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DEEP Issues State Park Operations Plan Heading into Summer Season

Press Releases



News Release Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

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DEEP Issues State Park Operations Plan Heading into Summer Season

State Parks Remain Open with Restrictions; Shoreline Swimming Areas Open; Inland Swimming Areas Closed, Capacity Limits and Social Distancing Guidelines Remain in Place

As we approach Memorial Day weekend, the traditional launch of the summer season, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) has released an **operational plan** (<https://portal.ct.gov/deep-parkscovid19>) that outlines for DEEP staff and visitors current guidelines around the operation and use of Connecticut state park grounds, trails, beaches, boat launches and other areas as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

While some of the information is guidance that DEEP has shared previously, the plan contains a good amount of new information, such as DEEP's current plan for the swimming areas it oversees, and provides a "one stop shop" for the latest information on outdoor recreation offerings administered by DEEP.

As the state begins a phased re-opening of its economy, the vast majority of state parks remain open, as they've been throughout the pandemic. The restrictions that they've operated under, such as daily capacity limits, social distancing guidelines for visitors, and use of face coverings, also remain in place.

Swimming and Beaches:

Last week, Gov. Ned Lamont, along with the governors of New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, announced that they would open beaches in their respective states effective Friday, May 22. Gov. Lamont also announced that in Connecticut, state parks that feature beaches along the Connecticut shoreline will be open May 22, though with capacity limitations, and visitors are advised to follow social distancing guidelines.

At this time, DEEP is permitting swimming only at shoreline State Parks (not inland State Park swim areas). Guidance from the state Department of Public Health indicates that recreational swimming is not a known form of transmission of COVID-19, in saltwater or freshwater. At this time, DEEP is making decisions about permitting swimming at State Parks based on considerations of potential crowding and the ability to maintain social distancing onshore, at beach locations.

It is DEEP's assessment at this time that shoreline parks that feature beaches, operating under limited capacity, can safely accommodate visitors on beaches, provided they follow recommended social distancing guidelines. Visitors to shoreline parks must maintain 15' of space from other beachgoers (blanket-to-blanket). This distance will allow for a 6' radius around each person or family and a 3' walkway in between groups.

Based on the very limited size of our beach and swim areas at inland state parks, and current social distancing guidance, DEEP will close beaches at inland State Parks, and prohibit swimming at inland State Parks. Again, this operational decision is based on the potential for on-shore crowding, not a concern of risk of transmission in freshwater. Park staff will monitor beach closure and educate the public to ensure compliance with the closures. DEEP will continue to review this policy in alignment with public health recommendations and will consider the reopening of designated swim areas on a case-by-case basis.

If you choose to visit a shoreline state park that features a beach, visitors are encouraged to select locations closest to home, and consider visiting early in the morning before crowds gather. At least 6 feet of social distancing must be maintained between persons, and groups over five remain prohibited. Visitors should recreate with members of their immediate household and not meet up with others. Visitors should bring face coverings and use them whenever they are in proximity to others. Face coverings should not be worn in the water. Visitors should not expect that restroom buildings will be open, but most locations will have portable toilets available.

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DEEP will reduce parking capacity and close beaches for the day if social distancing cannot be maintained, and will make adjustments to operations and consider longer-term closures if the situation warrants. Updates on closures are posted on the state parks Twitter feed, [@CTStateParks](#) .

Lifeguards will not be on shoreline beaches in Connecticut state parks early in the season. These beaches are currently posted as "No Lifeguards on Duty." It is expected that shoreline beaches will begin lifeguarding when adequate staffing, training, and safety practices meeting DEEP standards are in place. Lifeguards will be provided training to reduce the risk of virus transmission in the course of their duties, including providing CPR. Guidance for lifeguards is available from the [American Red Cross](#) . Lifeguards will not be posted at inland beaches while swimming is prohibited at those beaches.

Staff in DEEP's Water Monitoring and Assessment Program will be monitoring water quality at the shoreline parks open for swimming. The water quality at the beaches will be tested for the presence of infectious diseases using standard bacteria indicator species. Residents will be able to find swimming area closure information at DEEP's state parks Twitter feed, [@CTStateParks](#) , and will soon also be able to find that information on the DEEP website at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Recreation-Information/State-Swimming-Area-Water-Quality-Report> (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Recreation-Information/State-Swimming-Area-Water-Quality-Report>), or on DEEP's toll free Water Quality Information Phone Line at 1-866-287-2757.

Connecticut municipalities continue to make decisions regarding the beaches and swimming areas they oversee. DEEP has been in consultation with municipalities during the pandemic, and will continue to be. DEEP's [operational plan](#) (<https://portal.ct.gov/deep-parkscovid19>) is available for municipalities to adapt to their needs if they wish to do so.

Limited swimming capacity at state parks, combined with restrictions made by municipalities around the swimming areas they oversee, mean that residents will have to plan beach and swimming excursions well in advance, and be ready with a back-up plan if their first choice is closed.

State Campgrounds, Cabins, and Youth Sites:

As was recently announced, state Campgrounds, Cabins, Youth sites, Backcountry and River Camping sites are closed until at least June 11. Additional campground reservations for the 2020 season have been postponed for the time being to prevent the need to reimburse the public for future reservations if campgrounds remain closed.

Other options to open campgrounds are being considered that minimize staff and public risk. The decision will be based on current public health guidance, cleaning protocols and the availability of adequate staff and appropriate personal protective equipment.

Other Opportunities:

Aside from the four shoreline State Parks that feature beaches, there are numerous other parks that offer non-beach activities that still provide "fun in the sun." Walking, running, biking, hiking, boating, and fishing are all great ways to get in the outdoors, and can be enjoyed in places all over the state. For a list of the 142 state parks and forests Connecticut has to offer, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Listing-of-State-Parks> (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Listing-of-State-Parks>). For a list of the 117 state boat launches around the state, visit: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boat-Launches/Boat-Launches-in-Connecticut> (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Boating/Boat-Launches/Boat-Launches-in-Connecticut>). Information about fishing and hunting is also available on DEEP's website, www.ct.gov/DEEP (<http://www.ct.gov/DEEP>).

As has been the case on nice weather days, many parks reach capacity and close to new visitors for the day. To avoid closures, DEEP's guidance is the same as it's been for several weeks now: visit a less-traveled park, earlier in the day; check DEEP's state parks Twitter feed, [@CTStateParks](#) , or the DEEP Boating Division's Twitter feed, [@CTBoatingInfo](#) , to make sure the park or boat launch you want to visit isn't already closed, and have a back-up plan ready in case it is when you get there; and also don't forget to consider municipal parks, a trail maintained by another organization, such as the Connecticut Forest & Park Association (<https://www.ctwoodlands.org/> ) , or a land trust (<http://www.ctconservation.org/findalandtrust> ).

If you do visit a DEEP-administered outdoor recreation area, it's important to do so safely. For a complete list of DEEP's social distancing recommendations in the outdoors, visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/COVID-19-Updates-CT-State-Parks-and-Forests> (<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/COVID-19-Updates-CT-State-Parks-and-Forests>).

As we move forward into the summer season, DEEP will continue to monitor and assess public use and recreational activities that occur at state parks and other DEEP managed outdoor recreation areas. Evaluation of that information may result in changes to the operational plan. While law enforcement personnel are authorized to enforce social distancing and group size guidance, DEEP seeks to educate first and ask people to follow the rules, in hopes that visitors will take personal responsibility and make sure that they comply.

"I am proud that we have been able to keep Connecticut's parks system open at a time when people need it the most," DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes said. "This is all thanks to the adaptive leadership and hard work of our DEEP Parks employees and EnCon officers—and the cooperation of the public in following social distancing guidelines. I am hopeful that these common-sense guidelines will provide a blueprint for us to continue to operate and enjoy our State Parks and recreation areas safely into the summer."

To view the operational plan, go here: <https://portal.ct.gov/deep-parkscovid19> (<https://portal.ct.gov/deep-parkscovid19>).

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