NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY | Department of Environmental Conservation

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DEC and State Parks Encourage Responsible Recreation During COVID-19 Public Health Crisis

State Agencies Launch New #RecreateLocal Hashtag, Encourage New Yorkers to Discover Outdoor Spaces Close to Home

Common Sense Guidelines Promote Safe Recreation Practices to Help Stop the Spread

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (State Parks) today encouraged New Yorkers to engage in responsible recreation during the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis. DEC and State Parks recommendations incorporate guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the New York State Department of Health for reducing the spread of infectious diseases and encourage New Yorkers to recreate locally, practice physical distancing, and use common sense to protect themselves and others. In addition, DEC and State Parks launched a new hashtag - #RecreateLocal - and encouraged New Yorkers to get outside and discover open spaces and parks close to home.

DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos said, "New York State is home to some of the most spectacular public lands and parks in the world. In uncertain times, these special places can serve as an oasis from stress, fear, and anxiety. We encourage people to get outside-close to home-and follow these basic guidelines to help ensure your safety and the safety of your loved ones."

State Parks Commissioner Erik Kulleseid said, "New Yorkers are turning to our parks for exercise, stress relief, and a healthy nature break in these difficult times. To keep these places safe and healthy for everyone, we need to adjust the ways we enjoy our parks. Keep visits short and local, avoid crowds, and practice physical social distancing."

Getting outdoors to walk, jog, hike, ride a bicycle, fish, or visit a park or state lands is a healthy way to stay active, spend time with immediate household family members, and reduce stress and anxiety when practicing social distancing. While indoor spaces and restrooms at State Parks and DEC's public facilities may be closed out of an abundance of caution to prevent community spread of COVID-19, many parks, grounds, forests, and trails are open during daylight hours, seven days a week.

State Parks, lands, forests, and facilities are monitored by Park Police, Forest Rangers, Environmental Conservation Police Officers (ECOs) and other staff. These parks, lands, forests, and facilities and visitors will incorporate physical distancing to limit the potential spread of COVID-19. In addition, these officers and staff respond to, and assist, local agencies with search and rescue missions, wildfire suppression, and other response activities. Following this guidance will prevent unnecessary burdens on, and dangers to, State resources and local responders during the ongoing COVID-19 response.

For the safety of all visitors and to reduce the community spread of COVID-19, DEC and State Parks are undertaking steps to reduce public density at State Parks, State Lands, and facilities:

- Closing all playgrounds;

- Limiting access to athletic courts and sporting fields;
- Canceling all public programs and events at State Parks, Lands, Forests, and facilities until further notice;
- Closing all indoor visitor facilities, such as nature centers, environmental education centers, visitor centers, and historic houses to the public until further notice;
- **Camping changes:** all state-operated campgrounds, cabins, and cottages are closed to overnight visitation through April 30. All visitors with reservations will be issued a full refund. We ask for your patience as refunds are processed. New York State has also suspended all new camping, cabin and cottage reservations for the 2020 season until further notice. We are assessing campground status on a daily basis. If you've made a reservation for the season beginning May 1, and we determine your campground is safe to open, your reservation will be honored. However, visitors who wish to cancel an existing reservation may do so and receive a full refund. Thank you for your patience as we work to protect the safety of our visitors and staff;
- State Parks is closing all state golf courses; (updated 4/9/20)
- DEC is closing access to DEC-controlled fire towers to the public. Trails and the summits to the towers remain open, but the towers themselves present a potential risk with multiple people climbing the stairs, in close quarters, unable to appropriately socially distance, and using the same handrails; and
- Limiting parking. If the parking lot is full, visit a different location to recreate responsibly. For visitor safety and the safety of others, do not park on roadsides and only park in designated parking areas.

While enjoying outdoor spaces, please continue to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)/State Department of Health (DOH) guidelines for preventing the spread of colds, flu, and COVID-19:

- Stay home if you are sick, or showing or feeling any COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, coughing, and/or troubled breathing;
- Practice social distancing by keeping at least six (6) feet of distance between yourself and others, even when outdoors;
- Avoid close contact, such as shaking hands, hugging, or high-fives;
- Wash hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available; and
- Avoid unnecessary contact with surfaces that are often touched, such as doorknobs and handrails.

DEC and State Parks also encourage visitors to State Parks, State Lands, and other parks to:

- Stay local and keep visits short;
- Visit in small groups limited to immediate household members;
- Maintain distance from others while in places where people tend to congregate, such as parking lots, trailheads, and scenic overlooks;
- Avoid games and activities that require close contact, such as basketball, football, or soccer;
- Avoid playground equipment like slides and swings and other frequently touched surfaces;
- Do not share equipment, such as bicycles, helmets, balls, or Frisbees;
- If you arrive at a park and crowds are forming, choose a different park, a different trail, or return another time/day to visit; and
- If parking lots are full, please do not park along roadsides or other undesignated areas. To protect your safety and that of others, please choose a different area to visit, or return another time or day when parking is available.

New Yorkers over 70 years old or with a compromised immune system should not visit public spaces, including those outdoors. These New Yorkers should remain indoors or spend time in the backyard or other personal outdoor space, pre-screen visitors by taking their temperature, and require visitors to wear masks.

New Yorkers who are sick or have had contact with someone who is sick in the last 14 days should stay home and spend time in the backyard or other personal outdoor space. Do not visit public outdoor spaces.

Visitors to the Adirondack and Catskill Parks are reminded to always follow the Hiker Responsibility Code and avoid busy trailheads. Find the trails less traveled and visit when trails may not be as busy during daylight hours. DEC also encourages New Yorkers to be safe and sustainable when recreating outdoors.

Learn more about how you can protect natural spaces when exploring outdoors by following the seven principles of Leave no Trace. Additional information is available on the DEC website.