Limited camping returns to state parks June 9

SALEM, Ore. – Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) will offer limited camping at many state parks starting June 9. State park camping closed statewide March 23 in an effort to contain the spread of coronavirus and limit travel, especially to smaller communities and rural areas.

A list of which campgrounds will open June 9 is still being finalized. That list will be published on oregonstateparks.org by the end of May. Not all parks and all services will be available. Most of the campgrounds opening accept reservations, but some first-come, first-served state park campgrounds may open as staff and funding are available. No state parks will be open for camping until June 9.

Those campgrounds that do open will honor existing tent and RV reservations starting June 9, and will accept new reservations from one day to two weeks in advance, instead of the usual nine months in advance. Reservations will still be made through OPRD’s contracted vendor, Reserve America at oregonstateparks.reserveamerica.com. RV and tent campers without reservations will be welcome at open campgrounds as space permits.

Reservations for most yurts and cabins, and group camping and group day-use, are still subject to cancellation. Visitors holding those reservations will be contacted if a cancellation is required. Two main forces determine when a state park campground can open. Some communities, such as the north coast, are not yet ready for overnight visitors from outside their area.

A more widespread factor relates to funding. The Oregon State Park system is not funded by taxes, but by revenue from park visitors, a small share of the Oregon Lottery, and a portion of state recreational vehicle registrations. The revenue needed to operate state parks has fallen drastically since March, meaning one of the most popular state park systems in the country is being operated by about half the usual staff.

With a skeleton crew and limited means to hire more, there will be far fewer staff available to help visitors and address common problems such as noise and pets. Trash, landscaping, and cleaning services will all be reduced. Interpretive activities and ranger programs will be few and far between, if at all. Most restrooms are expected to be available, but some shower facilities may be closed. Service, and whether a park is open or not, is subject to change depending on health conditions around the park, available staff, protective equipment, and cleaning supplies.

Visitors can help state parks stay open:
• Choose a park as close to home as possible. Don’t travel if you’re sick.
• Visit with members of your household.
• Bring everything you need with you: trash bags, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, food, water. Pack out everything you bring in.
• Be gentle with the trails, restrooms, showers, benches, and picnic tables.
• Take it easy on yourself by enjoying low-key, familiar activities.
• Be a good neighbor. Keep your pets on a leash, your site clean, and respect quiet hours from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. every day.
• Keep at least six feet away from people from outside your household, and wear a face covering when you can’t. Avoid crowds even if you have a face covering.
• Cover coughs, and wash your hands regularly.
• Watch our Prepare + Care Welcome video at https://youtu.be/IN7qsM08I9k.

“Oregon needs what its parks can provide,” says Lisa Sumption, OPRD Director. “This is less service than Oregonians are used to, and we’re doing our best to stretch the budget, but it will take continued cooperation and support from visitors to make this work.”

A more complete statement from Director Sumption is online at oregonstateparks.org.

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