Governor’s jobs agenda fueled controversial state parks plan

The state’s controversial plan to develop new state-park campgrounds by private industry was driven by Florida Gov. Rick Scott’s campaign pledge to create jobs, according a report in the St. Petersburg Times.

The hastily assembled campground proposal did not originate with Scott but rather with enthusiastic bureaucrats eager to please the new boss, according to internal e-mails the newspaper obtained via the state’s open-records law.

Little attention was paid to the environmental impact the campgrounds would have on individual parks, the newspaper reported.

The proposal was put on hold after hundreds of opponents turned out last month for public hearings in Dunedin, Wakulla Springs, De Leon Springs and Fanning Springs. And then the feds started raising concerns about compliance with regulations attached to state lands financed with federal money.

But the plan is not dead.

“We need more camping in Florida state parks, period, the end,” Florida Park Service Director Donald Forgione told the newspaper.

State parks officials are going back to the drawing board with, hopefully, more consideration for the fragile environments upon which they intend to intrude.

Those of us who try to reserve campsites at state parks during the busy winter season might concur with the need. Sites can be especially difficult to procure in the Keys, near Orlando’s theme parks or near the coastline, even months in advance, as snowbirds prepare to flood the state in their RVs.

Hot Tip:

If you want a choice campsite in a Florida state park during the busy winter season, start early and check back often. State park campsites can be reserved up to 11 months in advance, and the ReserveAmerica reservations center is abuzz -- to the day of availability -- at 8 a.m. Toughest months are January through March. If you fail to get a reservation, don’t give up! Keep trying in the weeks and months that follow because there are often cancellations as snowbirds refine their itineraries and give up reservations.

**Camping in the natural Florida**

Florida Rambler regularly reviews public and private campgrounds that respect the “real Florida” by providing campers with a natural, authentic environment.

You should bookmark our Camping section and check back regularly for Florida’s Best Camping. <http://floridarambler.com/category/florida-best-camping/>

Here are just a few of the stories you’ll find there:

7 cool campgrounds within an hour of Disney

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-camping/roundup-best-camping-nea-disney/>

Best camping near Sarasota: Camp Venice

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-camping/camp-venice-on-myakka-river-near-sarasot/>

Best Camping Near Tampa: 9 choice campgrounds

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-camping/best-camping-near-tampa/>

Cayo Costa Island: A Remote, Romantic Getaway

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-beaches/cayo-costa-island-a-perfect-remote-getaway/>

Cabins in many state parks are often overlooked by out-of-state visitors and reservations are not under as much pressure. Check out this article by Florida Rambler’s Bonnie Gross: ‘Comfort Camping’

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-camping/florida-state-parks-with-cabins/>

**Links Related To Development of State Park Campgrounds**

Check out the management plans for individual state parks of interest to you with the Office of Park Planning, Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/parks/planning/plans.htm>

St. Petersburg Times article by Craig Pittman: Push to create private jobs powered controversial state parks plan.

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/environment/push-to-create-private-jobs-powered-controversial-state-parks-plan/1185019>

Previous Florida Rambler article: Opposition grows to private campgrounds in Florida State Parks.

<http://floridarambler.com/florida-best-camping/opposition-grows-to-private-campgrounds-in-florida-state-parks/>

Florida Audubon Society

<http://fl.audubon.org/>