



# One with Nature

*New 'green' campground preserves genuineness of the outdoors for visitors to popular state park.*

*By Jason Sweet*

The timing couldn't have been better for outdoor enthusiasts who live near Harrington Beach State Park. In 2009 camping facilities opened in the park, which lies along a mile of Lake Michigan shoreline in northeastern Ozaukee County, Wisconsin, a little more than a half-hour's drive north of Milwaukee.

"Camping numbers at state parks may take a hit during recession periods," said Ken Anderson, construction representative at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). On the other hand, "Parks closer to larger cities actually see an increase in numbers," he added.

Previously a day-use-only facility without a campground, the 638-acre park attracted around 500 to 1,000 visitors each weekend during recent summers. In 2005 the WDNR opted to add a campground – the first new state-operated campground in more than 20 years – to accommodate Harrington Beach State Park's many visitors. The Wisconsin Division of State Facilities retained Ayres Associates to design the new campground, which included 70 individual campsites; a group campsite to accommodate 30 people; a six-unit unisex flush toilet/shower/well house building; a drinking water well and water distribution system; an emergency hand pump; six pit toilets; roads through the campground; and three parking areas.

With the WDNR's desire to make the project as "green" as possible, the design team investigated ways to reduce environmental impacts. As Ayres Associates project manager Kristine Anderson put it, "All of us – the WDNR, Ayres Associates, our subcontractors – really tried to disturb as little of the natural landscape as possible."

To limit stormwater runoff, the campground's road system and three new parking lots were designed to minimize the amount of new impervious surface.

Efforts to control the visual impact of the project included paint color choices that help the facilities blend into the environment. This is in addition to setbacks of several hundred feet from the roadways that run adjacent to the park. Kristine Anderson said from May through October, when the campground is open, the full foliage makes the park barely visible from the road.

The campground also uses subdued, low-wattage lighting, which is generally directed downward rather than into the sky, where it would disturb stargazers' views, particularly important for visitors using telescopes in the park's recently constructed retractable-roof observatory.

Ayres Associates project engineer Matthew Maederer said "fitting the design with the existing topography of the proposed campground" was critical to the project approach. More specifically, "preserving tree canopy was a major goal of the project," he said. The WDNR and Ayres Associates conducted extensive preliminary planning to formulate several possible campground concepts. From these initial concepts, a successful blending of the best ideas emerged for the final plan. The WDNR played an integral role in the layout of campsites, designating specific trees to remain standing and carefully locating the living area on each site.





Ayres Associates designed a high-capacity well to provide water throughout the campground. Services included pump selection, distribution design, coordination with the architect regarding the well house building design, permits and approvals from the WDNR, specification writing, and bidding assistance.

The unisex toilet-shower building was designed as part of the campground facility to provide "creature comforts" for all campers. Architectural subconsultant Dorschner Associates designed the building, which is being used as a prototype for future toilet-shower facilities. Ayres Associates provided the following design services for the building: septic system, site grading, parking lot design, permits and approvals for the septic system, specifications writing, and bidding assistance. A second septic system was designed for recreational vehicle use.

Site subsurface conditions created several construction hurdles. A clayey soil lens was encountered, which posed

adverse road construction conditions. An engineered solution included road grade modifications. This was in addition to breaker run (3-inch crushed aggregate) and underdrain piping, which were used to stabilize the camp road subsurface.

The park sits on what had been the Lake Shore Stone Company limestone quarry between 1901 and 1920. A company town also had grown up around the quarry, and the foundation of one home was encountered during construction of a parking lot for the campground project. When at all possible, the WDNR attempts to preserve such structures. Ayres Associates shifted the parking lot to avoid disturbing the remains of the home.

During construction Ayres Associates provided construction observation and administration services such as processing requests for information, processing change orders, construction progress meetings, on-site observation when required, and contractor/owner coordination. For

almost every challenge on the project, Ken Anderson noted, the problem was resolved through good communication with Ayres Associates.

The campground design was completed in August 2007, and construction was completed in 2009. Last year the campground was opened for a preliminary run from August to October. Camper turnout was outstanding, Ken Anderson said. The excitement for the campground extends to local support from the nearby community of Belgium, he said. The park opened May 5 for its first full season of overnight camping.

With the availability of electrical campsites and modern restroom facilities, the campground is hardly a primitive one. And yet, with a major urban center 35 miles away and a town no more than a mile away, the campground conveniently provides an "in the woods" experience, thanks in large part to the strategic arrangement and design of the campsites. And there's also the draw of the beach

area just a quarter-mile hike from the campground.

More than a century and a half ago, naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote in his classic work *Walden*, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach." Thoreau had moved to the woods outside Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived in a small cabin for two years. Campers heading to Harrington Beach State Park may not bring such lofty philosophical aspirations. But behind the need "to get away," as the phrase goes today, is there not also something compelling people to explore those "essential facts of life?" Thanks to the new campground at Harrington Beach State Park, many in southeastern Wisconsin have another place to learn what the woods can teach – even if only for a few days at a time. ■

