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# 2003 NASCIO Recognition Awards Nomination Form

*Please complete entire form.*

**All nominations must be postmarked no later than Sunday, May 18, 2003.**

Title of Nomination: Missouri State Park Camping – Available For Everyone

Project/System Manager: Marian M. Fleischmann

Job Title: Reservation Administrator

Agency: Missouri Department of Natural Resources

Department: Division of State Parks

Address: PO Box 176

City: Jefferson City

State: Missouri Zip: 65102

Phone: 573/751-8486

Fax: 573/751-8656

Email: nrfleim@dnr.state.mo.us

**Category for judging**  
(please list only one): **Digital Government – Government to Citizen**

Person Nominating  
(if different than above): Chris Wilkerson

Job Title: Director, Management Information Services

Address: PO Box 176

City: Jefferson City

State: Missouri Zip: 65102

Phone: 573/751-6525

Fax: 573/751-7749

Email: nrwilkc@dnr.state.mo.us

*Please return nominations to:*

**2003 NASCIO Awards**  
**167 West Main Street, Suite 600**  
**Lexington, KY 40507**  
**Ashley Sinclair**  
**asinclair@amrinc.net**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
**Missouri Department of Natural Resources**  
**Missouri State Park Camping – Available for Everyone**

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources launched a new centralized campsite reservation system on January 1, 2003. The system provides reservation services for 2,000 campsites at 24 different state park facilities. Services are provided by calling toll-free 1-877-422-6766 and speaking with live reservation agents or by accessing the system via Internet ([www.mostateparks.com](http://www.mostateparks.com)). The Missouri Department of Natural Resources has partnered with DAKSOFT, Inc. of South Dakota to provide the necessary reservation services.

In the past, camping customers expressed frustration with Missouri's former reservation system because there were not enough sites available to reserve (600 campsites), the parks' telephone line was always busy, customers on the job could not call between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, etc. In addition, customers often did not perceive fair treatment in securing campsites. To remedy these issues, and to provide enhanced services with limited state expenditures, a centralized reservation system was procured. Reservation transaction fees paid by the customer directly to the service provider sustain the centralized reservation system.

The centralized reservation system is accessed via the Internet by each park facility and park administrative office, thus there has been no software or specialized hardware to purchase or maintain. The system provides varied statistical reports for camping revenue, customers, campsite usage, and other collected data.

During the system's implementation, staff collected more than 57,000 pieces of information about Missouri's campsites and park facilities. This information is critical to the on-line reservation system and provides data to the reservation agents so that customers can make appropriate choices about their camping needs. Further enhancements to the on-line system include detailed campground maps and a photo of each campsite.

Missouri's centralized reservation system provides the following benefits:

- Provides fair and equal access to Missouri's state parks by all individuals, including those that live close to the park or those traveling great distances.
- Enhances services to our customers through increased hours of operation, state-of-the-art telecommunications, and Internet reservation capabilities.
- Faster, more efficient check-in for the customer.
- Increases efficient spending of tax dollars by allowing park staff hours to be redirected to other customer-service enhancement projects at the park.
- Missouri taxpayers are not paying for the services, but rather the individuals that use the system pay for the system.
- Provides valuable data to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources about their customers, campsite usage, revenue, and other statistics.
- Provides an avenue to increase campsite usage and revenue through greater exposure on the Internet and through referrals from one park to another.

Written Justification

Digital Government: Government to Citizen (G to C)

## Missouri Department of Natural Resources

### Missouri State Park Camping – Available for Everyone

#### a) Description of the project, including length of time in operation.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources implemented a centralized reservation system to provide camping opportunities to all individuals on a fair and equal basis. The reservation system's first component comprises reservations made via toll-free telephone communication (1-877-ICampMO) to live agents at a reservation center located in Rapid City, South Dakota. Its second component is an effective Web site ([www.mostateparks.com](http://www.mostateparks.com)) that processes reservations electronically. Both the telephone and Web site sales channels process reservations simultaneously from the same data and same server. The system is funded through transaction fees paid by the customer using the system. Missouri's centralized reservation system has been in operation since January 1, 2003.

The reservation system relies on a series of campsite data, and the accuracy and clarity of the data is critical to help ensure the customer or agent chooses a campsite that meets the camper's needs. This data comprises more than 57,000 entries and includes information the customer may want to know, such as pad length and width, any obstructions that would prohibit them from using a slideout or canopy, availability of shade, utilities, distance to the shower house, restricted use, etc. In addition, Missouri is the first to provide information about the slope of each campsite pad, calculated in inches per 10 feet, and first to provide a photo of each campsite on its reservation Web site.

The system operates in accordance with business rules set forth by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The reservation agents must have a clear understanding about Missouri's business rules, and the reservation software and Web site also must be able to process reservations accordingly. There are currently 45 pages of business rules from which the system operates. Two examples of a business rule follow:

***Cancel Day of Arrival without Arriving at the Park:*** *Customer cancels on camping day of arrival (3 p.m. to 3 p.m. of the first camping day) will result in a \$5 cancel fee to contractor and the forfeiture of the current camping day plus one additional camping day (or portion thereof) to MDNR.*

***Equipment Capacity:*** *Maximum capacity limits for equipment placed on each campsite are subject to each site's design and size. In general, the equipment capacity will be two sleeping units, only one of which can be wheeled, and two non-sleeping modes of transportation. If a sleeping unit is on a motorized chassis, it shall be considered as one wheeled sleeping unit and as one of the two allowable non-sleeping modes of transportation. In addition, only one watercraft/ATV trailer is allowed per campsite at parks where special management regulations allow parking along the roadway or in grass adjacent to the parking pad of a campsite.*

The service provider collects all fees (reservation transaction fees and camping fees) at the time the reservation is made and temporarily deposits these funds into a private account. The camping fees,

less applicable Missouri state taxes, are remitted to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources on a weekly basis via electronic transmission. Applicable camping fee taxes vary from county to county, and are paid by the service provider on a monthly basis to the Missouri Department of Revenue. Extensive financial reports accompany each revenue wire.

Reservation data is communicated to the park on a daily basis. The park has electronic access to the reservation system and/or receives reservation data from the reservation center. Communication is varied due to each park's individual ability to communicate electronically via Internet. Reservations are processed from 6 months to 2 days in advance of arrival. When the window closes approximately two days prior to arrival, the park is sent or retrieves an accurate Daily Arrival Report that lists all reservation customers for the reporting period. The system includes a mechanism to mark each reserved campsite.

Over the years, the parks have been equipped with standard computer equipment that is used for both reservation functions and used for other park-related business. The service provider communicates with each park via Internet connection, which allows them access to live data. Any computer with Internet capabilities can communicate with the reservation system. To implement the new reservation system, there were no purchases of specialized equipment. This was an immediate cost-savings and will be a long-term advantage as well. Many states invest considerable dollars in equipment and software to run their reservation systems and are often then locked into that particular system. Because Missouri has minimal investment, we are flexible to choose other systems, if necessary, at the end of our contractual agreement.

#### **b) Significance to the improvement of the operation of government.**

For several years, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources researched options to provide a significant number of campsites for reservations. Because of the overwhelming staff costs and investment in technology, the department chose to outsource its reservation system to a turn-key operation. This has resulted in a savings of staff hours at 13 state park facilities that formerly processed reservations for their individual park. Instead of hours on the phone each day processing reservations or turning customers away because no more sites were available to reserve, these staff are now assisting with the centralized reservation interface at the park level and performing other duties for service enhancements at the park.

The centralized reservation system collects data about our reservation customer as well as campsite usage. This data will help the Missouri Department of Natural Resources make sound management decisions about our park resources and provides an avenue to communicate with our customers for surveys, mailings, etc.

The department does not have a funding source appropriated to pay for the reservation system and is not dependent upon legislative funding from year to year. Rather, the system is funded through transaction fees paid by the customer directly to the service provider. Compared to other state and federal recreation providers who subsidize their reservation fee, this is a significant cost savings to the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for this customer-service enhancement feature of centralized reservations.

Camping fees are collected at the time the reservation is made, which has resulted in fewer staff hours for money collection procedures at the park and has provided a safer environment for the fee collectors in that they are carrying considerably less money. Because the fees are collected by the service provider, Missouri law requires that the service provider remit all applicable taxes to the Missouri Department of Revenue. This will have positive results to Missouri's total state revenue. Missouri taxpayers often receive modest tax rebates when the cap is exceeded on total state revenue.

**c) Benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agency or state.**

The most significant benefit of the centralized reservation system is the ability for our customers to reserve on-line and have access to substantial data about Missouri state parks and its campsites. Customers can reserve 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service provider also administers telephone reservations (24 state park facilities) with live operators 15 hours a day, seven days a week--a substantial enhancement over our former system of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. 5 days a week at 13 state parks.

All individuals now have the same opportunity to reserve a campsite in Missouri state parks—including individuals that live close to the park or those traveling great distances.

Taxpayers are not burdened with paying for the system. Those who use the system pay for the system.

The system results in faster and more efficient check-in for the camper.

Park rules are provided to the customer via their reservation confirmation, which has resulted in better adherence to park rules. Likewise, the reservation system promotes consistency in the park staff adhering to policies at the park level.

Campsite usage has increased from referrals (when one park is full, refer the customer to another park with available sites) and from the added exposure of reservation capabilities on the Internet.

**d) Return on investment, short-term/long-term payback (include summary calculations).  
Projects must exhibit measurable operational benefit.**

Because the centralized reservation system operates with a six-month window (six months in advance of arrival), the department will realize a net income for 2003 equivalent to 18 months of camping (January 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004).

The camping fees are deposited weekly and the department earns interest on these funds for up to six additional months as compared to Missouri's former system.

Internet reservations open up new markets for Missouri state parks. Currently, approximately 40% of all reservations are made via the Internet, which exceeds most other state and federal recreation providers.

Past research implies that Missouri's former reservation system was costly to administer. It was estimated that the staff time to process each reservation amounted to approximately \$12. This was attributed to the lengthy telephone contacts while making the reservations (5 – 10 minutes), the contacts that did not result in a reservation because all sites were already reserved, and the call volume peaks and valleys. In addition, when assigned reservation staff could not work for various reasons, other higher paid staff of the facility had to fill in. These processes, although very customer friendly, did not result in a cost-effective reservation system. With the new system, staff hours once used to make reservations has been redirected to other customer service enhancements at the park level. In these times of tight finances, the new centralized reservation system has allowed the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to do more without increased staff costs.

Revenue calculation is limited due to operations beginning January 1, 2003.

	2002	2003
January through April Camping Income Comparison:	\$437,134	\$768,448