

# Another summer of crowds expected at parks

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Memorial Day weekend traditionally marks the beginning of the summer camping, vacation and recreation season. Last summer, Pacific Northwest public lands and trailheads were overrun by people seeking COVID-safe getaways in the fresh air. The pandemic may be winding down, but it doesn't look like the crowds are abating.

"From everything I am hearing, all of the public land managers are bracing for the crowds," said Washington State Parks spokesperson Meryl Lassen. "We expect it to exceed 2020."



Tom Banse/Northwest News Network

**Campsite reservations at popular parks in the Pacific Northwest are going fast, if not already sold out for the peak summer period.**

Lassen said reservations for state park campsites are running far ahead of the pace of the last normal year, 2019. Marine state parks are also seeing higher moorage fee collections from boaters. Lassen said it appears people who discovered the great outdoors last year aren't ready to give it up.

"People aren't yet necessarily comfortable going to busy areas indoors, going to concerts, museums, what have you," Lassen said. "I think people still feel pretty safe in the outdoors."

At Mount Rainier National Park, visitor counts for this calendar year through April are 51% higher than during the same four months of pre-pandemic 2019.

"We do expect a busy summer," said Terry Wildy, chief of interpretation for the national park. "We're seeing increased visitation already. For planning purposes, folks may want to have a Plan B."

Wildy said people thinking of taking advantage of the sunny Memorial Day weekend forecast should be aware there is still 11 feet of snow on the ground at the popular Paradise recreation

area on the slopes of Mount Rainier.

"You've got to be ready for that with the clothing you take with you and your gear," Wildy said.

Mount Rainier National Park is in the midst of a multi-year planning process to address congestion in the Nisqually to Paradise road corridor. Strategies under consideration for the future include implementing a shuttle system or introducing a timed-entry reservation system.

Some popular national forest destinations in the Northwest are introducing advance reservation systems to manage crowding.

In central Oregon, the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests will require both day-use and overnight visitors to get a permit to hike on certain trails leading into the Three Sisters, Mount Jefferson and Mount Washington wilderness areas. The new, limited-access permitting system covers 19 of the most popular trails in the central Oregon Cascades. The U.S. Forest Service

said its objective is to better manage peak season crowds and preserve the wilderness character of these areas.

Separately, beginning in mid-June, the Gifford Pinchot National Forest will require drivers to obtain a reserved parking ticket to visit recreation sites in a 14-mile stretch dotted with waterfalls along the upper Lewis River between Mount St. Helens and Mount Adams. In a news release, the national forest said the new parking reservation system comes in response to significant increases in visitor traffic, which led to safety concerns over congestion, habitat protection, trash and human waste.

An extra element to research for people headed into the woods of western and southern Oregon are closures left over from last September's rash of big wildfires. For example, as KLCC reported, many campgrounds, trailheads and boat launches in the McKenzie River and Detroit ranger districts of the Willamette National Forest are still closed because of

safety threats such as hazard trees and rock falls.

The Oregon Office of

Emergency Management cautioned travelers to be prepared for delays on some

highways as debris cleanup from last September's wildfires continues.



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