March 17, 2020

COVID-19 “Coronavirus” and the Buckeye Trail

Dear Buckeye Trail Family,

Buckeye Trail Association Staff, Trustees and Volunteer Leaders are closely watching the spread of the Coronavirus and the virus' impact on the Buckeye Trail. The spread of the virus affects our hikers, members, volunteers, staff, and planned events. Our highest value is the health and safety of all of our Buckeye Trail Family members, especially those in the higher risk categories.

It is important for us all to follow best practices around illness prevention. Helpful guidelines borrowed from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy are copied below. Additionally, Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for events can be viewed here: [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/large-events/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html). Governor Mike DeWine has also issued a ban on mass gathering of 50 or more people in the state of Ohio until further notice here: [https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/](https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/), as well as President Trump recommending gatherings of less than 10 people at this time.

Having a ban on mass gatherings with an indefinite timeline creates uncertainty in planning and promotion of events such as Buckeye TrailFest. For the peace of mind of our volunteers and participants we are sadly forced to cancel Buckeye TrailFest and MorelFest 2020.

**Buckeye TrailFest, April 30 – May 3. Cancelled.**
A refund policy for registrations and sponsorships and rescheduling decision will be made by April 1. This is first and foremost a consideration of the health and wellbeing of our registrants. To honor the hard work of the Crooked River Chapter and Buckeye TrailFest Committee Volunteers we plan on rescheduling BTF 2020 to 2021 back at Camp Manatoc. The groundwork has been laid; sponsors and partners will be encouraged to re-confirm their participation for next year’s TrailFest.

Consideration during these exceptional circumstances will need to be made for the obligations of the Constitution and By-laws of the Buckeye Trail Association for election of Trustees to the BTA Board, election of Officers, and any amendments to the BTA Constitution required during an Annual Meeting of the BTA. Alternative methods to fulfill our Annual Meeting obligations will be developed by the BTA Board of Trustees and shared with the membership by April 1.

**MorelFest, May 8 – 10. Cancelled.**
The CDC has recommended that gatherings of over 50 people be postponed for 8 weeks lasting until May 10. For this reason the most responsible course of action is to cancel MorelFest 2020. A refund policy for registrations and sponsorships and rescheduling decision will be decided by April 1.

**Other Upcoming Events:**
BTA Volunteer Organized Hikes
Chapter and Volunteer Leader organized hikes should be cancelled and not be scheduled until the Governor lifts a ban on mass gatherings. This includes scheduled events on the Buckeye Trail website and Meetup.com websites managed by BTA Chapters.

BTA Volunteer Participation in Partner Events
We cannot control our partner events going forward or cancelling. We relieve our BTA Volunteers from participating in representing the BTA at these events until further notice. If BTA Volunteers decide to attend and represent the BTA they do so at their own risk and should take all precautions in sanitization and social distancing as possible.

The Buckeye Trail Shop
The physical Buckeye Trail Shop in Yellow Springs has been closed. Online sales will continue as long as it is safe to send virus-free items out for our customers.

The Buckeye Trail Crew
The Buckeye Trail Crew schedule will go ahead as planned with extra emphasis on safety for Trail Crew members. Increased focus on sanitization and social distancing of 6 feet should be observed as well as keeping groups of 10 or less working separately in the outdoors. **There will be no BTA Chuckwagon feeding BTA Volunteer groups to discourage sharing of that space, food, and utensils until after May 10.** Please bring your own food, water and prepare your own food independently. We will post updates on the BTA website with any further notices on how future policy changes from land managers may affect any Buckeye Trail Crew Work Party.

BTA Office Operations
Travel by BTA Staff and visitation to the Shawnee office has been postponed. While Ohio schools are closed and mass gatherings banned the BTA Staff will not work from the BTA Office except for extreme and necessary needs. BTA Staff and AmeriCorps Members have gathered everything they need to work from home and will work remotely coordinated by the Executive Director via phone, email and video conferencing. This will offer opportunities to focus on different priority projects during this normally busy trail season.

We are doing our best to use common sense in an exceptional situation with an abundance of caution for the health and safety of our Volunteers, Staff, Members, and Hikers. The Coronavirus is terribly inconvenient and we are a relatively small organization, but we care very much about our Buckeye Trail Family. We hope the situation blows over as quickly as possible and we are criticized for doing too much, not for doing too little.

If there is any silver lining it is that this is an excellent time to hike the BT and we hope that everyone takes advantage of being released from some obligations to enjoy all that Ohio has to offer out on the
Buckeye Trail, it’s always open… but please check in with the local land manager’s policies before hitting the trail. *The Trek* recently highlighted the BT as one of the [Top 10 trails in the country to find solitude](#). Spring is coming, as well as the annual migration of birds. Birding is another great way to enjoy self-isolation so we’ve created a [brochure](#) highlighting many great places to hike more miles of the BT while adding to your birding life list.

Below are some important health tips for hikers and volunteers borrowed from our friends at the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Thank you for your understanding throughout this uncertainty,

Andrew Bashaw  
Executive Director  
Buckeye Trail Association

- For Buckeye Trail hikers, distancing yourself from others and maintaining good hygiene is the best defense for reducing your chances of contracting any illness:
  - Wash your hands frequently with biodegradable soap at least 200 feet from water sources. When soap is not available, use hand sanitizer that contains 60-95% alcohol.
  - Avoid sharing food. Do not eat out of the same food bag, share utensils or drink from other hikers’ water bottles.
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
  - Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing. Use the crook of your arm (inner elbow) or use a tissue and dispose of it using Leave No Trace Principles.
  - Keep some distance between you and other hikers whenever possible, especially if anyone shows signs of being sick. Avoid shaking hands or other close contact — instead, elbow bumps or waving are safer ways to greet others.
  - Avoid congregating in groups along the Trail.
  - If you are an older adult or have serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes or lung disease, [you are at a higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19 disease](#). Hike and camp away from others to minimize the likelihood of infection.
  - If you begin to feel sick, stay away from others and get off the Trail until examined and cleared for return to the Trail by a medical professional.

For volunteers working on the trail, these additional guidelines are also recommended:

- Minimize carpooling to work locations. While this is not ideal regarding environmental impacts, personal safety and health take priority.
- Work in groups of no more than 15 people in any location.
- Avoid sharing tools and equipment whenever possible.