

The State of Illinois faces an unprecedented financial challenge, and it will require straight talk and leadership to resolve it. Since becoming Department of Natural Resources director in February 2009, we have restored communication with constituents and asked for assistance—primarily through Conservation Congress—and provided candid information on funding and budgets. Constituents and organizations responded and together we won additional resources in a fees bill.

As we begin the new fiscal year, DNR is being asked to cut costs and help with solutions. This will not be easy. DNR will protect funds from licenses and fees, and focus on our core-mission tasks.

In the coming months we may ask for more help as we take on the question facing conservation agencies across the nation: How do we fund conservation today as traditional hunting and fishing participation and funds decline?

As a result, DNR will become more responsive to customer demands in today's world. The agency recently



rolled out one solution with a new online camping reservation system, which makes utilizing Illinois' state park system for family vacations, school and family reunions, weddings and other organized events much easier.

DNR has entered into an agreement with ReserveAmerica, North America's leading camping reservation, campground management and marketing solutions provider, to handle booking campsites at 67 sites and picnic shelters at 51 of Illinois' state parks.

Why did I ask staff to pursue a relationship with ReserveAmerica? Frankly, our antiquated campground reservation system needed to enter the 21st century and the families, hikers, hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts using Illinois state parks, recreation areas and state fish and wildlife areas deserve a convenient reservation system.

For years, reserving a campground or picnic shelter meant mailing in an application or calling the site. Although our parks are open seven days a week, most park offices are staffed the traditional work day hours of 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., often making it difficult for those who work during the day to place a call. In

addition, with the tough economic climate we've endured the past several years, staffing levels at many state parks have declined. In many instances, nearly 100 percent of the staff's time is dedicated to providing visitors with clean, safe facilities and maintaining existing programs and services.

Rather than dedicating staff and considerable time to develop our own system, we opted to utilize a tried-and-true service provider, one which specializes in complete reservation solutions and an online reservation system. Illinois joins a network of 20 other states and seven federal agencies where more than 7.5 million camping transactions were processed last year.

For you, the ReserveAmerica automated system means improved customer services that will be available to you when you need them, 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. And, ReserveAmerica means that you can check on the availability of your favorite campsite, whether it is next weekend, next month or later this year.

For Illinois, ReserveAmerica means a streamlined means of operating our campground and shelter reservation business, and a system that we hope means that you'll come play—and stay—with us more often.

A stylized, handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Marc Miller".

Marc Miller, Director

Check us out!

Remember www.reserveamerica.com when you're making campground and picnic shelter reservations. The Illinois help number (assistance in navigating the site only) is 1-800-246-5082.