



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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New Season, New Experiences Await Visitors to Many Pa. State Parks

Harrisburg, PA - When the Memorial Day holiday weekend ushers in the traditional start of the camping season, state park visitors will find more areas open to pets, more smoking controls on swimming beaches, and a revamped reservation system that makes it easier to sample these and other major changes at many of Pennsylvania's 121 state parks.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has announced campers will be able to bring their pets to selected campgrounds this coming weekend in five new state parks. Meanwhile, the 2016 camping and swimming season ushers in "Smoke Free Beaches" at 12 new state parks across Pennsylvania.

"We know that having a pet along is an important part of a vacation for many people, and over the years, since a pilot program was begun, we have heard repeated calls to allow pets in more state park campgrounds," DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said today.

New state park pet camping sites have been provided this season at Hyner Run, Clinton County; Sinnemahoning, Cameron County; and Pymatuning, Crawford. Cabins will be provided at Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County, and Nockamixon State park, Bucks County.

"We're responding to the wishes of our customers -- visitors to our state parks," Dunn said, "with an expanding project that continues to judge its effectiveness, and gauge how park campers, both with and without pets, like this change."

Surveys, feedback to park managerial staff, and reservation information all played a key role in the department's decision to continue expanding a pets policy that began in 2001 with nine parks. Addition of five this season brings the total of participating state parks to 55.

"It was this same ongoing bid to gauge the pulse of the public that led our Bureau of State Parks to also expand its 'Smoke-Free' beach locations," Dunn noted. "From the outset of this program in May 2013 beach restrictions consistently have been hailed by visitors for significantly improving air quality and reducing cigarette-butt litter.

"Success of our initial goals, as well as feedback from park visitors across the state, encouraged us to expand the 'Smoke Free' Beach areas this season."

With the addition of smoking restrictions at 12 new state parks, a total of 21 parks now have "Smoke Free Beaches." Latest additions were Hills Creek, Tioga County; Lyman Run, Potter County; R.B. Winter, Union; Presque Isle, Erie; Pymatuning, Crawford, Laurel Hill, Somerset County; Whipple Dam, Huntingdon County; Gifford Pinchot, York County; Cowans Gap, Fulton County; Gouldsboro, Monroe County; Ricketts Glen, Luzerne County; and Worlds End, Sullivan.

“With these changes, improved RV accessibility, new facilities and other major improvements at many state parks, the summer of 2016 should be an exciting one for our state park visitors,” Dunn said. “And to keep those folks better informed, we’ve enhanced our reservation system to better help them select the perfect facility for their overnight visit.

“Visitors now can search for full hook-up sites or pet-friendly sites, from the comfort of home or with their mobile device. Better campsite descriptions, enhanced maps and photos of each site give visitors a more accurate view of the site prior to arrival, ensuring they have a quality state park experience.”

The DCNR secretary noted pet owners at selected state park sites must comply with many program regulations. They govern leashing; barking and other noise; maximum number of pets allowed (two, when the size of a cat or larger); aggressive behavior; proper cleanup and disposal of feces; valid licensing when required; and needed vaccinations.

Violations could require campers to remove their animals from park grounds. Park officials are empowered to determine whether animals meet the definitions of "pet," which are commonly kept in household captivity, and "caged pets," which will not be released from their cage while at the park.

Smoking constraints at designated parks eliminates smoking on beaches and swimming areas. For visitors who smoke and still want to use these beaches, designated areas adjacent to the beach are provided.

The restriction includes cigarettes, pipes, cigars and the increasingly popular e-cigarettes. Staff at newly affected parks have been preparing for the change by purchasing and installing butt disposal units; installing new signage; establishing designated smoking areas with seating; and informing park user and support groups.

Visit www.dcnr.pa.gov for more information on pets and smoking regulations, as well as participating parks. For reservation information, www.visitPAparks.com.

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