

Campgrounds can open for snowbirds with no place to go, but will they?

Sarah Sobanski

Seasonal campgrounds are off Ontario's non-essential list for emergency housing — but park owners can still choose to remain closed.

[Six Foot Bay Resort](#) in Buckhorn is one park that's chosen to open sites for residents who don't have another Canadian residence, though owner Garry Hall said it doesn't feel like a choice.

“It's not right. Why should they come and use the property when no one else can? Those people that chose to go to Florida should not be our problem,” Hall said. “It's one of those things ... We shouldn't have to be faced with the problem, but they've kind of dumped it on our plate.”

The news comes after some confusion with the province's initial edict that deemed seasonal campgrounds non-essential during the pandemic and said they had to close — or more aptly, not open — except in the case of residents who needed to complete their quarantine period and had nowhere else to go.

Canadian residents, returning from winter homes outside the country, wondered where they would live if their campgrounds couldn't open for the summer season. [Some Kawartha Lakes snowbirds found themselves struggling to find places to stay when their parks told them they wouldn't open.](#)

The province has since [amended restrictions on seasonal campgrounds, allowing them to open for residents whose only home is in the park, during the pandemic.](#) This only applies to trailers and recreational vehicles with hydro, water and sewage servicing. All shared facilities in the park, such as bathrooms, must remain closed.

Hall said the residents who only have homes in his park will be isolating until the park opens. He said that might be harder to ensure in parks larger than Six Foot Bay, a small family-owned resort that opened in 1949.

“They're not going to get a free run of the place,” he said. “We've made it known that we don't really like this idea.”

Hall pointed out letting only some residents into the resort isn't fair to the residents that have permanent Canadian residences outside of the park. He said 95 per cent of the residents have paid their fees, and he can't afford to refund them and run his business.

“We worked all winter,” he said, noting the resort is doing what it can to work with residents, but it won't be claiming any government assistance.

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“Everything has to be paid. The people renting, they’re renting the site whether they use it or not. I think pretty well all of the places are doing the same thing ... A lot of places that have mortgages, they couldn’t do that. They’d be out of business.”

A Kawartha Lakes seasonal park resident, who reached out to Mykawartha.com, said she was concerned about affording living outside of her park, which wasn’t opening. She had rented outside of the park locally all winter and found it “very tight.”

Others who wrote in also expressed concerns over costs, noting many seasonal residents are seniors on fixed incomes, and wondered how they would pay to rent as well as pay park fees.

“I understand not wanting to open up these parks to everybody, but for those of us that use these places as our summer homes, we should be allowed to go there,” said another resident. He noted he saw the government helping those laid off but not those now having to pay for two places to live.

He added, “On top of this, if we do have any savings, now is not the time to be cashing them in with the drop in the stock market and value of our dollar.”

“Why is it we are not able to follow the same rules at our park as we do at home?” asked seasonal Fenelon Falls park resident Jim Barr. “Parks are not that busy at this time anyways, mostly retirees. This is nonsense. I have a new trailer I make payments on and I will have to pay my full rental season.”

“I think it’s up to each individual business to run things the way they think is fair, to the people and the business, and that’s about all they can do,” Hall said.

Some seasonal campgrounds, such as the Kawartha Lakes-owned Centennial Park, have rules that residents must have another Canadian residence outside of their park. Hall said he might look at establishing similar regulations in the future.

“The onus should not be on us,” he said. “But again, this is one of those things; this might not happen, hopefully, for another 50 years.”

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