



DCNR Facilities are Closed, State Park and Forest Lands are Open for Activities Like Hiking

By DCNR

BUSHKILL - Stay calm, stay home, stay safe. While travel in Pennsylvania has not been restricted, the best advice to slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) is to stay home. But what about healthy, outdoor activities?

We know, and many studies have shown, that outdoor recreation is good for us. Nature makes you nicer and is good for mental health; exercise, especially outdoors, serves as an immune booster; and doctors are prescribing outdoor activities to help with physical health issues. These things are important during this unprecedented time.

We all need to do our part during the nation's public health crisis caused by COVID-19. DCNR is acting to help protect employees, partners, volunteers, and visitors while still allowing opportunities to connect with nature.

State Park and Forest Events Canceled Amid Concerns about the Potential Spread of COVID-19

On Monday, DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn announced that all facilities at state park and forests in Pennsylvania will be closed for 14 days (until Tuesday, March 31) to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

During this time, the public is still able to access trails, lakes, forests, roads, and parking areas for passive and dispersed recreation, such as hiking.

"People will have access to state-owned open spaces to continue to enjoy the healthful benefits of recreation and being outdoors," Dunn said. "However, as part of Pennsylvania's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, all of the buildings at state parks and forests including the park and forest offices, and all restrooms will be closed, and all events and public educational programs are canceled."

This is a change from the initial action taken to close day use areas in state parks, including parking areas, in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties. Public lands are now open in these counties as well as statewide, and parking areas are accessible.

"We heard from many visitors who were disappointed about not being able to hike and enjoy nature in our state parks, as they saw it as a good alternative to avoid crowds and stay healthy," Dunn said.

"We learned from that, and evolved our direction to allow access to public lands while encouraging visitors to follow social distancing recommendations."

Closed facilities include:

- Park and forest offices and visitor centers

- Restrooms

- Campgrounds, cabins, and all forms of overnight accommodations

- Public programs, events, and trainings are canceled

- Trails are open for hiking, although there will not be any restrooms available. Water access areas and boat launches are open for boating and fishing.

- DCNR rangers, park managers, and state forest district managers remain at work to ensure security and public safety. Other staff, such as maintenance workers and environmental educators, is limited.

Social Distancing in the Outdoors

"We encourage practicing social distancing while enjoying open spaces including avoiding groups and crowds, and state park and forest visitors should use the bathroom before they leave home,"

Dunn said.

To help avoid exposure to COVID-19 and still enjoy the outdoors:

- Adhere to the social spacing guide (minimum 6 feet) between people and don't recreate in groups

- Take hand sanitizer with you and use it regularly

- Avoid touching your face, eyes, and nose

- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with a tissue or flexed elbow

- If you are sick, stay home until you feel better



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State Tax Filing Deadline Extended to July 15

By Matt Szuchyt

HARRISBURG – The deadline to file Pennsylvania personal income tax returns with the Department of Revenue for 2019 has been extended by 90 days to July 15, according to Senate Appropriations Chairman Pat Browne.

The new deadline mirrors the decision made by the Internal Revenue Service, which extended the federal tax-filing deadline by 90 days earlier this week.

All penalties and interest on 2019 personal income tax payments will also be waived through the new deadline. Taxpayers who make quarterly estimated payments will also receive an extension. Both first and second quarter payments will be due July 15.

Taxpayers are encouraged to file returns electronically to enable the Department of Revenue to process returns while state offices are closed. Tax returns can be filed for free online through the PADirectfile system.

Free tax forms and instructions are also available at www.revenue.pa.gov.

Vote-By-Mail Option Available for Upcoming Primary Election

HARRISBURG - As Pennsylvania lawmakers work to contain the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, I would like to remind residents that they have the option to vote by mail in the upcoming primary election scheduled on April 28. Also know that conversations have begun in regards to moving the primary election date.

As part of a broad election modernization package that was approved by the General Assembly and signed into law in 2019, voters now have the option to request a ballot by mail. Previous law required a voter to request an absentee ballot only if he or she would be physically unable to go to the polls on Election Day.

Voters must complete an application for a mail-in ballot no later than 5 p.m. seven days prior to the election, and completed ballots must be returned no later than 8 p.m. on the day of the election.

Pennsylvanians can learn more about voting by mail and complete an application for a mail-in ballot at www.VotesPA.com/ApplyMailBallot.

Senate Resolution Allows Members to Vote Remotely

HARRISBURG - The Senate took an important step to continue its operations safely by passing a resolution allowing members to vote remotely. The temporary emergency rules will ensure the Senate can continue voting even when members cannot be physically present due to coronavirus mitigation efforts that are ongoing statewide.

The resolution creates a mechanism for members to file bills electronically and to participate in committee meetings and session through the use of communications technology. The emergency powers are scheduled to expire July 31, 2020 or 10 days following the expiration of the governor's emergency order, whichever is sooner.

In order to ensure transparency, session was announced well in advance and streamed live for the public at www.PAsenateGOP.com. Video of session is available below:

3/18/20 - Senate Session

Vote-By-Mail Option Available for Upcoming Primary Election

In order to limit in-person contact during the upcoming Primary Election currently scheduled on April 28, more voters may be interested in voting by mail. Voters will have this option as part of a new law that was approved last year that included some of the most significant changes to the state's election laws in decades.

Voters can learn more about how to vote by mail at VotesPA.com/ApplyMailBallot.

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