



A Message from our Superintendents **COVID-19 Update #6: Seasonal Campers** May 13, 2020

Provincial Parks Announcement gives us Hope

On Saturday, May 9, Premier Doug Ford and Jeff Yurek, the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, announced that Ontario's 500+ provincial parks and conservation reserves would be allowed to open for day use visitors commencing May 11, 2020.

The announcement clearly stated that access to the parks and reserves is limited, camping is prohibited, and drinking water and washroom facilities will not be available. Playgrounds and beaches will remain closed. Activities such as walking, hiking, bird watching and biking are permitted, with the strong reminder to ensure social distancing, bring hand sanitizer, and stay at home if not feeling well.

Since the provincial [Closure of Outdoor Recreational Amenities Emergency Order](#) came into effect on March 30, 2020, the UTRCA has continued to provide access to our conservation areas (CAs) for the same activities now being allowed in the provincial parks and reserves. We did this recognizing that access to green space is limited and people need somewhere to go, close to home.

Although the Province's latest announcement applies only to provincial parks and conservation reserves, and does not directly affect what the UTRCA is doing, it gives us hope that we are all moving in the direction of being able to enjoy our CAs this summer – although to what capacity still remains to be seen.

Please ensure you observe physical distancing and group size requirements, whether you are visiting our conservation areas or other parks.

Conservation Area vs. Conservation Reserve

With Premier Ford's announcement, there was some confusion in the media and elsewhere as to whether conservation areas are the same as conservation reserves.

These natural spaces both protect natural and cultural features while offering recreational opportunities, but they differ in the legislation under which they were created.

Provincial parks and conservation reserves are provincial entities, governed under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act. Conservation areas are regulated under the Conservation Authorities Act and follow a watershed base model. Thus, while some people use the terms "conservation reserve" and "conservation area" interchangeably, they are not, in fact, the same thing.

Summer Kick Off, COVID-Style

The May long weekend has traditionally been the unofficial kick off to summer but, this year, the holiday weekend will look and feel very different.

Obviously, camping is out of the question, as are many of the other typical Victoria Day holiday weekend camping activities, such as socializing around the campfire, watching fireworks, reconnecting with neighbours, and preparing the seasonal campsite for the upcoming summer. For 2020, the weekend is about continuing to "flatten the curve." The best way to do that is to stay home.

Having said that, the 2020 May long weekend does not have to be boring – far from it! With some imagination, you can start some new traditions or, if nothing else, make it a weekend to remember. Some possibilities include:

- Re-create your campsite in your backyard
- Sit quietly on your balcony, porch or front step and birdwatch
- Create a backyard scavenger hunt
- Cook “s’mores” on a campfire or BBQ in your yard (check fire restrictions in your area first)

You can also check out **#utrcaNatureChallenge** for ideas to fill your long weekend with activities that keep you close to home but make you feel like you are at the park. These challenges are posted daily at 10 am on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

Please Remember

In last week’s update, we reprinted important reminders when visiting our parks. These reminders may seem unnecessary and redundant, but they are truly important. The health and safety of our staff and visitors is paramount and we want to stress that. Please be sure to review those reminders before planning your visit to the park.

Vehicle access within the CAs remains restricted to the parking lots prior to the gated areas. This ensures that visitors continue with passive use activities and maintain guidelines, and reduces traffic beyond the parking areas.

Staff will be on site throughout the long weekend to monitor the activities of park visitors. Because COVID-19 is an unprecedented situation and the May long weekend usually brings out larger crowds, we do not know what to expect. With that in mind, a “zero tolerance” program will be in place.

By following the provincial directives and our campground rules and regulations, everyone can safely enjoy a brief visit to our parks.

Absolutely NO fires, running of generators, alcohol, cannabis, fireworks, or congregating while you check your trailer will be tolerated.

You must practice physical distancing (minimum 2 metres/6 feet away from other people).

Plan your Visit – A Message from Dr David Williams, Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health(April 29, 2020)

“If you plan to do something outside over the weekend, make a plan by selecting a time and location that will allow you to practice social distancing.”

When we reached out to our local health units for messaging, they said this point is extremely important to share. The rationale behind this statement is if you plan your visit, you are more aware of times, places, and if you will be able to practice physical distancing. Too often, those who travel on a whim end up in busy places.

Keep in Touch – Keep Informed

UTRCA staff want to keep everyone apprised of decisions about the camping season. The best method is electronically and we encourage our campers to ensure we have the most up to date contact information. We will also post these updates on our websites.

For those of you who don’t have email, we will snail mail the information to you. Please understand that, because the impacts of COVID-19 change frequently, by the time you receive the updates, the decisions, directions and operations may have changed. You are responsible for ensuring you have the most up to date information pertaining to UTRCA decisions.

We encourage anyone without email to set up an account or ask a fellow camper to keep you apprised of communications so you have the most recent information.

Need to speak with park staff?

Please call the park directly and leave a message. Staff check these messages daily.

- Fanshawe CA: 519-951-6181 ext 367
- Pittock CA: 519-539-5088 ext 1
- Wildwood CA: 519-284-2292 ext 1434

Stay informed about COVID-19 impacts on UTRCA programs and services.

- fanshaweconservationarea.ca
- pittockconservationarea.ca
- wildwoodconservationarea.ca