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Contact: Greg Fugate
osa.media@state.co.us

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Better Management of Campsite Reservations at Colorado State Parks is Needed

DENVER—The Colorado Office of the State Auditor (OSA) has issued a performance audit of Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s (CPW) management of campsite reservations. Overall, auditors found that CPW is not managing campsite reservations at state parks in a way that maximizes the use of available sites by the general public or the fee revenue that CPW could be collecting from campground use.

CPW offers more than 4,200 overnight campsites for public use, including sites with electrical hookups for recreational vehicles (RVs), tent sites, cabins, yurts, and tipis, at the 42 state parks across the state. The public made about 209,000 camping reservations in Colorado state parks during Calendar Year 2021, and CPW collected about \$14.7 million in revenue from campsite reservations.

Auditors found that more than 1,500 of the State’s 4,200 (36 percent) campsites were closed for at least one night from January 1 through September 7, 2021. Although some of the site closures may have been for legitimate reasons (e.g., sites closed to the public for use by volunteer camp hosts), auditors could not reliably verify what proportion of the closures appeared to be reasonable due to discrepancies in CPW’s reservation data. In total, these closed sites could have brought in up to \$1.9 million in additional fee revenue if the sites had been made available and reserved by the public.

Auditors also identified about 136,500 reserved nights across 32 parks from January 1 through September 7, 2021, in which the parks charged a total of about \$837,000 less than what the standard nightly fees for these campsites would have otherwise required. Regional managers approved these reductions in campsite reservation fees; however, they did not document their rationale for how

lowering the fees would encourage occupancy and otherwise increase campground use, which is required by CPW policies. CPW also refunded about \$12,500 for 268 cancelled reservations for reasons that did not qualify for a refund, according to CPW policy.

“Colorado has a great asset in its state parks system. We want to ensure that the State is maximizing campsite resources for use by all Coloradans and our out-of-state visitors. We also want to ensure that fee revenue from campsite reservations is maximized, since that fee revenue helps to fund the parks,” said Cariann Ryan, Audit Supervisor.

The audit makes six recommendations (including recommendation subparts) for improvements. The full audit report is available online at www.colorado.gov/auditor.

About the Office of the State Auditor

Under the direction of the State Auditor, the OSA’s nonpartisan, professional staff promote government accountability by conducting independent performance, financial, and IT audits and evaluations of state agencies, departments, and institutions of higher education; conducting independent evaluations of the State’s tax expenditures (e.g., credits, exemptions, deductions); tracking about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law; and operating a statewide fraud reporting hotline.

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