

Governor Noem Proposes \$10 Million Campsite for Custer State Park

A proposal by Governor Noem could catapult Custer State Park into major problems many National Parks face today.

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA, USA, January 31, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- South Dakota is known for its wide-open spaces, independent citizens, and a hands-off approach to government involvement in typically private-sector lines of business. That's why it was quite a surprise to many South Dakotans to hear of a new \$10-million, 176 campsite proposal for [Custer State Park](#). Governor Noem rolled out the proposal to increase campsites in the park by 50%, stating that there had not been any expansion in 41 years.

Government involvement in traditionally private business has long been remembered in South Dakota, going back 100 years to the Republican Progressive Peter Norbeck, South Dakota's 9th Governor. Norbeck is admired by many, and rightly so. He changed the face of the landscape and had numerous accomplishments under his belt that would be the envy of any politician today. A few of his accomplishments, however, are etched into the minds of South Dakotans as much as [Mount Rushmore](#), Needles Highway, or Badlands National Park.



Daniel Milks taking a drive through Custer State Park



My XO Adventures Touring in the Black Hills of South Dakota

Those are the South Dakota cement plant, the formation of a state-owned hail insurance program, stockyards, grain elevators, and even a coal mine. Only the first is generally accepted as a financial success. The detractors would say that the cement plant stymied private businesses from entering the field. They'd be right, and as with most state enterprises, it provides an unfair advantage in an otherwise balanced ecosystem.



Custer State Park is the second-largest in the country. It's comprised of 71,000 acres thriving with herds of Bison, Elk, Pronghorn (Antelope), Bighorn Sheep, and deer. It was an accomplishment to create, restore and preserve. Peter Norbeck had quite a hand in the creation of the park, and hats off to him for it. Since its creation in 1906, Custer State Park has acted as a sanctuary for many animals and can be credited as a major player in bringing back the bison from extinction. Countless visitors have come from all over the nation to visit the area, creating long-lasting memories for families that include the park in their vacation planning.

Custer State Park is extraordinarily special. So special is the park that it hasn't added campsites in 41 years! There's no doubt the demand exists, but at what cost? Projections show revenue generated from the proposed campsite would reach \$500,000 a year, paying the State of South Dakota back in only 10 years. While this might be true, there comes a ripple effect that goes beyond dollars.

A 50% increase in campsites opening in year one would have an impact on privately-owned campgrounds, which is a serious concern to those involved. Beyond that, the two-lane [Wildlife Loop Road](#) would become increasingly congested. At the peak of the season, Wildlife Loop Road is already overburdened. Standstills occur at the sight of an antelope, or when the Bison freely cross the road. Rangers do their best to untangle these "Buffalo Jams." More people means more traffic, more accidents, more trash, more noise, more pollution, and less nature.

Migration patterns within the park would change along with the look and feel. While creating more tax dollars widens the eyes of politicians, it isn't a plus in the minds of many locals. South Dakota is a state whose residents want to protect, and for good reason. Governor Noem has done her part to bolster the friendly business environment and appears headed for reelection on November 8, 2022. This doesn't mean that a popular politician is immune to putting forth ideas with good intentions but bad outcomes. Noem, like Norbeck, is faced with a decision that could drastically alter the future of Custer State Park. Its trajectory could end up looking a lot like a Busch Gardens Safari experience if care isn't taken. If you think that's far-fetched take a look at just about every National Park in the country.

At a time when the National Park Service struggles with solutions to the overcrowding, proposals

for Custer State Park seem to want to run headlong into the problem. Many parks are already implementing programs to improve overcrowding by limiting the number of visitors on a given day. Many working in the park will tell you, we're approaching those limits right now. Little has been said at the impending "event horizon" that no doubt South Dakotans will be facing in the not-so-near future.

If 10 million dollars can be made available to Custer State Park, the government may want to consider getting ahead of the issue and using the money to improve the existing experience. Perhaps low-interest loans could be made to the current campsite owners to improve their facilities. More funds are needed for conservation. Currently, 50% of the radio-collared bighorn sheep are dead due to mycoplasma ovipneumoniae, a pneumonia-causing bacteria that nearly wiped out the herd in years past.

Park Rangers are stretched thin trying to reign in the number of UTV's deviating from established trails. One doesn't have to look far to find the scars across beautiful meadows and fields. Forestry management braces each year for the fire season as well as a lookout for the infamous pine beetle, which devastates swaths of trees due to a more compact canopy and an increase in heatwaves. The streams and creeks of the Black Hills have been reduced to a trickle, resulting in a huge impact on the ecosystem. The riparian habitats are shrinking, a bellwether of what may come.

There are many reasons to spend money in Custer State Park, but expanded access and government interference in private business are not at the top of the list. Norbeck was a visionary, a conservationist, and a republican. His vision has been realized, now is the time to manage it properly.

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