

## **Frequently Asked Questions – State Parks and Beaches**

### **April 1, 2020**

#### **Q: Are state parks and beaches open or closed?**

To protect public health and safety, the Governor announced the temporary closure of Rhode Island state parks and beaches beginning Friday, April 3. DEM asks the public not to drive to parks and beaches. The entrances will be blocked, there is no public parking, and these facilities are closed to vehicular traffic. DEM is not prohibiting Rhode Islanders from walking or riding bikes at parks and beaches if they are not congregated in groups of five or more and are adhering to social/physical distancing rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19. DEM will be patrolling these sites and dispersing groups of people. Given the serious nature of COVID-19, DEM will continue to provide any needed updates regarding changes to this guidance.

#### **Q: How long will this closure last?**

The closure is open-ended. DEM will continue to work closely with the Governor's office and the Rhode Island Department of Health for guidance on this issue. Although we do not know when parking areas will reopen, DEM will continue preparing to get parks and beaches ready for the summer season.

#### **Q. If I can't go to the park, what can I do?**

A. People are encouraged to recreate close to home – in their backyards, on their stoop, or a walk around the block. Together with partners, DEM has developed a list of 50 fun, nature-based activities that Rhode Islanders can engage in at home or in their backyards or local neighborhoods. The activities are for all ages and can be done individually or with family members. The complete list is available online in both English and Spanish, and includes apps and virtual learning opportunities, reading and educator resources, DIY and home projects, and outdoor activities. Get started at <http://riparks.com/getoutside.php>

#### **Q: Are state management areas still open?**

A: Yes. Management areas remain open for the time being, but this is a situation that DEM will be monitoring very closely. We ask all Rhode Islanders to abide by local and state stay-at-home orders, and limit travel whenever possible, even for approved recreation activities. If you do go to a refuge, preserve, management area or other open spaces, and see that parking is limited or lots are full, you should change your plans and take your walk back home. Given the serious nature of COVID-19, DEM will continue to provide any needed updates regarding changes to this guidance.

**Q: Will the bike paths be closed?**

Currently the bike paths are open. However, this is a situation that will be monitored very closely and may change in the future. Please remember that parking areas at parks and beaches are closed. We ask that people avoid bike paths if they are crowded and maintain social distancing and groups of no more than five. Given the serious nature of COVID-19, DEM will continue to provide any needed updates regarding changes to this guidance.

**Q: How will DEM enforce this? Will people be ticketed? Fined?**

DEM always tries to educate first and ask people to follow the rules. If people are blatantly ignoring the new rules, however – if they choose to congregate at state parks and beaches, if they're not adhering to the physical distancing rules – and one of our Environmental Police Officers observes that behavior, yes, they may be cited if actions and behavior are not corrected. It would be a civil violation – the equivalent of a traffic ticket.

**Q: What are the safety guidelines for being outdoors? How do I hike and bike safely?**

There are many ways for residents to safely enjoy the outdoors, as long as they take the necessary precautions by adhering to the Governor's guidance on not gathering in groups of more than five and practicing social distancing. People should avoid trails and bike paths if they are crowded and maintain social distancing on all bike paths and trails. For details on safety guidelines, visit <https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>

**Q: How will this affect the opening of state campgrounds?**

The opening of state campgrounds is delayed until May 1 at the earliest. All campground reservations through April 30 have been cancelled. The state's reservation agent, Reserve America, is contacting those with reservations during this period with information about the cancellations. Reserve America is waiving all cancellation fees and will issue refunds to the credit cards used to make the reservations. Due to the high volume of cancellations, refunds could take up to 30 days to process.

**Q: Are private campgrounds open?**

No. The Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation has asked private campgrounds not to open at this time due to COVID-19. For information, visit <https://dbr.ri.gov/>.

**Q: When will the golf course at Goddard Memorial State Park open?**

DEM already had announced that the opening of the Goddard Park golf course would be delayed. The golf course will be closed as long as the state parks are closed.

**Q: What guidance can you offer regarding Opening Day of the trout season?**

Opening Day of the trout-fishing season will not occur on its traditional date, which this year is Saturday, April 11. DEM still is working out a plan to modify Opening Day. As soon as we have a plan in place, we will announce it. While we understand the frustrations of anglers wishing to have definitive answers about Opening Day, we ask for your patience. As soon as we have a plan that ensures social distancing to minimize the spread of COVID, we will announce it to the freshwater angling community. We know people want to go trout fishing!

**Q: Are non-trout waters open?**

Yes. Rivers, lakes, and ponds that are not stocked with trout are open for fishing year-round. This includes most of freshwater areas in Rhode Island. During this time of social distancing, fishing should be enjoyed as solitary experience or with members of your immediate household, not as a group activity. For a map of trout-stock waters visit <http://dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/TroutWaters.pdf>

**Q. Are DEM boat ramps open?**

Yes, excluding ramps located within state parks that remain closed until further notice. Outdoor activities, including boating, are a great way to relax and enjoy nature. However, please remember that social distancing guidelines still apply. All boaters are encouraged to consider the size of the vessel, the number of people on board, and the ability of people to stay six or more feet apart. As a reminder: when on the water, personal floatation devices should always be worn.

Visit DEM's website for a list of [public boat launching sites](#). Given the serious nature of COVID-19, DEM will continue to provide any needed updates regarding changes to this guidance.

If you need to register your boat or renew your boat registration please use the [online portal](#). Upon completion of the online renewal, boat owners will be able to print a temporary registration that allows the vessel to be used during the two-week period while the registration is being processed and the decal mailed.

Boaters can register new vessels by mail by filling out a registration application, outboard motor registration application, and title application. [Required registration documents are located here.](#)

**Please note: DEM advises everyone to follow guidance about COVID-19 from Governor Raimondo and the Rhode Island Department of Health. More information about COVID-19 and Rhode Island's response can be found here:**  
**<https://health.ri.gov/diseases/ncov2019/>**