**Showcasing the DNR: #OptOutside this Black Friday**

**By EMMA KUKUK**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

For a lot of people, the day after Thanksgiving often is devoted to laying around on the couch recovering after the big feast, watching college football all day or hunting for the best Black Friday shopping deals.

With the November holiday just days away, the time is right to consider another option, one started by Recreation Equipment, Inc. – the Kent, Washington-based retail and outdoor recreation services company known more commonly as REI.

The company’s #OptOutside campaign launched in 2015 has grown in popularity since.

The outdoors-focused movement encourages people to spend more time outside, and highlights the benefits of immersing yourself in nature, on Black Friday and all year long.

For the fourth year in a row, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is participating alongside REI in encouraging others to join the [#OptOutside](https://www.rei.com/opt-outside) movement.

On Friday, Nov. 29, the DNR will waive the regular Recreation Passport vehicle entry fee providing access to Michigan’s 103 state parks and recreation areas, 138 state forest campgrounds, and state trailheads and boat launches.

“For anyone who’s been itching to get outdoors or someone who might need a nudge, Black Friday is the perfect day for residents and visitors to explore Michigan’s natural resources,” Ron Olson, chief of the DNR Parks and Recreation Division. “From quiet trails to picturesque waterfalls, breathtaking vistas and more, state parks are full of opportunities for fun and reflection.”

While no Recreation Passport is needed, all camping, permit and license fees still apply.

**Relax after the holiday**

Deciding to get outside after Thanksgiving Day is about getting some fresh air in the great outdoors, spending valuable time with family and friends and, perhaps most importantly, relaxing.

“The holiday season can be hectic,” said Maia Turek, DNR Parks and Recreation Division resource development specialist. “This is a good way to stretch your legs, unwind and appreciate the gift of plentiful, scenic outdoor spaces. Michigan has some of the most beautiful destinations and getting outside in the fall and winter creates a completely different recreational experience for all of your senses.”

No matter the season, Michigan’s public lands are treasures to be discovered.

“Give your New Year’s resolutions a head-start by starting over the Thanksgiving holiday,” said Sherry Krause, a certified personal trainer at the Grand Traverse Athletic Club in Traverse City. “After all the extra food and often sedentary visiting, the day after the big feast is a perfect time to start moving.

“An outside walk can help with depression and anxiety, set your circadian rhythm, focus your attention in a quiet way, and of course, give you a big dose of vitamin D. And the big holiday present you receive with all those things – they all promote weight loss.”

**Make new traditions, explore the outdoors**

Ami Van Antwerp, DNR Parks and Recreation Division communications coordinator, said opting outside is a unique opportunity to explore Michigan’s natural assets.

“Spend a day under one roof, then spend a day under the sky,” she said. “When you think of all the different ways you can enjoy these green spaces, state parks are really like one big outdoor gym with 100-plus locations.”

Once you get outside, there are plenty of activities to choose from:

* Hike, run, fat-tire or mountain bike, snowshoe and more on over 13,000 miles of state-designated trails and pathways.
* Watch for birds and other wildlife on acres and acres of public lands.
* Discover Michigan’s fascinating backstories by visiting historic sites.
* Enjoy some late-season fishing (double-check to be sure your favorite boat launch is open).
* Hunt in Michigan’s state parks and recreation areas, state game areas or state forest lands.
* Soak in the peace and quiet of Michigan’s natural areas.
* Search for a variety of hidden geocaches as part of the [State Park Centennial GeoTour](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79133_79205_85747_86992_88875---%2C00.html).
* Capture some gorgeous nature photos with your camera or phone.

See our [Things to Do webpage](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79119---%2C00.html) to learn more about all the different activities you can enjoy when you #OptOutside.

Opting for the outdoors is about more than simply getting outdoors – it’s also a chance to create new traditions.

“Thanksgiving is all about family gathering around the dinner table,” Turek said. “Adding an #OptOutside component is a simple way to introduce a new activity that can become a tradition with a healthy outcome, too, and one that can create lifelong memories.

“When you have several generations together, there’s nothing like doing something fun outside.”

#OptOutside is one way to extend the Thanksgiving experience and create some magnificent memories.

Quick tips on enjoying, and supporting, the outdoors:

* Those who do head outdoors on Black Friday should remember that Michigan’s firearm deer hunting season is in full swing. Keep yourself and your family, friends and pets safe when you’re in the woods by wearing bright colors, being mindful of others outdoors, and remember that dogs at state parks must always be kept on 6-foot leashes.
* Want to enjoy and support Michigan’s state parks and recreation areas year-round? The $11 [Recreation Passport](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79134_79210---%2C00.html) gives you unlimited vehicle access to state parks, boat launches, state forest campgrounds, trailheads and other attractions. Plus, each purchase helps fund needed maintenance and improvements at state and local parks.
* If you’re interested in lending a hand to ensure state parks remain beautiful for future generations, there are plenty of [volunteer stewardship](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_79767_79860_81155---%2C00.html) workdays throughout the year. Volunteers help with everything from collecting native seeds to pulling invasive weeds to insect monitoring.

This year consider making the Thanksgiving weekend more memorable with an outing in Michigan’s spectacular outdoors. Take a break from holiday shopping and opt outdoors this Black Friday. You’ll likely learn more about yourself and your loved ones and maybe even create a new holiday tradition that will inspire all of you to continue for decades to come.

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [Michigan.gov/DNRStories](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003---%2C00.html). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [Michigan.gov/DNR](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003---%2C00.html).

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