DNR Closing Public Lands to Recreation Activities

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In order to stop the spread of COVID-19, all public lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources (nearly 6 million acres) will be closed to the public through at least April 8.*

***Please note that a newer press release found here extends the closure of public lands through May 4**.

The state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today announced the closure of all DNR-managed lands to the public. The closure goes into effect tomorrow – **Thursday, March 26** – and will last through at least **April 8**.

This step is a continuation of the agency's efforts to protect people by stemming the spread of the coronavirus. On Monday, the agency, along with the State Department of Parks and Recreation and State Department of Fish and Wildlife, closed all campgrounds across the state through April 30.

Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, the elected official who leads DNR, issued the following statement:

"This was not an easy decision. We treasure our forests and trails and beaches as places of rejuvenation and refuge from the chaos of daily life. But, I cannot ignore the unfortunate reality of what we saw this weekend: crowded trails, people shoulder to shoulder, and large gatherings. This behavior undercuts the sacrifices that Washingtonians of all means and ability are making in order to adhere to social distancing. And it undercuts the heroic efforts of our doctors, nurses, and first responders who risk their lives each day responding to this unrelenting epidemic.

"This behavior also makes clear that, while we have taken drastic measures, we have not done enough when it comes to closing areas where large crowds gather and communicating the importance of staying at home and avoiding physical contact with others.

"The disruptions we are experiencing are difficult and challenging – and unprecedented in our lifetimes. But they are necessary. We must bend the curve. And if we all do our part, these temporary disruptions will save countless lives."

.Additional Resources

- You can find more frequently asked questions here: www.dnr.wa.gov/closure
  (plain text version available at the bottom of release)

- See additional DNR operational notices related to COVID-19 by following this link: https://www.dnr.wa.gov/slider

About DNR Recreation
Led by the Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, DNR manages 1,200 miles of trails and 160-plus recreation sites in 3 million acres of working forest state trust lands and 92 natural areas. DNR trust lands keep forests development-free, provide clean water,

and generate revenue for public services and school construction.

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Recreation & Public Access Closure Frequently Asked Questions

DNR Will Be Closing Public Access to State Lands to Keep Everyone Safe During the COVID-19 Outbreak

How long is this closure?
For two weeks, from Thursday, March 26 through Wednesday, April 8. During this period, DNR will assess the situation to evaluate whether lands will remain closed past April 8.

Does this apply to all DNR Managed Lands?
Yes, this applies to all DNR managed lands, which include trailheads, trails, roads, free flight launch sites, campgrounds, water access sites, day-use areas, and dispersed recreation (camping, off-trail hiking, hunting, target shooting, etc.)

Why is the closure necessary?
The decision to close is a difficult one. Recreation provides physical and mental health benefits. Unfortunately, too many people were not following recent safety guidelines while out on our landscapes. At this time, it is extremely important that we follow the direction of scientists and doctors to stay home except for essential needs.

Isn't being out in the wilderness safer than being elsewhere?
In some ways, yes, but other people also think so. When everyone heads to their favorite recreation area, suddenly people are parking together, sharing facilities, passing on the trail. Closing access is a significant step, but it's necessary and temporary. The sooner people follow stay home direction, the sooner we can welcome folks back.

Why is camping closed?
Campgrounds bring people together and that is why we cherish outdoor adventure. However, this creates a potentially unsafe setting. Visitors stay for days at a time, cook and eat in close proximity, share restroom facilities, and have limited resources for following disinfection and hand washing recommendations.

We weighed many scenarios, and came to the conclusion that the most effective course is to fully close camping for now. We recognize that this will create additional challenges for some people, however, it is imperative that we take action to limit risk and exposure for everyone.

How will this be enforced?
We take this closure seriously and expect the public to also. Ultimately, we are counting on people to do the right thing and comply. It is important that we all abide by this closure to protect the safety of everyone. Our enforcement staff will be patrolling our landscapes. If you are found on state land, our staff will provide information about the closure and ask you to leave. Citations can be issued to individuals who refuse to leave.

Does this apply to commercial activities?
No. Consistent with the Governor's order, essential business functions of DNR will continue on state lands. That includes timber harvests, which support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, and our agriculture lands that support our food supply. Social distancing will be adhered to by these workers, and any non-essential elements will be done via telework or suspended.

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