

## **Budget realities force DNR to reduce services at many recreation facilities across Washington**

### **Local News**

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OLYMPIA - As the Fourth of July holiday weekend approaches, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wants the public to know that it will be reducing services to many facilities at DNR-managed recreation sites. DNR begins reducing services this week. A list of recreation sites affected by reductions in service is available at: [www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/ameduced\\_services\\_063009.pdf](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/ameduced_services_063009.pdf). A map of these sites is at [www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/ameduced\\_services063009.pdf](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/ameduced_services063009.pdf) (1.9 MB PDF file). The public can still recreate on state trust lands that have reduced services; however, there will not be any amenities such as outhouses, picnic tables, signs, or garbage service at these sites. In addition, gates to some of these sites may be locked and the only way in may be on foot. DNR asks that people visiting these areas pack out whatever they pack in and observe other principles of outdoor stewardship such as "Leave No Trace". (<http://www.lnt.org/programs/principles.php>)

"As a result of budget cuts, DNR has had to make some difficult and painful decisions," said Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark. "It is unfortunate that we need to start reducing services just as summer activities get into full swing. Although services are being reduced at some sites, public lands will remain open to the public." These measures are needed to address the decreased funding of DNR's Recreation Program in the upcoming two-year budget cycle, which begins July 1. DNR may need to make further reductions in services to its recreation areas this fall. During the 2009 legislative session, DNR's Recreation Program budget suffered a nearly 50 percent loss of funding. The biggest cut came with the loss of grant funding from the Nonhighway and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program. In addition, the program's general fund budget was cut by nearly half. Many recreation groups and individuals have expressed a great deal of concern over impending reductions in service. DNR's recreation staff will be working with the public and recreation user groups to look for creative ways to keep from reducing services at other recreation areas. Several groups have already stepped forward with donations of volunteer time and money: the Northwest Paragliding Club, the Skagit County Chapter of the Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, and the Tahuya Focus Group.

**Criteria used to reduce services**To determine which facilities to cut services, DNR developed the following criteria:

**Trail Access.** DNR's role in providing outdoor recreational opportunities has evolved during the last 40 years from camping and dispersed recreation to being the primary provider of low-elevation trails and forest roads (motorized and non-motorized use) in Washington. Service reductions will focus on those facilities that don't support access to DNR trail systems.

**Level of use.** Service reductions will occur at many sites that are more remote and little used.

**Maintenance costs-to-visitor ratio.** The cost of maintaining a facility is driven by the distance from the field office, amount of vandalism, number of sites to take care of, number of outhouses that need to be pumped out, and number of visits. We looked at reducing services at those sites that are greater than two hours from a DNR work center, experience higher than average vandalism, have less than 10 sites to maintain, and receive less than 2,000 visitors per year.

**Service area considerations.** Many DNR recreation facilities are in proximity to other public recreation opportunities. We reduced services at some of our facilities that were near

other sites to make sure the public still had recreation opportunities in that area. For more information about changes at DNR's recreation facilities, contact Mark Mauren, assistant division manager with DNR's Asset Management and Recreation Division, at 360-902-1047 or

[mark.mauren@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:mark.mauren@dnr.wa.gov). **Recreation on DNR-managed lands**

DNR manages more than 5 million acres of state-owned forest, aquatic, agricultural, conservation and urban lands. Most recreation on these lands takes place in the 2.1 million acres of forests that DNR manages as state trust lands. By law, DNR manages state trust lands to produce income for schools, universities, prisons, state mental hospitals, community colleges, local services in many counties, and the state's general fund. State trust lands are also managed to provide fish and wildlife habitat and educational and recreational opportunities. DNR-managed lands provide a variety of landscapes throughout Washington State. Recreational opportunities include hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, camping, motorized vehicle riding, mountain biking, and boating.

DNR's main recreation focus is to provide trails, trailhead facilities, and a primitive experience in a natural setting.