

Rep pitches aid plan as campgrounds struggle to compete with modern resorts

Roughing it

By Laurel J. Sweet | Monday, February 15, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | [Media & Marketing](#)

The great outdoors increasingly seems less so to 21st century adventurers, who want their s'mores delivered hot from a chef's oven, their children and pets amused and their starry, starry nights Wi-Fi connected.

As campground owners struggle with folding their tents under the financial pressure of trying to compete with five-star resorts, state Rep. James M. Murphy has gone as far as to call the family camping experience in Massachusetts "endangered" in a bill the Weymouth Democrat will bring before the Legislature Feb. 25.

Murphy is asking the state Department of Environmental Protection to undertake a study and pitch an action plan by year's end for reuniting overindulged, tech-addicted vacationers with the simplistic pleasures of Ma Nature.

"If You Didn't Get Dirty, You Didn't Have Fun," is one of the T-shirts Paula Carroll, executive director of the 76-member Massachusetts Association of Campground Owners, plans to sell at next month's Northeast Conference on Camping and Trade Show in Springfield.

"Camping has been changing dramatically over the last 10 years," Carroll said. "People still want to be outside at night by the campfire, but they want to be entertained, too, and they want the comforts of home. You have to keep up with that."

In addition to floating trampolines and homemade take-out meals, Carroll said campground owners are even building dog parks to appease families demanding pet-friendly destinations.

In addition to four hot tubs, two swimming pools and a 20,000-square-foot entertainment complex, Normandy Farms, a family owned campground in Foxboro, offers yurts - climate-controlled tents with flat-screen TVs.

"The beauty of camping is there's a campground out there for everyone," said Marcia Galvin, MACO president.

But it's not just creating carnivals where once a sleeping bag, engrossing novel and bag of briquettes sufficed. Galvin said most Bay State campgrounds have been passed down through generations. The state restricts single-ownership properties to one 10,000-gallon septic tank, seriously thwarting any hope of growth.

"The fear," she said, "is the mom-and-pops can't afford to keep the land as it is, and they could be bought out easily by housing developments and shopping malls. Camping is a great way to connect with your family and it's affordable, but the value of the land is priceless. Camping will go by the wayside."

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