

# **2004 Profile of Wisconsin's Campers**

**In conjunction with**

**Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners  
WI Department of Natural Resources**

## Profile of Wisconsin's Campers Executive Summary June – October 2004

Wisconsin is home to a wide variety of campgrounds that would satisfy every type of camper. From the wilderness and rustic-style campgrounds that offer the quiet serenity from the hustle and bustle of daily living, to those that resemble small communities with all the conveniences of home, Wisconsin's campgrounds can satisfy the appetites of any camping enthusiast.

Wisconsin's private campgrounds and State Parks have established Wisconsin as a premiere camping destination. To better understand this market segment and ensure that marketing dollars are being spent wisely to reach them effectively, the Department of Tourism partnered with the Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners and the WI Department of Natural Resources to gather information from campers during the summer and fall of 2004.

The objectives of this research were: 1) profile Wisconsin's campers (age, income levels, residence) 2) to describe trip characteristics (length of camping trip, method of camping, party size and composition and, participation in area activities) 3) assess satisfaction with Wisconsin camping experience 4) measure visitor spending.

### Participating Campgrounds & State Parks

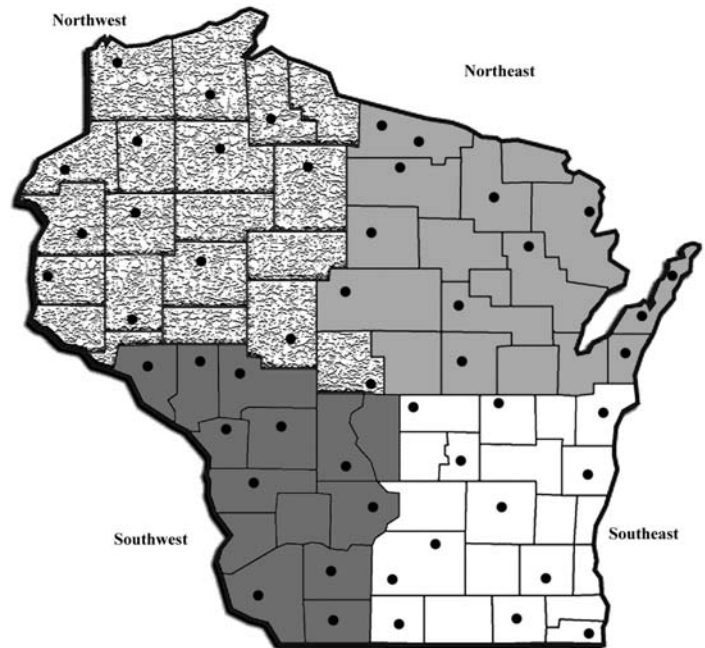
#### Research Methods

Self-addressed, postage paid surveys were randomly handed out as campers registered for their site. The state was segmented into four regions; surveys were color-coded so that data could be analyzed regionally. The map at the left shows the counties by region as well as the location of the campgrounds and state parks that participated in this study. There were 28 WACO-affiliated campgrounds, 6 state parks, and the remaining campgrounds were either private or county-owned.

To entice campers to complete the survey, their names were included in a drawing for weekend camping getaways. A total of 783 camping parties participated in this study, representing 3,132 campers.

#### Demographics

Overall, campers originated from four Midwestern states, the majority being Wisconsin residents (72%). Illinois residents had the second highest percentage (11%) followed by Minnesota (10%), and Michigan (1%). Looking at the campers origin by their respective media market areas, the highest percentage came from the Milwaukee market (19%) followed by Madison (14%), Green Bay (14%), Twin Cities (14%), Wausau-Rhineland (11%), Chicago (8%), and La Crosse-Eau Claire (7%).



Fifty-two percent of the respondents were between the ages of 39 and 57; one fifth (21%) were 58 years old or older; 23% were between the ages of 23 and 38 and the remaining 3% were 22 or younger. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were females.

Over half (56%) did not have children under the age of 18 living in their household and their annual household income was primarily in the middle-income brackets. Fifty-two percent had incomes between \$21,000 and \$60,000, 21% had incomes between \$61,000 and \$80,000, and 22% had incomes of \$81,000 or more.

Nine out of ten RV campers don't consider themselves snowbirds and those who do, flock to Arizona, Florida or Texas.









Campers were asked to list their three favorite leisure activities and those receiving the highest number of mentions included hiking, relaxation, swimming, reading, walking, golfing and sightseeing.

**Trip Characteristics**

The primary trip purpose for eight out of ten respondents was to camp; 7% combined their camping trip with a visit to family and friends, 5% indicated their trip was an annual event and 1% indicated they were in the area on business.

The graphic at the right shows the type of camping equipment respondents were using. Tent camping is still very popular; however, RV camping is increasing in popularity. Except for tents and multiple methods (multiple methods usually consisted of tents in addition to a popup camper or van), the majority of campers were using a type of RV. RVs are categorized into two types. **Towable** includes pop up camping trailers, truck campers, travel trailers and fifth-wheel travel trailers. **Motorized** RVs combines transportation and living quarters in one unit such as Class A motorhomes; Class B motorhomes and Class C motorhomes.

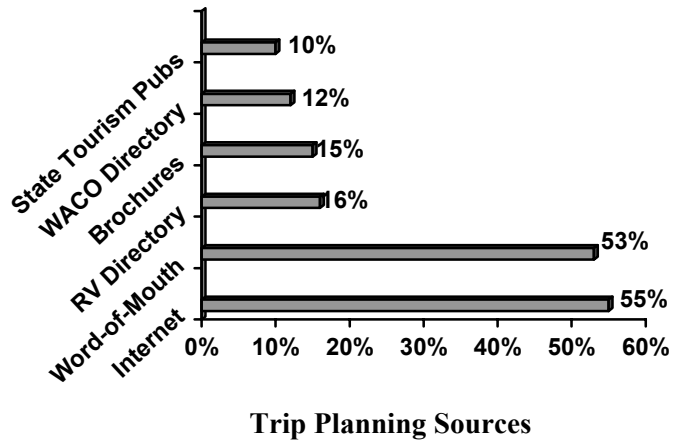
On average, RVers were on longer camping trips (3.7 nights) than tent campers (2.7 nights).

Method of Camping			
Tent		RV	
	31.7%		Popup Camper 17.3%
			5 <sup>th</sup> Wheel 10.4%
			Travel Trailer 24.8%
			Class A 7.9%
			Class B/Van 0.9%
			Class C 4.0%
			Truck Camper 2.1%

Twenty-five percent of the campers planned their trip within a seven-day period, 23% within four weeks, 28% planned it one to three months in advance and 25% were planning their trip four or more months out.

Campers were given a listing of various informational sources typically used for leisure trip planning and asked to check all the sources they used to plan their trip. From previous research conducted by the Department, word-of-mouth recommendations typically receive the highest number of mentions. However, Wisconsin's campers cited the Internet most often (62%) with word-of-mouth coming in second (46%).

When asked to list the Internet sites they used, the DNR and Reserve America websites were mentioned frequently (48%). Reserve America is the reservation system used by the DNR. Local Internet sites (20%) followed as did miscellaneous Internet sites (19%), WACO (17%) and the Department of Tourism website (17%). Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureaus accounted for 8% of the mentions. Following the Internet and word-of-mouth were State Parks Guide (18%), RV Directory (12%), State Tourism Publications (11%) and WACO Directory (10%).



Camping has been a favorite Wisconsin pastime for many years. Participation levels in area activities fluctuated from auto racing (2%), to hiking and walking (64%). Various other activities included shopping (49%), area attractions (40%), dining (39%), bicycling (28%), visiting family and friends (27%), water sports (26%), museums/historic sites (19%), festivals and events (15%), and other area activities (12%).

The overall travel budget for Wisconsin's campers averaged \$335 per group per trip.

Asked to rate their level of satisfaction with a variety of amenities, those receiving the highest ratings were scenery, peace and quiet, relaxation, campground service, campground amenities and proximity of campground to home.

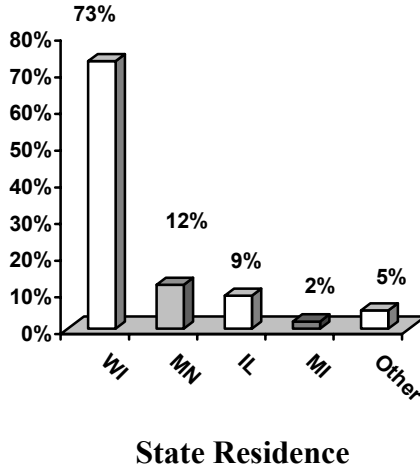
### Party Characteristics

Six out of ten camping parties (63%) were traveling with family members; 23% were traveling with a combination of family and friends, and 8% were traveling with friends. Overall, the average party consisted of four people. Campers were also asked if they were traveling with any children under the age of 18. Of those who responded, it was an even mix – 50% were traveling with kids and 50% were not.

Following are fact sheets pertaining campers and the regions they camped in, RV campers versus tent campers, and ages of campers.

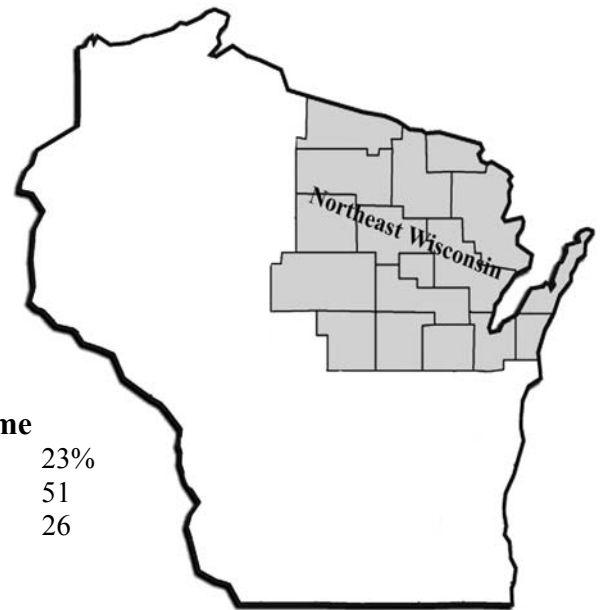
### Northeast Wisconsin Campers

#### DEMOGRAPHICS



22 or younger	2%
23-38 years old	24
39-57 years old	52
58 or older	22
<b>Average age</b>	<b>47</b>

Less than \$41,000	23%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	51
\$81,000 or more	26



#### Trip Characteristics

##### Method of Camping

Travel trailer	34%
Tents	20
Popup camper	20
Class A motorhomes	10
5 <sup>th</sup> wheel	9

**Average Nights Camping** 4.3

##### Travel Companions

Family	66%
Family & friends	28
Friends	5

**Average Party Size** 4.7

##### Traveling with Kids <18

Yes	60%
No	40

##### Trip Planning

Within 7 day	17%
Within 4 weeks	18
Between 1 and 3 months	31
4 months or more	34

##### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Internet	55%
Word-of-mouth	53
RV directory	16
Brochures	15

##### Websites Used for Planning Trip

Local Internet	33%
Other Internet sites	30
WACO	27
DNR	19
Dept. of Tourism	16

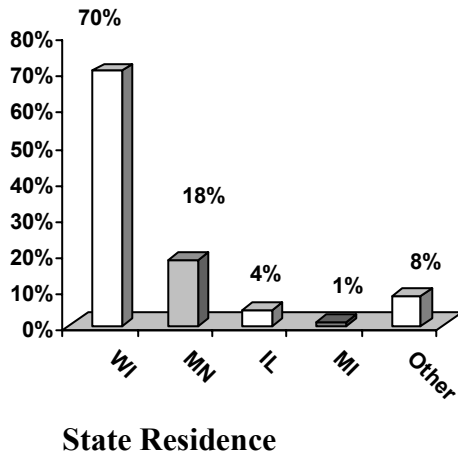
##### Trip-Related Activities

Shopping	68%
Hiking/walking	59
Dining	55
Area attractions	52
Water sports	41

**Average Travel Budget** \$512

### Northwest Wisconsin Campers

#### DEMOGRAPHICS



#### Age

22 or younger	3%
23-38 years old	24
39-57 years old	49
58 or older	23

**Average age** 47

#### Annual HH Income

Less than \$41,000	28%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	53
\$81,000 or more	19



#### TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

##### Method of Camping

Tent	34%
Travel trailer	18
Popup camper	17
5 <sup>th</sup> wheel	14
Class A motorhomes	9
Class C motorhomes	5

**Average Nights Camping** 3.4

##### Travel Companions

Family	67%
Family & friends	18
Friends	8
Alone	6

**Average Party Size** 4.0

##### Traveling with Kids <18

Yes	49%
No	51

##### Trip Planning

Within 7 day	25%
Within 4 weeks	27
Between 1 and 3 months	28
4 months or more	19

##### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Internet	60%
Word-of-mouth	45
State Park Guide	17
State Tourism Pubs	14
RV directory	13

##### Websites Used for Planning Trip

DNR	48%
Dept. of Tourism	21
WACO	20
Other Internet sites	20
Local Internet site	11

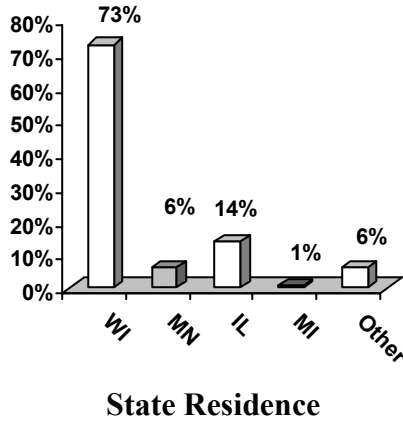
##### Trip-Related Activities

Hiking/walking	68%
Shopping	49
Dining	37
Area attractions	34
Bicycling	28

**Average Travel Budget** \$286

### Southwest Wisconsin Campers

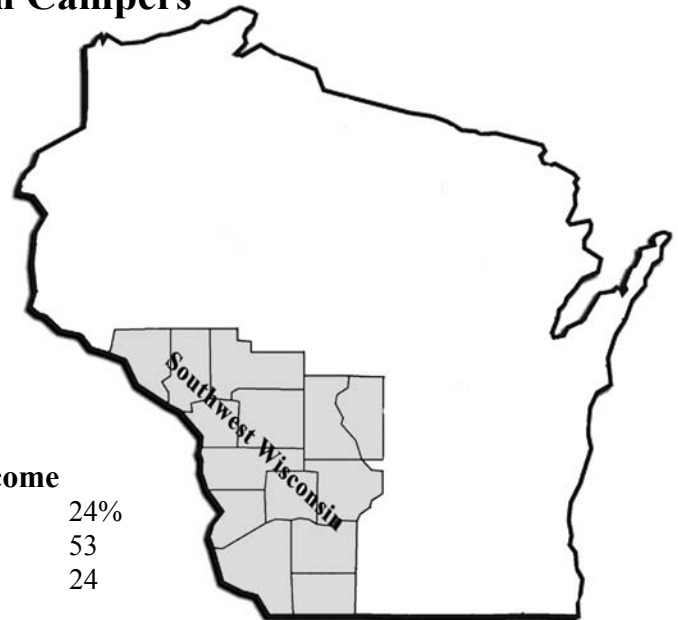
#### DEMOGRAPHICS



Age Group	Percentage
22 or younger	4%
23-38 years old	24
39-57 years old	54
58 or older	18

Average age 46

Income Range	Percentage
Less than \$41,000	24%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	53
\$81,000 or more	24



#### TRIP CHARACTERISTICS

##### Method of Camping

Tent	41%
Travel trailer	20
Popup camper	15
5 <sup>th</sup> wheel	11
Class A motorhomes	5
Class C motorhomes	4

Average Nights Camping 3.0

##### Travel Companions

Family	58%
Family & friends	24
Friends	10
Alone	6

Average Party Size 4.3

##### Traveling with Kids <18

Yes	49%
No	51

##### Trip Planning

Within 7 day	27%
Within 4 weeks	22
Between 1 and 3 months	29
4 months or more	22

##### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Internet	69%
Word-of-mouth	41
State Park Guide	20
WACO Directory	11
State Tourism Pubs	10
RV directory	10
Brochures	10

##### Websites Used for Planning Trip

DNR	49%
Local Internet Site	23
Dept. of Tourism	19
Other Internet sites	15
WACO	11

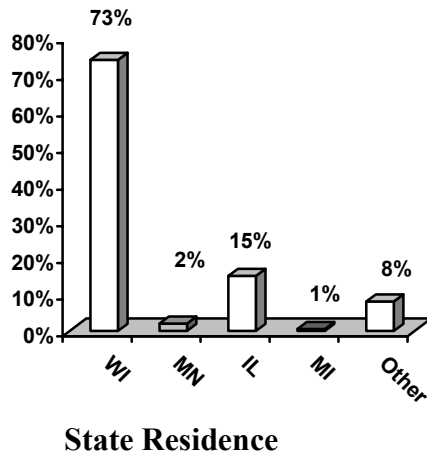
##### Trip-Related Activities

Hiking/walking	57%
Shopping	45
Area attractions	44
Dining	37
Bicycling	25

Average Travel Budget \$299

### Southeast Wisconsin Campers

#### DEMOGRAPHICS



22 or younger	3%
23-38 years old	21
39-57 years old	54
58 or older	22
<b>Average age</b>	<b>48</b>

Less than \$41,000	27%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	53
\$81,000 or more	20



#### Trip Characteristic

##### Method of Camping

Tent	29%
Travel trailer	29
Popup camper	18
Class A motorhomes	9
5 <sup>th</sup> wheel	8
Class C motorhomes	4

##### Average Nights Camping

3.0

##### Travel Companions

Family	62%
Family & friends	22
Friends	10
Alone	5

##### Average Party Size

3.8

##### Traveling with Kids <18

Yes	44%
No	56

##### Trip Planning

Within 7 day	29%
Within 4 weeks	23
Between 1 and 3 months	23
4 months or more	25

##### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Internet	62%
Word-of-mouth	46
State Park Guide	28
RV Directory	12
Local tourism information	10
State Tourism Pubs	10
WACO Directory	9

##### Websites Used for Planning Trip

DNR	58%
Local Internet Site	15
Other Internet sites	15
WACO	15
Department of Tourism	12

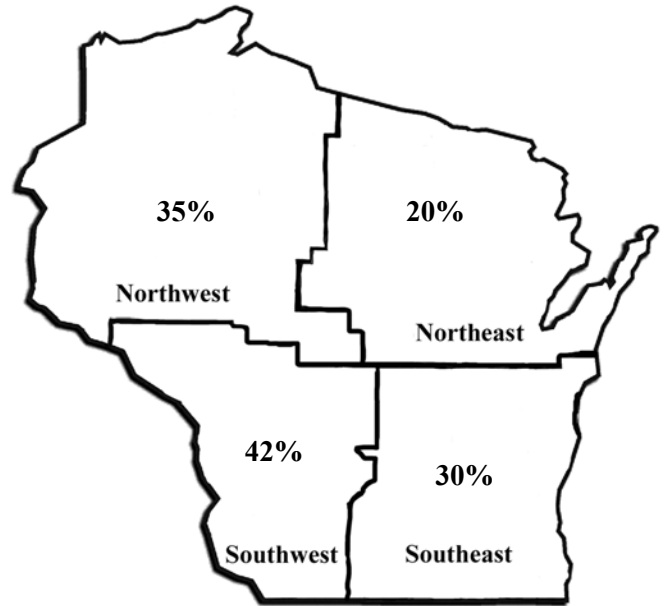
##### Trip-Related Activities

Hiking/walking	73%
Shopping	38
Bicycling	33
Dining	29
Area attractions	29

**Average Travel Budget** \$269

## Wisconsin's Tent Campers

Statewide almost one-third (32%) of all campers surveyed during the summer and fall of 2004 were tent camping. The map at the right shows the percentage of tent campers by the region in which they were surveyed.



### Demographics

#### State Residence

State	Percentage
Wisconsin	73%
Illinois	13
Minnesota	9
Other states	5

#### Age

Age Group	Percentage
22 or younger	8%
23-38 years old	31
39-57 years old	54
58 or older	7
<b>Average age</b>	<b>41</b>

#### Annual HH Income

Income Level	Percentage
Less than \$40,000	27%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	55
\$81,000 or more	18

### Trip Characteristics

**Average Nights Camping** 2.7

#### Travel Companions

Companion Type	Percentage
Family	59%
Family & friends	21
Friends	15
Alone	5

**Average Party Size** 4.2

#### Traveling with Kids <18

Response	Percentage
Yes	48%
No	52

#### Trip Planning

Planning Timeframe	Percentage
Within 7 day	24%
Within 4 weeks	30
Between 1 and 3 months	26
4 months or more	20

**Average Travel Budget** \$267

#### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Source	Percentage
Internet	68%
Word-of-mouth	47
State Park Guide	22
State Tourism Pubs	11
Local tourism information	9
Other types of information	8
Brochures	7

#### Websites Used for Planning Trip

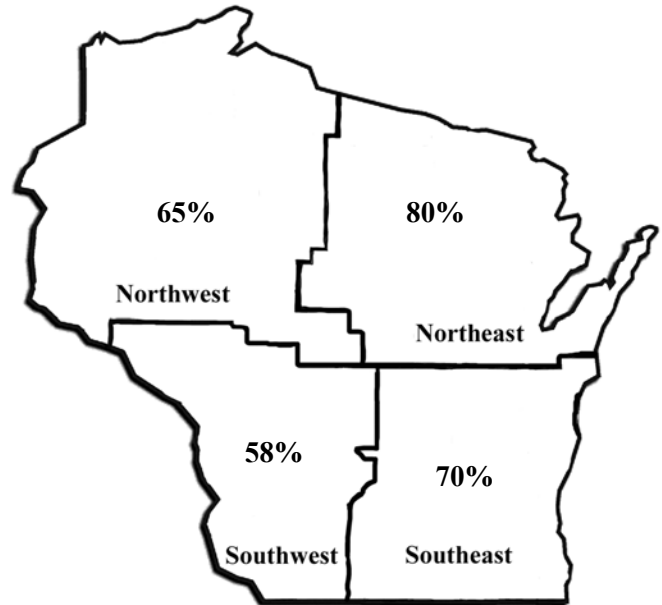
Website	Percentage
DNR	60%
Department of Tourism	18
Other sites	17
Local Internet site	15
WACO	9
Chamber/CVB	8

#### Trip-Related Activities

Activity	Percentage
Hiking/walking	73%
Shopping	38
Area attractions	38
Dining	38
Water sports	34

## Wisconsin's RV Campers

Statewide almost more than two-thirds (68%) of all campers surveyed during the summer and fall of 2004 were camping in their RVs. The map at the right shows the percentage of RV campers by the region in which they were surveyed.



### Demographics

#### State Residence

State	Percentage	Age Group	Percentage
Wisconsin	72%	22 or younger	1%
Minnesota	9	23-38 years old	20
Illinois	9	39-57 years old	51
Michigan	2	58 or older	28
Other states	8		

**Average age 50**

#### Annual HH Income

Less than \$40,000	26%
\$41,000 - \$81,000	52
\$81,000 or more	23

### Trip Characteristics

**Average Nights Camping** 3.7

#### Travel Companions

Family	67%
Family & friends	22
Friends	6
Alone	4

**Average Party Size** 4.1

#### Traveling with Kids <18

Yes	50%
No	50

#### Trip Planning

Within 7 day	17%
Within 4 weeks	26
Between 1 and 3 months	32
4 months or more	25

**Average Travel Budget** \$369

#### Top Mentions—Informational Planning Sources

Internet	59%
Word-of-mouth	44
RV Directory	19
State Park Guide	16
WACO Directory	15
Brochure	11
State Tourism Pubs	10
Local tourism information	9

#### Websites Used for Planning Trip

DNR	38%
Local Internet site	23
WACO	22
Other sites	20
Dept. of Tourism	17

#### Trip-Related Activities

Shopping	54%
Hiking/walking	50
Area attractions	43
Dining	41
Family/friends	3

### Marketing Recommendations

The majority of campers (72%) are from Wisconsin with most of the residual from our core markets of Chicago and the Twin Cities. In order to grow the camping segment of the tourism industry, reaching new potential travelers is important.

- Targeting the in-state audience will reach over 72 percent of the people who camp in Wisconsin. Because word-of-mouth is very important as a resource for campers, utilizing a public relations approach will establish the brand you are selling and reach the consumer effectively. Following are some ideas that could engage state-wide news media:
  1. Offer packages as trade out for on-air mentions.
  2. Create something to generate talk value and let the media know about it. This could be a charitable event, celebrity appearances or a unique demonstration or give-away.
  3. If there is something of news-worthy interest, write press releases and send a photo along with it.
- While the Internet is among the most popular ways campers find information to decide on a destination and make arrangements, in order to create awareness and attract new potential visitors to your website, advertising and public relations are keys to creating new demand for information whether it is via the Internet or publications.
- Additional ways to increase awareness of Wisconsin's wealth of camping opportunities is to seek out publications, travel stories and links to other websites such as general newspaper sites or regional websites dedicated to nature based recreation campers find of interest. Other Department of Tourism research indicates that campers frequently engage in hiking, fishing, biking, boating, hunting and enjoying parks and forests.
- The most important source of information for campers is the Internet. Fifty-five percent of the respondents to the survey indicated that is their primary source of information. You must have a website that is full of useful information for planning and is updated with new information regularly. And, it is not enough to have a site, you must have a marketing plan that makes people aware of the address so they will visit it.
  1. Establish links with complimentary websites.
  2. Make your site exciting and useful so people will visit it often.
  3. Place photos of people having fun so that it is visually appealing.
  4. Gather people's names and addresses so you can build your own database.

The Department has complete in-state media lists that they will share free-of-charge.

While camping is their primary activity, they do participate in a variety of other activities. Create a partnership with those other businesses or entities and cross promote each other. Utilize the Departments activity sets to ensure that you are presenting a menu of opportunities. Make it easy for the visitors to participate and note that the survey results indicated that campground service was one of the satisfaction benchmarks.