

THE SCENE



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

NEWS & UPDATES FROM COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

APRIL 8, 2020

www.fs.usda.gov/crgnsa

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

DO THE RIGHT THING

- By **respecting** closures
- By **following** local orders
- By **limiting** non-essential travel
- By **reducing** impact on facilities

TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

#DoTheRightThingNW

Clackamas County Sheriff's Office | Friends of the Columbia Gorge | Hood River County Forestry Department | Hood River County Sheriff's Office | Klickitat County Sheriff's Office | Multnomah County Commissioner Lori Stegmann | Multnomah County Roads Department | Multnomah County Sheriff's Office | Oregon Department of Transportation | Oregon Marine Board | Oregon State Parks | Skamania County Sheriff's Office | Wasco County Sheriff's Office | Washington Department of Natural Resources | Washington Department of Transportation | Washington State Parks | U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District | USDA Forest Service

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

We've partnered with more than a dozen federal, state and local agencies in and around the **Columbia River Gorge** to launch a **social media campaign** to encourage outdoor enthusiasts to **comply with public health directives to stay home and reduce the spread of COVID-19**. Public lands within the boundaries of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area are managed by several agencies and counties, most of whom have temporarily closed lands and water access to adhere to state executive orders. The campaign reminds people that the closures also **protect agency employees and first responders**, and **prevent damage to the environment** from unwanted impacts that can occur when facilities are closed.

Historic Columbia River Highway

WHAT'S OPEN, WHAT'S CLOSED

To ensure the health and safety of State Parks staff and the general public, closures also apply along several miles of the Historic Columbia River Highway and throughout the related State Trail. These **closures apply to cyclists and pedestrians, not just motorists**.

- A daytime closure is in place from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. along the seven miles from **Larch Mountain Road to Angel's Rest**.
- **Angel's Rest to Ainsworth** (seven miles) are closed around the clock.
- All sections of reconstructed paved walking & biking trail known as the **Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail** are closed, including the **Twin Tunnels** between Hood River and Mosier.
- Highway sections through Hood River and east of Mosier are open, but remember, the governor's order calls for people to limit non-essential travel.



A deputy patrols a closure near Vista House. Photo courtesy Multnomah County Sheriff's Office

Most likely you've heard by now that **all Forest Service lands in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area are closed**. Due to the high density of visitors, it simply isn't safe for people to visit lands or for employees to maintain sites while we are in midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people understand this, but asked about less visited trails and off-trail adventures.

- Developed sites are closed to **protect staff and communities**. We are in **alignment with both governor's orders and local orders**, such as the Skamania County hiking closure.
- The Gorge has steep slopes and drop-offs and unstable rock formations that create off-trail hazards. Any visit off the beaten path takes **unnecessary risks** that may **strain local law enforcement and medical resources**.
- Visiting public lands **while facilities are closed leaves impacts on human health and the environment**, as trash and human waste accumulates on the landscape. Each small action has a magnified effect when millions of visitors come, as they do each year in the Gorge.
- Creative parking to get around closed lots and crowded access points **creates hazards for motorists** and blocks access by emergency services.

Regionally, there are some "dispersed" recreation opportunities available. However, businesses typically used for replenishing hiking supplies may be closed and the governors are asking people to limit non-essential travel. The forest is managed for the long-term and will be here when the peak danger has passed. Remember, this is just temporary. In the meantime, we encourage you to enjoy the outdoors and discover nature in your neighborhood.



Forest Service employee cleaning overflowing trash at Bonneville Trailhead prior to the closure.

KLICKITAT MILE ONE IMPROVEMENTS PROPOSED

Despite short-term closures, our recreation and planning teams are still hard at work planning long-term improvements to recreation sites, such as a proposed project at **Klickitat Mile One**. This green space is a miles north of **Lyle** in the eastern Gorge, just off the first river mile of the **Lower Klickitat Wild & Scenic River**. Part of Klickitat Mile One is county-managed, but the proposed project would take place on the National Forest System lands.



Klickitat Mile One National Forest System land, site of the proposed improvements.

Wild & Scenic Rivers are designated by Congress to protect their "**outstandingly remarkable values**," which in the case of the Klickitat River includes **resident and anadromous fish** and their habitat.

Popular recreation at the site includes kayaking, picnicking, swimming, dog walking, stand-up-paddleboarding, and wildlife viewing. The site is currently undeveloped with no visitor amenities. The goal of the improvements is to manage recreational use at the site in a way that maintains these values and other river corridor characteristics, such as **water quality, scenery, natural vegetation**, while providing a quality **recreation** experience. The proposal would restore upland and streambank vegetation, develop a 12-vehicle parking lot, a waterless vault restroom, signs, picnic tables, and create a natural surface river access trail. A copy of the **draft Environmental Assessment** is available online at:

www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51221

