

**4VAC15-20-155. Definitions and Miscellaneous: In General; Camping on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned or department-managed lands.**

**SUMMARY:**

The recommendation is to establish a fee of \$10 associated with authorization for camping on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned or department-managed lands to offset increased costs associated with maintenance of these lands, enforcement of laws and regulations on these lands, and related administrative costs.

**RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE OF AMENDMENT:**

**4VAC15-20-155. Camping on Wildlife Management Areas and other department-owned or department-managed lands.**

- 1 A. Authorization. It shall be unlawful to camp at any time without purchasing a \$10 camping  
2 authorization.
- 3 B. Camping periods. Unless otherwise posted or authorized, it shall be unlawful to camp for  
4 more than 14 consecutive nights, or more than 14 nights in a 28-day period on department-  
5 owned or controlled lands.
- 6 C. Allowed and prohibited locations. Back country camping is allowed. Adjacent to roadways,  
7 camping is allowed only in previously cleared areas. No vegetation may be cut, damaged, or  
8 removed to establish a campsite. Enclosed camping trailers or camping vehicles are allowed if  
9 they do not occupy the entire available parking area in that location. It shall be unlawful to camp  
10 within 300 feet of any department-owned lake, boat ramp, or other facility. It shall be unlawful  
11 to camp at other specific locations as posted. This section shall not prohibit active angling at  
12 night along shorelines where permitted.
- 13 D. Removal of personal property and refuse. Any person who establishes or occupies a camp  
14 shall be responsible for the complete removal of all personal property and refuse when the  
15 camping authorization has expired. Any personal property or refuse that remains after the  
16 camping authorization has expired shall be considered litter and punishable pursuant to § 33.2-  
17 802 of the Code of Virginia.
- 18 E. It shall be unlawful when camping on department-owned or department-managed lands to  
19 store or leave unattended any food (including food for pets and livestock), refuse, bear attractant,  
20 or other wildlife attractant unless it is (i) in a bear-resistant container; (ii) in a trunk of a vehicle  
21 or in a closed, locked, hard-sided motor vehicle with a solid top; (iii) in a closed, locked, hard-  
22 body trailer; or (iv) suspended at least 10 feet clear of the ground at all points and at least four  
23 feet horizontally from the supporting tree or pole and any other tree or pole. It shall be unlawful  
24 to discard, bury, or abandon any food, refuse, bear attractant, or other wildlife attractant unless it  
25 is disposed of by placing it inside an animal-resistant trash receptacle provided by the  
26 department.
- 27 F. Any violation of this section or other posted rules shall be punishable as a Class III  
28 misdemeanor, and the camping permit authorization shall become null and void. The permittee  
29 shall be required to immediately vacate the property upon summons or notification. A second or  
30 subsequent offense may result in the loss of camping privileges on department-owned or  
31 managed properties.

## **RATIONALE:**

In 2020, the Board adopted regulations requiring anyone camping on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), or on other Department-owned or Department-managed sites, to secure a no-cost camping authorization. This authorization provided a means for the DWR to know who was using DWR areas, document known start and end dates by camper, and have a way to contact campers in the event of an emergency. Up to six individuals are allowed under one camping authorization. Additionally, the authorization ensured that campers adhered to certain rules and requirements to reduce impacts to properties and reduce associated staff maintenance costs. During 2025, the Department issued approximately 2,400 camping authorizations.

Prior to the implementation of the camping authorization, the agency had many instances of individuals setting up long-term camp sites or abandoning campers, tents and other equipment when not in use. The Department does not have the funding or staffing to manage long-term camping. Further, long-term camping can degrade wildlife habitat, which is a primary function of WMAs. In most cases, suitable camping locations are limited. Camping for longer than 14 nights could prevent others from enjoying DWR properties.

Even with the implementation of camping authorizations, the DWR continues to incur increased expenses associated with maintaining these areas on the WMAs and enforcing rules, regulations and laws on the areas. Increased demands by Virginians for natural places in which to recreate continues to put pressures on DWR lands. The 2024 Virginia Outdoors Plan corroborates this outcome, noting that 82% of respondents to the Virginia Outdoors Survey indicated that access to the outdoors was very important to them and that “natural areas” (i.e. undeveloped) were the most needed outdoor recreation asset (47% of respondents). The 2026 cost for primitive camping at Virginia State Parks ranges from \$16-\$21, plus a \$5 non-refundable transaction fee and applicable Virginia sales tax. These rates are based on four guests at a camp site.

The proposed DWR \$10 camping authorization fee will help offset on-going maintenance and development costs associated with both infrastructure and habitat on Department-owned and Department-managed lands, as well as law enforcement patrols needed to ensure user compliance with WMA rules, regulations, and laws and safety of the public on these properties. Acknowledging that there may be a nominal churn rate of 3%, the DWR anticipates that the new camping authorization fee will generate \$23,450 additional revenue annually.