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**Maricopa County Parks Taking Preventive Actions to Protect Visitors**

Maricopa County’s parks, trails, and open spaces provide spaces for respite, health, and wellness. However the temporary closures of local gyms, entertainment services, and recreational opportunities has made open space parks and trails some of the most sought after spaces to exercise, relieve stress, and relax.

“The first weekend the Governor’s closure of non-essential services was put in place, our regional parks saw a 26 percent increase in park attendance,” stated Maricopa County Board of Supervisors Chairman Clint Hickman, District 4. “Our team quickly realized we had to modify our operating procedures to ensure those visiting the parks would have a safe environment to hike, bike, and recreate in.”

For the past month, the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department has been relying heavily on guidance and expertise from the Public Health Department for the most up to date information on COVID-19 best practices and safety protocols for the parks.  Marcy Flanagan, Executive Director for Maricopa County Department of Public Health notes, “Exercise is an important component of overall health and wellbeing. Physical activity also helps support mental health, and outdoor activity can be a great way to maintain mental health while practicing physical distancing.”

The parks department has made difficult operational decisions to ensure physical distancing in County parks. “While the decision to close several popular trailheads, the northern section of Lake Pleasant Regional Park, and limit the capacity for each park was a difficult one for us to make, the majority of our park visitors understand why these decisions were made and support our efforts,” added R.J. Cardin, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department Director.

This week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released COVID-19 Guidance for Park Administrators to offer guidance to local, state, and national parks managing the resources. The guidelines cover the following safety precautions:

* Promoting everyday preventive actions
* Guidance on maintaining and ensuring restrooms remain open for public visitation
* Proper operation, maintenance, and disinfection of swimming pools
* Canceling or postponing large events and gatherings
* Social-distancing in popular areas of the parks
* Postponing or canceling organized activities and sports
* Educating staff sick-leave, teleworking policies, and COVID-19 preventative actions
* Reviewing the CDC’s guidance for businesses and employers

“These guidelines, coupled with the guidance we’ve received from Public Health, provide me comfort in knowing we’ve taken the appropriate recommended actions to promote physical-distancing and safe recreational experiences in the parks. And, our parks will continue to follow these additional safety precautions until we are informed by the Board or Governor that they are no longer needed,” Cardin added.

The department would also like to remind the community that they should continue to:

* Stay home if they are sick or do not feel well.
* Visit parks that are close to your home.
* Prepare before you visit. Make sure you bring sunscreen, water, hand-sanitizer, and personal hygiene items.
* Use physical distancing and maintain at least six feet between individuals in all areas of the park.
* Stay at least six  feet away from others to ensure physical-distancing and help stop the spread of COVID-19.
* Move to another area if the trailhead or area of the park you are visiting is crowded.

We are all in this together and need to work together to help stop the spread!

A complete copy of the CDC’s guidelines can be found at [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/park-administrators.html](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDQsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMDA0MTcuMjAzMDg1NzEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5jZGMuZ292L2Nvcm9uYXZpcnVzLzIwMTktbmNvdi9jb21tdW5pdHkvcGFya3MtcmVjL3BhcmstYWRtaW5pc3RyYXRvcnMuaHRtbCJ9.OQw5107-_Xob7J58Iu3Z1DgYlXyztUwuzYt4Dodzrg8/br/77552331564-l). To learn more about Maricopa County’s regional park system, visit [www.maricopacountyparks.net](http://www.maricopacountyparks.net).