

CAMPGROUND GUIDE

Manners, please: Emily Post for the outdoors crowd

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Whether you are camping alone in a tent for a single weekend or with your family in a fully-loaded RV for an entire season, there are certain rules of etiquette that must be followed at any campground.

Derek Lone, who has owned and operated Timberline Campground in Benzonia for 15 years, outlined some of the most important tenets of camping etiquette and the biggest problems he has run into while running a campground.

On noise:

Many campgrounds, especially those in which campers are in close proximity, have designated "quiet hours," during which all partying, music and loud talking should cease. If you are being too loud, you will likely receive several warnings, Lone said, but repeated noise violations can result in ejection from the campground.

On pets:

For many, pets are a vital part of camping, but if not properly supervised, they can ruin the experience for others, said Lone.

"You've just gotta pick up after your dogs," he said.

On trash:

Although some campsites require campers to take care of their own garbage, many campgrounds, especially those catering to RVs, provide dumpsters. However, as Lone said, many people insist on leaving garbage bags out by the road as if someone is going to come

by and pick them up.

"Occasionally we'll move (the bags), but you don't want to do that too often or they begin to think that's where they're supposed to put it," he said. "Sometimes we'll just leave (the trash) out there and let them figure it out."

On reservations:

Timberline Campground and similar sites are often busy or even full during the summer season. Seasoned campers make reservations months in advance, so don't expect to just drive in on a Thursday and find a free space for the weekend, said Lone. "We're mostly full from June through mid-October, so you can't just cruise in."

On locals:

"Locals are a big problem," Lone said, explaining that they often rent out their houses for the summer, so they come to the campground while their houses are occupied by visitors.

The problem, according to Lone, is that the locals bring too many people with them.

"They have friends coming over all the time — they just draw too many people" he said, which leads to increased noise and disruption. "Also, they get behind on the payments."

Lone said that because of the "local problem," he doesn't even advertise locally; he would rather draw business from other areas.

On big groups:

Similarly, big groups of campers, specifically groups with multiple RVs, can be problematic, Lone



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It's a good idea to call ahead to make sure the campsite has available spaces.

said.

"A lot of times, they haven't seen each other in a year, and they want to party when they get there — to whoop it up."

Consequently, many campgrounds are hesitant to book large groups. Some designate separate areas for them.

On young people:

You might expect that the younger the camper, the more rowdy and difficult. However, Lone said that younger people are actually easier to deal with.

"Most of the time, they don't even know they're doing anything wrong — they don't have a clue. They will usually stop if you tell them," Lone said.

On Alcohol:

Alcohol is probably the biggest problem for most campgrounds.

"I don't mind a drink," Lone said. But when people get drunk, it causes problems.

Campers on vacation often see the evening and night as the perfect time to party, but it can be just as bad when the campers are seasonal residents.

"A lot of construction guys will come for the season. With some of them, they work all day and drink all night," Lone said.

Lone recently had to kick a camper out of Timberline for repeated disturbances.

"He let his dog run wild; he would party and get drunk and bother the

neighbors ... We gave him five warnings, and we finally asked him to leave," Lone said.

On blacklisting:

Lone said that if a person or group is so disruptive that they are kicked out of the campground, they will often be marked down as troublemakers in the campground office computer and will not be allowed to book a site in the future. At Timberline, the computers have a file on each camper that contains comments on their previous stays, such as "partied until 2 a.m."

"But it's hard to tell if someone's going to be a problem," Lone said. "You usually don't know until they get there."