

North Dakota Parks & Recreation Department

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **August a big month for state park visitation**

The North Dakota state parks system visitation saw significant improvement in August, offsetting a slow start to the summer and bringing the end of summer visitation tally to within 1 percent of the first eight months of 2007.

In August, state parks reported 162,954 visitors, an increase of 12.75 percent from the same month last year. By the end of August, state parks welcomed a total of 710,054 guests. Through Aug. 31, 46,669 campers have stayed at state parks. Nearly 3,200 people have taken advantage of cabin rentals.

North Dakota parks director Doug Prchal is encouraged by the upturn in visitation noting the strong end of summer visitation nearly made up for the slow start in May which was hampered by cold, wet weather and fire bans.

“State parks continue to provide excellent outdoor activities and remain an economical entertainment choice,” Prchal said. “It doesn’t appear that higher gas prices have had a significant effect on travel as surmised earlier in the season.”

Nearly every park in the state system saw improvement over the numbers recorded in 2007 for August. Lake Sakakawea State Park saw a 22 percent increase, Turtle River State Park was up 20 percent, Icelandic State Park up 13 percent, Lake Metigoshe State Park up 11 percent, Fort Stevenson State Park up 10.5 percent, and Cross Ranch State Park up 7 percent.

Lake Sakakawea State Park manager John Tunge credits improved fishing due to rising lake levels and good weather as reasons why visitation numbers were up.

“The salmon fishing really picked up and we saw a lot of people come out for the Labor Day weekend,” Tunge said. “I’ve talked to a lot of people, and they are concerned about gas prices, but they didn’t let it curtail their fishing much. Some didn’t come as often but they stayed longer.”

Icelandic State Park manager Justin Robinson is also seeing campers staying longer and the weather in August couldn’t have been much better. The annual “Kids’ Weekend” was a tremendous success this year attracting families with a variety of activities for kids. Another activity which drew a large crowd was the “Deuce Icelandic Celebration.”

“This year the Kids’ Weekend was amazing. I know we had 500-plus at the amphitheater program,” Robinson said. “We had a magician, Iron Kid contest, arts and crafts, watermelon seed spitting contest, fishing derby, bike parade and sand sculpture contest. It was just old-fashioned fun and games.”-