Forest Campsites and Redden Lodge to Stay Closed

The Delaware Forest Service will implement a new fee-based online reservation system for camping and the historic Redden Lodge later in the summer. Camping and lodge rentals will not be available until the system is operational.

DOVER, Del. – Effective June 1, in accordance with Delaware's Phase 1 Reopening Plan, outdoor gatherings of more than 25 people will be permitted at Delaware's state forests, subject to compliance with the Delaware Division of Public Health's "Guidance on Outdoor Gatherings."

While the state's ban on short-term rentals will be lifted on June 1, camping at Blackbird State Forest and Redden State Forest, as well as the Redden Lodge, will be closed to the public until further notice. Plans are underway to implement a new online, fee-based reservation system expected to be operational later this summer. There is no fixed date on the launch of the new system.

The Delaware Forest Service has been working to create additional campsites at both Blackbird and Redden, which will be open when the registration system goes live. The new system will also handle advance bookings for the popular and historic

Redden Lodge. Users will be able to make camping and lodge reservations for future dates, receive electronic confirmations, and make payments and receive refunds via credit card.

Assistant State Forester Kyle Hoyd says the plan is to improve the overall camping experience and provide greater access.

> *"Our main goal is to be able to increase reservation efficiency and ease for the general public. The new registration system will allow us to better manage this resource we provide. The minimal fees we are charging will go towards upkeep and maintenance, as well as enhanced amenities such as new fire rings, camping grills, improved sites and parking areas. Visitors will be able to enjoy more than 65 miles of state forest trails that are available for public access," Hoyd said.*

Delaware State Forests (Blackbird, Taber, and Redden) remain open for hiking, horseback riding, outdoor recreation, and other uses – subject to guidance from the Division of Public Health on proper social distancing, use of face coverings. There are currently no access fees to visit a state forest and use the trails.

State Forest offices will also remain closed to public visitors until further notice.

The Delaware Forest Service will honor only planned outdoor events scheduled prior to the COVID-19 shutdown. Outdoor gatherings of up to 250 people in an unenclosed space, such as weddings, may only be carried out if there is strict adherence to guidelines for protecting vulnerable populations, including: proper hand hygiene, adequate social distancing, face coverings, and other measures outlined in the Phase 1 Plan.

For more information, contact Kyle Hoyd at kyle.hoyd@delaware.gov.

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