

8 state parks won't reopen this summer



Cape Blanco Lighthouse on the Oregon Coast. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Budget cuts caused by COVID-19 pandemic

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Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Eight Oregon state parks and campgrounds, including some of the state's most iconic places, won't reopen this summer, due to budget cuts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The list of indefinitely shuttered places includes beloved state parks such as Cape Blanco and Washburne campground on the Oregon Coast, plus Devil's Lake in Lincoln City and Saddle Mountain in the Coast Range.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is facing a \$22 million budget gap following declines in revenue after park shutdowns and a major decline in Oregon Lottery money that funds much of the state parks system.

The agency has needed to reduce its staff in the field by almost half, while also laying off more than 40 people in its Salem headquarters.

"The state park system has been slowly reopening since early May, but nearly every park is experiencing reduced levels of service," the agency said in a news release. "OPRD is relying on visitors to help us through this unprecedented time."

Here's a list of the parks and campgrounds that won't reopen by Labor Day.

- Alfred A. Loeb State Park campground and day-use.
- Battle Mountain Forest State Scenic Corridor day-use
- Cape Blanco State Park campground and day-use (closed through 2020).
- Carl G. Washburne Memorial State Park campground.
- Devil's Lake State Recreation Area campground.
- Saddle Mountain State Natural Area campground and trails.
- Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor campground and day-use.
- Umpqua Lighthouse State Park campground.

State parks spokesman Chris Havel said the decision on which parks to keep closed was driven by where the agency had enough staff to maintain the parks.

"State parks are grouped into units. Our field managers have to choose how staff spend their time within the unit, and that can mean concentrating on the parks that can run at a minimally-acceptable level by keeping others closed," he said.

While eight state parks won't reopen, the majority of the system — more than 200 parks — will be open.

Reduced services

The parks that have reopened have a much smaller staff than normal during the busy summer season.

"Our rangers will be focused on essential duties to keep you safe, so other

typical services may fall by the way-side," the agency said.

Everything from showers to ranger booths to welcome centers may be closed.

"Events and programs will be canceled, ice or firewood sales may be suspended, and grounds maintenance and trash pickup will be less frequent. Service availability may change quickly," the agency said.

Officials suggested people visit the official website of a given park before traveling, to ensure they understand what will and won't be available.

Plan and prepare

For those planning to head to reopened parks, the agency had a list of suggestions for best-practices in this unique situation.

Prepare

- If you're not feeling well, stay home. The parks will still be here when you recover.

- Whether you're stopping for the afternoon or camping overnight, bring the essentials with you: face coverings, hand sanitizer, trash bags (pack it in, pack it out), water, snacks, and toilet paper.

- Choose a park close to home. The shorter your trip, the fewer stops you have to make on the way there, and the less time you'll be in close proximity with others.

- Check the park's webpage in advance to learn what amenities are available. Some may be closed; read the "reduced services" section below.

- Make a backup plan for your outing. Summer is a busy time at state parks, and people are extra stir-crazy this year. If you show up and the park or parking areas look crowded, it's a good idea to turn around and follow your backup plan.

- Parking may be limited, and please don't park on road shoulders or private roads. It's dangerous and you risk your vehicle being damaged or towed. If the parking lot is full, turn around.

Care

- Try to maintain at least 6 feet of physical distance from folks that aren't part of your household. Please wear a face covering, especially when in congested areas like parking lots, trailheads or restrooms.

- Take it easy while at the park: stick to trails and activities you're familiar with. If you get in over your head and get injured or lost, that will further strain our already thin resources.

- Take your trash with you when you leave. Garbage service has been significantly reduced and packing out what you pack in is a huge help to park rangers.

- With the weather heating up, campfire restrictions may be in effect in some state parks. Check campground and trailhead notice boards for posted fire restrictions, or call ahead to double check. Fireworks are never allowed in state parks or on the ocean shore.

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