

Dept. of Natural Resources: Gov. Evers directs DNR to close 40 State Parks, Forests and Recreational Areas

Posted on Thursday, Apr 9, 2020

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MADISON, Wis. - The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is modifying its state park operations on a case-by-case basis to maintain the safest environment for visitors and staff.

Due to unprecedented crowds, litter, vandalism and the need to protect the health and safety of our visitors and staff, Gov. Evers has directed the DNR to close the following Wisconsin State Parks, Forests and Recreational Areas effective Friday, April 10:

Northeast Region

High Cliff State Park

Southeast Region

Big Foot Beach State Park, Harrington Beach State Park, Havenwoods State Forest, Kohler-Andrae State Park, Kettle Moraine State Forest Lapham Peak, Loew Lake, Mukwonago River, Northern Unit, Pike Lake, Southern Unit, Lakeshore State Park and Richard Bong State Recreational Area

South Central Region

Aztalan State Park, Belmont Mound State Park, Blue Mound State Park, Cadiz Springs State Recreational Area, Capital Springs State Recreational Area, Cross

Plains State Park, Devil's Lake State Park, Fenley State Recreational Area, Governor Dodge State Park, Governor Nelson State Park, Lake Kegonsa State Park, Lower Wisconsin Riverway, Mackenzie Center, Mirror Lake State Park, Natural Bridge State Park, Nelson Dewey State Park, New Glarus Woods State Park, Rocky Arbor State Park, Sauk Prairie State Recreational Area, Tower Hill State Park, Wyalusing State Park, Yellowstone Lake State Park, Gibraltar Rock State Natural Area, Pewits Nest State Natural Area, Parfrey's Glen State Natural Area and Dells of The Wisconsin River State Natural Area

Several parks have had record attendance recently. For the weekend of April 4-5, High Cliff had an estimated 16,457 visitors, Lapham Peak had an estimated 11,168 visitors, Kohler-Andrae had an estimated 8,469 visitors, Devil's Lake had an estimated 7,647 visitors, Richard Bong had an estimated 3,884 visitors, and Mirror Lake had an estimated 2,870 visitors.

Harrington Beach had an estimated 3,639 visitors for the weekend and has had more than 5,600 estimated visitors so far for the month of April. By comparison, the average monthly visitors at Harrington for the past 12 years is 9,695 for the entire month of April.

Under the Safer at Home order, we must do all that we can to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The DNR understands the public's need to enjoy the benefits of nature during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the Safer at Home order recognizes outdoor activity as an essential activity, people wishing to take a break outdoors are advised by public health officials to exercise in your local neighborhoods and maintain a social distance of 6 feet or more.

"We know there are benefits to getting outdoors. By not doing this would put people's lives at risk," said DNR Secretary Preston D. Cole. "With the weather warming we are seeing increases in visitors and a myriad of challenges surrounding social distancing. In order to protect the public, this is a necessary step."

In efforts to help minimize the transmission of COVID-19 at parks, the DNR waived fees, and closed state park offices, visitor centers, and non-essential buildings. Currently, the safety of our staff and visitors supersedes continuing operations at

certain locations. If the public does not follow social distancing guidelines and vandalizes property, more state parks may have to close.

The DNR urges visitors to do their part when visiting a park. Most Wisconsin state parks, forests and other day-use areas [do not have garbage or recycling bins](#). When you visit, you will need to take your garbage and recyclables home with you. We all play a vital role in taking care of our natural resources. Following the [Leave No Trace principles](#) helps protect the land for generations to come.

The DNR continues to receive the most up-to-date information and will adjust operations as conditions change. We will also continue to monitor on-the-ground circumstances each day to determine if more park closures or an entire state park system closure becomes necessary. Before visiting other properties, please check with [individual parks](#) regarding changes to park operations.

We thank you for your patience and cooperation as we all go through the COVID-19 emergency together and apologize for any inconvenience. This is a rapidly evolving situation. For updates, visit the [DNR website](#) or follow @WIDNR on [Facebook](#), @wi_dnr on [Instagram](#), or @WDNR on [Twitter](#).

For specific information regarding the COVID-19 we encourage the public to frequently monitor the [DHS website for updates](#), and to follow @DHSWI on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), or dhs.wi on [Instagram](#). Additional information can be found on the [CDC website](#).