

Report Highlights

State Park Campsite Reservations

Department of Natural Resources

Performance Audit • May 2022 • 2162P



OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

C O L O R A D O

Key Concern

Overall, we found that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), within the Department of Natural Resources, is not managing campsite reservations at state parks in a way that maximizes use for the general public or the revenue that CPW could be collecting from campground use.

Key Findings

- More than 1,500 of the State's 4,200 (36 percent) campsites were closed for at least one night from January 1 through September 7, 2021. Although some of the site closures may have been for legitimate reasons (e.g., sites closed to the public for use by volunteer camp hosts), we could not reliably verify what proportion of the closures appeared to be reasonable due to discrepancies in CPW's reservation data. In total, these closed sites could have brought in up to \$1.9 million in additional state revenue if the sites had been made available and reserved by the public.
- We identified 136,517 reserved nights across 32 parks from January 1 through September 7, 2021, in which the parks charged a total of \$836,921 less than what the standard nightly fees for these campsites would have required. Although regional managers approved these reductions in campsite reservation fees, they did not document their rationale for how lowering the fees would encourage occupancy and otherwise increase campground use, which is required by CPW policies.
- CPW refunded about \$12,500 for 268 cancelled reservations for reasons that did not qualify for a refund, according to CPW policy, based on CPW reservation data. In addition, we could not determine whether CPW refunded the appropriate amount for another 853 reservations, or more than \$21,100 worth of refunds; for these reservations, either CPW staff did not enter any notes into the database field where staff are supposed to document the reason for a refund, or the notes were too vague to determine if the cancellations were eligible for a refund.
- In 2021, CPW collected about \$14.7 million in revenue from campsite reservations. However, the issues our audit identified resulted in CPW collecting up to \$2.8 million less in revenue from campsite reservations than it might have.

Background

- CPW was created in 2011 from merging two separate divisions—Colorado State Parks and the Colorado Division of Wildlife—to protect, preserve, enhance, and manage the State's natural, scenic, scientific, and outdoor recreation areas, and provide a comprehensive program of outdoor recreation that includes a state park system.
- CPW offers more than 4,200 overnight campsites for public use, including sites with electrical hookups for recreational vehicles (RVs), tent sites, cabins, yurts, and tipis, at the 42 state parks across four regions in the state.
- Campers are allowed to reserve a campsite from 1 to 14 nights in a 28-day period.
- CPW manages campsite reservations through its campsite and outdoor customer relations software called the Integrated Parks and Wildlife System (IPAWS).

Recommendations Made

6

Responses

Agree: 6

Partially Agree: 0

Disagree: 0