State Parks Open for Solitary Exercise, Some Facilities Closed

April 3, 2020

PIERRE, S.D. – Game, Fish and Parks officials say that while some facilities are closed, state parks remain open, allowing visitors to engage in solitary recreation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Parks and open spaces are essential resources for physical health and mental wellness," said State Parks Director Scott Simpson. "We believe you can safely be active outside while following the social distancing and other guidelines provided by Governor Noem and the CDC."

The SD Department of Health says that the parks provide a good opportunity for individuals to get out and enjoy some much-needed exercise.

"While enjoying your time outside, remember to continue to follow the social distancing guidelines of staying 6 feet

apart," said Colleen Winter, Division Director, South Dakota Department of Health.

Simpson said visitors should choose activities such as walking, biking, birdwatching and fishing that avoid shared spaces and maintain social distancing guidelines. Park offices are closed, and staff are primarily working from home through May 1. Shared spaces in the parks, such as comfort stations, fish cleaning stations, and visitor centers are also closed through at least May 1. Campsites, cabins and lodges are open for stays at this time. Cabins and lodges will be reservable based on the availability of cleaning resources and staff at each park. Park staff will be reaching out to cabin and lodge reservations holders before their stay to discuss appropriate steps.

Simpson encourages visitors to consult gfp.sd.gov before heading to the parks, as the situation could change. "We are evaluating the circumstances every day, as is the rest of the country," he said. "We understand that you may have questions and concerns about visiting during this time. Everyone must make mindful decisions as we care for ourselves and our families, and staying home is an option available to you."

If you do visit the parks, Simpson offers the following guidelines:

• Refrain from using the parks if you are exhibiting symptoms of illness.

• Follow CDC guidance on personal hygiene prior to and during use of parks.

• Be self-sufficient. Prepare for limited access to public restrooms, showers and water fountains.

• Be self-contained. Leave these public spaces as clean as you found them.

• Limit contact with shared spaces and surfaces, like door handles or picnic tables. Use hand sanitizer if you do touch them.

• While on trails, warn other users of your presence as you near, and step aside to let others pass.

• Follow CDC guidance on the recommended size of social gatherings. Maintain proper physical distance at all times.

• Observe CDC's minimum recommended social distancing of 6 feet from other individuals at all times. If this is not possible, find an alternate location or depart that space.

• Be respectful of check-in and check-out times so staff have time to properly clean between guests.

• Consult gfp.sd.gov for up-to-date guidelines on park use.

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