GAME AND PARKS EXPANDING CAMPING OPPORTUNITIES

Jerry Kane May 20, 2020

LINCOLN, Neb. – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will open first-come, first-served camping on May 22 at Smith Falls State Park, 35 state recreation areas and wildlife management areas for all camping units, including tents.

This decision is prompted by overwhelming demand for camping opportunities, challenges in bringing additional park locations and campsites into the reservation system as planned, and public comments regarding the desire to camp even without normal facilities, which will remain closed. Those include shower houses, designated swimming beaches, playgrounds, and park activities. A limited number of primitive restrooms will be available.

Park regulations allow for up to eight people per campsite. The 35 state recreation areas that will be open include Alexandria, Bluestem, Box Butte, Bridgeport, Buffalo Bill, Cheyenne, Conestoga, Cottonwood Lake, Dead Timber, Enders, Gallagher Canyon, Keller Park, Lake Maloney, Long Pine, Memphis, North Loup, Olive Creek, Pelican Point, Red Willow, Riverview Marina, Rock Creek Lake, Rockford, Sandy Channel, Sherman, Stagecoach, Summit, Sutherland, Swanson, Union Pacific, Verdon, Wagon Train, Walgren Lake, War Axe, and Wildcat Hills.

Mormon Island State Recreation Area near Grand Island and Danish Alps SRA near Hubbard will not offer camping, as they are near communities with high COVID-19 incidence.

Game and Parks will open camping on wildlife management areas where it was allowed previous to the COVID-19 health emergency to help distribute camping activity.

“We made the earlier decision to allow limited RV camping, by reservation only, consistent with health directives that encourage limitations on crowd size and our current capacity to protect and serve the public,” Game and Parks Director Jim Douglas said. “We are pleased to be able to offer more opportunities on smaller park areas that typically attract less people. Busier areas such as Branched Oak Lake, Medicine Creek Reservoir and Lake McConaughy, which attract larger crowds, will retain RV camping by reservation

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The prevailing health recommendations for social distancing and group sizes less than 10 to meet the state Directed Health Measures still apply, and it's incumbent upon park visitors to be responsible for their own actions to protect their health, the health of their community and that of other park users.

For the park locations in the online reservation system, camping will continue to be limited to advanced reservation at OutdoorNebraska.gov/reservations, and only for self-contained recreational vehicles. No first-come, first-served camping is allowed at these locations, and no tents will be allowed at this time, but expanded camping may be allowed in the near future. These areas are: Branched Oak, Calamus, Chadron, Eugene T. Mahoney, Fort Kearney, Fort Robinson, Fremont, Indian Cave, Johnson Lake, Lake McConaughy, Lake Minatare, Lake Ogallala, Lewis and Clark, Louisville, Medicine Creek Reservoir, Merritt Reservoir, Niobrara, Pawnee, Platte River, Ponca, Rock Creek Station, Two Rivers, Victoria Springs, Willow Creek, and Windmill state recreation areas, state parks and state historical parks.

Game and Parks cautiously will phase in additional park services and amenities in consort with health directives and advice from health departments.

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