



File Code: 5300**Date:** April 7, 2020**Route To:****Subject:** Developed Recreation Site Closure Order**To:** File

I am issuing Regional Order No. R2-2020-01 to provide for public and employee health and safety by closing all Developed Recreation Sites on National Forest System lands within Rocky Mountain Region (Region 2) in the States of Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious and potentially fatal disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus which leads to respiratory illness. The virus is thought to spread mainly between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. As of April 3, 2020, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported a total of 239,279 cases of COVID-19 nationwide with over 5,000 cases in the five state Rocky Mountain Region alone.

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. As a result, the best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to the virus. The President's Coronavirus Guidelines suggest that individuals avoid social gatherings in groups of 10 or more people, remain home wherever possible, and avoid discretionary travel. In addition, in states with evidence of community transmission, the Guidelines require closure of indoor and outdoor venues where groups of people congregate. All five states have seen some degree of community spread of the coronavirus. As a result, the Governors of Colorado and Kansas have issued executive orders which direct all individuals living in the state to stay home or at their place of residence. These requirements were implemented to preserve the public health and safety, and to ensure the healthcare delivery system is capable of serving all residents.

There are 17 National Forests and 7 National Grasslands in the Rocky Mountain Region. Stay at home orders in surrounding states along with the closures of ski areas and National Parks has led to an increase in visitation to many national forest and grassland sites across the Region. Despite State orders in Colorado and Kansas, droves of people have been gathering in national forests and grasslands. This increased recreational use is posing a challenge for COVID-19 response and the health and safety of not only the public, but Forest Service and local law enforcement personnel.

Therefore, this closure order is needed to protect public and employee health and safety, along with natural and cultural resources by prohibiting people from visiting and utilizing designated recreation sites on national forests and grasslands. This order will close key recreational facilities such as campgrounds, day use sites, and picnic areas as these are



attractions that draw large numbers of people and require significant management oversight, especially during the high-use conditions now being realized. This management burden puts Forest personnel at additional risk of exposure to COVID-19. And in several instances already, Forest employees have run out of the necessary personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies to perform site maintenance activities safely while mitigating the risk of exposure.

While designated recreation sites will be closed, the general Forest area including the extensive trail system will remain open and available to the public. Hiking and walking outdoors is widely considered beneficial to maintaining one's health and is a deterrent to contracting COVID-19. It is the intent of the Agency and the Region to maintain trail access to the extent practicable.

Trails are accessed by trailheads. Trailheads vary across the states with regard to their level of development. Some are simply dirt pull-outs along the roadside, while others are highly developed paved parking areas with multiple restrooms, running water systems, and picnic benches. Most visitor groups on trails consist of less than 10 people and once they park and head out on their hike they can maintain more than 6 foot distance between others. In addition, the timing of use is often dispersed throughout the day. Where trail conditions and use levels are such that risks cannot be mitigated, local Line Officers may take additional actions to spread out use.

Forest and grassland officials across the Region have reached out to their local government officials to discuss this order and all were supportive of the action. Public Affairs Officers and Specialists have connected with the public and fielded calls related to the open or closed status of facilities. National Park Service, and some State and local governments have taken similar steps already, closing park areas, campgrounds, and similar recreation infrastructure.

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act. This action falls within the category identified in 36 CFR 220.6(d)(1) - prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety - and does not require documentation in a decision memo, decision notice, or record of decision. I have determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances associated with this temporary closure. Implementation of the decision may begin immediately.

JENNIFER EBERLIEN
Acting Regional Forester

Enclosure