

*My brother-in-law locked his keys in his van and all of a sudden a person talks to the camp host. The camp host calls the ranger and he had a Ford Explorer. Opened up. Unbelievable the tools he had in the back of this thing. He had a slim jim and he popped the lock.*

## Guarantee campers' safety

*I feel so safe there. I really do. I just felt really safe. The rangers are on top of it and I can let my kids run around easier than I do at other campgrounds.*

*I was just a little nervous (at Northern Highland) where I could always let the kids go at Peninsula.*

# Hazards

## Campers are mainly worried about severe weather.

During this portion of the discussion moderators provided campers with a list of possible hazards and asked which ones concerned them. The list included:

- Diseases / poisonous plants (Lyme disease, West Nile virus, poison ivy)
- Animals (raccoons, bears)
- Forest fires
- Injuries
- Severe weather
- Thefts

Generally speaking campers were unconcerned about these and other threats. There was some concern about severe weather, some close encounters with aggressive raccoons, and a few brushes with poison ivy. For the most part, however, participants had given little thought to possible emergencies or dangers.

## Severe weather

Some campers simply take this threat in stride.

*We've had wind and rain and storms and stuff and we're campers and we just kind of, "OK, if this what's happening." We've had some pretty severe weather up there and we just kind of go with the flow. My boys aren't scared. I'm sure if we had to, we'd probably get in our vehicle or in a ditch.*

*It's part of the territory. Part of camping. Tent camping especially.*

Others worry about the weather.

*I worry about the storms. We've been up there with some really bad storms.*

*I camp alone a lot. I feel pretty safe. A storm will send me straight to a hotel.*

*If you know it's coming you head into town and go to a bar.*

Some have thought about what they might do in the event of truly severe weather.

*There's the shower house, that's where we would go if there was a tornado warning. That's where we'd go.*

## Insects

*I take the tick and mosquito powder. I really don't worry about this stuff (referring to list). That's just part of the camping experience.*

*Lyme disease and West Nile virus. When I was down in Missouri there was a huge problem with deer ticks. We actually had to get checked because there were so many down there. There are some in the Northern Highland and that is a concern. I worry about that. Poison ivy and poison oak go away.*

## Threats from others

A number of people voiced concern about high-powered motorboats churning the waters where their children swim. They feel that such craft pose a threat to their children.

*I have a lot of problems with the water ski beach. The boaters race along the shoreline to get the skiers close to the beach. The kids are swimming. That's a lot of horse power in that little area.*

# Campers' Emergency Preparedness

## Most campers are not prepared for an emergency.

When people go camping they are planning to have fun. They are not expecting or prepared for an emergency. Participants said they take the same precautions while camping as they do at home. They use bug spray, avoid poison ivy, and check for ticks. Parents with children take first aid kits. And naturally everyone pays closer attention to the weather.

## Accept the risks

Campers feel that camping comes with an acceptable level of risk. These risks are different from those of everyday life but they are not greater.

*These risks: there are risks everywhere. But the memories my kids are going to have forever are worth the risk of having someone fall off their bike.*

*All through life you take chances.*

*I can get Lyme's disease at home. I can get West Nile at home. I can get poison ivy at home. I can get into a car accident at any time.*

*No, this is daily life.*

*When you're going to go camping, you almost take all of this into consideration anyway. As soon as you walk out your front door.*

*Camping is an adventure.*

*I take the tick and mosquito powder. I really don't worry about that stuff, that's just part of the camping experience. Auto accidents, I always think of that whether I'm going camping or to work.*

A number of campers feel that they, and not the DNR, are responsible for their safety.

*I'm kind of the opinion that we are responsible for ourselves and we accept certain risks.*

*I don't think it's up to the DNR to protect us from normal, everyday hazards.*

Some people wondered if campers didn't have a "false sense of security" while visiting a state forest or park.

*I wonder if we have a false sense of security.*

*People think that because it's a park it's perfectly safe. And the kids are running out on the edges of the rocks. I don't know what you do about that.*

## Preparedness

From the point of view of preparedness the campers in groups can be sorted into three categories:

1. Those who have made no preparations for an emergency.
2. Those who have some emergency materials such as a first aid kit but have given little thought to an emergency.
3. Those who are consciously and purposely prepared for an emergency while camping.

NOTE: Most campers fall into the first and second categories.

## First aid kits

*My husband put together a kit when he went into Canada a number of years ago and its got splints for fingers and all sorts of stuff and it just goes with us every time.*

*We have, our camper is pretty stocked and I have everything that's in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom.*

*We have just a first aid kit that stays in our truck all the time. That's there. So I don't take anything extra except bug spray otherwise I just realize these potentials are there and deal with it.*

## Protection from insects and insect borne disease

*After the Missouri Lyme disease thing we really make sure we've got our mosquito stuff on all over. I just get some really good stuff and put it on all their stuff. I used to worry about their skin. Lyme disease is worse than worrying about that stuff.*

*We check for ticks when we go out, check for ticks when we come back. We shave the boys' heads every summer for that reason.*

## Children and preparedness

Children often cause families to be prepared. Note also that women may have more or take more responsibility for this than men. This is consistent with other studies of emergency preparedness. Families with children are more prepared than those without and women take the responsibility for such preparedness.

*We have to be ready because we have kids.*

*I have band aids in my pocket when we go for hikes. [woman] Every time we need it. Every single time.*

*It's usually the women. The guys—it's get in the car and drive us up there. That's your job. Get us there. Have the fishing equipment and the beer.*

# State Forest Preparations

## Campers think that the DNR could do more to safeguard campers.

### Provide emergency contact information

Campers believe that the DNR should provide emergency contact information in the campgrounds. Information on church services is posted on the bulletin boards but not information on who to contact or what to do in an emergency.

*One thing I was thinking of—put a ticket on the little board there—what would be the best number to call if you had an emergency, a heart attack.*

*If there was any type of emergency have the appropriate number to call. Some of those areas may not have 911 but maybe there's a sheriff's dispatch. You could call and say, "The kid fell in the fire and is severely burned. Where is the nearest hospital?"*

*Back to that emergency number: have someone you could get a hold of if something was going on.*

*On the bulletin board: here is the nearest hospital or where the sheriff's number is.*

*[Question: we don't give you emergency information?] I've asked. They don't have anything.*

Some think that the DNR should give them some information on what to do in the event of an emergency.

*What would be nice is a handout.*

*They have a real good hospital up there but you wouldn't know that if you were a stranger.*

*I think when you check in they should give you information. One of the things that should be given is "here's some of the safety precautions if there's bad weather."*

## Improve communications

Campers also note that there are no longer any phones in the campground so they would be unable to call for help.

*One of the things I find frustrating is that there are no longer pay phones at the campgrounds. Not everyone has a cell phone. You don't have that good reception anyway.*

*I think it's a hazard not to have a phone around.*

*You've got to drive into town to make a call.*

*I've had an experience where I ended up in the hospital with no way to get to anybody. I couldn't think of the number at the contact station. It was really disappointing when they took out the two pay phones.*

Some don't know what they would do in an emergency.

*If something really came down I wouldn't know what to do except dial 911. And if you haven't got coverage....*

## Warn of severe weather

Campers noted that rangers have come through the campgrounds and warned them about severe weather.

*The rangers were coming through and telling people that there were storm warnings and that people could seek shelter in the bathrooms or Sayner had opened up their city hall to go to and they offered that as another shelter. I thought that was great. We went to Sayner.*

*The ranger comes around. That's what's happened when we've camped. [give advice?] Our neighbors were at Kohler Andrae and there were tornado warnings and they had to leave. It was that bad.*

Others, however, didn't get that warning and some didn't know what to do with the information that they did get.

*They went through Crystal Lake and said take cover. No one ever came to Musky. They heard it because it echoed. It said to go to Sayner for cover. OK. We go to Sayner. And there's nothing. Where do you go in Sayner?*

Those in small campgrounds may not get any warning at all.

*We were there 10 years ago in a tent and it was thundering and lightning so bad, and the wind was whipping. I thought we were going to be dead by morning. Nobody came through. We were in Canard. A small site.*

To be sure not everyone expects the DNR to provide them with a warning.

*I wouldn't even expect a warning.*

# Introducing All Terrain Vehicles

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## Campers have very mixed feelings about the possible introduction of ATVs into state forests.

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During these discussions campers were asked what they thought about the possible opening of state forests to ATV use. Many, though not all, were strenuously opposed. They cited the noise, damage to the environment, and other dangers such vehicles posed. ATVs are incompatible with camping. A few, however, felt that they were appropriate / did have a place in a state forest setting if they were kept separated from or stayed on designated trails and away from campgrounds.

## Positive ATV comments

ATVs on designated trails

*As long as they stayed on the trail. If the state gives them a trail, and the ATV dollars from the registration go to fix the erosion they cause. I don't like them but I guess they have a right to use them and they're taxpayers too. We don't want to be paying extra money to enforce this group.*

*Restrict them away from concentrations of people. Away from campgrounds. Away from lakes. You have to restrict areas.*

ATVs deserve a place just like every other activity.

*I don't want to restrict anybody because we have bike trails and hiking trails and snowmobile trails. They probably should have something too.*

*I guess we need opportunities for everybody. If that's something they like to do, great. You wouldn't want to see them in the campground or in the woods by the kids.*

ATV riding is a growing sport and space must be provided.

*There's got to be some kind of compromise. It's grown to such a huge thing now. They do need some kind of trails. But it has to be planned out carefully where they run and how many they run.*

ATVs will benefit the northern economy.

*ATVs are no different than snowmobiles. You keep them on the trail. They generate more money than any cross country skier. They will generate money for the state of Wisconsin.*

*People with motorboats spend a lot of money. People in canoes don't. Businessmen like money.*

## Negative views on ATVs and their impacts

ATVs won't stay on the trail.

*I don't think they'll stick to it. You can go up to the Chippewa county forest area and you can see a lot of those trails going, the ruts are deep there. I don't think they'll stick to the trail. A certain percentage are going to go off the trail and through the woods and pretty soon you're going to have more of them following those trails.*

*It seems to me that fifty percent of them ride wherever they want. You drive down the highway and you see them riding all over on the shoulder of the road, which is illegal and they are doing it. Up north they are all over the place and nobody is regulating them.*

They have different motivations for being in the outdoors than do the campers.

*I don't think they are there for any other reason than to run their machines. They're not enjoying what the forest has to offer other than a place to run their machines, making noise, polluting.*

*It's not a racetrack. It's camping.*

*It's a real oil and water situation. I don't see ATVs and the camping experience mixing at all. I just think it will have a negative effect on campgrounds and state forests that people really love.*

*They can go on private land if they need to. They don't belong in state forests or state parks.*

*The noise and stuff. Can't keep on the trail. The pollution is not on the trail. It spreads. Chases the animals away. You're not going to hear the loons.*

Concern about terrestrial impacts.

*There's a lot more erosion than people think. The more mud and water they can find, they are going to do it. And they're going to go off the trail to find it. Mud and water is where they're going to go.*

*It's a jet ski on land. Erosion would be bad. To me, I just don't like all that noise. When you're out in the woods and you want to hike or kayak or bike and just not hear anything. Just lay down and listen to the leaves falling.*

*They do too much damage to the ground and I don't like them.*

*The four wheeler will wreck [the ground]. They'll rip it up. I don't think the animals want to hear noise all summer long. Let them rest.*

*It may have a more significant impact than what the state forest can really endure.*

Theft could increase.

*Property owners might be concerned about theft or whatever.*

People will get hurt.

*Somebody always has to have the fastest ATV. Just like snowmobiles. These are all accidents waiting to happen. Up north, every day, an ambulance must be picking someone up.*

*The statistics for safety on those things are horrific. It scares me.*

The DNR will be unable to police them.

*You can't police the campgrounds with the spread that you have. How in the world are you going to begin to consider taking care of ATV trails?*

Interestingly, Natural Resource Officers who work in the one state forest that allows ATVs (Black River) note that they have to decide if they are going to police the campgrounds or monitor ATV trails. Thus the addition of ATVs to a forest setting could indeed increase the workload for a force that is already spread too thin. They further note that some riders do indeed go cross-country rather than staying on the trails.

*We've got the camping end of it and the ATV end. You have one officer typically on at a time on the property. So if you're in the campgrounds, the ATVs are free. If you're on the ATVs the campgrounds are left vacant. You try and do a mix of it, hit a little bit of both. You get a lot of off trail activity from the ATV trails.*

# Appendix 1: The Views of Natural Resource Officers

## Permanent State Forest Resource Officers

Natural Resource Officers (NROs) expressed doubt that law enforcement in state forests was a priority for the Forestry program. They note that often a handful of officers police large properties. This means that there are areas of the forests (canoe trails for example), that receive little or no enforcement. It also means that the campers have little contact with the NROs themselves. They further note their heavy workload—they simply can't get the job done with the officers they have and the large number of visitors to state forests.

## Enforcement as a low priority

These rangers believe that enforcement is a low priority for the Forestry program. They note that while the number of state forest visitors is increasing the number of rangers to assist and police those visitors is not.

*I think it's maybe the rest of Forestry tends to focus on timber management and fire control. We get totally forgotten about. It just seems like that.*

*Recreation and law enforcement seem to be a side issue to Forestry on state forests. It should be a larger component (forest supervisor).*

*Our visitors increase every year. And we don't get any more positions.*

*I think we're almost invisible sometimes, probably because we're just doing our job. I think sometimes we're invisible.*

## Lack of enforcement on state forests

Some campers complained that state forests have too many rules and too few rangers to enforce them. These rangers tend to agree. They note that there are simply not enough rangers to enforce the rules on the sprawling properties for which they are responsible. It should also be noted that the rangers don't have the time to effectively protect the forest from timber theft and timber fraud.

*We have 4 permanent rangers for 220,000 acres.*

*There's a lot of things we don't have time to do. Such as canoe sites. Unless there's a major problem they don't get checked. Checking trails for passes or going down the trail to see what's going on. We don't get on the trails, we don't have time.*

*On our property, there's always somebody violating the law somewhere on our forest. That could be somebody taking a tree, or camping without fee, or abducting somebody.*

*You're handling the things you come across. If there were more of you, would you find more? Of course. It's just that there are a lot of other things you didn't come across. Are there more things going on out there? Oh yeah.*

When asked if the level of law enforcement on their properties was "adequate" the rangers gave the following responses.

*It depends on what you consider adequate. Are we keeping the peace for the most part? On my property we're doing that.*

*We're putting band aids on the big cuts.*

*Yeah, mine are first aid, I guess. That's a good way to put it.*

For rangers the logical solution would be to expand the number of rangers working in state forests.

*I think Madison is good at giving us equipment. They try to keep us happy that way. Instead of new equipment an extra body would be more needed or attention to certain issues would be needed.*

## Meeting public expectations for enforcement

These rangers echoed the remarks of those who camp on state forests: The public expects to see rangers and either doesn't see them or see them as often as they would like. Rangers likewise lament this lack of coverage and contact.

*When the visitors come to Northern Highland they don't have a clue they are not in a park and they wonder why the rangers aren't around more because in a park setting the rangers are on foot a lot more. We've got a huge area to cover and we got to be in a vehicle. They don't see the rangers. (...) I think we need more presence. I think the public expects our presence there. Just walking and talking and seeing what's going on.*

*The public right now is so aware of law enforcement issues since 9-11.*

## Protecting the public

Resource officers fear that state forest visitors are under-protected and that there is a potential for a real disaster. Rangers, like campers, worry about severe weather and their inability to warn campers of its approach. They feel that the forests have, so far, been lucky in avoiding a disaster. They worry that this luck may run out and when it does they will be unable to protect those visiting the forest.

*As long as we keep doing our job, nothing serious has happened, they leave us alone. Sooner or later something serious is going to happen and we're not going to have the manpower to take care of it.*

*If we have a major storm come through the Highland, we can't even get to all the campgrounds before it hits. It's not possible.*

## Protecting forest resources

NROs have little time to monitor timber sales or to protect state forests from timber theft and timber fraud. Policing recreation on the forest often takes priority.

This NRO has done some work monitoring timber harvests for possible theft. He notes, however, that this is an irregular or infrequent exercise.

*If they thought there might be a problem then we'd work them but we haven't done it very often. We do have a surveillance camera. We put that on some jobs. We've sat out in the brush and watched them load and checked the sale tickets. But not very much since I've been there.*

In other situations NROs are unaware that there is even a timber sale in place or a harvest underway.

*That's one we've talked about. There's a lot of times—I don't know there's a sale until afterwards. You're going by and it's "Oh, when did they log that?" The sale's done, the product is gone and I never even knew we had one set there.*

Others note that they just don't have time to police timber sales on the forest.

*It's a time factor too. We're so busy doing other things. We have 4 permanent rangers for 220,000 acres. Just recreation is more than we can handle. This past year Mark's directive has been to help the Foresters and to deal with that. Otherwise you didn't do much of that before.*

*We did as much as we could. But the property—you can have 5 to 8 active sales going on at once. Some are small.*

Without observation it's impossible to know just how much theft is occurring in the forests.

*When he (DNR Forester) tells me some of the things that have happened over there I go "maybe it's not happening here, maybe it is and we're not getting picked up on."*

## Resource Officers and at risk contacts

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Resource officers, like rangers, work with an unknown and unpredictable public. And like the rangers they do not have an effective list of "at risk contacts." They also note that they often work alone and lack immediate back-up should they find themselves in a difficult situation.

NROs, often work alone and deal with unpredictable groups of people.

*You're working alone, you have 6 to 10 people on a site, they are all terribly intoxicated. You never know what you're going to get. People you normally reason with you can't if they are intoxicated. You're already into it up to your ears*

NROs retreat if the situation looks too threatening.

*Our backup is sometimes 30 to 45 minutes away. So you've got to use what's up here when you're talking to someone. When you feel like something is going to happen you just back off. If there's a problem we never go in alone.*

State forest superintendents also note the unpredictable risks their staff encounters while working on the forests (Weber personal interviews).

*Rangers are always working alone and drug use and meth labs make patrol work dangerous. Especially since some rangers only have part time law enforcement duties. Evidence of dumping of waste products from meth labs on state forest properties indicates drug users / producers frequent remote state properties.*

Some forests have listings of at risk contacts but find that it doesn't work very well.

*It's been one of our issues ever since I've been up there. We tried to do it on paper, it just doesn't work. I kind of clumsily tried to do some thing electronically but it would only be for our property and you have to run back to the office and do it.*

*We have a citation ledger that was developed with the assistance of you guys—all the citations we've written on the forest. We're trying to incorporate warnings in that and getting some other data incorporated into that. We're having a hard time getting the computer to do what we want to do.*

NROs reacted with interest when a readily accessible electronic data base of at risk contacts was suggested.

*Wow.*

*Any tools like that would be very welcome.*

*That's better than what we got now.*

## Training needs

Those in permanent status did not identify extensive personal training needs. This person felt that periodic refresher training would be useful.

*I think we need more refreshers and we're starting that with the extra day of training. We do it once a year for maybe 2 hours for the re-certification. We get all these brush-ups.*

Similarly, superintendents note that enforcement staff would benefit from additional training related to alcohol (Weber interviews):

*Rangers could use more training in Operating While Intoxicated and Juvenile Alcohol issues.*

## Issues related to enforcement

During these discussions NROs raised a few issues related to their actual authority for enforcement, communication on matters related to regulatory changes, and relationships with wardens.

### NROs Authority

At times NROs and wardens have differed over the extent of the NROs authority.

*I've had issues before where there's always some confusion about what we can and can't do.*

### Credentials

Some also question the utility of their 'special warden credentials' and the circumstances under which they can use them.

*Case in point: one thing for us is we carry deputy warden credentials. They come down with this directive that we can't use our special credentials unless we are right next to one.*

*What's the sense? I don't need a special warden credential to work with a warden. All they have to do is ask for my help. So I have special warden credentials for what?*

## Changes in rules and regulations

A few feel that they are in the dark when it comes to changes in the law and being informed about those changes.

*A lot of things, for enforcement situations, law changes or whatever, there's no communication between supervisors, no communication. There is between some of the field guys who want to communicate but as far as law changes, the only thing we have to rely on is our LE newsletter out of the bureau.*

### Warden / NRO Communications

It appears that communication between these two groups can also be problematic.

*The quality of the communication depends on the warden.*

*I concur with [ ]. We can't maintain communication. It's not there. It was for awhile. It was better for awhile. That warden left the area.*

Others note good working relationships with the warden in their area.

*We have, in my opinion a real good relationship. Part of it is the warden himself. He's been there a long time. I have too. He let's me know what's going on and if I've got something he can help with, it's back and forth. A lot of it has to do with him. That's always been a good relationship from my point of view.*

## LTE Natural Resource Officers

LTE NROs identified the following categories of concerns:

1. Training,
2. Guidance,
3. Jurisdiction, and
4. Communication.

## Continue training for LTE NROs

LTEs who are just starting out note that they completely lacked experience in how to go about doing their jobs.

*I would say the first year I started doing law enforcement it was kind of intimidating and confusing because there is stuff that is clearly illegal but you had no experience in contacting somebody about something as simple as going in and telling them that they're too loud at night. You're not really sure what to do. You just kind of follow what somebody else is doing and hopefully you don't screw up.*

These LTEs enthused about the three days of training they received prior to returning to work on the Northern Highland state forest. They strongly recommended that this training be continued.

*That training as the best thing this Department could have done for us.*

*I think we're better trained this year. Last summer we were kind of thrown into it. Here you go. Go out and make your law enforcement contacts and kind of learn as you go. But this summer we had about three days of training before anything even started and that was scenario based training so it was helpful.*

## Provide written guidance

Some felt that they would benefit from having written guidance on policies and procedures.

*I wouldn't say necessarily written policies but maybe a training manual that talks about some things like OK, you've got somebody with marijuana up in Crystal Lake. Here is kind of the process that you need to go through and here are your options. As to what they are, kind of laying that out more so that when you're out there working, you run into it and now it's like OK, what exactly are my options here? Exactly how do I pursue these?*

## Clarify jurisdiction

LTEs want to know how their responsibilities fit with those of county law enforcement. They would also like to have a more formal understanding with the counties on how to handle certain kinds of incidents that occur on the margins of county and state forest lands.

*That was one thing that in my first three summers up here I was like, "OK, we're in three counties. We've got towns in the middle of our forest. Where do we have jurisdiction and where don't we?"*

*It's just kind of confusing because we have such a large area here with the highways and everything. I think that something that is kind of confusing is if you see a violation going on, on the road in Vilas county or Oneida county. If there's forest on one side, I guess technically we can pull the person over. But you don't want to step on the county's toes or anything. I would kind of like to see something like a mutual type of agreement with the counties.*

## Improve communication

LTE NROs on the Northern Highland were concerned about their inability to communicate with one another and, more generally, about communication procedures.

*If you want to talk about an officer safety issue talk about communications. I don't care if you've got a cell phone in your truck. Believe it or not, we have to get out of the truck every now and then. You've got to have radio cell phones.*

*The full-timers, they have the new ones. Then we have the old ones. I mean even when we're in the same campground, just two officers at different ends, we try different frequencies and it's like "OK, where are you?"*

Communication procedures can be problematic. The state patrol may not be responsive and there appears to be some friction with local dispatchers.

*The problem, I get the opinion that the dispatchers are frustrated with us. That they feel we're a nuisance. But yet we have a state contract with them and we're paying them to do this for us. But yet we get treated very poorly by them.*



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