

Horsetooth, Carter to open Friday to limited camping

Only county residents with existing reservations will be allowed



An empty campground is seen at Carter Lake west of Loveland on March 30. Larimer County is looking to reopen a limited number of campsites this weekend to county residents who have existing reservations only.

By PAMELA JOHNSON | johnsonp@reporter-herald.com | Loveland Reporter-Herald
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Larimer County will open two campgrounds to a limited number of campers this Friday, under a plan endorsed by the county commissioners during a Monday work session.

The Department of Natural Resources closed its campgrounds across four county properties when Gov. Jared Polis issued a statewide stay-at-home order to slow the spread of the coronavirus. County officials have been talking about how, and when, to reopen them safely.

Daylan Figgs, director of the department, said the county is planning to reopen campgrounds with a phased approach leading into summer, adding more options as health restrictions are lifted.

This Friday, one campground at Carter Lake and one campground at Horsetooth Reservoir will open, only to Larimer County residents to prevent causing people to travel here, and only to those who already have a reservation on the books. Those campers must have a hard-sided camper.

“This allows us to control the number of people in a campground,” said Figgs, noting that those with reservations who will be able to camp this weekend amount to “about 30 folks at Carter Lake, and a few less at Horsetooth, about 50 total.”

The county’s remaining campgrounds at Flatiron Reservoir, Pinewood Reservoir and Hermit Park will remain closed. Those likely will open later in the summer as public health restrictions loosen up.

Hermit Park, which has about 80 of the county’s 400 campsites, is within the Estes Valley, which is under a separate health directive banning short-term rentals to slow tourism and the spread of COVID-19.

As of now, group picnic areas, swim beaches and other gathering facilities at the county parks remain closed. The department has not said when those will reopen; that depends on health orders and direction that is still unknown in this unprecedented situation.

Also remaining closed are all rental cabins and teepees because of cleaning issues.

The commissioners have encouraged the natural resources department to reopen campsites as soon as they could do so safely to give people an option for outdoor activity during this stressful time.

One issue was being able to adequately clean the bathrooms. For this first opening, the bathrooms at campsites will remain closed. Restrooms could reopen later this summer, and when they do, the county has hired a cleaning contractor to make sure they are cleaned and disinfected appropriately.

Currently, there are bathrooms open at county trailheads and near the open boat ramps, but none will open right away at campgrounds.

“If we restrict to hard-side, they bring a bathroom with them,” Figgs said.

A second concern was not opening too many sites to avoid crowding, which is a public health hazard. The commissioners had suggested opening only to Larimer County residents. However, the county had to receive special permission from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to do that because while Larimer County manages recreation on the sites, the bureau owns them.

Figgs said the bureau granted that option as long as there is a public health order in place.

“It’s a significant achievement that the bureau let us limit to Larimer only,” said Commissioner Steve Johnson.

The second piece of this phased opening would be to open more sites and to open to everyone who has an existing reservation, including those from out of county and out of state. A date for that piece has not yet been confirmed. That, too, will include only hard-sided campers.

“We’ll let that run until some point in the summer when we all feel comfortable about a full opener,” said Figgs.

The statewide stay-at-home order is set to expire this Sunday, and officials have been talking about a phased reopening of different businesses. However, there has been no official word on whether the order will be extended or, if not, what type of activities will be allowed and restricted.

Camping To Resume In Larimer County With Some Restrictions: No Tents, No Walk-Ups

By Tori Mason | April 30, 2020 at 11:25 pm

<https://denver.cbslocal.com/2020/04/30/camping-larimer-county-coronavirus/>

LARIMER COUNTY, Colo. (CBS4) – The Larimer County Department of Natural Resources has spent the last few weeks consulting with its health department on ways to manage risk for those recreating outdoors. Larimer County will open its campgrounds, with some restrictions, to guests with existing reservations on Friday.

“Our ability to make this available to the public is going to be a shared responsibility. It’s our hope that folks can come out and enjoy the campground, but we’re really relying on them to be responsible and respect the guidelines,” said Ken Brink, Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

Campers must have self-contained “hard-side” units with bathrooms. No tent camping or walk-up reservations will be allowed. None of the restrooms or shower houses will be open for campers. Group picnic sites and pavilions will also stay closed to promote social distancing.

Guests from other areas, who have reservations, are permitted to camp.

“Yes, we’re talking about being safer at home, but people are bringing their homes here,” said Brink. “Those family units, they’re going to be safe and not interact with other groups. That’s our expectation. We’re asking them not to sit around a campfire with 12 people at night.”

Brink says about 150 groups have reservations to camp this weekend. Everyone is still expected to wear masks around others and be conscious of their decisions. If they don’t, camping plans for groups to come will go back to being on hold.

Camping in Larimer County will be allowed based on the following criteria:

- All existing reservations already booked in system, regardless of residence
- All campgrounds open including Hermit Park Open Space
- Campers must have self-contained “hard-side” units (defined as camping units with bathrooms)
- No secondary units allowed
- No tent camping allowed
- No walk-up camping reservations allowed
- Cabins and teepees remain closed
- All restrooms and shower houses closed
- Group picnic sites and pavilions remain closed
- Carter Lake Area/Horsetooth allow a maximum of 8 people per unit
- Hermit Park allows a maximum of 6 people per unit

If people with existing reservations aren’t comfortable visiting the campground, Larimer County is offering full refunds.

Loveland's new Prairie Ridge Natural Area adds to outdoor opportunities



The 785-acre natural area on the northwest corner of Loveland opened May 1, 2020. Fort Collins Coloradoan

Miles Blumhardt, Fort Collins Coloradoan | Published 7:19 a.m. MT May 6, 2020 | Updated 1:42 p.m. MT May 6, 2020

<https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2020/05/06/check-out-prairie-ridge-natural-areas-trails-loveland-colorado/3084948001/>

Whether you need a little outdoor time now to beat your coronavirus-related stress or wish to play it safer when the pandemic passes, I have just the place for you.

The city of Loveland's Prairie Ridge Natural Area opened Friday, and Monday I got out to visit it.

What you need to know

Where: 6400 N. Wilson Ave. in northwest Loveland. That's just north of the intersection of 57th Street and Wilson Avenue (Taft Hill Road in Fort Collins) or 1.5 miles south of the Coyote Ridge Natural Area.

Open: Sunrise to sunset daily

Cost: Free

What's there: 3.3 miles of soft-surface trails, 36 parking spaces (none for horse trailers but horse trailer parking can be found at Coyote Ridge Natural Area), vault toilets

What's allowed: Hiking, mountain biking, trail running, horseback riding and wildlife watching from trails

What's not allowed: Dogs and e-bikes

Best time to go: Anytime when temperatures aren't too hot. Mornings and evenings are generally when you see the most wildlife. For photographers, sunrise is best.

Pros: It serves as an easy connection to Coyote Ridge Natural Area and Rimrock Open Space and Blue Sky Trail, which combined have 35 miles of trails. It's an option when the Coyote Ridge parking lot fills, which is often. Solid kid- and family-friendly trails with little elevation gain. And once you get past the unexciting 1.2-mile Prairie Ridge Trail from the parking lot to the trail T, the 1.4-mile Ridge to Ridge Trail hugs the first hogback and offers plenty of wildlife and wildflower viewing.

Cons: The 1.2-mile trail leading from the trailhead to the first hogback is similar to the initial trail at Coyote Ridge Natural Area in that it's not overly exciting and can get very hot when the temperature warms.

Good to know: In May 2000, the 785-acre Prairie Ridge Natural Area was acquired as part of the 3,500-acre community separator between Loveland and Fort Collins and funded by Loveland, Fort Collins, Larimer County and Great Outdoors Colorado.

The eastern two-thirds of the property is farmed for dryland wheat. The western one-third includes hogbacks, shale ridges, shortgrass prairie and foothills shrubland.

The community separator also includes Loveland's Sunset Vista Natural Area, Larimer County's Long View Farm and Fort Collins' Coyote Ridge Natural Area.

Information: www.cityofloveland.org/departments/parks-recreation/open-lands-natural-areas