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Subject: Guidance for the Operation of Recreation Services Sites and Food Services

To: Regional Foresters and Station Directors

This supercedes guidance issued on 03/16/2020.

Summary of Changes since 03/16/2020:

- *Incorporates the latest Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance,*
- *Identifies facility closures to limit groupings and ensure employee safety,*
- *Identifies bathroom and shower facility restrictions,*
- *Considers local health restrictions,*
- *Identifies resource considerations,*
- *Describes proper sanitation procedures and Personal Protection Equipment requirements.*

The Forest Service is taking the risks presented by COVID-19 seriously. Given the rapidly changing situation, proactive and precautionary steps are essential to ensure long-term viability of the workforce and mission delivery and based upon comprehensive and continual assessments of workplace, recreation sites, and community risk. The Agency is following OMB, USDA and CDC guidance and using a common risk management framework to identify risk factors and mitigation measures, and to make risk-informed decisions accordingly. Social distancing measures and facility closures are necessary to preserve the health and welfare of Forest Service employees, partners, cooperators, our families, and the local communities in which we live.

As the number of COVID-19 cases in the United States increases and the World Health Organization has classified the COVID-19 as a pandemic, the USDA has issued guidance on visitors and food services. The USDA Forest Service is issuing guidance to Agency staff for how to implement this guidance and to mitigate potential employee exposure, recognizing that site-specific decisions will need to be made by local Line Officers based upon the local situation and employee/public safety. This guidance will be updated as the situation changes.

Guidance for Forest Service Operation of Recreation and Food Service Sites

The National Forest System is an American treasure that can be a resource for people in difficult times. Of the 30,000 sites the Forest Service manages nationally—10,000 campgrounds, 159,000 miles of trails; 750 rental cabins; 2,000 trailheads; 130 visitor centers; 2,150 day-use and boating and fishing sites, and day to day information and permit sales at our office and, while recreation service delivery is not critical to mission delivery, it can be possible to offer services to the public that are consistent with guidelines for maintaining public health. Forest Service recreation facilities promote solitude and self-reliance. These recreation activities offer benefits to health and wellbeing that visitors to the National Forests can continue to enjoy.

Forest Service risk management assessments require recreational services to adhere to public health recommendations concerning “social distancing”. This evaluation, which should include partner



organizations as practicable, is critical to inform strategies the Agency is taking to mitigate risks of exposure to both employees and the public, while not unnecessarily restricting access to National Forest system lands. In forested areas and facilities that foster dispersed recreational access such as campgrounds, day use sites, and the NFS trail system, person-to-person contact can be minimized with risk mitigations. Access by the public to those sites need not be restricted so long as sanitation measures and staffing capacity are adequate to minimize risks to public health and damage to resources.

However, certain Forest Service facilities such as visitor centers, group camping sites, and large bathroom and shower facilities are, by their very nature, designed to draw in large numbers of people. It is inherently challenging to impose restrictions on the number and behavior of visitors at such sites without compromising the intended services, sanitation, or social distancing measures. The health and safety of visitors as well as Forest Service volunteers, contractors, resource assistants, and staff is paramount. **Therefore, in order to minimize risk to staff as well as the public, visitor centers and other sites where people congregate should be closed until further notice.** As of this guidance, congregations are defined by 10 or more people, however, local or federal guidance may change.

Within the Agency Risk Framework, managers of Forest Service public facing recreation facilities should implement the following recommendations along with CDC, state, or local guidance. **Agency recreation services will be offered in alignment of local health and safety guidance, for example local curfews or shelter in place guidelines.** Risk assessments and updated Job Hazard Analysis will be required to ensure appropriate measures remain in place to mitigate potential risks to Agency personnel and contractors. They will need to be continuously reviewed, coordinated with partners, and decisions updated as conditions change. Expanded public notice of the latest safety guidance and services will need to reflect current risk evaluations.

The format of this guidance is tiered to match USDA Visitors and Food Service Guidance 03/16/2020 and is updated to recent OMB guidance.

A. LIMIT VISITOR ACCESS

1. Reconsider Visits

i. *For Visitor Centers and other FS sites that concentrate people:*

1. Limit public visitor congregation until further notice. Close visitor centers, information offices, and associated facilities such as group bathroom facilities.
2. Post alternative customer service approaches such as phone numbers or websites in areas where limited access has been implemented.
3. Associated Visitor Center facilities, including outside interpretive trails, open areas, and public access points may remain open if risk assessments establish a framework for such.

ii. *For Campgrounds, Day Use Sites, and Dispersed Recreation:*

1. Do not allow activities that congregate large groups. Close group camping sites and large visitor congregations until further notice and implement administrative access restrictions.
2. Consider closures where resource degradation cannot be managed through current workforce staffing.
3. Large bathroom, shower, and other facilities that foster groupings of people should be closed.
4. Single bathrooms (SSTs, etc.) may remain open but are to be posted with cleaning schedules. When activities cannot meet safety or sanitation guidelines limit services as appropriate.
5. Provide materials and training to staff and contractors regarding cleaning techniques,

protocols, and protection, including wearing proper personal protective equipment (PPE) of public Forest Service recreation facilities. Employee safety must remain paramount managers and employees must follow all employee safety protocols. When activities cannot meet safety or sanitation guidelines limit services as appropriate.

6. Increase cleaning of public areas in accordance with CDC guidelines and Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) using the following guidelines:
 - The following steps have been transcribed from existing CDC guidance on Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection Recommendations for known COVID 19 contamination. Additional agency guidance for prevention and frequency is forthcoming.
 - Surfaces
 - If surfaces are dirty, they should be cleaned using a detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
 - For disinfection, diluted household bleach solutions, alcohol solutions with at least 70% alcohol, and most common EPA-registered household disinfectants should be effective. If a unit does not have a suitable disinfectant, a simple diluted bleach solutions can be used if appropriate for the surface. (Prepare a bleach solution by mixing: 1/3 cup bleach per gallon of water or 4 teaspoons bleach per quart of water <NEVER MIX BLEACH WITH AMMONIA OR ANY CLEANSER>)
 - Personal Protection Equipment
 - Staff should wear disposable gloves, gowns or washable layered clothing, for all tasks in the cleaning process, including handling trash.
 - Gloves and gowns should be compatible with the disinfectant products being used (Consult the Material Safety Data Sheet for proper PPE requirements as additional PPE might be required based on the cleaning/disinfectant products being used)
 - Gloves and gowns should be removed carefully to avoid contamination of the wearer and the surrounding area. Be sure to clean hands after removing gloves.
 - Staff should immediately report breaches in PPE (e.g., tear in gloves) or any potential exposures to their supervisor.
 - Staff should clean hands often, including immediately after removing gloves by washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains 60%-95% alcohol may be used. However, if hands are visibly dirty, always wash hands with soap and water.
 - Follow normal preventive actions while at work and home, including cleaning hands and avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands
7. Associated facilities, including outside interpretive trails, open areas, and public access points may remain open if risk assessments establish a framework for such.
8. Continue existing fee programs as appropriate, while seeking ways to minimize person-to-person contact and the handling of cash.

9. Consider reducing hours of operation to match diminished visitor demand and/or staffing capacity.
10. Where possible, offer services online and consider other virtual methods of serving the public.

iii. For District Offices and other locations where recreation services are scheduled and conducted:

1. Close public spaces, offices, limit exposure for public facing employees, and practice social distancing.
2. Where possible, conduct all day-to-day permit processing over the phone, by US mail, or via email.
3. Devise alternatives for procedures that currently require physical interactions, such as purchasing firewood permits.
4. When physical transactions must take place, consider using strategies that do not require people to enter each other's personal workspace, such as leaving forms in secure drop boxes.
5. Consider suspending the issuance of new permits that would require day-to-day oversight from an FS employee,
6. Remind permittees that they must conform to advisories issued by State and local organizations regarding maximum number of participants at a gathering, etc.

2. Schedule and Screen

i. For District Offices and other locations where recreation services are conducted for walk in services:

1. Close public spaces, offices, limit exposure for public facing employees, and practice social distancing.
2. Where possible, make all visits by appointment only.
3. If security personnel are not regularly available, keep doors locked to prevent unscreened individuals from entering.
4. All visitors should be screened using the USDA "Visitor Health and Travel Questionnaire" prior to being admitted to Forest Service facilities.
5. Post screening questions and phone numbers adjacent to entryways so visitors can request entry.
6. When possible, screening questionnaires should be filled out and submitted in advance of the visit to properly screen visitors and expedite the process.
7. Visitors should not queue in line to seek access to offices. Provide opportunities for visitors to maintain social distancing by, for instance, encouraging them to wait in their cars until they can be served.

B. ESCORT REQUIRED

i. For District Offices and other locations where recreation services are conducted:

1. Close public spaces, offices, limit exposure for public facing employees, and practice social distancing.
2. Visitors should not be allowed to access any locations on the site other than those directly relating to the reason for their visit.
3. Escort personnel need to follow recommended social distancing recommendations.

C. FOOD SERVICE

1. Cafes and cafeterias at Forest Service facilities must discontinue service to the general public, but may continue to offer services to Forest Service employees and partners as appropriate, subject to USDA guidance.

D. ONSITE BUSINESSES/RETAIL

1. Work with permanent vendors at Forest Service facilities to implement this guidance and limit congregations of people. Vendors may remain open, as appropriate, if they are operating in accordance with this guidance or as agreed upon with a local line officer in consideration of local health guidance.
2. Maintain a close dialogue with any partners who operate in or around Forest Service facilities, including Interpretive Associations.

E. COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC

1. Provide frequent updates to the public in a variety of media (i.e., recorded messages, signage, social media announcements) regarding topics like availability of services and updated cleaning schedules.
2. In communications with the public, officials should emphasize that the health and safety of Forest Service volunteers, contractors, resource assistants, and staff is a top priority, while acknowledging the limits of federal workers' ability to guarantee COVID-19-free environments.
3. Where applicable, direct the public to online resources for information needs, pass sales, and permits.

Please visit the Be Prepared Website for the latest Federal government information at <https://www.dm.usda.gov/beprepared/Covid19.htm>



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