

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 8, 2014

Contact: Susan Bulmer, Northeast Parks Regional Manager

Phone: (802) 476-0181

Email: susan.bulmer@state.vt.us

Mail:

Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks & Recreation

5 Perry Street, Suite 20

Barre, VT 05641

Management Plan Set for Waterbury Reservoir Remote Campsites

MONTPELIER - Each year, more than 75,000 visitors enjoy the natural resources and recreational opportunities offered at Vermont's 863-acre Waterbury Reservoir. Little River State Park, Waterbury Center State Park and the surrounding forest land offer visitors access to boating, swimming, paddling, fishing, camping and hiking.

"Waterbury Reservoir is one of the most popular lakes in our state park system," said Susan Bulmer, Northeast Parks Regional Manager for Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (VDFPR). "As stewards of state land and the parks, our department is responsible for conserving and managing the natural resources within our parks while providing a safe recreational experience for visitors."

"As the popularity of Waterbury Reservoir increases, so do the challenges," explained Bulmer. In recent years, remote shore lands surrounding the reservoir have seen increased pressure by campers. VDFPR has identified nearly 35 undesignated campsites along the perimeter of the reservoir. "These are sites that campers have created," explained Bulmer. "As undesignated sites, there is no oversight by our park staff and no long-term management plan in place to help protect environmental quality and to ensure sustainable use of the sites by the public."

"Because there has been no formal management of camping along the shores of the reservoir, state police officers and game wardens have at times been placed in the position of being called to the reservoir to deal with disturbances without having clear guidance as to what activities are and are not permitted on this land," said Captain Paul White, Troop Commander, Vermont State Police Troop "A" (Williston/St. Albans/ Middlesex). Undesignated or un-numbered sites have also presented problems for public safety agencies called to respond to emergencies. "Over the last few years we have responded to some very serious situations, and without designated sites it has been difficult to respond to emergencies in a timely manner," stated Gary Dillon, Chief of the Waterbury Fire Department.

"We realized that it was time to develop a strategy that would not only ensure the protection of the natural environment, but would also provide a valuable recreational resource to those interested in remote camping along the reservoir," said Bulmer. In October 2013, VDFPR held a public meeting in Waterbury aimed at gauging interest in the development of a management plan for remote sites. The department also conducted a survey of Waterbury Reservoir users and the public to get feedback. "What we learned is that the public supports a level of management that will protect the resources but will also maintain the character of remote camping," said Bulmer.

Since that time, VDFPR has worked with a number of stakeholders, including the Friends of Waterbury Reservoir, to develop a strategy for managing remote campsites at the park. A three-year management

plan has been developed, with initial steps already underway. “Our primary goal for this year is collecting additional information that can help us identify areas that will become designated as remote campsites or day use sites,” said Bulmer. To start, temporary site numbers will be assigned to all existing sites to aid public safety agencies in their response to emergencies, and to help park staff manage the sites. Public education will also be key during this period, according to Bulmer. “It is important that visitors understand how these newly designated sites will be managed, and how we can all work together to create new recreational opportunities that will not have a negative impact on the environment.”

“This management plan is a thoughtful response to public feedback about how the remote campsites on the Reservoir are managed in order to ensure that this valuable resource is protected for future generations,” said Laurie Smith. Smith serves as president of the Friends of Waterbury Reservoir, a local non-profit group committed to protecting, improving and enhancing the ecological, recreational and community values of the Waterbury Reservoir. “We feel this three-year plan is a balanced and pragmatic approach that addresses the visitor experience, ensures sustainability and also addresses public safety concerns.” Smith added that the Friends of Waterbury Reservoir is collaborating with VDFPR on a trash data study starting this summer, as well as ongoing stewardship efforts about the reservoir. To learn more, and to volunteer, visit www.friendsofwaterburyreservoir.org

The development of trails leading to the sites and the installation of red-worm composting toilets are also part of the first phase of VDFPR’s three-year management plan.

“Waterbury Reservoir is a treasure in our state,” said Michael Snyder, Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation. “We look forward to providing these enhanced recreational opportunities to park visitors while continuing with our tradition of environmental stewardship.”

To learn more about VDFPR’s three-year management plan, please contact Susan Bulmer at susan.bulmer@state.vt.us.

SIDEBAR: HIGHLIGHTS OF WATERBURY RESERVOIR 3-YEAR PLAN

Year 1: 2014

- Designate all known existing sites as remote camping sites or day use sites
- Install inconspicuous temporary site numbers at designated sites
- Monitor use of sites and provide educational information to users
- Improve at least 10 remote sites with trails to sites and installation of composting toilets
- Close sites that suffer from soil compaction, erosion, or that pose high flood risk

Year 2: 2015

- Improve additional remote campsites if funding is available
- Continue stewardship outreach to users

Year 3: 2016

- Improve remaining remote campsites if funding is available
- Review previous two years’ experience and explore logistics for future management

#