



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Research
Paper NE-489

1981



Trends in New Hampshire Private Campgrounds During the Seventies

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MANUSCRIPT RECEIVED FOR PUBLICATION
17 FEBRUARY 1981

Abstract

The findings of a 1980 census of commercial camping enterprises in New Hampshire are presented, including the growth of commercial camping enterprises during the period 1964 to 1980, campground characteristics, services and facilities, and the average costs and returns of operating a campground. This report represents the third census of the New Hampshire campground industry. The data presented reflect the 1979 calendar year and are based on a survey of 138 campgrounds conducted by the U.S. Forest Service in cooperation with the campground owners of New Hampshire.

Introduction

The Survey

Included in this analysis is information about the characteristics of New Hampshire private campgrounds, such as average length of season, years in business, years of ownership, capacity, recreation facilities, campsite fees, operations, employment, revenue, expenses, and profitability.

The results presented here are summarized from 1979 operating data provided by a sample of 138 campgrounds. The questionnaire was mailed to 189 campgrounds listed in the 1980 New Hampshire Camping Guide, Wheelers RV Resort & Campground Guide (1980 edition), Rand McNally Campground & Trailer Park Guide (1980 edition), and the 1980 membership list provided by the New Hampshire Campground Owners Association. Responses were obtained from 138 campgrounds or 73 percent of those receiving the survey. Fifty-one percent (70) of the respondents provided complete information about their income, fees charged, and costs of operation.

The Growth of Commercial Campgrounds in New Hampshire

During the summers of 1964, 1971, and 1980, attempts were made to conduct complete censuses of commercial campgrounds in New Hampshire. In 1964, 108 campgrounds were located. In the 1971 census we found 189 camping enterprises in business and 25 under construction. In 1980, 189 campgrounds were located.

The New Hampshire campground industry doubled in size every 3 years from 1955 to 1964; by 1971 it had doubled again, and reached its peak of 237 enterprises in 1973. Campgrounds that have ceased operation since 1955 number 106, a failure rate of 36 percent.

The regional distribution of commercial campgrounds reveals heavy concentration of enterprises in the lakes region and White Mountain region (Table 1).

In 1971, the size structure of the industry revealed a strong imbalance toward smaller and less economic units (Table 2). Campgrounds with fewer than 50 tent or trailer units decreased from 53 percent of the total to 31 percent in 1980. The percentage of campgrounds with 50 to 99 campsites increased from 28 to 33. And campgrounds with more than 99 sites increased from 19 to 36 percent. In 1971 an average campground had 62 sites; by 1980 the average had increased to 89 sites.

Relatively few owners provided a complete accounting of the costs of operating a campground. However, enough data were collected on major cost items to produce a partial comparison picture of operating costs (Table 3).

Campgrounds in 1970 had an average gross income of \$9,000 or approximately \$145 per site. Campgrounds in 1979 had an average gross income of \$34,000 or approximately \$382 per site.

The most common daily rates charged at New Hampshire campgrounds are shown in Table 4. The seasonal camping rate in 1970 averaged \$176; in 1979 it was \$385.

The 189 campgrounds in 1980 had a projected developed capacity of 16,821 campsites, not including overflow capacity and undeveloped campsites. This was an increase of 51 percent over the 11,123 developed sites reported in the 1971 census.

A comparison of facilities and services offered at reporting campgrounds between 1971 and 1980 reveals substantial investments in modernization (Table 5).

All but two (1 percent) of the 138 campgrounds had some campsites with utility connections for electricity or water and sewage; in 1971, 6 percent of the campgrounds lacked utility connections. Seventy-six percent of the 12,285 campsites at the responding campgrounds had at least an electrical connection, up from 70 percent in the last census. The average campground of 89 sites had 28 tent sites (no hook-ups) and 61 sites with some combination of utility connections (Table 6). In 1971, the average commercial campground in New Hampshire had 62 sites (19 tent sites and 43 sites with some utility). And in 1964, the average campground had about 40 campsites evenly divided between tents and trailers.

Campground Characteristics

Enterprise Size and Competition

Campgrounds responding to the survey reported a total of 12,285 developed sites; an additional 422 sites were under construction, reflecting a 3 percent rate of expansion.

Ninety-three percent of the surveyed campgrounds were located wholly on their own land. Another 5 percent had part of their operation on leased land, and the remaining 1 percent were located entirely on leased land (Table 7).

Of the 119 campgrounds that reported competitor campgrounds within 10 miles, 36 percent reported at least six campgrounds within 10 miles. The median number of competitors was 4.1 (Table 8).

Volume and Trend of Business

The maximum overnight capacity of a campground is equal to total developed sites plus overflow capacity multiplied by average number of persons in a camping party. The average maximum capacity for all campgrounds was 409 persons (Table 9). The average "comfortable capacity," a subjective

assessment by each campground owner, was 293 persons (or approximately 3.25 persons per developed site).

The average campground attendance decreased by 2 percent in 1979, while income remained the same (Table 10). Forty percent of the campgrounds reported declines in business, while 36 percent had increases in 1979. While an overall decline is apparent, volume of business ranges from minus 80 percent to plus 99 percent. The primary factor affecting attendance mentioned by 59 campground owners (60 percent) was the gasoline situation.

Of the 124 campgrounds responding to the question, "What percentage of your campers are seasonals?", 92 percent rented some sites to season-long campers, and these made up 33 percent of the average campground's attendance.

Years in Operation and Season Length

The average campground has been in business for 14 years and under the same ownership for the past 10 years. Nearly three-fourths of the campgrounds (73 percent) have been in operation 10 years or more. The oldest campground reported in the study has been in operation for 65 years, and the second oldest for 50 years.

Fifteen percent of the campgrounds were open all year. May is the most common month for opening (73 percent), and October is the most common month for closing (60 percent) (Table 11). July is the leading month for the "peak season" to start (69 percent), and September is the leading month for the "peak season" to end (69 percent) (Table 12).

Services and Facilities

Camper Services

A minority of campgrounds offer rentals of camping equipment (Table 13). Trailers are available for rent at 22 percent of the campgrounds; however, most campgrounds providing this service have only one or two units available.

A majority of campgrounds have camp stores and firewood. Other services commonly offered include vending machines, boat launching ramps, propane gas, movies, suppers, and dances. A complete listing of services is presented in Table 14.

In addition to camping, campground operators characteristically offer a variety of recreational activities. Equipped playgrounds are available at 64 percent of the campgrounds. Other facilities generally available are recreation halls, offered by 54 percent; ballfields, offered by 45 percent; and coin-operated games, offered by 43 percent. Other recreation facilities frequently found at campgrounds include outdoor swimming pools, hiking trails, boat rentals, and stocked fish ponds (Table 15).

Today's modern commercial campgrounds almost universally offer such camper necessities as hot showers (91 percent), flush toilets (90 percent), and dumping stations (82 percent) (Table 16).

Costs and Returns

Revenue

Campsite rentals accounted for 64 percent of average campground income during 1979. Average campsite rental income was \$20,000 (Table 17).

The average camping fee, for a family of four using an electrical connection, was \$6.51. The average minimum camping fee was \$5.52. Average surcharges for utilities are reported in Table 18.

Premium fees for quality sites were charged at 11 percent of the campgrounds. Premiums are more common in New Hampshire than in the Nation as a whole (11 percent vs. 5 percent) (National Campground Owners Association 1981). A minority of campgrounds offer discount fees for off-season (4 percent), visit length (31 percent), elderly (1 percent), and groups (1 percent).

At many camping enterprises, equipment rentals, store sales, meals, services, concession income, and vending machines generate more income collectively than do campsite rentals. In fact, campsite rental income, as a percentage of gross, has become a common indicator of enterprise success because every campground receives some income from sources other than campsite rentals; the lower the percentage, the more "fully-integrated" the operation (Table 19). When examining their revenue data, it is important to understand that the data contain a wide range of campground operations from overnight stops to resort campgrounds having equipment rentals, stores, lunch counters, services, concessions, and vending machines.

Expenses

The average total cost of campground operation for the campgrounds in this survey was \$35,000 in 1979 (Table 20). Of that amount, about one-fourth goes for labor, and one-fifth for purchased goods and supplies. The average campground's per-site cost for utilities is \$33.71; for advertising, \$11.24; for insurance, \$22.47; for property taxes, \$22.47; for debt services, \$56.18; for depreciation, \$67.42; and miscellaneous expenses, \$44.94. Fifteen percent of the responding campgrounds also reported expenses for purchased (contract) services of \$33.71 per site, and \$89.89 for leasing privately owned land—or \$45.98 per acre. Labor costs average about \$4,000 per paid employee.

Profitability

Success in any business is equated with profitability. Profitability in the campground business is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons. Many campground owners have other sources of income and apparently feel that they can afford to put more money into the campground than they may get out of it in the short run.

Profitability of campgrounds varied greatly in 1979. An examination of financial data indicated that 41 percent of the campgrounds suffered a loss. Of those making a profit, about 70 percent made a profit of less than \$10,000 (Table 21).

Summary

The objective of the census of commercial campground operations is to provide descriptive statistics about the industry to:

- (1) improve understanding of private campground economics throughout the financial community and in government.
- (2) develop a data base on industry economics that will provide a point of comparison for identifying trends in the campground industry.
- (3) examine the performance of the New Hampshire campground industry for the 1979 season.
- (4) provide a basis for evaluating individual enterprises against state-wide averages.

The 138 campgrounds in this survey are 73 percent of the state's camping enterprises. Representative samples, particularly where income and cost data are involved, are impossible to obtain for such a large and diverse industry. The following data are therefore presented as state averages:

Average New Hampshire campground Statistics

Campground size (acres)	67
Total developed campsites	89
Overflow capacity (family units)	23
Maximum capacity (persons)	409
Days operated at maximum capacity	14
1979 attendance as a percentage of 1978	98%
Days open (for 86% who are not open all year)	154
Opening date	April 23

Closing date	October 22
Peak season	July to September
Years in operation	14
Total employees	4
Receipts	\$34,000
Cost of operation	\$35,000

If our 73-percent sample was representative, the characteristics of New Hampshire's campground industry in 1979 were:

Total persons employed	756
Wages paid	\$1,512,000
Property taxes paid	\$378,000
Interest paid	\$945,000
Income generated	\$6,426,000
Acreage involved	12,663
Overnight capacity	16,821
Camper days provided	2,032,128
Number of enterprises	189

Considering income alone, it would appear that the commercial campground industry in New Hampshire is a \$6-million contributor to the economy.

Acknowledgments

We express our deepest appreciation to the 138 campground owners who unselfishly shared their 1979 business records with us, and to Wilbur F. LaPage for his cooperation and assistance.

Literature Cited

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- LaPage, Wilbur F., Paula L. Cormier, and Steven C. Maurice.
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APPENDIX

Form approved
OMB # 40S-80012

NEW HAMPSHIRE CAMPGROUND
DECENNIAL ECONOMIC SURVEY

1980

Please complete and return this survey by JULY 11, 1980,
in the enclosed pre-stamped envelope.

We have designed this questionnaire to minimize its burden
on your time. The instructions and definitions provided are
intended to facilitate the collection of comparable data--please
follow them as closely as possible. The definitions are arranged
as they appear in the questionnaire.

The data must include the summer season and an entire 12-
month period. If you wish to send us a copy of your financial
statements, we will complete a questionnaire for you. All
information will be kept strictly confidential.

Name of campground _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip Code _____

Telephone _____

Person to contact if further information is required:

Person to whom the final report should be sent:

THANK YOU!

1. FACILITY AND SERVICE INVENTORY

Facility	(Insert number)		(Check one)	
	In operation	Under construction	Owner operated	Concession
a. <u>Campsites:</u>				
With electricity				
With water				
With sewer				
With no hook-ups				
Total developed sites				
Overflow capacity (family units)				
b. <u>Camping Shelters:</u>				
Rental trailers				
Rental tents				
Rental lean-tos				
Rental cabins				
Other (describe)				
c. <u>Service Facilities:</u>				
Store(s)				
Lunch counters				
Dining rooms				
Meals delivered to sites				
Vending machines				
Marinas				
Boat launching ramps				
Boat dock spaces				
Cable TV connections				
Firewood				
Propane gas				
Gasoline pumps				
Rec. vehicle repairs				
Rec. vehicle sales				
Guide services				
Recreation director				
Movies				
Suppers				
Hayrides				
Dances				
Sports instruction				
Nurse/doctor				
Babysitting				
Other (Describe)				

Facility	(Insert number)		(Check one)	
	In operation	Under construction	Owner operated	Concession
d. Recreation Facilities:				
Swimming pools (outdoor)				
Swimming pools (indoor)				
Recreation halls				
Coin operated games		XXXXXX		
Beach frontage	ft.	ft.		
Hiking trails (owned)	mi.	mi.		
Hiking trails (access to)	mi.	mi.		
Rental boats (w/motors)		XXXXXX		
Rental boats (no motor)		XXXXXX		
Rental trail bikes		XXXXXX		
Rental snowmobiles		XXXXXX		
Rental horses/ponies		XXXXXX		
Stocked fish ponds				
Playgrounds (equipped)				
Ballfields				
Other (describe)				
e. Sanitary Facilities:				
Flush toilet bldgs.				
Vault toilet bldgs.				
Pit toilet bldgs.				
Other toilet facilities				
Dumping stations				
Hot showers				
Automatic washers		XXXXXX		
Clothes dryers		XXXXXX		
Other (describe)				

2. OPERATION DATA

- a. Number of years in operation _____ years
- b. Number of years owned by you _____ years
- c. Acres owned _____ acres
- d. Acres leased _____ acres
- e. Miles to nearest public campground _____ miles
- f. Miles to nearest private campground _____ miles
- g. Number of other campgrounds within 10 miles _____ campgrounds
- h. Opening date this year _____
- i. Closing date this year _____
- j. Dates of your "peak season" from _____ to _____
- k. What is the maximum capacity of your campground? _____ persons
- l. How many days did you operate at maximum? _____ days
- m. What do you feel is a "comfortable capacity?" _____ persons
- n. How many paid employees do you have? _____ persons
- o. How many total employees do you have? _____ persons
- p. By what percentage did your payroll increase this year? _____ percent
- q. Did your total attendance increase ____ or decrease ____?
- r. By what percentage? _____ percent
- s. Did your total campground income increase ____ or decrease ____?
- t. By what percentage? _____ percent
- u. What percentage of your campers are repeat visitors? _____ percent
- v. What percentage of your campers are seasonals? _____ percent
- w. Would you briefly comment on this year's camping business--What weather conditions, travel factors, or changes in your operation and marketing might have affected your performance this year as opposed to 1978?

Tables

Table No.

1. Location of New Hampshire camping enterprises in business; 1964, 1971, 1980
2. Distribution of small, medium, and large campgrounds in New Hampshire; 1971, 1980, (in percent)
3. Average costs per site
4. Daily rates at New Hampshire campgrounds
5. Facilities and services offered at New Hampshire campgrounds, in percent
6. Campsite combinations
7. Land ownership and leasing
8. Proximity of competitive public and private campgrounds
9. Operation data for 1979
10. Percentage of decline in 1979 camping business attributed to the 1979 gasoline situation and to weather
11. Percentage of New Hampshire campgrounds opening and closing each month
12. Percentage of New Hampshire campgrounds starting and ending their "peak season" each month
13. Percentage of campgrounds with camping shelters for rent
14. Service facilities offered at private campgrounds in 1979, in percent
15. Recreation facilities offered at private campgrounds, in percent
16. Sanitary facilities at private campgrounds, in percent
17. Average revenue reported by 70 New Hampshire campgrounds in 1979
18. Utility surcharges at New Hampshire campgrounds
19. Percentage of total income provided by campsite rentals, New Hampshire campgrounds, 1979
20. Average expenses reported by 70 New Hampshire campgrounds in 1979
21. Profitability of commercial campgrounds (before taxes), in percent

Table 1.—Location of New Hampshire camping enterprises in business; 1964, 1971, 1980

County or region	1964 ^a	1971 ^b	1980
County:			
Belknap	14	25	20
Carroll	22	44	32
Cheshire	6	18	10
Coos	12	22	22
Grafton	19	28	32
Hillsboro	2	11	12
Merrimack	13	17	16
Rockingham	5	28	27
Strafford	8	13	10
Sullivan	7	8	8
Total	108	214	189
Region:			
White Mountains	35	49	47
Dartmouth—Lake Sunapee	16	17	18
Lakes	37	72	61
Monadnock	7	23	13
Merrimack	5	27	20
Seacoast	8	26	30
Total	108	214	189

^aNew Hampshire State Planning Project 1965.

^bLaPage et al. 1972.

Table 2.—Distribution of small, medium, and large campgrounds in New Hampshire; 1971, 1980, (in percent)

Number of sites	1971 ^a	1980
Fewer than 50	53	31
50-99	28	33
100 or more	19	36

^aLaPage et al. 1972.

Table 3.—Average costs per site

Expense category	1971 ^a	1980
Salaries & wages	\$21.00	\$89.89
Advertising	5.45	11.24
Utilities	10.55	33.71
Insurance	5.27	22.47
Property taxes	14.30	22.47
Interest	19.13	56.18
Depreciation	29.10	67.42
Purchased goods & supplies	4.05	78.65
Purchased services	14.70	33.71
Miscellaneous	11.15	44.94

^aLaPage et al. 1972.

Table 4.—Daily rates at New Hampshire campgrounds

Type of campsite	1971 ^a	1980
Tent site; no utility hookups	\$3.00	\$5.00
Campsite with electricity or water connections	\$3.50	\$6.00
Campsite with electricity, water, and sewage connections	\$4.00	\$6.50

^aLaPage et al. 1972.

Table 5.—Facilities and services offered at New Hampshire campgrounds, in percent

Facility or service	1971 ^a	1980
Hot showers	76	91
Dumping stations	57	82
Firewood	75	91
Camp store	42	62
Recreation hall	26	54
Washers, dryers	19	41
Swimming pool	5	23
Rental trailers	3	22

^aLaPage et al. 1972.

Table 6.—Campsite combinations

Type of site	NH	NE ^{a, c}	US ^a
With electricity	69	120	105
With water	68	116	104
With sewer	38	56	57
With no hookups	28	30	30
Total developed sites	89 ^b	152	135
Overflow capacity (family units)	23	54	56
Number of campgrounds	138	34	137

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

^bCompares with 84.33 average for 1978 reported by Woodall Publishing Co.

^cNortheast: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania.

Table 7.—Land ownership and leasing

Item	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Acres owned	67	65	45
Number of enterprises with leased land ^b	9	3	13

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

^bIncludes both private and public land.

Table 8.—Proximity of competitive public and private campgrounds

Item	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Miles to nearest public campground	13	17	13
Miles to nearest private campground	5	6	8
Number of other campgrounds within 10 miles	5	5	5

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 9.—Operation data for 1979

Item	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Maximum capacity in persons	409	775	663
Number of days operated at maximum	14	25	30
“Comfortable capacity” in persons	293	644	497
Percent change in attendance (v. 1978)	-2	-5	-9
Percent change in income (v. 1978)	0	+3	-1
Percent of campers who are repeat visitors	56	56	48
Percent of campers who are seasonals	33	23	19

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 10.—Percentage of decline in 1979 camping business attributed to the 1979 gasoline situation and to weather

Factor	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Gasoline situation	60	44	51
Weather conditions	20	32	28
Other causes	19	24	21

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 11.—Percentage of New Hampshire campgrounds opening and closing each month

Month	Campgrounds opening	Campgrounds closing
March	1	—
April	6	—
May	73	—
June	5	—
August	—	1
September	—	16
October	—	60
November	—	6
December	—	3
Open all year	15	—

Table 12.—Percentage of New Hampshire campgrounds starting and ending their "peak season" each month

Month	Peak season starts	Peak season ends
May	10	—
June	20	—
July	69	3
August	1	18
September	1	69
October	—	9
November	—	1

Table 13.—Percentage of campgrounds with camping shelters for rent

Item	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Rental trailers	22	44	25
Rental tents	5	9	8
Rental lean-tos	3	9	4
Rental cabins	12	12	9
Other	6	9	7

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 14.—Service facilities offered at private campgrounds in 1979, in percent

Service offered	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Store	62	82	93
Lunch counters	9	32	30
Dining rooms	2	9	5
Meals delivered to sites	1	0	1
Vending machines	32	62	67
Marinas	5	9	9
Boat launching ramps	25	26	20
Boat dock spaces	16	24	15
Cable TV connections	0	0	4
Firewood	91	85	75
Propane gas	23	47	60
Gasoline pumps	5	15	23
Rec. vehicle repairs	4	12	7
Rec. vehicle sales	3	6	6
Guide services	7	18	15
Recreation director	13	32	18
Movies	25	53	33
Suppers	23	41	31
Hayrides	18	29	24
Dances	23	56	31
Sports instruction	5	9	9
Nurse/doctor	4	6	7
Babysitting	12	24	22
Other	11	24	23

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 15.—Recreation facilities offered by private campgrounds, in percent

Facility offered	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Swimming pools (outdoor)	23	47	63
Swimming pools (indoor)	0	6	4
Recreation halls	54	79	77
Coin operated games	43	85	82
Beach frontage	46	47	27
Hiking trails (owned)	24	50	32
Hiking trails (access to)	28	41	30
Rental boats (w/motors)	7	6	10
Rental boats (no motor)	27	26	28
Rental trail bikes	0	3	3
Rental snowmobiles	1	3	1
Rental horses/ponies	5	6	7
Stocked fish ponds	18	26	23
Playgrounds (equipped)	64	85	87
Ballfields	45	74	42
Other (tennis, shuffle-board, etc.)	36	59	52

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 16.—Sanitary facilities at private campgrounds, in percent

Facility	NH	NE ^a	US ^a
Flush toilet buildings	90	100	97
Vault toilet buildings	3	3	5
Pit toilet buildings	20	18	7
Other toilet facilities	4	9	7
Dumping stations	82	97	96
Hot showers	91	100	99
Automatic washers	41	74	88
Clothes dryers	41	79	88
Other (irons, porta-sewers, tubs, etc.)	3	12	7

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Table 17.—Average revenue reported by 70 New Hampshire campgrounds in 1979

Source	Average revenue	Number of campgrounds
Campsite rentals	\$20,000	65
Equipment rentals	\$ 2,000	21
Store sales	\$ 9,000	36
Meals	\$ 1,000	1
Services	\$ 1,000	7
Concession income	\$ 5,000	7
Vending machines (incl. games)	\$ 2,000	26
Other campground income	\$ 5,000	28
Total receipts ^a	\$34,000	70

^a Average of 70 responding campgrounds—not the sum of preceding figures.

Table 18.—Utility surcharges at New Hampshire campgrounds

Utility	Average additional charge	Number of campgrounds
Electricity	\$1.05	26
Electricity & water	\$1.17	67
Electricity, water & sewer	\$1.69	42

Table 19.—Percentage of total income provided by campsite rentals, New Hampshire campgrounds, 1979

Percent of income	Percent of enterprises
90-100	46
70-89	26
50-69	21
30-49	5
Less than 30	2

Table 20.—Average total expenses reported by 70 New Hampshire campgrounds in 1979

Expense category	Average cost	Number of campgrounds
Salaries & wages (incl. benefits) ^a	\$ 8,000	33
Advertising, promotion, publicity	\$ 1,000	59
Utilities	\$ 3,000	56
Insurance	\$ 2,000	58
Property taxes	\$ 2,000	55
Interest	\$ 5,000	42
Land use fees:		
public land lease	— ^c	1
private land lease	\$ 8,000	6
Depreciation and amortization	\$ 6,000	41
Purchased goods and supplies	\$ 7,000	45
Purchased services	\$ 3,000	21
Miscellaneous expenses	\$ 4,000	44
Total expenses ^b	\$35,000	70

^aThe average number of paid employees was 2; the average number of total employees was 4.

^bAverage total reported—not the sum of preceding figures which do not add because sample size varies.

^cLess than \$500.

Table 21.—Profitability of commercial campgrounds (before taxes), in percent

Profit	NH	NE ^a	US
Loss	41	31	28
\$0-9,999	42	34	37
\$10,000 and over	17	34	35

^aNational Campground Owners Association 1981.

Cormier, Paula L., Peggy S. Nystrom.
1981. Trends in New Hampshire Private Campgrounds During the
Seventies. NE. Forest Exp. Stn., Broomall, Pa.
12 p. (USDA Forest Serv. Res. Pap. NE-489)

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ODC: 907.2

Keywords: New Hampshire private campgrounds, growth, campground characteristics, services and facilities, costs and returns.