



NEWS RELEASE

STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
News Release No. 15 – June 27, 2018

DNR Begins Restoration of Houghton County Recreation Trails

HANCOCK, MICH. Michigan Department of Natural Resources officials are preparing to reopen some recreation trails areas of Houghton County that were hit hard by heavy rains on June 17. The rains did significant damage to DNR-maintained ATV and snowmobile trails in the Houghton–Hancock area. Some trail segments will reopen by the weekend.

“We had to close about 60 miles of DNR recreation trails in Houghton County, but some of the trail segments that had less damage are already repaired and graded. After some final safety inspections, we’ll be ready to open those segments back up for public use” said Jeff Kakuk, western U.P trails specialist for the Parks and Recreation Division. “We also want to let area visitors know that the vast majority of local recreation facilities are still open for business. The Copper Country has miles and miles of back roads and local trails that weren’t significantly affected by the rain.”

A DNR incident management team responding to the recovery effort spent several days during the past week doing initial damage inspections, closing trail access points, and cleaning plugged culverts, according to Brian Mensch, incident commander for the team. “Now that those critical tasks are winding down, we’re focusing on actual repair work. We have several miles of the Bill Nicholls trail just about ready to reopen between Toivola and Obenhoff Road” said Mensch. “We also have a good chunk of the Lake Linden grade repaired between Normand Road and Calumet.” The DNR anticipates that the 23-mile stretch of trail from South Range south to the Houghton-Ontonagon county line will be re-opened later this week.

With Independence Day coming up next week, DNR officials stressed that most area recreational facilities are intact. “All three state parks in Houghton and Keweenaw counties, plus our state forest campground at Emily Lake are open for business” said Parks and Recreation District Supervisor Doug Rich. “McLain State Park visitors coming in from Hancock are getting detoured through Calumet because of a washout on M-203 west of Hancock. Other than that, things are running normally in the state parks here – McLain, as well as Fort Wilkins and Twin Lakes.”

Area tourist accommodations are open and ready to welcome visitors, according to Dianne St. Amour of the Keweenaw Convention and Visitors Bureau. “We have so many recreational opportunities to offer, and most were not at all affected by the storm” said St. Amour. “Visitors can call our office at 906-337-4579 for the latest on local trail conditions.”

Storm damage also forced closure of five area boating access sites. However, two of those facilities have since reopened at Otter Lake and Otter Dam, said Rich. “Boat ramps at Lily Pond, Boston Pond, and Bootjack remain closed till further notice. But we have 33 other accesses still open in Houghton County and another 12 in Keweenaw.”

Although some DNR trail segments are nearly restored, others will take much longer to repair because of massive washouts and difficult access for heavy equipment, said Kakuk. “Our goal is to have the Bill Nicholls trail south of Houghton and the trail from Hancock to Calumet completely back in shape by this

winter's snowmobiling season. The Freda grade, much of the Lake Linden grade, and the Houghton to Chassell grade will take a lot longer."

Supervisory staff from the DNR Parks and Recreation Division, including chief Ron Olson, toured damaged trails and boating access sites yesterday. "We are taking a hard look at what it's going to take, both in the short and long terms, to get these trails back on board," said Olson. "It will take a lot of people, a lot of equipment, a lot of money and a lot of cooperation inside and outside the department. Hopefully that will include some support from the federal government as well."

Hazards remain on many area roads, trails, and waterways. The DNR advises trail users, campers, and boaters to use caution in affected areas and to be alert for unstable or dangerous conditions.

For the latest information on closures of DNR-managed facilities, visit the DNR's webpage at: www.michigan.gov/dnrclosures.

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