**Showcasing the DNR: Ready, set, get outdoors**

Heading outdoors for some springtime adventure and recreation can produce some spectacular results. Consider everything Michigan offers to enjoy and explore, from mighty rivers and waterfalls to Great Lakes shorelines and lush forests, more than 100 state parks, 11,000 miles of developed trails and so much more.

“It’s an exciting time of year to be outside, with nature reborn after the solitude of wintertime,” said Dan Eichinger, Michigan Department of Natural Resources director. “But springtime is also a season to be cautious and aware of several variables that might prove challenging – from weather to water and encounters with wildlife.”

Some of the best advice for those new to the outdoors and veterans of woods and waters alike is to “know before you go.” Plan, study and think before you leave the house.

Check a map to find out exactly where you’re going and leave a note at home detailing your plans, including when you expect to return. Maps include important features to be aware of, such as private and public lands, steepening terrain, trails, roads and water sources.

Print maps to take with you, as cellphone coverage is not available in some remote areas throughout the state. Check with bait shops or other businesses learn more about local conditions.

If you’re new to an activity, consider hiring a guide or instructor, read written materials or view online tutorials to help you learn more about what you’ll need to know before you get out there.

Check a weather forecast to help determine what types of conditions you may encounter and how to dress properly for the day. You might want to bring a weather radio along with you.

Consider items you might need to bring with you including a rain jacket, hiking boots, warm clothes and incidentals like sunscreen and insect repellent. Be sure to leave a note at home detailing where you are going and when you plan to be back.

“Springtime outdoors usually means encountering water in one way or another,” said John Pepin, DNR deputy public information officer. “There are several things to consider that will help you avoid problems.”

Swelled with snow and ice melt, lakes, rivers, creeks and streams may look inviting, but water temperatures remain very cold. Hypothermia is a serious, even deadly, concern for anyone getting into these chilled waters unequipped.

Spring runoff often results in water covering low-lying areas typically dry in the summer, including pathways, foot bridges and even portions of roadways.

Springtime often attracts people to waterfalls at peak flows to take photographs or to witness the tremendous power and spray of raging rivers.

High water also can produce dangerous currents and cover rocks and other hazards, while leaving embankments, viewing platforms and ledges slippery. Spring steelhead anglers and smelt dippers should also be aware of these hazards.

While it’s a little early for clouds of mosquitoes and blackflies, reports of ticks have already been received. Foragers should consult field guides or other resources to be certain of which mushrooms or plants they are picking to eat from the forest.

The DNR has a helpful [foraging webpage](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79119_104319---%2C00.html) linked to a [morel mushroom identification](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79119_92603_92605-496116--%2C00.html) page.

Though Michigan’s state parks and state forest campgrounds remain open, visitors may find certain features, like some restrooms, shower buildings and trails or roads, closed until conditions allow for reopening.

“This is our typical reopening procedure that occurs each spring,” said Ron Olson, chief of the DNR’s Parks and Recreation Division. “We wait for the snow and ice to melt, then we begin cleanup with everything in top shape to be fully operational at all of our facilities by Memorial Day weekend.”

Boating access sites are open, and skid piers are on a schedule to be installed.

Some of Michigan’s cultural attractions administered by the DNR, including museums, also may be closed under current provisions of coronavirus directives.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, the outdoors became a safe place to get outside while maintaining social distance. Many people experienced Michigan state parks, fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreation for the first time.

Hunting and fishing license sales skyrocketed during 2020, and so did attendance at all 103 state parks. With many newcomers to these areas, it’s important to [recreate responsibly](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_106407---%2C00.html), be courteous to others and ensure everyone has the chance to enjoy these places and activities to their fullest.

You can [find areas to enjoy the outdoors near you](https://midnr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=a623826e6dbf48b5b9930e316f0d410b) and [check for closures](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79137_79770_79781---%2C00.html?page=1&limit=10&filterCategories=&searchQuery=) on the DNR website. Remember to [leave no trace](https://lnt.org/why/7-principles/). Public lands and properties are open to everyone, whether you’re an outdoor recreation veteran or just stepping on the trail for the first time.

“One of the saving graces during the worst days of the coronavirus pandemic was the ability of people to find nature and the outdoors open for recreation and reinvigoration,” Pepin said. “Michigan’s out of doors remain open for adventure and recovery. We want people to recreate responsibly and play it safe when they’re out there.”

Aspects of being responsible and polite while enjoying the outdoors include sharing trails and roadways, social distancing, reporting garbage dumpers and poachers, keeping volume levels low and packing out what you pack in.

Fire safety is critically important during springtime. In Michigan, at few hundred wildland fires typically are reported each year, with the vast majority ignited by humans.

Human causes of wildland fires include debris burning, arson, campfires, smoking and sparks from equipment, powerlines and railroads. Of these, debris burning is consistently the top cause.

In Michigan, wildfires caused by lightning strikes typically burn the most amount of total acreage. Over the past decade, the [number of fires in the state](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79136_79237_80917-458731--%2C00.html) ranged from a low of 165 in 2011 to 496 in 2012. Acres blackened topped 23,000 in 2012 or as few as 600 acres in 2014 and 2017.

Before burning debris, check [Michigan.gov/BurnPermit](http://www.Michigan.gov/BurnPermit) to see whether burning is allowed that day. Be sure to thoroughly extinguish all fires and don’t [burn household garbage in campfires or burn barrels.](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0%2C4570%2C7-350-79135_81057_81058---%2C00.html)

The Michigan DNR oversees 4.6 million acres of public land, including 3.9 million acres of state forests, 19 state-managed harbors and more than 1,300 boating access sites, but care for those tremendous natural resources and outstanding recreation facilities can be helped or hurt by each of us as individuals.

“We should all do our best to care for our public lands and protect our outdoor traditions and recreation heritage here in Michigan,” said Brad Garmon, director of the DNR’s Office of Outdoor Recreation Industry. “We need to help ensure these countless recreation opportunities we enjoy are here for the generations that follow.”

For more information on Michigan’s outdoor recreation opportunities and natural and cultural resources check out the Things to Do and Places to Go pages at [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

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](http://www.Michigan.gov/DNR).

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