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News and Notes

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News and Notes

A COVID-19 Timeline of Northeast Outdoor Closings

The new coronavirus and the disease it caused, COVID-19, acquired global pandemic classification in March 2020. Federal, state, and local governments in the Northeast focused first on medical supply chains, workplaces, and essential businesses. As an afterthought, or perhaps aftershock, land managers realized that people were rushing to get outside onto public lands in April and May during “mud season,” when use traditionally is low because snow is melting out and new plants struggle to take hold on new ground. Early spring can also be a dangerous time for recreators who find dirt at the trailhead but, up high, ice, sudden snow squalls, or swollen rivers.

Land managers and governments responded to this high use by closing some trailheads and parking areas. But they closed sites only within their management. Hikers could find that confusing. For example, on April 24 the White Mountain National Forest closed several areas it controls but not trailheads on private or state-owned land. The popular trailhead known as Appalachia on Route 2 in Randolph, New Hampshire, where trails on the north side of the Presidential Range begin, stayed open because the New Hampshire Department of Transportation has jurisdiction over that area.

If people violated the trail closures, they could be fined or face criminal penalties. Later, these same organizations, land managers, and agencies planned for “reopening” by limiting parking lot capacities, removing picnic tables and water fountains, and requiring visitors to answer questionnaires.

Following is a brief timeline of COVID-19’s track across public lands in the Northeast. This is by no means exhaustive or complete. It shows the different ways the federal, state, and local governments and the trail clubs, such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and Randolph Mountain Club, maintained facilities and trails in high-use areas. *Appalachia* deadlines stopped this timeline with mid-July. It will continue in the next edition.

March 2020

March 13: RMC closes to overnight use its four shelters in the northern

Presidential Range of the White Mountains: Gray Knob, Crag Camp, The Perch, and Log Cabin.

March 16: AMC closes all lodges and food services throughout the Northeast, including the New Hampshire facilities, the Highland Center in Crawford Notch and Joe Dodge Lodge at Pinkham Notch. AMC suspends all in-person staff and volunteer-led programming until further notice.

March 28: The National Park Service closes all overnight shelters (56 total) and privies (75 total) along the Appalachian Trail in Virginia (11 shelters, 12 privies), Maryland (1 shelter, 2 privies), Pennsylvania (8 shelters, 6 privies), New Jersey (1 shelter, 1 privy), New York (5 shelters, 5 privies), Connecticut (7 shelters, 16 privies), Massachusetts (1 shelter, 4 privies), and Maine (22 shelters, 29 privies). (In Vermont and New Hampshire, where the federal authority is the U.S. Forest Service and local clubs operate the campsites, see April 24, April 30, and May 6.)

April 2020

April 2: WMNF closes Tuckerman Ravine, Huntington Ravine, the Gulf of Slides, and all facilities and parking lots at Pinkham Notch Visitor Center (which AMC manages under a special use permit). The Mount Washington Avalanche Center suspends avalanche forecasting.

April 3: Vermont State Parks closes the Long Trail and associated side trails on state land.

April 16: Baxter State Park closes the park and offices until further notice.

April 24: WMNF closes more than 100 sites, including trailheads, campsites, and campgrounds. These include popular sites such as Diana's Baths and the Lincoln Woods trailhead.

April 30: AMC announces it will not open its high huts in the White Mountains for the rest of 2020. AMC also closes all of its lodges throughout the Northeast until further notice.

May 2020

May 1: WMNF reopens all trailheads it closed on April 24. However, the April 2 Tuckerman Ravine/Pinkham Notch order remains in place. All campgrounds, campsites, and shelters remain closed.

May 4: New Hampshire announces reopening guidelines for private campgrounds and New Hampshire State Parks, effective immediately once guidelines are in place. Hampton Beach State Park remains closed.

May 6: The Green Mountain National Forest closes overnight camping at designated sites, restrooms, and outhouses at campsites on the AT and Long Trail.

May 22: WMNF opens campgrounds in advance of Memorial Day weekend. Group sites and some dispersed camping areas such as Tripoli Road remain closed.

May 22: Vermont State Parks reopens the Long Trail and side trails on state park lands.

May 23: New Hampshire reopens motorized trail networks on state park lands.

June 2020

June 5: New Hampshire State Parks reopens Hampton Beach State Park.

June 8: WMNF reopens the east side trails up Mount Washington and the Cutler River drainage. Services are limited. No camping will be allowed in the Cutler River drainage, including at Hermit Lake Shelters, tent platforms, and Harvard Cabin.

June 13: In Virginia, a 27-mile section of the AT including McAfee Knob and Tinker Cliffs reopens. Many designated campsites remained closed along the AT between Georgia and Maine, including the terminus on Katahdin, in Maine's Baxter State Park.

June 15: Baxter State Park opens road gates for vehicle access to 60 miles of trail and to streams and ponds for hunting and fishing. High-elevation trails remain closed. Gates are open from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M., and no overnight camping is permitted.

June 26: Green Mountain National Forest reopens for overnight camping at designated overnight sites on the AT and Long Trail.

June 28: RMC reopens its Log Cabin and The Perch for overnight use. Crag Camp and Gray Knob remain closed. A caretaker patrols the camps but does not collect fees, and users are encouraged to donate through RMC's website.

July 2020

July 1: Baxter State Park opens all trails and roads and opens to overnight camping. Bunkhouses remain closed.

July 1: AMC opens its lodges: in New Hampshire, Pinkham Notch Visitor Center and Joe Dodge Lodge, the Highland Center, and Cardigan Lodge; in Maine, Medawisla Lodge & Cabins, Gorman Chairback Lodge & Cabins; in New York, Stephen & Betsy Corman AMC Harriman Outdoor Center; and in New Jersey, Mohican Outdoor Center. The following remain closed: AMC's high huts in the White Mountains, and some campsites. AMC programs including August Camp, Teen Trails and Teen Wilderness Adventures, and the White Mountain Hiker Shuttle are canceled.

July 10: WMNF opens designated backcountry campsites, tentsites, and shelters for overnight camping.

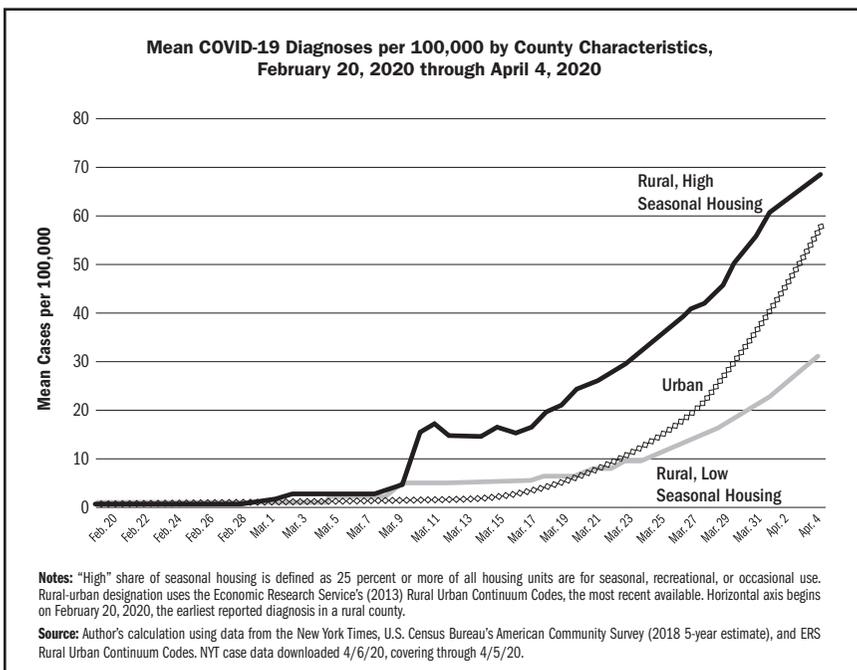
—*Sally Manikian, with organizational, government and task-force press releases.*

Researcher Tracks COVID-19 Risks in High Seasonal-Home Areas

In the early weeks of the new coronavirus spread, research from the University of New Hampshire suggests that many owners of seasonal houses across the United States decided to do their quarantining in those second homes.

Dr. Jess Carson, research assistant professor of public policy at the University of New Hampshire's Carsey School of Public Policy, identified a faster spread of COVID-19 cases in areas with more seasonal houses between mid-March and mid-April.

The graph here shows that on March 11, when the World Health Organization declared a worldwide pandemic, in rural areas where seasonal houses



In the nation's 199 rural counties where seasonal housing accounts for 25 percent or more of all housing units, average cases per 100,000 were more than twice as high as in other rural counties and 15 percent higher than in urban areas as of April 5.

JESSICA CARSON/CARSEY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

make up 25 percent or more of the residences, the positive case rate accelerated faster than in both rural counties with fewer seasonal houses and urban areas. This research confirmed anecdotal reports in seasonal communities of an influx of non-year-round residents to their second homes, or renting vacation homes, including counties in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine.

“This research captured a pattern that was specific to the initial weeks of the pandemic,” Carson told *Appalachia*. “By April 9, rates in urban counties had eclipsed those in rural places with high seasonal housing. By the end of April, the gap between rural counties with higher and lower shares of seasonal housing had closed.”

Carson said as the virus spread farther throughout rural places, other COVID-19 hotspots in rural areas developed, “as the virus left fewer communities untouched.” Since that time, she added, other researchers have identified other rural areas as hotspots, “namely those home to prisons and meatpacking plants. And of course, because ‘rural’ is not a monolith, the spread, short-term outcomes, and long-term implications of the pandemic are likely to remain uneven within and across rural places.”

—Christine Woodside, with thanks to Dr. Jess Carson

Two Stories of Backcountry Quarantining in 1882 and 1918

Quarantining to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus echoes a practice residents of backwoods Maine engaged in to save themselves at least twice in history. Loggers resorted to the practice during the 1882 smallpox outbreak, and some parents living in the Millinocket area applied it during the 1918 flu pandemic.

Starting in 1881, Maine public health regulations for lumber camps required that the logging camp boss remove men with smallpox from the main camp compound and place them in a separate small camp. The rest of the camp’s crew had to remain in the woods where they were, but they could continue to work. Efforts to keep the healthy men at the camp even with a doctor’s presence and sterilization, which included the burning of all bedding and other items, was difficult because of the men’s fear. Officials pursued the escaped men, caught some and brought them back, but many more made it home to Quebec through the woods. Some camps in later years built what the men referred to as “pest houses.”

In 1882, in response to a smallpox outbreak, lumbermen set up a hospital camp on one of the Jo-Mary Lakes. Joseph A. Thompson, longtime woodsman from the Houston Pond area, recorded its presence as he and

a companion paddled by it on their route south from the West Branch of the Penobscot River through the Jo-Mary Lakes to Katahdin Iron Works. Logging camp bosses brought their smallpox-stricken men there until they became healthy or died. Maine history chronicler Fanny Eckstorm learned from Lewey Ketchum of six men who died of smallpox and whose graves were at “Logan Joe Mary,” perhaps the site of the hospital camp.

By the early 1890s, vaccinations were a requirement for those in lumber camps and working in the mills. In late 1903, smallpox was prevalent in the Lower Chain Lakes area that abuts the Jo-Mary chain, and Maine recorded 2,096 cases with 9 deaths.

The 1918 Flu Epidemic. The large island in Lower Togue Pond at the southern edge of what would become Baxter State Park was home for an unknown number of Millinocket children during the summer of 1918. The only reference to this event was a 1918 note in the Thomas Welcome Clark family logbook; children lived in a tent camp on the island for the summer. Their families presumably quarantined them so they would escape the flu pandemic.

Clark, a married man with family, was a Great Northern Paper Company engineer who in 1908 began renting the small camp at the head of the island for some of each summer. Fred M. Peasely, a married Millinocket hardware store owner with two children, owned the camp and the island lease. Fortunately Mother Nature made this island level and rock-lump free with a pleasant forest—ideal for tenting. The only way to reach the pond was with a horse and cart from Millinocket followed by a canoe paddle. The Clark family eventually bought the island and has retained its ownership.

Curiously, not once in my last ten years of West Branch log driving research have I discovered information pertaining to the 1918 flu and logging camps. The current pandemic caused me to search again, this time through additional public health resources. For those hired to work in the logging camps at that time, regulations required a physical, but by late fall 1918 the priority for men was World War I. Recruiters for the winter logging operations were picking men in groups off the streets, allowing them to bypass the physical. Public health officials knew of this and began sending inspectors to the camps after they opened in late fall. What they might have encountered is unknown, but surely finding flu would have been worthy of reporting. Each camp had its own cutting crew and they stayed in the same place and by common practice never left during the season, an unenforced quarantining. The flu had nearly ended in Maine by the time they came out of the woods in late April 1919.

—*William Geller*