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New Washington Outdoor Coalition Shares Six Important Tips for How to #RecreateResponsibly this Memorial Day

More than 50 organizations agree on practical advice for enjoying the outdoors during the pandemic to protect Washingtonians



During the global COVID-19 pandemic, spending time outside has become of even greater importance to Washingtonians because of the mental and physical benefits fresh air and nature provide. As Gov. Jay Inslee re-opens state lands and waters, people are excited, but we need a shared set of steps for reducing the risk to ourselves and others while enjoying nature. The newly formed Washington Recreate Responsibly Coalition brings together more than 50 organizations to simplify and amplify that guidance — to make recreating responsibly easier to remember, follow and share. And the work of the Washington coalition has begun to help shape the national conversation.

Brought together under the leadership of Washington Trails Association, outdoor retailer REI and state land managers, the Recreate Responsibly Coalition includes government agencies, nonprofits and outdoor businesses inspired by a love of the outdoors and a desire to help people safely experience the benefits of nature while ensuring that our public lands stay open.

“It became clear pretty quickly that there were a lot of similar conversations happening. It made sense for us all to come together to agree on clear and consistent guidelines that everyone could use,” said **Andrea Imler, Washington Trails Association.**

The result is six quick tips to help reduce the spread of the virus, based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), public health guidelines and recreation experts. Whether you are hiking, biking, paddling or riding (a horse or a dirtbike), these tips offer advice for how to recreate responsibly during this public health crisis. From what to consider as you plan your adventure, to how far you should travel — the Recreate Responsibly tips provide appropriate guidance.

Six tips to help you #RecreateResponsibly

1. **Know Before You Go:** Check the status of the place you want to visit. If it is closed, don't go. If it's crowded, have a plan B.
2. **Plan Ahead:** Prepare for facilities to be closed, pack lunch and bring essentials like hand sanitizer and a face covering.
3. **Stay Close to Home:** This is not the time to travel long distances to recreate. Most places are only open for day use.
4. **Practice Physical Distancing:** Adventure only with your immediate household. Be prepared to cover your nose and mouth and give others space. If you are sick, stay home.
5. **Play It Safe:** Slow down and choose lower-risk activities to reduce your risk of injury. Search and rescue operations and health care resources are both strained.
6. **Leave No Trace:** Respect public lands and communities and take all your garbage with you.

“The fact that the statewide Recreate Responsibly Coalition formed so quickly is testament to our shared value of public lands,” said **King County Executive Dow Constantine**. “Here in King County, we treasure our parks, trails, and wilderness, and as our residents get outside to enjoy these special places, we encourage everyone to follow the Coalition’s six simple tips for recreating responsibly.”

“As Washingtonians, we continue to fight to slow the spread of COVID-19. As a community that treasures the outdoors, we are so profoundly grateful to get back outside. It is one small step back to normalcy for all of us,” said **Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz**. “Due to our shared sacrifice and the heroic work of our first responders, doctors and nurses, we can now begin reconnecting with nature again. However, we all must take the proper precautions to keep our communities, our families and ourselves safe from the virus so we can continue to enjoy the healing powers of nature.”

The coalition realized that harmonizing these simple guidelines would increase the understanding and awareness of these shared best practices across the state, and potentially beyond. REI, one of the founding members of the Recreate Responsibly Coalition, has a reach beyond the state’s boundaries and quickly saw the potential to channel this energy nationwide.

“Spending time outdoors has been important for many Americans during this public health crisis,” said **Eric Artz, President and CEO of REI Co-op**. “The #RecreateResponsibly coalition is an inspiring example of what’s possible in this state when organizations come together with a shared passion and a clear goal. By simplifying and amplifying guidance on how to recreate reasonably, we are keeping ourselves healthy, supporting our land managers and working together to keep our public lands open. This is a collaborative model we hope to see take off at the national level and in other states.”

Building on the idea that simple, consistent advice would be good for everyone, REI, Outdoor Alliance and the Outdoor Industry Association have convened a national group of partners interested in helping to ensure this important conversation expanded nationally. This national Recreate Responsibly Coalition is now 18 strong and evolving into a #RecreateResponsibly movement with a website at www.recreateresponsibly.org to share the guidelines and other resources. The group will launch an awareness campaign on Thursday, May 21, just in time for Memorial Day weekend — encouraging folks across the country to keep these six easy tips in mind to recreate responsibly while enjoying their summer adventures.

The Coalition recognizes this is a first collective step. As more people get outside, and as governments update their COVID-19 policies, the guidance may need to be updated. In addition, different activities— climbing, off-roading, trail maintenance and restoration, for instance — may require additional protocols. The Coalition hopes to synthesize and amplify that additional guidance for the benefit of the broader community, too.

The reality is that the impacts of this pandemic on recreation and public lands will be felt for months, and maybe years, to come. The quick, collective response of the outdoor community shows how a love of nature can bring us together.

“Recreating responsibly helps us care for each other, and at the same time, take greater care of our outdoor spaces. It is thrilling to see the work the Recreate Responsibly Coalition is doing extend across the nation,” reflects **Jon Hoekstra, Executive Director, Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust**.

It has become clear that natural spaces and the ability to enjoy them are not mere nice-to-haves. Whether you are hiking, paddling, riding or walking in your local park, access to nature is a key component to our nation’s health and well-being.

Long term, the Recreate Responsibly Coalition hopes that this growing recognition of the value of time spent outside will translate to an increased desire to be strong stewards for public lands well into the future.

Download additional assets at www.RecreateResponsibly.org (live 5.21.2020)

Quotes from Collation members:

“Outdoor recreation is vital to tourism and to the wellbeing of our local residents. I believe the Recreate Responsibly messaging provides a helpful “best practices” framework for outdoor recreation enthusiasts.” -- **Meilee Anderson, Visit Rainier**

“Washington outdoor groups have a long history of coming together to find compromises and solutions that support the core belief that being outside is good for us,” said **Kathy Young, Back Country Horsemen of Washington**.

“We are in this together, as part of the #RecreateResponsibly Coalition, we are working together to make sure our re-entry to trails, parks, waterways and public lands is done in the most responsible, safe and sustainable way.” -- **Yvonne Kraus, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance**

“Washington’s forests and rivers are a defining feature of our quality of life and time in the outdoors is critical for physical and mental health,” said Thomas O’Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director. “In the midst of this public health crisis we have an added responsibility to recreate responsibly and I know we can.” **Thomas O’Keefe, American Whitewater**

"Being part of this coalitions gives us hope that when we can resume programming, we will do so in the safest possible way. Y.E.T.I. is not only committed to sharing the recreate responsibly information with our youth but also the communities we serve. Together we can make sure that everyone feels safe in the outdoors. " **Talia Hirsch, Youth Experiential Training Institute**

“Though Washington’s National Forest lands remain temporarily closed at developed recreation sites, enjoying the outdoors responsibly benefits all public lands. We at the National Forest Foundation are proud to participate in the newly formed coalition and look forward to sharing these guidelines broadly.” -- **Mary Mitsos, National Forest Foundation**

Members of the Washington Recreate Responsibly Coalition

Access Fund	Oregon Trails Coalition
American Whitewater	Outdoor Alliance
Back Country Horsemen of Washington	Outdoor Asian
Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism	Pacific Crest Trail Association
Boys & Girls Club of South Puget Sound	Pacific Northwest Four Wheel Drive Association
Cascade Bicycle Club	Pacific Northwest Trail Association
City of Spokane Parks & Recreation	Recreation Northwest
Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area	REI
Colville National Forest	Spokane Parks Foundation
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance	Spokane Regional Health District
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance - Eastern WA	Surfrider
Chapter	The Mountaineers
Forterra	The Wilderness Society
Gifford Pinchot National Forest	Trailkeepers of Oregon
Inland NW Land Conservancy	Trout Unlimited
InterIm CDA	U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region
King County Parks	Visit Rainier
Methow Trails	Washington Alpine Club
Mountains To Sound Greenway Trust	Washington’s National Park Fund
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest	Washington Off Highway Vehicle Alliance
Mule Deer Foundation	Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife
National Forest Foundation	Washington State Department of Natural Resources
National Park Service - Mt. Rainier National Park	Washington State Parks
National Park Service - Region Office	Washington Trails Association
North Cascades National Park	Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
Northwest Marine Trade Association	Youth Experiential Training Institute
Northwest Motorcycle Association	
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest	
Olympic Hiking Co	
Olympic National Forest	