

## River trip best practices in advance of Memorial Day Weekend

A web-meeting hosted by RMS on 5/21/2020

Presenters: Jack Henderson, Risa Shimoda, Dave Cernicek, and Bob Stanley

Notes: Dan Shelby

List of COVID related river closures nationwide:

<https://www.river-management.org/2020-covid-19-river-closures>

Example COVID protocols and other resources submitted to RMS:

<https://www.river-management.org/2020-covid-19-river-closures---guidance-samples>

### Risa introduced the meeting, which has become a series.

- There are rivers open in all 50 states.
- Standards vary by river and sometimes by county on the same river.
- REI's outdoor initiative was released today but doesn't talk about rivers.
- This is an opportunity to share ideas and talk about what's going on.
- ***These are not official recommendations. We are not an authority on health or disease transmission, just river managers brainstorming best practices.***

### Signups

- Lots of raft companies are having to turn away groups of 3 or less because it is not economically viable with that guide ratio, and it seems unsafe to combine groups in a single raft no matter the size.
- Others will only take one family at a time which is the safest approach.
- Let clients know the COVID operating plan: what to do on arrival, when will they have to wear a mask, who will hand them what, etc.

### Pre-screening

- Managers at several levels are trying to take this on.
- How to manage the 14-day period before employees and clients arrive?
- Where have you been? What have you been doing?
- Check in 1-2 weeks out and again when clients arrive onsite.
- Check in daily with guides.
- Have all paperwork and transactions finished before clients arrive.
- Gear fitting is the only thing that is still attached to the office.
- Can we do check in and gear fitting outside? Table in the parking lot?
- Need to have a plan if something goes wrong. Know what to do if someone shows up with symptoms
- If someone has been in contact with symptomatic people they must stay home.

- Some rivers are asking that out of state visitors quarantine for 14 days. Is this possible? Is this enforceable? No, it is up to individuals for compliance. All we have is the screening.

### **Vehicle shuttling**

- Use a 3<sup>rd</sup> party shuttle service.
- Busses or vans with reduced capacity.
- Masks must be worn in vehicles where 6 ft distance is marginal.
- 4 people per vehicle if all wear a mask and open their window.
- Must be willing to be flexible and change conditions.
- Use a bus to bring drivers only back to the put-in.
- Guides riding to the river together is an issue.
- Every other row blocked, empty seat behind driver, mask of clients' choice is mandatory. Driver mask is mandatory.
- Can shower curtains be used as dividers in a van or bus?

### **Parking lot**

- Give rangers a 6-ft stick (or paddle, etc.) to show and maintain appropriate distance. Guide paddle-raft paddles are ~6 ft. So is a kayak paddle.
- Interactions can get heated on the ramp. Physical interactions can lead to exchange of bodily fluids, but it is necessary and important to enforce regulations including social distancing.
- Unpermitted private trips may feel that they are not obligated to follow COVID guidelines. They may show up in large groups, without masks, breaking 6ft distance with each other, and may "bring more drinks than a liquor store." How to enforce safely?
- The health department can shut the river down at any time and there is a lack of awareness among some groups of how tenuous the situation is.
- Only 2 companies allowed to launch at a time in a 5-lane ramp – compliance is easier with outfitters because they know what's at stake and have established permits that managers can leverage.
- Are physical barriers possible on the private side of the launch, to make distancing mandatory? Rows of dumpsters or other barriers blocking every other lane?

### **Decontaminating gear**

- Get clients involved in the decontamination process so they can be assured that it is clean.
- Cernicek has set up a decontamination station with a foam cannon for outfitters to use at the takeout. He supplies the water and outfitters can use the disinfectant of choice. He is planning to set up dunk tanks too.
- Would be great to have handwash stations at putin/takeout but the rental company will not allow these in an unsupervised/public place.
- Hand wash stations and sanitizer is mandatory at offices and vehicles.

## General comments

- Confluence Research and Consulting is conducting a systematic survey on these topics. We want to hear what's happening at your river. We will monitor conditions through the summer and publish results as they become available. Our first round of data collection ends on Monday, 5/25. We expect to have a summary available in the weeks to come. Please use this link to complete the survey:  
<https://www.surveylab.com/pageTag/SurveyCampaign/cld/c7310adf70914ad3add28d16f9aeb4d5992d1f1a5/>
- Westwater is open for day use as of yesterday. Commercial operations are not up and running yet because they have not had time to book. Health department is leaving mitigation up to individual companies because they don't have the resources to deal with every individual business. There is a lot of variation between companies in terms of the complexity of plans. Some have well-developed plans, some are, "full steam ahead."
- Boat sizes: 16 ft boats are big enough to maintain some distance between groups, but what about 14 ft? – probably not. Family units only on rafts? Will this be commercially viable for companies without large fleets and many guides? Some managers are allowing increased number of boats with the same group size.
- Date thresholds – are people setting dates/thresholds to reassess or change rules? No, everything is in flux and we have to stay flexible.
- It's the press that will shut rivers down, probably due to a highly visible minority of users who don't follow guidelines. That's why there's a need for some agency involvement in the regulations
- Question for future: Who is responsible for the mitigation plan? County, state, fed, agency, outfitter, etc.? Are outfitters required to submit a plan before opening? We're hearing lots of different cases.
- Finally, how can we make social distancing fun, interesting, or cool? Can we use creative ideas to get buy in from populations who otherwise resist COVID regulations? See Fish Tails in MD:  
<https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-md-bumper-table-revolution-20200518-z2wrplx6xvgfnd7hqzptiz7ka-story.html>

Or how about this German café? I've seen many stranger fashion choices out there on the river....

<https://mymodernmet.com/german-cafe-pool-noodles/>

A few more fun ideas:

<https://www.restaurantbusinessonline.com/marketing/restaurants-get-creative-putting-social-distancing-play#page=0>

<https://abc7chicago.com/harry-carays-reopen-restaurants-chicago-reopening-phases-coronavirus/6198948/>

<https://www.redbubble.com/i/mask/Funny-mask-I-don-t-like-masks-by-KiwiBrush/47496686.9G0D8>

### **From the chat box**

We opened for business yesterday on the Lower Rogue. Most shuttles are single parked cars moved from point A to point B. We'll be monitoring the rec section and looking for compliance with state COVID-19 restrictions that are reinforced by the state marine board

The Governor of Texas has put guidelines in place for river outfitter shuttles- every other row for buses, but groups should be 6ft. apart. It doesn't make sense in practice though. I see outfitters going with one option or the other. Masks are not required but are strongly recommended. Park Rangers are present but the main enforcement power is the Police Department. We are seeing an increase in visitation due to our close proximity to other large cities.

Include America Outdoors, state offices of recreation websites and several major western outfitters including Holiday River Expeditions have begun to post their protocols and procedures - all are very similar practices

We got a page for that <https://www.river-management.org/2020-covid-19-river-closures---guidance-samples>

I wonder if the diving industry can be helpful. They decontaminate daily at shops -- decontaminate in a dunk tank -- wetsuits, etc.

We were directed to use foaming disinfectants, not power sprayers to avoid spreading things.

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2>

We have a limit of 25 people per gathering in our state. Is that the case with other states in Phase 1? It affects our limit of 30 per outfitter permits

AZ is still using 10 But, not always being enforced

Alaska is removing all limits as of tomorrow but some communities may stay with limits - it's 50 now.