

Campground owners in Naples upset over National Park Service competition.

[Register with us in one easy step!](#)

Federal vs private local campgrounds fight!

NAPLES _ Tensions are heating up between the National Park Service and Everglades City area campground businesses.

Campground owners say the park service is unfairly undercutting them with low rates and improved hook-ups for deluxe RVs in the Big Cypress National Preserve along U.S. 41 East.

_I think we_ve got what might be kind of a crisis situation,_ Outdoor Resorts of Chokoloskee owner Kenny Brown said.

Collier County Commissioner Jim Coletta is asking commissioners Nov. 18 to approve a resolution urging the park service to _utilize standard operational and management techniques to ensure fair and balanced competition._

Preserve officials are asking the park service for permission to study the local market to be sure the preserve_s camping fees are _within a reasonable range,_ preserve spokesman Bob DeGross said.

To change its rates, the preserve would have to obtain a waiver from a federal moratorium on new Naples Park Service fees that has been in place since July 2008. The moratorium expires in 2010.

_We recognize we don_t want to be in competition with local businesses,_ DeGross said.

The preserve last raised its rates in 2005 after it improved its Midway campground, where the preserve offers electric hook-ups for RVs but not sewer or water hook-ups.

RV campers pay \$19 per night at Midway; tents pay \$16 per night. At the preserve_s Monument Lake campground, where there are no hook-ups, the preserve charges \$16 per night for RVs and campers.

At Outdoor Resorts, Brown noticed something amiss last winter, he said.

Seven or eight RV lots stood empty while the park service_s improved campgrounds were brimming with big RVs _ Brown_s customers, he said.

Brown charges \$69 a night for a space with electric, water, sewer and cable. The resort has swimming pools, a hot tub, a clubhouse, tennis and shuffleboard courts and a marina.

This winter, with the economy in a tailspin and more RV_ers looking for a bargain, Brown said he_s projecting his empty spaces will amount to a loss of \$1,500 a day.

That starts to add up, you know? Brown said.

At the Trail Lakes campground in Ochopee, owner Dave Shealy charges \$25 per night for RVs or \$20 per night for tent campers. He provides electric and water hook-ups and sewage pump-out stations.

His campground once attracted 60 to 70 campers per night. Now he_s lucky to get five or six, he said.

Shealy has been at odds with the preserve before over its decision to ban swamp buggy access from his campground as part of a plan to limit environmental damage from off-road vehicles.

The preserve_s campground improvements, along the same stretch of U.S. 41 East as Trail Lakes, are the last straw for Shealy.

_The bottom line is they shouldn_t be there in the first place,_ he said.

Brown, at Outdoor Resorts, said his location at the end of State Road 29 provides another hurdle.

Motorists from Miami must bypass cheap rates at the preserve_s campgrounds along U.S. 41 and then drive another 30 minutes to get to his resort.

He said he fears fewer campers in Chokoloskee and at a new resort opening in Everglades City will mean less business at the town_s restaurants and charter fishing docks.

I get a little jittery, he said. _It_s going to be a lean year._

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2008/nov/08/collier-campground-owners-cry-foul-over-business-l/>

Published on Nov. 9 2008

The original page is located at

<http://free.naplesplus.us/articles/view.php/38007/campground-owners-in-naples-upset-over-national-park-service-competition>.