



# Friends of Lake Anna State Park

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*3601 Burton Road • Bumpass, Virginia 23024-9687*

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Dear Senators Reeves and Garrett:

We are strongly opposed to SB 571 because it undermines the public recreational opportunities and community economic support that the Virginia State Park System brings to the citizens of the Commonwealth and its visitors. We offer the following specific comments regarding this bill's provisions and respectfully ask that you withdraw the bill:

1) Prohibition against constructing campgrounds in state parks unless a study shows that adequate camping is not already provided in the area by private campgrounds.

- The 2005 Virginia Outdoors Survey, a random survey of Virginia households, shows that:
  - 86.4% of respondents said it was “important” or “very important” to have camping in Virginia State Parks.
  - 61.4% of respondents said that public campgrounds should be in parks even if private campgrounds were nearby. Only 12.6% said no and 26% checked “Don’t know”.
- DCR has taken the position that there is demand for both public and private camping, and that both types should be available throughout the State.
  - 63.8% of Virginia Outdoor Survey respondents say they camp mostly in public campgrounds, while only 31.7% camp mostly in private campgrounds (4.5% don’t know).
  - The private sector offers camping services that are not generally available in state park campgrounds:
    - Long-term, seasonal or annual campsites
    - Upgraded electric utilities for larger camping units
    - Use of private golf carts for internal transportation
    - More liberal social amenities

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2) Prohibition on self operation of camping, cabins, marinas, food services, merchandise sales, etc. unless the Department attempts to contract the service out at least every two years.

- The provision closely mirrors the requirements of HB611 (Competitive Government Act), with the same potential problems
- This would require a great increase in general fund support for state parks. The “profits” from cabins, camping, swimming, etc. are used to subsidize “non-profitable” park services such as trails, educational programs, picnic areas, fishing, wildlife observation, etc.
- DCR has often experienced poor services from private providers, especially for facilities with only marginal profits.
- In effect, this would allow the private sector to “cherry pick” the highly used park facilities and leave the Agency to run those with the least income.

3) Requirement that state parks match the average price of nearby private campgrounds and defines the types of fees that must be reported and when the annual fee evaluation must take place.

- The Agency already meets the timing requirements for annual fee review and setting on a calendar that is more conducive to setting seasonal pricing.
- The Agency already sets prices according to the definitions required in the draft bill, except that all but primitive campsites include picnic tables and grills. These are not generally considered to be “amenities” by either the private or public sector.
- The Agency already compares its fees to private providers by looking up representative campground prices on the internet.
- The Bill ignores the fact that citizens do not compare state park camping fees to private campground fees. They compare them to other public providers including surrounding state park systems.
- The Agency compares its camping fees to other public providers and finds that its fees are at or above all surrounding states and other government providers.

For the foregoing and many other valid reasons, we respectfully ask that you withdraw this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

Sincerely,

Jo Finch, President

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