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Parks

-- Poe Springs Reopened Saturday As Other Parks Are Slowly Allowing Visitors

Poe Springs, located in High Springs, opened June 13 after being closed since March. This reopening comes with some limitations, such as a 50% capacity and stricter guidelines.

Many parks in the area are opening up at limited capacity like Devil’s Millhopper and Payne’s Prairie, allowing locals to enter the park with some restrictions in place.

Poe Springs opened at 50% capacity. This capacity will be determined by the amount of parking spots, only allowing 64 cars to park at a time.

“Park staff will patrol the day use area and swimming area to ensure all social distancing and safety guidelines are being followed,” said parks and open space manager, Jason Maurer.

Interaction between swimmers and staff will be contactless and mixing with a group of 10 or more people is strongly discouraged.

Some parks managed by the Florida Park Service reopened around May 13, but Poe Springs waited about a month before making the decision to allow visitors.

“We decided to wait longer and monitor the ongoing health department COVID information before making a final decision about reopening the park,” said Maurer.

Other local parks such as Devil’s Millhopper Geological State Park has already reopened, but similar to Poe Springs, has taken public health and safety measures very seriously.

The Devil’s Millhopper is currently open, but has restricted the amount of visitors and group size to about 50 or fewer people.

All facilities in the geological state park are closed except for the nature trail and views into the sinkhole. The sinkhole, which is the main attraction of the park, is not open for visitors because its size would not be conducive to social distancing practices.

The state park is conducting its reopening in phases, with the first one having started May 21. This phase focused on reducing the population density in the park as well as limiting camping space.

“To support safe social distancing, DEP has cancelled events and programs and closed group gathering locations such as pavilions, playgrounds, museums and visitor centers,” said Weesam Khoury, press secretary for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Like many other businesses and state parks, Poe Springs was financially impacted by the statewide lockdown due to COVID-19. With a $5 per vehicle entry fee, the park has seen a 12-week loss of revenue.

According to Maurer, the springs took a financial hit during Memorial Day weekend. With the park being closed since March 18, they weren’t able to make any revenue on one of their most traditionally profitable times of the year.

As of June 10, parks in the Alachua County area have been opening up, such as the San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park and Payne’s Prairie Preserve State Park. All Florida state parks are currently open and in their beginning phases since the statewide lockdown.

On re-opening day, Poe Springs reached their capacity limit of 50% by 1:30 p.m. and reached it earlier on Sunday at 11:45 a.m. The staff said they received positive feedback from visitors.

Poe Springs will be open from 8 a.m.-7 p.m., and will allow for swimming and all other facilities to be used with social distancing guidelines in place.