



Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association

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To: Governor Evers
Secretary-designee Andrea Palm, Department of Health Services

From: Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association (WPRA)

Date: April 23, 2020

RE: **Plans to Reopen Wisconsin's Parks, Aquatic Resources and Recreational Amenities**

The Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association (WPRA) provides professionals and agencies in the areas of Parks, Recreation, Community Education and Aquatics with leadership, engaged communities, advocacy and development opportunities to promote the benefits of park, recreation, environmental, educational and cultural services throughout Wisconsin. The WPRA strives to improve the quality of life for all of Wisconsin by demonstrating and supporting the critical services provided by the Park and Recreation profession related to conservation, wellness and social equity. The WPRA is a membership association representing over 1,200 individuals delivering a broad spectrum of services in Wisconsin. Our members include professionals in local, county, state, school district, private and agency settings. WPRA also represents public Park and Recreation Boards and Commissions, students, commercial firms and retired members.

The COVID-19 public health emergency and related Safer at Home Emergency Orders have drastically altered the way Wisconsin residents can utilize their local parks, playgrounds, and other recreational amenities. Our members have roped-off playgrounds, removed nets and locked gates for outdoor sports, canceled special events and recreational programming, and delayed hiring summer workers. At the same time, parks and open spaces continue to be highly utilized by residents as a much-needed refuge in these turbulent, unpredictable times. Our members want to continue to provide this welcome relief to residents – especially as the weather becomes warmer and summer arrives.

In order to provide these vital, important services to all residents, our members need to be prepared for the summer season. Wisconsin is a diverse state – and likewise, so are our parks. Some more urban parks face challenges maintaining safe social distancing measures, while parks in more rural areas, have ample space to protect visitors. Acknowledging these differences is important and should be considered regionally allowing for direction from local health department leadership.

We understand and are adhering to the revised Safer at Home Order (Emergency Order 28). For our members to be adequately prepared for the summer months, **we ask you consider and adopt the following exemptions immediately upon the conclusion of the executive order:**

- **Summer Camps:** Many parents, including front line workers, rely on the local summer camp programs for essential childcare.
 - 1) Permit summer recreational camps (regardless of licensure or certification) to operate, in compliance with “Safer at Home” requirements for child care.
 - 2) Allow school facilities and grounds to be used for municipal and fund 80 summer camp and physical wellness programs. Many community and school recreation/community education departments utilize school facilities and grounds for camps and need access before the “end of the school year” (June 30th).
 - 3) Prioritize children of first responders, municipal, and essential workforce employees for summer camp enrollment.

- **Playgrounds and Other Park Amenities:** For proven physical and mental health benefits to Wisconsinites, we want to ensure community members can safely return to our parks during the summer months. Just as golf courses can be opened with social distancing and other requirements, we believe that park facilities can be as well. Upon conclusion of the Safer at Home order and in Phase 1 of the Badger Bounce Back plan:
 - 1) Open playgrounds and park facilities utilizing social distancing guidelines
 - 2) Use “At your own risk” signs and other signage following CDC guidelines to include social distancing at playgrounds and amenities, such as outdoor sport courts, athletic fields, skate parks, disc golf, etc.

- **Aquatic Resources:** *Due to the variances among organizations and facilities, we will use the term "Aquatic Resources" throughout this letter. Please note that an Aquatic Resource refers to, but is not limited to, indoor, outdoor and wading pools, beachfronts, splash pads, interactive water features, and other aquatic amenities.*

For the purpose of safe, supervised and affordable swimming experience, we want to ensure community members can safely return to using public water sources. Opening some of these resources require 4-5 weeks lead time to adequately clean and perform necessary maintenance and sustainability of infrastructure. Aquatic Resources are staffed by seasonal employees (including certified lifeguards), who need to be hired and appropriately trained prior to opening.

As these Aquatic Resources are opened this summer under certain restrictions, our members need to make those preparations soon. Continuing to work in tandem with the local public health department factoring in Aquatic Resource size and space available:

- 1) Open Aquatic Resources in Phase 1 of the Badger Bounce Back plan for purpose life-saving swim lesson/instruction.
- 2) Open Aquatic Resources in Phase 2 of the Badger Bounce Back plan for the purpose of safe and guarded open water-related activities, including but not limited to; managing admissions, schedule modifications, requiring social distancing of deck furniture, use of lane/pool area closures, etc.
- 3) Monitor the number of people who can be in changing rooms/restrooms at same time.
- 4) Proper PPE for staff and CDC guidelines for protection of employees/visitors.
- 5) Ensure state pool licenses will be renewed and inspections permitted to ensure pool operators can open when phases allow.

Like you, we understand COVID-19 isn't going to just disappear anytime soon. Many entities are going to have to balance how to return to service while still protecting the public and their employee's health. We believe that by following the above recommendations, our members can do this. We can safely provide essential summer camp childcare coverage, access to local playgrounds and amenities, and use of aquatic resources.

Now more than ever, Wisconsin residents need access to the mental and physical health benefits gained through playing at the park or swimming at the local pool. As park and recreational professionals, we stand by to work with the administration and our local government officials, including public health departments, to deploy appropriate, safe plans for each community.

Our members want to continue to be a partner and expert resource with legislators in determining resolutions to community health by providing facilities, programs, and services to our residents. We support and appreciate your leadership during this public health crisis. Thank you for your consideration of the above recommendations.

Sincerely,



Jake Anderson, President
Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association



Jennifer Rzepka, CAE, Executive Director
Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association