COVID-19 “Coronavirus” and the Buckeye Trail

Dear Buckeye Trail Family,

Buckeye Trail Association Staff, Trustees and Volunteer Leaders continue to closely watch the ever evolving impact of the Coronavirus on the Buckeye Trail. The spread of the virus is affecting our hikers, members, volunteers, staff, and planned events. Our highest value continues to be 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. The State of Ohio continues to gather important information related to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 here: https://coronavirus.ohio.gov.

I know that my family and I have found solace and escape from the overwhelming news and even a bit of joy and renewal out on the BT nearby our home in recent days. I hope that you are able to take advantage of the same opportunity that BT provides today as it was intended to do all the way back in 1958, “… a Buckeye Trail could in its ideal serve as one person envisioned the Appalachian Trail – “remote for detachment, narrow for chosen company, winding for leisure, lonely for contemplation, the trail leads not merely north and south but upward to the body, mind and soul…”.

One important question of the day is “Can I still hike the Buckeye Trail?”

There are two very specific answers at this time; yes to local day hikes with your household in uncrowded areas, but no to long distance hiking on the BT. It hurts me to say the words ‘do not hike the BT’, but we are heading in to the peak of a global pandemic that can be a life or death matter for us and others.

Most Buckeye Trail hikers are excellent ambassadors for the BT and BTA. A long distance hiker poses an unnecessary risk to themselves and the communities they pass through at this time. Campgrounds and other hiker services are closed for overnight stay and resupply. Buckeye Trail Angels and local community members should not feel pressured to assist strangers and risk their family’s health. Portions of the BT are literally closed, like Hocking Hills State Park, with more likely to follow suit in the coming weeks. If a hiker becomes sick or twists an ankle they may require medical assistance in hard to get to places which will pull emergency medical professionals away from dealing with the Coronavirus in their community. Like the rest of the world, we look forward to getting back to normal as soon as possible.

For the grey area in between a long distance hike and a local hike with your household read this Outside magazine article on the topic and check out these helpful graphics from the National Recreation and Park Association and Bishop Climbers Coalition to help you decide if you are recreating responsibly.
COVID-19: SOCIAL DISTANCING ON PUBLIC TRAILS

Do not use parks or trails if you are exhibiting symptoms.

Share the trail and warn other trail users of your presence and as you pass.

Be prepared for limited access to public restrooms or water fountains.

Observe CDC’s minimum recommended social distancing of 6’ from other persons at all times.

Follow CDC’s guidance on personal hygiene prior to visiting parks or trails.

IS MY RECREATION RESPONSIBLE DURING COVID19?

SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS CAN LEAD TO A NUMBER OF OVERALL HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS LIKE LESSENING ANXIETY, BOOSTING Creativity, AND GETTING YOUR VITAMIN D. BUT DURING THIS TIME OF CRISIS, NOT ALL RECREATION IS RESPONSIBLE.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE.

AM I COMING INTO CONTACT WITH SURFACES THAT CAN HOLD AND TRANSFER THE VIRUS?

DOES THIS ACTIVITY PUT ME AT RISK FOR POTENTIAL RESCUE STRAINING LOCAL RESOURCES?

AM I LEAVING MY HOME COMMUNITY?

WILL I POTENTIALLY COME WITHIN SIX FEET OF PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT A PART OF MY HOUSEHOLD?

DOES MY RECREATION BRING ME IN CLOSER CONTACT WITH VULNERABLE GATEWAY COMMUNITIES?

WILL THIS PUT ME IN CLOSER CONTACT WITH VULNERABLE POPULATIONS, SUCH AS THOSE WITH COMPROMISED IMMUNE SYSTEMS, PERSONS OVER THE AGE OF 65, OR THOSE WHO ARE PREGNANT?

IF YOU CAN ANSWER YES TO ANY OF THESE, PLEASE FIND ANOTHER FORM OF RECREATION OR ALTER YOUR PLANS TO KEEP YOUR COMMUNITY SAFE.
Buckeye TrailFest, April 30 – May 3. Cancelled. Being re-scheduled at a similar time and place for 2021. A refund process is in place and all registrants have been notified via email.

Considerations during these exceptional circumstances are still being developed for the obligations of the Annual Meeting of the BTA. Alternative methods to fulfill our Annual Meeting obligations are being developed by the BTA Board of Trustees including the use of video conferencing.

MorelFest, May 8 – 10. Cancelled. A refund process is in place and all registrants have been notified via email.

Upcoming Buckeye Trail Crew Work Parties
April 15-19, Wayne National Forest: Postponed, date to be determined

Other Upcoming Events:
- Blue Blaze Academy – BTA Volunteer Training, July 8-12. As planned until further notice. Decision by June 1, 2020.
- Little Loop Challenge, July 18. As planned until further notice. Decision by June 1, 2020.
- Run for Blue Blazes Trail Run, October 3. As planned until further notice. Decision by August 1, 2020.

BTA Volunteer Organized Hikes
Chapter and Volunteer Leader organized hikes should be cancelled or postponed 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 is being decided by each work party. Currently the work parties in April have been postponed to later dates for the safety of Trail Crew members.

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 Properties
Other than the BTA Office in Shawnee the BTA owns and operates several preserves and the Beall Farmstead. The BTA Beall Farmstead, at Tappan Lake, is available for dispersed, primitive camping for Buckeye Trail Association members. No amenities (restrooms, etc.) are available at this time. The BTA Century Barn is closed until further notice and will not be opened until at least May 1, 2020. Do not attempt to use the Farmhouse water spigot as the well pump is currently turned off.

The BTA owns and manages Adirondack shelters, privies, etc. in several places around the BT including the Pretty Run Preserve in Vinton County, Imhoff Preserve in Perry County, Ballinger Preserve in and Serpent Mound Shelter in Adams County among others. Responsible recreation and personal responsibility are very important. Please practice social distancing with other parties who may be sharing the area. Just as we wouldn’t touch shared surfaces like picnic tables, our structures should be off limits until social distancing bans are lifted.

**BTA Annual Budget**

The BTA Board of Trustees Finance Committee is attempting to stay ahead of the curve as the impacts of the Coronavirus evolve quickly. Observing the likely continued decrease in income to fund regular BTA projects and programs the Committee is recommending a significant reduction in the budget, meeting bi-weekly throughout the crisis to adjust accordingly, and looking for new opportunities during these extraordinary times to fund our mission. One great example is a recent grant approval from the Campbell’s Foundation to support the sustainability of the BTA!

At this time we have had to make tough decisions to limit expenses where possible. BTA Volunteers should call to ask before they purchase items under our normal reimbursement policies to make sure we still have a budget item for them at this time. I commend the volunteers of the Committee for wrestling with these tough decisions at this time.

Again, 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 stressful for everyone 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.

It is still 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, but please check in with the local land manager’s policies before hitting the trail. We are heading in to the peak time of the virus and more restrictions on local and regional park systems are being added each day. General guidance from state and federal agencies is that outdoor recreation like the BT is still a great way to exercise and relieve stress during this time. However, new guidance highlights that recreation should be local rather than traveling great distances.

Thank you for your understanding throughout this uncertainty,

Andrew Bashaw  
Executive Director  
Buckeye Trail Association