

State parks and trails open

From the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

Wisconsin's state parks and trails will remain open to the public. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources continues to receive the most up-to-date information and will adjust operations as conditions change. We will continue to monitor on-the-ground circumstances each day to determine if park closures become necessary.

Recent guidance from the Department of Health Services (DHS) recommends canceling or postponing gatherings of 10 people or more to help protect Wisconsinites, visitors and staff from the spread of COVID-19, particularly those who are most vulnerable to infection and severe disease.

"We recognize that spending time outdoors benefits both physical and mental health. Getting outdoors can also help relieve stress, especially during this public health emergency. A quiet walk does wonders to reduce our anxieties," said DNR Secretary Preston D. Cole. "The DNR is committed to providing a safe environment for our visitors to enjoy, while protecting the health of our staff."

Parks, law enforcement and property staff will be diligently ensuring groups larger than 10 do not congregate as well as provide routine sweeps of state park system properties.

On March 19, the DNR implemented the following changes to the operation of all state parks and recreation areas across the state consistent with guidance provided by the Wisconsin Department of Health and Department of Administration.

Here is what to expect:

- Voluntary registration fees
 - Admission is voluntary at this time via self-registration or electronic kiosks
 - The closure of all state park offices, visitor centers, and non-essential buildings for duration of public health emergency
 - Bathrooms remain open
- The DNR closed the follow-

ing state buildings to the public: park headquarters, offices, visitor centers, nature centers, research stations, ranger stations, shooting ranges, fish hatcheries, shelters, showers, concessions, and indoor group camp buildings on all DNR owned properties open to the public.

Restrooms on state properties will remain open given there are enough resources, cleaning supplies and access to personal protective equipment for staff to maintain them.

Properties will continue to be staffed and outdoor recreational opportunities (hiking, trails, fishing, hunting, etc.) remain open at this time.

Visitors are reminded to practice proper personal hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to limit group sizes to under ten people when enjoying state properties.

Camping and special permits

All campsites (Individual, group, and indoor) are closed through April 30, 2020. Refunds will be issued to all customers.

No new reservations will be accepted until further notice.

DNR staff or Camis Reservations staff will be reaching out to individuals with current or upcoming group camping reservations to issue refunds. Any other questions regarding camping reservations can be directed to the Camis Call Center at 1-888-947-2757.

Our customer service representatives also continue to provide service via phone at 1-888-936-7463 from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily.

For updates on event cancellations and building closures at DNR properties, visit the DNR website or follow @WIDNR on Facebook, @wi_dnr on Instagram, or @WDNR on Twitter.

This is a rapidly evolving situation. For specific information regarding the COVID-19 we encourage the public to frequently monitor the DHS website for updates, and to follow @DHSWI on Facebook and Twitter, or dhs.wi on Instagram. Additional information can be found on the CDC website.

How local townships are responding to virus

By Tristan McGough
Special to the Reporter

With ever-shifting official pronouncements from world, federal, state, and county level authorities, it's little wonder that local municipalities are buffeted against the rocks of this current pandemic involving COVID-19.

Town of Milton Board Chair Brian Meyer sums it up succinctly, "We're taking reasonable precautions, but every day the situation changes and we're responding accordingly."

Meyer points out that throughout the day he is receiving COVID-19 related healthcare messages from the governor's office, Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services, FEMA, the CDC, U.S. Health and Human Services, several federal agencies, including the Oval Office, and world health organizations that are compiling, analyzing and reporting data.

Town of Milton's Clerk Marcy Granger said, "The town hall is closed to the public until further notice. We have a table set up for permit processing, and we've extended dog licenses until June."

Meyer amplified, "Basically, we've set down two things. First, there are visits by appointment only, relating to town business. Second, we've postponed or cancelled public meetings, like the fire commission that was scheduled to meet this Thursday, as well as upcoming municipal court."

"As for our next town meeting, it's not until April 13, and there's nothing critical if we have to cancel it at this time. We'll wait to make that determination a little later, though it's not unfairly reasonable to say that, given the trend, the likelihood is that we will cancel it."

Town of Sumner is doing likewise with its chairman issuing a proclamation: declaring, "For good and sufficient cause, I, John Dohner Jr.,

Chairman of the Town of Sumner, Jefferson County, Wisconsin, with authority under Wis. Stats 323.14(4) do close the Town Office to the public during an emergency [COVID-19 Pandemic]...."

The proclamation further states, "The Election on April 7, 2020, will be conducted in conformance with the assigned protocols of the Wisconsin Election Commission and Order of the Governor of Wisconsin or any other official with requisite authority."

"Electors will be limited to three (3) at one time within the Town Hall for the purpose of voting."

Glendan Rewoldt, Sumner Clerk, had told the board at its regular meeting on March 16, 2020, "However, we're unable to comply with the Election Commission's recommendations to install a hand washing station at the front doors, and we're not able to get enough Purell hand sanitizer to ensure everybody kills whatever germs may be on their hands when they come in or go out."

She indicated that the lack of hand sanitizer was due to none being available on commercial shelves because of hoarding.

As for the Town of Dunkirk, they currently have enough sanitizer and are using it liberally at their town hall. Unlike Sumner—where permits and the like are passed through the mail slot and received by medically-gloved staff—Dunkirk Clerk Melanie Huchthausen said, "We've set up tables in the town hall and people keep their distance. There are new pens in boxes that a resident takes one from and then I wash it down with sanitizer after they've left. There is also hand

sanitizer on the tables that they're instructed to use before and after they fill out the form or permit."

Town of Albion's clerk, Julie Hanewall, revealed that their town hall has remained open, too, and as of yet, they have not limited their operating hours. However, she said, "I'm waiting for the board to make a decision on all that. I'm very busy with online (absentee) voting, which we're encouraging."

Every township is encouraging online registration for absentee voting, where, once a resident requests it, an official ballot will be sent them so they can vote their preferences and send it back through the mail.

The entire April 7 election is hanging in the air, but a good many clerks and town officials are recommending to county and state authorities that they postpone the upcoming elections.

"I for one," Rewoldt states, "am 77-years old and don't want to be exposed to this virus. Two stand-by election workers already said they won't serve. How are we to even process the election without enough workers? How are we to protect them and the public?"

"This is bigger than anyone realizes. It's hitting rural communities and not just the big cities."

Rewoldt gives a concrete example to bring the point home. "My daughter is an RN who works for SSM in Janesville, and her best friend, another RN, tested positive and is quarantined at home with her family. Both her in-laws tested positive, too."

Town of Porter's chairman Dave Viney related his state of

the municipality. "I keep taking questions from citizens every day. We're waiting to hear from the county and state just what is going on and what needs to be done to ensure safety."

Viney disclosed, "I can tell you this, we'll probably meet for our Annual Meeting, only to postpone it under law until a later date. And, already we've had to take extraordinary measures with our recycling center, which we have open every Saturday."

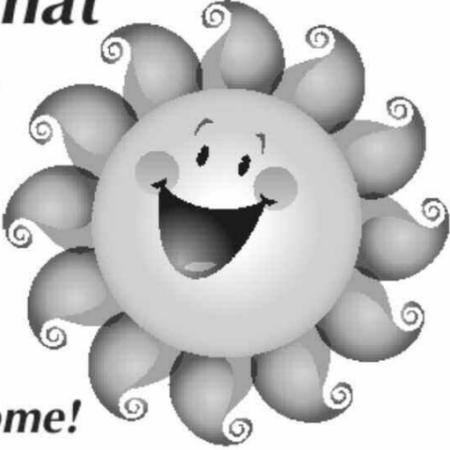
"Usually we have a monitor at the center to collect money and help out, but last Saturday, due to concerns, we left the center unattended and anyone who came in took care of business by themselves."

Like other local townships, the Town of Fulton has posted their latest notice entitled: "REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT ONLINE – REFRAIN FROM COMING TO THE TOWN HALL." Further, "in light of Governor Evers' order, the Fulton Town Hall is closed for all non-essential business."

Fulton's clerk Connie Zimmerman issued an email stating, "In an attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19, the Town of Fulton will be changing how some services are handled at the town hall. At this time the clerk/treasurer will still be present during regular office hours in order to assist citizens with questions, requests or payments via phone or email only."

Zimmerman, Meyer and other local officials at the town level are all awaiting further clarification and instructions on safe, daily governmental operations, as well as the impending spring election.

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