



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
Contact: (423) 476-9729

Cherokee National Forest Closing Camping and Group Recreation Sites

Cleveland, TN—March 23, 2020 - In response to guidance from State health officials and experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), all camping, cabins, group recreation sites, and restrooms in the Cherokee National Forest will be closed effective at noon today, March 23 2020. The closure will remain in effect until at least May 15, at which time it will be reevaluated.

This closure includes the Ocoee Whitewater Center, Chilhowee Day Use, Buffalo Mtn. ATV Trail, all campgrounds, cabins, beaches, shooting ranges, picnic pavilions and all restrooms. Boat launches, most trailheads, and the general forest area, including trails and river corridors, will remain open to hiking, biking, boating, dispersed camping, hunting, fishing, etc. The use of trail shelters on the Appalachian Trail is discouraged. Please follow social distancing guidelines and Leave No Trace principles. Pack out all trash and refuse.

By closing campsites and group recreation sites, the USDA Forest Service is taking necessary measures to safeguard the health of employees and the public. The health and safety of employees and the nearby communities is always our top priority at the USDA Forest Service. Please remember to review current recommendations from the CDC and focus on recreating safely while protecting yourself, Forest Service employees and our volunteers.

In addition to closing camping and group recreation sites, all Cherokee National Forest offices are operating virtually until further notice. This means many employees are teleworking and are no longer doing business in person. To protect the health and safety of employees and customers, no face-to-face meetings are being scheduled. However, continuing service to the public during this time is very important. Customers needing information, permits and maps are encouraged to visit the website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/cherokee/> or call the nearest Cherokee National Forest office during regular business hours for assistance:

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Ocoee Ranger District: 423-338-3300
Tellico Ranger District: 423-397-8455
Watauga Ranger District: 423-735-1500
Unaka Ranger District: 423-638-4109
Forest Supervisor's Office: 423-476-9700

Individuals with paid reservations through May 15, 2020 will be contacted by email and full refunds will automatically be processed by Recreation.gov with no cancellation fees. Individuals should not attempt to contact Recreation.gov to request a refund, as that will lead to a cancellation fee being charged. Reservations made farther into the future will remain valid, unless circumstances demand further closures.

Visitors are primarily responsible for their own safety. Keep in mind, trails and roads may be open for use, but please recreate responsibly and follow [public health guidelines](#) regarding social distancing while you recreate in National Forests. Law enforcement and search and rescue operations may be limited due to COVID-19 issues. High risk activities such as rock climbing or motorized activities that increase your chance of injury or distress should be avoided. For the most current and accurate information about COVID-19, contact your local health officials or visit the CDC website at www.cdc.gov. Information from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is available at: www.usda.gov/coronavirus.

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