

# RV PARKS & CAMPGROUNDS SELLING OUT – A BCLCA MEMBER SAYS IT LIKE IT IS!

According to the British Columbia Lodging & Campgrounds Association, in the last year-and-a-half, British Columbia has lost around 40 campgrounds. This is the equivalent of about 2,510 sites. Given the fact that RV shipments to BC were up 40% in 2006 over 2005\* (CRVA) and there are a million RVs on the road in Canada, this is very concerning. So why are we losing campgrounds? Land Values. Imagine the following scenario: You have a small campground that you enjoyed running for a number of years, but your customers want more services/amenities, 50 amp hook-ups, pull-thrus and room for large rigs with sliders. Your current facilities are aging and require repair. You could take out a loan for a large sum of money to do the necessary upgrades or you could sell the campground to a condo developer for millions and retire in style. Not much of a decision! And that is where most of these campgrounds are going, to condo development. As the baby boomers start to retire there is a growing demand for vacation properties and retirement homes in beautiful locations. Consider Osoyoos. Fifteen years ago there were 12 campgrounds available for nightly camping. This summer there are 4 operating. By next summer one more will be closed and there are concerns about whether another one may be closing as well. This may leave only 2 campgrounds in Osoyoos for 2008. The ironic part of this is that Osoyoos is marketed and deemed to be a beautiful tourist destination. This popularity is pushing up land values. Last summer a campground in Osoyoos went on the market at \$19.5 million. People said there was no way it would sell for that price, yet an offer was accepted in the fall for the full asking price. The situation in Osoyoos is merely an example of what is happening Province wide and across North America. As an example, Florida lost 40 campgrounds in one year.

The State is very concerned about this for obvious reasons. The Palm Springs area has 1,000 fewer sites than 3 years ago. Back in Canada, Westbank, in Kelowna has lost 4 parks in the last couple of years and is in a worse situation than Osoyoos. We are losing our private parks and our public parks were never designed to accommodate today's RV's. A related issue is that out of the RV resorts and campgrounds that are still operating, less and less continue to offer nightly camping. The trend is to move towards seasonal sites or to sell off the lots. The reason for this is that it is far more work to manage a campground with constant check-ins and check-outs than it is to have a consistent customer that stays for the long term. With the trend towards seasonal sites, owned sites and loss of campgrounds to condos, our net number of sites that are available for nightly rentals is decreasing rapidly. The good news is that the Provincial Government has formed a working group to look into this situation. (*Ed: BC Lodging & Campgrounds Association is a key part of this group.*) Its purpose is to: "Propose actions that can be taken by government and industry to increase the number of available campsites for recreation vehicles." It is time for the RV industry to work together to address these issues and try to stem the tide. GoRVing has done a wonderful job of raising the profile of the RVing lifestyle and we have great RVs designed for various kinds of experiences, so we need to work together to ensure that RVers have parks to go to.

*Margot Bartsch  
VP of Business Development  
Holiday Trails Resorts*

\*Shipments to BC in 2006 were 12,963, a 40% increase over 2005. Travel trailers are the most popular in Canada, followed by Fifth Wheels. (Info supplied by CRVA).