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State Parks to Reduce Visitor Capacity During COVID-19 Pandemic

Fines, Charges Possible for Violations of New Rules to Promote Social Distancing

Connecticut is announcing stricter measures to support safe, solitary enjoyment of outdoor spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. On Tuesday, Governor Ned Lamont issued Executive Order No. 7R authorizing the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to prohibit walk-in visitors at State Parks in an effort to maintain social distancing in parks and outdoor spaces. Concurrently, DEEP is announcing plans to limit parking capacity at certain parks to manage visitor levels.

While State Parks remain open for solitary recreation, DEEP is closely monitoring park visitorship, and is closing parking lots when lots become full and lowering parking thresholds where necessary. In some locations, DEEP has observed additional visitors parking outside of park entrances closed for capacity and walking in, which undermines DEEP's ability to maintain manageable visitor levels through park closures. Executive Order No. 7R provides DEEP discretion to impose penalties on individuals who enter parks after they have reached capacity. These penalties include fines and even arrest, up to and including Class D felony charges for interfering or obstructing any lawful civil preparedness activity. In addition, any person who violates the ban will be subject to a 30-day eviction from all State Parks and other lands under DEEP's oversight. These new measures will help DEEP manage parks safely as warmer weather is anticipated to attract more visitors to state parks.

The Governor's previous Executive Order No. 7N, issued last week, prohibits social and recreational gatherings of more than five individuals. DEEP staff, including Environmental Conservation Police officers and park staff, are actively monitoring for compliance with this prohibition on gatherings, and are educating visitors and enforcing the provisions of Executive Order 7N about the parks. Concurrently, DEEP will begin to implement operational changes to prohibit picnicking at state park locations.

DEEP staff are adapting operational plans for the state's most popular parks, including Hammonasset Beach State Park, including targeted reductions in parking availability and other measures on a park-specific basis. Park visitors are strongly encouraged to take these common-sense steps when visiting state parks:

- **Check before you go.** The primary way to check for park closures is to follow @CTStateParks on Twitter.
- If you're not feeling well, stay home. Signs and symptoms of coronavirus include fever, cough and shortness of breath.

- Rather than traveling to some of the most popular spots, discover new places close to home by following DEEP's social media #CTTrailsLessTraveled or visit <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Listing-of-State-Parks>
- Follow other social distancing guidelines here: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/COVID-19-Updates-CT-tate-Parks-and-Forests>

These new steps add to the significant measures DEEP has put in place over the last few weeks to ensure safe, social distancing practices in state parks, including limiting access to areas where the public tends to congregate by closing satellite office locations and education centers, restrooms and pavilions within State Parks and Forests. DEEP also recently closed the tower at Sleeping Giant State Park in Hamden. Signs have been posted at park facilities and picnic shelters emphasizing the need to maintain social distancing.

More at: www.ct.gov/DEEP | Follow on Facebook at [CTDEEP](#), [CTStateParks](#) | Follow on Twitter [@CTDEEPNews](#), [@CTStateParks](#) | connect and crowdsource social tags [#CTTrailsLessTraveled](#) [#StaySafeOutdoors](#)

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