Select Coastal State Parks Closed Due to Overcrowding

March 26, 2020

Bureau of Parks and Lands announces steps to help slow the spread of coronavirus

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's Bureau of Parks and Lands (BPL) today announced that, with the support of Governor Janet Mills, it is taking additional proactive measures to protect the health and safety of Maine people from the threat of COVID-19. Effective Friday, March 27 at 12:01 am, the following Midcoast and Southern Maine coastal State Parks and beaches are closed until April 8: Reid State Park, Popham Beach State Park, Fort Popham, Fort Baldwin, Kettle Cove State Park, Two Lights State Park, Crescent Beach State Park, Scarborough Beach State Park, Ferry Beach State Park, and Mackworth Island. (Note that the closure could be extended depending on the spread of the potentially deadly virus.)

Overcrowding in the past few weeks has made it increasingly difficult for the public to implement appropriate physical distancing. As a result, the department is closing select coastal parks and beaches and monitoring visitation at all State Parks. Additionally, last weekend, the BPL recorded heavy use at Sebago Lake State Park, Range Pond State Park, Wolfe's Neck State Park and Bradbury Mountain State Park. With warm temperatures, overcrowding may become an issue requiring additional measures in these and other State Parks. The BPL is calling on visitors to be mindful of crowding and to seek alternate close-to-home spots to get outside, including back yards and neighborhoods, land trust trails, wildlife management areas, and public lands.

> *"Closing any of our State Parks is the last thing we want to do," DACF Commissioner Amanda Beal stated. "We are keeping as many parks as possible open, and we encourage people to look for ways to take much-needed breaks in the outdoors that allow them to avoid crowded places and maintain physical distancing."*

The department will work closely with local, county, and state public safety officials as it modifies park operations. Other measures taken to date by the BPL include canceling all park events and closing all playgrounds and public restrooms. Additional steps under consideration for this weekend involve restricting vehicular traffic and parking at some parks to reduce the concentration of visitors.

The BPL has set up a webpage with a list of park closures and descriptions of curtailed services at www.parksandlands.com/covid19. During the closures, BPL staff will continue patrolling parks and will work with local and state law enforcement to enforce all coronavirus guidelines and park regulations.

To support Maine CDC's efforts to flatten the COVID-19 curve throughout the state, BPL is asking the public to play their part. Flattening the curve is our shared mission. With working together in mind, here are a few reminders developed by the Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and Inland Fish and Wildlife on how to get fresh air while staying safe.

Avoid crowds

- Visit a lesser-known spot and explore places close to home. Consider visiting a nearby Wildlife Management Area, or less trafficked state park, public land, or local land trust.

- Have a plan B (and C). If your first destination has a busy parking lot, go to the next spot on your list! Maine Trail Finder is a great resource.
- Get outside earlier or later in the day to avoid peak times, and please keep your visits brief.
- Recharge in your backyard and neighborhood! Backyard adventures in the time of coronavirus are an excellent idea. Remind friends and neighbors to stay safe by tagging Instagram pics with #backyardpark.

Know before you go

- If you are exhibiting symptoms related to COVID-19, or if you have recently been exposed to COVID-19, please stay home.
- Stay at least six feet away from other people.
- If you do decide to go for hike, remember trails are likely to be slippery from ice and mud, which can increase the difficulty level. Stick to easy trails to avoid injuries and further stress on health care resources.
- Be sure to tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Be prepared for limited access to public restrooms (use the bathroom before you leave home).
- Always leave no trace, including cleaning up after your pet, so be sure to bring a disposable bag to carry out any waste.
- And remember to take precautions to prevent exposure to ticks by wearing light-colored pants, closed-toe shoes, and applying EPA-approved bug repellent.

The BPL is closely monitoring the coronavirus situation and following guidance provided by the Governor's Office and the Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Maine Emergency Management Agency.

Answers to questions about Maine State Park Closures

Q: Can I enter one of the CLOSED Maine State Parks anyway?
A: No. Entering a closed State Park is considered trespassing.

Q: Can I park on the street or road outside of an OPEN Maine State Park and walk in?
A: Everyone is required to respect parking signage on roads adjacent to State Parks and to respect our neighbors.

Q: How might my visit to an OPEN State Park be different than usual?
A: With schools and businesses closed, our State Parks are seeing above-average use for this time year. With increased numbers comes the need to be extra vigilant and follow precautions advised by the Maine CDC. Guidance includes frequent washing of hands for at least 20 seconds using soap and hot water, coughing and sneezing into tissues, and promptly disposing of the tissue, and avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth. It is also important is to prevent gatherings of 10 or more people and to practice physical distancing of at least six feet, from person to person. For the latest Maine CDC guidance, visit their website.

Q: What do curtailed services mean?
A: At OPEN State Parks, hours of operation are 9 am to sunset unless otherwise posted; all park events and programs are cancelled; playgrounds and restroom facilities are closed to the public. Please note park access may change without notice.

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