



HELP KEEP PARKS SAFE AND OPEN

A MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER ROBERT E. DOYLE

In the Bay Area we are blessed with over a million acres of beautiful public parkland. Californians love to get outdoors to enjoy nature and exercise, in fact they depend on it. For residents and their families it is an essential and fundamental part of their daily lives. Parks make lives better.

We are all currently facing the greatest health pandemic of the last 100 years, and a “Shelter in Place” order that must be taken seriously.

We want to help get everyone through this crisis by keeping our parks open, but the safety of the public – and that of our employees – has to be the highest priority. Like you, many of our staff are sheltering in place, taking care of themselves and their loved ones. This creates a significant challenge for keeping our parks open.

We have tried to keep our 73 parks and over 1,300 miles of trails open through this crisis, but what happened this past weekend was unsafe and distressing. Thousands of Bay Area residents headed to nature – overwhelming parks, parking areas, and staff. Overcrowding has already forced many of our fellow park agencies to consider closing.

Our current limited staff is doing its best to keep up with the community’s need to exercise and get outside. However, staff still needs to respond to emergencies, remove hazardous trees, and work on fuels reduction as we prepare, along with CalFire, for another serious fire season. I want to express my appreciation to all park staff everywhere, working hard during this emergency.

Many of our building facilities have been closed for some time to reduce the potential spread of the virus, including children’s play areas and structures, picnic areas, visitor centers, and campgrounds. For health and safety reasons, park restrooms and drinking fountains are also not available.

BEND THE CURVE

We need your help to keep our parks safe for you and our staff. Because of recent park overcrowding, use of picnic areas, and unsafe group gatherings and meet-ups, we have decided to “Temporarily Close” specific parks and park areas from Friday, March 27 through Thursday,

April 30. A few parks are fully closed, while only some parking lots and access points are closed at others. We hope this will help us limit overcrowding and help “Bend the Curve.” For up-to-date information on park area closures go to www.ebparks.org/coronavirus.

We are coordinating with health departments daily. If unsafe overcrowding continues, or the public does not maintain social distancing – even for dogs – we may be forced to close additional areas. As Governor Newsom said last Monday, “We can’t bend the curve if everyone is out. I don’t want to close big, beautiful open spaces. But we can’t see what we saw over the weekend.”

I have received many emails, since we announced additional closures, concerned that their favorite park or parking area has been closed, or that restrooms are not open. On behalf of the Park District, I would like to thank the public for their understanding and cooperation. We have tried to spread closures across the District as best we can. However, safety is the priority.

The good news: as the largest regional park system in the nation, the vast majority of our parks, open space, and trails remain open, as are our 300-miles of paved regional trails.

If they are to remain open, we need your help. Together we can BEND THE CURVE!

Robert Doyle is general manager of the East Bay Regional Park District. Doyle has been with the Park District since 1975 and has served as General Manager since 2011. The East Bay Regional Park District is the largest park district of its kind in the United States with 73 regional parks on over 125,000 acres of open space.

Possible “What Visitors Can Do To Help” info box to go with Op-ED.

What Visitors Can Do To Help:

- ✓ **Maintain a 6-foot distance from other people**
- ✓ **No picnicking, groups, gatherings, or meetups** (only immediate households should be together)
- ✓ **Be aware of high-touch points such as trail gates** (use hand sanitizer or gloves)
- ✓ **Keep dogs on leash** (even dogs should social distance)
- ✓ **Pack-in, pack-out trash, including dog poop bags** (trash collection is limited)
- ✓ **Bring water and hand sanitizers, and use restrooms at home before you come** (bathrooms and water fountains are closed, do not use single use plastic water bottles as they are a major source of litter in the parks)
- ✓ **Park properly and safely** (parking restrictions will be enforced)

Other Possible info boxes:

CHECK OUR WEBSITE BEFORE YOU GO TO SEE UPDATES ON ANY CLOSURES.

“GO” BEFORE YOU GO AND WASH YOUR HANDS BEFORE AND AFTER YOU VISIT A PARK OR TRAIL AND BRING HAND SANITIZER IF YOU HAVE IT.

WHILE THE PARK DISTRICT NORMALLY ALLOW DOGS OFF LEASH IN MANY PARKS, BECAUSE OF HIGH USE, FOR PUBIC SAFETY, AND TO MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING, THE DISTRICT IS ASKING THAT DOGS BE ON LEASH.