

COE CAMPGROUNDS



Chapter Outline

1. Introduction to Corps of Engineers (COE) Campgrounds
2. Resources for Finding and Booking COE Campsites
3. Build Your COE Campground Bucket List



Key Chapter Takeaways

- COE parks are a unique type of public park, often located along rivers and dams.
- COE parks usually have basic amenities and stunning views.
- Making reservations at COE parks during popular times can be challenging.
- COE campsites can be booked through [recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov)

What's the Big Idea?

Imagine water views from the windows of your tent or RV as you're just steps away from a lake or river. While you might think you have to reserve a campsite at an exclusive resort to have this kind of experience, you can find it at an inexpensive rate at COE campgrounds.



PART I:

Introduction to COE Campgrounds



| What's the Big Idea?

While you're probably familiar with private campgrounds and state parks, fewer campers know about Corps of Engineers campgrounds. This section will introduce you to the COE and help you understand why people love these campgrounds.

| What Is a COE Campground?

The United States Army Corps of Engineers is a military system focused on engineering, construction, and civil works. One part of its mission is to manage dams and the lands surrounding them. While private developments are not allowed in these areas, the COE has built campgrounds in many of these scenic spots.

| How Many COE Campgrounds Are There?

The COE manages more than 450 campgrounds in 43 states.

| What Should You Expect at a COE Campground?

As most campgrounds are located on lakes and rivers, water access and scenic views are the most striking features.

Many campsites are built right on the water's edge, where you can easily access the shoreline for swimming, fishing, boating, and paddling.

While some campsites are not located directly along the shore, you still have close access to the body of water.

Some campgrounds have level concrete pads, while others are gravel or grass.

PART I:

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What Amenities Will You Find at a COE Campground?

- Large campsites.
- Water access in the campground, which may include swimming beaches, docks, marinas, and more.
- Many have restrooms and shower houses with running water, but you may also find some with vault toilets or no comfort stations at all.
- Most do not have full hookups, but many offer electric or water and electric hookups.
- Most have a dump station.
- Some have other recreational facilities, which could include playgrounds, basketball hoops, picnic pavilions, and more.

How Much Can You Expect to Pay for a Campsite at a COE Campground?

The nightly fee is usually \$12 to \$50, depending on the location and amenities.

Those with an annual senior national park pass may get discounted rates of up to 50 percent.

What Are the Pros of a COE Campground?

- Beautiful campsite views, often of the water
- Large sites
- Inexpensive price
- Easy access to lakes and rivers for recreation

What Are the Cons of a COE Campground?

- Difficult to find since they're less publicized.
- Often need to book well in advance, especially for summer weekends.
- May be in remote locations, far from stores and restaurants.
- May have limited to no cell phone service or data access due to challenging locations.
- Maintenance and cleanliness varies across campgrounds, especially during busy periods.

PART I:

Introduction to COE Campgrounds



Will You Have Cell Phone Service at a COE Campground?

When making your reservation on the Recreation.gov website, click on the “Ratings and Reviews” tab. Many of the reviews include cell phone service and coverage strength information.

On the left-hand side of the page, a column marked “Mobile Coverage” compiles this data for each major carrier.

Can You Fit at a Site if Your Rig Is Over 30 Feet?

Many COE campgrounds are spacious, with wide roadways and long sites, so larger rigs will often be able to fit. Each site description will specify its length.

You’ll find very few pull-through sites, however.

Can I Bring My Kayak, Canoe, or Boat?

Yes, this is a major draw for COE campgrounds. You’ll see kayaks and canoes at many campsites, and even larger boats.

Can I Put a Tent and an RV on a Single Campsite?

Another popular feature of COE campground is that you can typically put a tent and an RV on the same campsite. Many have large grassy areas with room for a tent. Be sure to check the rules for your specific campground.



COE campsites are often great for hammocking, as well.

PART I:

Introduction to COE Campgrounds



What Do You Need to Know About Flooding at COE Campgrounds?

Since many COE campgrounds are located directly on the water, there are times when campgrounds close sections or sites due to flooding. This usually occurs after an extended period of heavy rain and not just from a single storm.

If this happens, the COE will let you know in advance and will refund your deposit.

Additional Notes:

PART II:

Resources for Finding and Booking COE Campsites



| What's the Big Idea?

Now that we've opened your eyes to COE campgrounds, you're probably wondering how to locate and book campsites at them. This section covers everything you need to know.

| What Books Are Helpful for Locating COE Campgrounds?

There are several print publications focused on COE campgrounds across the U.S. If you like flipping through a book and seeing maps and photos, a print publication is useful.

Here are some recommended books:

- *The Wright Guide to Camping with the Corps of Engineers* by Don and Joyce Wright
- *RV Camping in Corps of Engineers Parks: Guide to over 600 Corps-Managed Campgrounds on Nearly 200 Lakes Around the Country* by Roundabout Publications

| What Websites Are Helpful for Locating COE Campgrounds?

The [Corps Lakes Gateway](#) website allows you to search by state and filter by body of water. You can limit your search to locations with camping. Look for the COE symbol to identify campgrounds managed by the COE.

Once you identify the campgrounds, use [Recreation.gov](#) to make reservations and to find out more about the amenities, rules, and campsites.

| How Can You Get a Campsite at a Popular COE Park?

While on the [Recreation.gov](#) website for the park you plan to visit, click on the "Seasons and Booking" tab. This will tell you how far in advance reservations open.

The site may also specify a specific time that reservations are released each day.



If you're attempting to book for a summer holiday weekend, it's recommended to book as soon as campsite reservations are released; up to the exact minute, if you can.

PART II:

Resources for Finding and Booking COE Campsites



How Can You Find Out More About a COE Campground?

The Recreation.gov site has more information.

<i>Click on</i>	<i>To learn about...</i>
Campsite List	Individual campsites; may be filtered by availability and features; use the embedded map to see where sites are in relation to the water.
Fees & Cancellations	Rates and campground policies.
Facility Information	The geography of the region, the waterway, the onsite activities and amenities, nearby attractions, "Need to Knows" (general campground policies), and contact info.
Ratings & Reviews	Reviews from prior visitors and cell phone signal coverage.

What Campsite Details Can I Find for COE Campgrounds?

Each COE campsite listed on Recreation.gov will have the following information listed:

- Site type with details about hookups
- Check-in and check-out times
- Number of people allowed per site
- Electricity amperage (if available)
- Whether pets are allowed
- Equipment details (whether RVs, trailers, and/or tents are allowed)
- Driveway entry (back-in or pull-through)
- Driveway surface
- Maximum vehicle length
- Number of vehicles allowed
- Site width
- Additional amenities like picnic tables, firepits, and more