

A Message from the State Parks Director About Park Closures

New Mexico, like the rest of the world, is currently in uncharted territory. COVID-19 is spreading rapidly and as of this submission, New Mexico has 35 positive cases. This is a disease that spreads through close contact and is especially dangerous to the elderly and people with compromised immune systems. That's why, on March 15, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham directed all state parks, museums, historic sites and cultural institutions to [close temporarily](#) through April 9.

We also have confirmed cases of community spread in New Mexico, meaning, it's not clear how the disease was contracted. Confirmed cases of community spread make social distancing even more crucial, which is why the Governor took additional action this week and closed more places where people gather and added restrictions on restaurants and bars.

The decision to close State Parks was not made lightly. I've spent 22 years working in the New Mexico State Park system and I love each of our treasured outdoor spaces. But the facts are facts, and by reducing public interactions we can slow the spread of this disease.

By temporarily closing parks, we are reducing the public's interaction with each other and with State Park staff. For every visitor to a State Park, we need staff to provide operational park management: collecting fees, cleaning facilities and campgrounds and providing law enforcement. Each one of these interactions creates a new opportunity to spread the virus. It's a risk we cannot take. By staying home we're not only protecting the larger community but keeping our Park staff and first responders safe.

We know this is hard. The outdoors provide solace and an opportunity to connect with nature at times like this. We know that this will have an impact on the local community. But we also know that New Mexicans are resilient and that our state government is working round the clock to assist impacted workers and businesses. The Governor has [extended unemployment eligibility requirements](#) for workers who are impacted by temporary closures. The New Mexico Economic Development Department is offering a [new loan program](#) to businesses impacted by COVID-19 closures.

These are hard times, but we will get through them together. Right now, it is important for all New Mexicans to practice social distancing, avoid large gatherings and wash their hands. We need to take these measures now to protect our communities and each other.

-Christy Tafoya

State Parks Director