

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hawk Mountain Trails Remain Closed

April 30, 2020—The world-famous and privately-owned Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has been and remains closed, Sanctuary officials reminded today, and will remain so until data shows the spread of COVID-19 has reached safer levels.

“We don’t have an exact date, but the staff meets frequently, coordinates with the board, and makes science-based, data-driven decisions. We intend to be part of the solution and support our local and county task force to stop the spread of COVID-19,” explains Sanctuary President Sean Grace.

Surveys demonstrate that the average visitor to Hawk Mountain drives 50 miles one-way, and the rocky overlooks and national-park-caliber staff, programs, and facilities attract annual visitation that can average 75,000 people—the majority during autumn, but also with large numbers during spring and summer.

“Large groups are exactly what we don’t want when we’re trying to flatten the curve, and every public health message is clear: recreate close to home,” he adds. That may mean the Sanctuary reopens after the shelter at home order is lifted.

Berks County Commissioner Christian Leinbach agrees.

“In the past week numerous vehicles have parked along Hawk Mountain Road in Albany Township. The occupants have ignored the Sanctuary’s clear signage and illegally trespassed onto private property. This is illegal and extremely disrespectful to both Hawk Mountain and their neighbors. Berks County is working with Albany Township, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, and Law Enforcement to determine the best way to help enforce compliance with this closure,” he says.

Sanctuary staff and board have developed a phased reopening plan based upon the Commonwealth’s Red, Yellow, and Green phases. This allows the Sanctuary to make decisions based upon data from Carnegie Mellon University’s Decision Support Tool that balances economic benefit versus inherent safety risks to staff and the public.

Unfortunately, the recent news that golf courses, marinas, and privately-owned campgrounds can open has sent a mixed message to the general public who wish to recreate outside.

“Considering the large number of COVID cases in Berks County, traveling to the Sanctuary is not good for the people traveling here, and it’s not good for the local community. We’re thrilled to have assistance from the Berks County sheriff’s office, who intend to discourage this open trespassing,” Grace said.

In the meantime, Hawk Mountain has doubled its efforts to provide online content, free virtual programs, and fun ideas to enjoy nature in your own backyard. Scientists are submitting manuscripts, analyzing data, working via video with colleagues from around the world, and developing new online programs with the education team that connect people, local-to-global, with raptor conservation.

“We’re working harder than ever, and I understand: the weather is nice and everyone wants to get outside. No one wants to reopen more than the staff at Hawk Mountain, but we’re not going to open until we can do it safely and correctly,” he adds.

<https://www.doyourpartberks.com/>

<https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#PhasedReopening>