

Washington County opens spring camping, picnicking season with new online reservation system

Washington County Parks will start accepting reservations for the 2016 camping and picnicking season online, by telephone, or in person at any parks office starting March 1. New for 2016 park users may register for Washington County Parks programs online through the county's website, for both free and fee-based programs. Users will be required to create an account with Washington County Parks at www.co.washington.mn.us and may do so by searching "parks reservations." Accounts may be created immediately with the new system.

Guided fitness hikes underway in Washington County parks, next one Feb. 25

Hike on! A rotating schedule of guided fitness hikes throughout the Washington County Parks trail system continues at the Lake Elmo Park Reserve-Nordic Center. Participants may take part in two fitness hiking programs, one at Lake Elmo Park Reserve or one that is a Free Tuesday Trails Tour that visits a different Washington County Park each month. Each fitness hike will be 60 minutes and include a warm-up with fitness challenges along the way.

Trail routes will vary by park and be a mix of turf, gravel, grass, and paved depending on conditions with light to moderately steep terrain areas. Dress for the weather and hiking activity; a water bottle is recommended. The programs are for those ages 13 or older, and all minors must be accompanied by an adult. Participants should plan to arrive to the programs 10 minutes early. If there is light rain, the programs will go on as scheduled.

The Lake Elmo Park Reserve hikes are 9 to 10 a.m. Thursdays, plus two October hikes that are 6 to 7 p.m. Meet at the Nordic Center. The Lake Elmo Park Reserve hikes are:

- April 7, 21;
- May 5, 19;
- June 2, 16, 30;
- July 14, 28;
- Aug. 11, 25;
- Sept. 8, 22;
- Oct. 6, 13 (6-7 p.m.), 20, 27 (6-7 p.m.);
- Nov. 3, 17; and
- Dec. 1.

Free Tuesdays Fitness Hikes will rotate through Washington County parks 6-7 p.m. the first Tuesday of each month. They will be:

- May 3, at Cottage Grove Ravine Regional Park (meet at the playground);
- June 7, at Pine Point Park (meet at kiosk);
- July 5, at St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park (meet at the Hilltop Pavilion Parking Lot);
- Aug. 2, at Big Marine Park Reserve (meet at playground);
- Sept. 6, at Washington County Historic Courthouse (meet on the front stairs);

For Washington County park locations, see www.co.washington.mn.us/parks.

For questions, call 651-430-8370 or email at parks@co.washington.mn.us.

These programs are free with a Washington County Parks vehicle permit (\$5/day or \$25/annual) with the exception of Free Tuesdays, when no vehicle permit is required on the first non-holiday Tuesday of the month. Find Washington County Parks on Facebook at Washington County Parks | Official and on Twitter @WashCtyParks and @WashCtyTrails.