

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contact: Rachel Pawliz, 541-308-1744, rachel.pawlitz@usda.gov *email will likely get a faster response time right now

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All National Forest Lands in the Columbia River Gorge Closing Due to COVID-19

Hood River, Ore. — March 26, 2020 — Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

To align with state and local measures directing people to stay home to save lives, the U.S. Forest Service is temporarily closing all National Forest System lands within the boundaries of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area to public access.

Forest Service staff are implementing the closures today by posting signs and, in some cases, gating or barricading developed recreation sites. The closures will remain in effect until further notice, as we monitor the latest state and local guidance on the COVID-19 pandemic.

After conducting a risk analysis of Forest Service recreation sites within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, it became apparent that there are too many people converging on both developed and unofficial recreation sites to ensure proper social distancing. Crowd sizes were too large to comply with current health authority guidelines, and we cannot ensure a COVID-19 free environment.

The closure is not limited to developed areas such as day use sites and trailheads, as it encompasses all National Forest System lands within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area boundary. It also includes BZ Corner and Husum Falls sites, which provide access to the Lower White Salmon Wild & Scenic River.

This area closure means that dispersed use and unofficial “user” trails are also off limits. Please be aware that many unofficial trails are described on blogs and websites maintained by third party organizations who may not make regular updates to the status of the sites they describe. Those dispersed areas and trails may be accessible from state and county roadways, and may not include extensive signage at dispersed interfaces with other public lands. However, the closures carry the full weight of law and can be enforced with citations.

“We acknowledge that this closure comes at a time when many were seeking respite in natural areas; however, this is a temporary pause to help health authorities get the COVID-19 pandemic under control. Thank you for doing your part to help prevent the spread of the disease,” said Lynn Burditt, forest supervisor for the national scenic area.

Both Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Mt. Hood National Forest also have closures currently in effect. For more information visit:

www.fs.usda.gov/giffordpinchot and www.fs.usda.gov/mthood.

As sites reopen, announcements will be issued and updates will be posted on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area website at: fs.usda.gov/crgnsa

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Rachel Pawlitz
Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Forest Service

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

p: 541-308-1744
rachel.pawlitz@usda.gov

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