

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **CONTACT:**

Laurie Metanchuk, Director of Community Affairs  
Brittany Kovach, Communications & Marketing Coordinator  
630-232-5980 forestpreserve@kaneforest.com

Forest Preserve District of Kane County  
1996 S. Kirk Rd., Ste. 320, Geneva, IL 60134  
www.kaneforest.com

## **Do your part to keep preserves open and safe, during pandemic**

GENEVA, IL — With all but essential businesses closed during the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, residents may wonder why the Kane County forest preserves have remained open.

The simple answer is that public open space is considered essential, and outdoor activity is specifically permitted as part of Gov. Pritzker's Executive Orders:

*“Individuals may leave their residence ... to engage in outdoor activity, provided the individuals comply with Social Distancing Requirements, as defined below, such as, by way of example and without limitation, walking, hiking, running, or biking. Individuals may go to public parks and open outdoor recreation areas.”*

*Executive Order 2010-10*

As the agency managing the most public open space in Kane County, it's vital that the preserves remain open to that public, said Forest Preserve Commission President Mike Kenyon.

“It's not only permissible but *necessary* for people to get outside, go for a walk or run, and mentally decompress, especially during times of crisis.

“With more than 22,000 acres and 200 miles of trails within the Forest Preserve District of Kane County system, there's plenty of space for preserve users to spread out, get some fresh air, and find respite in nature — and still comply with the Governor's orders. Do we want everyone to come spend time in the preserves right now? No, of course not, but we want residents to know that we're here and open, when and if they need us,” he said.

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“Kane County residents have been extremely supportive of the Forest Preserve District. It is our responsibility to remain open and available to them, now,” Kenyon said.

Executive Director Monica Meyers said the District asks residents who do choose to visit during this time, to do so safely: follow social-distancing guidelines; keep a minimum of six feet from others, step off the edge of a trail, if necessary; wear a mask; stay home if sick; and avoid preserves and trail locations that are typically more popular or have a full parking lot.

While the preserves have been able to remain open, other parts of District operations have been impacted. All nature programs, shelter reservations, and special-event rentals have been canceled through April. District-owned facilities — including Creek Bend Nature Center at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles, the Fox Valley Ice Arena in Geneva, and the District’s three golf courses have been closed since mid-March. If the stay-at-home order is extended, it would also delay District campgrounds from opening on their regular date of May 1.

“We’re waiting to see what happens, like everyone. If the stay-at-home order is extended, we’ll keep our buildings shut down longer, but we’ll continue to provide open preserves and trails, and strongly encourage anyone using them to do so safely,” Meyers said.

To further lessen contact, the District encourages preserve and trail users to “get off the beaten path,” and choose to visit preserves that are less-frequented than others. Instead of preserves in the Tri-Cities or along the Fox River, head further west or south within the County. Preserves that typically don’t have as much traffic as their eastern or riverfront counterparts include: Big Rock Forest Preserve in Big Rock, Binnie Forest Preserve in West Dundee, Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve in Sycamore, and Hampshire Forest Preserve in Hampshire, to name a few. For an interactive forest preserve map, visit the District’s website at [www.kaneforest.com](http://www.kaneforest.com).

Alternatively, if you’d like to virtually visit some of the preserves, the Forest Preserve District has been posting a number of photos and videos on its social media channels. Find the District on social media by searching [@forestpreserve](https://twitter.com/forestpreserve).