

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 187

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED SEPTEMBER 17, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman RONALD S. DANCER

District 12 (Burlington, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean)

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

SYNOPSIS

Urges DEP to reopen all NJ State parks closed during COVID-19 pandemic.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 9/17/2020)

1 **AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** urging the Department of
2 Environmental Protection to reopen all New Jersey State parks
3 closed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to staffing
4 reallocations and shortages.
5
6 **WHEREAS**, State parks are vitally important resources that help to
7 promote the health and wellness of the public and contribute to the
8 economic and environmental well-being of the community; and
9 **WHEREAS**, State parks provide members of the public with
10 opportunities to exercise, experience the State's natural beauty and
11 diverse history, and enjoy the various health benefits of recreation
12 and being outdoors; and
13 **WHEREAS**, During the State-mandated quarantine due to COVID-19,
14 State parks have served an even larger role in the lives of New
15 Jersey residents; and
16 **WHEREAS**, As gyms and many indoor spaces remain closed in an
17 effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, parks have become primary
18 locations for exercise and socially-distanced socialization; and
19 **WHEREAS**, Although Governor Murphy encouraged State residents to
20 avoid traveling far distances and to make use of local facilities,
21 some communities have faced closures of their local State parks;
22 and
23 **WHEREAS**, On August 10, 2020, the New Jersey State Park Service
24 announced the closures of Fort Mott State Park, Voorhees State
25 Park, and Stephens State Park for all uses, including passive
26 recreation, until further notice due to staffing reallocations and
27 shortages; and
28 **WHEREAS**, Residents of this State who frequently utilized the
29 currently closed State parks for recreation, relaxation, and
30 environmental appreciation will be forced to travel to different and
31 more populated State parks; and
32 **WHEREAS**, The closure of the less crowded State parks is inconsistent
33 with the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and
34 Protection (CDC), which recommends that the public avoid
35 crowded parks; and
36 **WHEREAS**, During this unprecedented year of harsh restrictions related
37 to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the Department of
38 Environmental Protection (DEP) make every effort to ensure that
39 residents of this State are able to utilize all of New Jersey's outdoor
40 recreational areas; and
41 **WHEREAS**, For these reasons, the DEP is urged to reopen and find
42 ways to adequately staff all closed State parks throughout the State
43 of New Jersey, so that New Jersey's State parks can operate safely
44 and further benefit the State's residents; now, therefore,
45
46 **BE IT RESOLVED** by the General Assembly of the State of New
47 Jersey:

1. This House urges the Department of Environmental Protection to reopen all New Jersey State parks closed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to staffing reallocations and shortages.

2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the Commissioner of Environmental Protection.

STATEMENT

This resolution urges the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to reopen all New Jersey State parks closed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to staffing reallocations and shortages.

Access to State parks is essential to the health and wellness of New Jersey residents. State parks provide the public with opportunities to exercise, get fresh air, observe nature, and learn more about the history of the State. The role of State parks in the lives of New Jersey residents has grown enormously since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. As many gyms and indoor spaces remain closed in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, State parks have become the primary location for socially distanced recreation, socialization, and relaxation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC), along with the Governor, has also encouraged residents to stay local and refrain from traveling long distances. This has resulted in many New Jersey residents relying upon their local State parks. However, due to increased visitation at certain State parks throughout the State of New Jersey, the DEP has reallocated staffing from less crowded parks. Staffing reallocations and shortages has resulted in the closure of multiple State parks throughout the State. On August 10, 2020, the DEP announced the closures of Fort Mott State Park, Voorhees State Park, and Stephens State Park for all uses, including passive recreation, until further notice. The closures force residents who relied on local parks to travel longer distances to State parks that are more crowded and therefore, more dangerous during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During this year of harsh restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the DEP make every effort to ensure that residents of this State are able to utilize all of New Jersey's outdoor recreational areas. For these reasons, the DEP is urged to reopen and find ways to adequately staff all closed State parks throughout the State of New Jersey, so that New Jersey's State parks can operate safely and continue to benefit the State's residents.