March 17, 2021

COVID-19 / Coronavirus and the Buckeye Trail

Dear Buckeye Trail Family,

Buckeye Trail Association staff, Trustees and key volunteers continue to closely watch the ever evolving impact of the Coronavirus on the Buckeye Trail and Buckeye Trail Association. As you know the spread of the virus has affected our events, hikers, members, volunteers, staff, and family members. 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.

This document is meant to provide some guidance on events organized by the BTA and general use of the BT in 2021. 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.

Here are a couple of other resources regarding the Ohio Department of Natural Resources:
https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/static/responsible/Sector-fact-sheet-7-Campgrounds.pdf

My family and I have found solace from the overwhelming news and even a bit of joy and renewal out on the BT near our home throughout the pandemic. 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…”.

Good News! You Can Still Hike the Buckeye Trail.

It is still an excellent time to hike the BT. The popularity of outdoor activity, including use of the BT has dramatically increased over the past year and we hope that everyone continues to take advantage of being released from some obligations to enjoy all that Ohio has to offer out on the Buckeye Trail.

While, you can take local day hikes with your household in uncrowded areas, **we still do not recommend** long distance hiking on the BT that may depend on the help of others and other communities.

Many campgrounds and other hiker services may be closed for overnight stay and resupply. Buckeye Trail Angels and local community members should not feel obligated to assist strangers and risk their own or their family’s health. Local portions of the BT could literally be closed, like Hocking Hills State Park was for a time in 2020. If a hiker becomes sick or twists an ankle they may require medical
assistance in hard to get to places which could pull emergency medical professionals away from dealing with the Coronavirus in their community.

Please check in with the local land manager’s policies before hitting the trail. We are still very much in the middle of a pandemic and new restrictions on local and regional park systems could occur. 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, guidance continues to encourage recreation that is local rather than traveling great distances into other communities.

For the grey area in between a long distance hike and a local hike with your household please visit and consider these resources as we all try to figure out the best way to recreate responsibly. Like the rest of the world, we look forward to getting through this challenging time as soon as possible.

https://www.recreateresponsibly.org/
https://americanhiking.org/blog/hiking-responsibly-faq-covid-19/

Buckeye Trail Events include:

- MorelFest, April 16 -18: In planning with Covid-19 adjustments.
- Buckeye Trail’s Biggest Day Hike, June 5th, National Trails Day.
- Buckeye Trail Annual Meeting – VIRTUAL. June 5th See https://buckeyetrail.org/events.php
- Buckeye TrailFest in the Cuyahoga Valley: Postponed until 2022 to give BTA volunteers the opportunity to put on the best TrailFest possible.
- EGGS Hike, June 24 - 27: In planning with Covid-19 adjustments.
- Little Loop Challenge, September 25: In planning with Covid-19 adjustments.
- Blue Blaze Festival (Run for Blue Blazes Trail Run), October 2. As planned until further notice.
- Buckeye Trail Crew Work Parties. See https://buckeyetrail.org/events.php
- Chapter and local BTA volunteer hiking and volunteer events, including those organized on social media such as Facebook or Meetup.com.

Please see the attached event checklist to help you plan a safe and enjoyable Buckeye Trail event within the limitations of the Ohio Department of Health recommendations.

**Face coverings:** We require face coverings indoors and when social distancing cannot be met with a minimum of 6 feet outdoors unless there is a medical, developmental or other exemption for the individual. Face coverings are required in all buildings that the BTA owns, uses, or contracts for. Face coverings and social distancing will be included topics during safety briefings before BTA events and at the end as a reminder.

**Camping:** Campsites with multiple campers should be distanced at least 10’ apart from other campsites. Campsites should not gather more than 10 campers together that are not comfortable camping together during a BTA event. Campers in one campsite should stay out of other campsites.

**Event Leaders:** BTA events should separate into groups of 10 or less for the duration of the event. Every BTA event should have a backup leader in case the primary leader has to leave for any reason. Additional leaders are needed for each group of 10 or less that requires leadership, such as a Buckeye Trail Crew Work Party.
Volunteering: Volunteer groups should be 10 or less in size and practice social distancing of a minimum of 6’. Any event leader is welcome to cancel their event if they are not comfortable with participating and cannot find a replacement leader.

Carpooling: Many BTA events have relied on carpooling in the past to shuttle groups between points. This year event organizers may need to account for a few more cars when carpooling is less desirable. Face coverings should be used while carpooling. Event participants should not be required to carpool beyond their comfort level.

Tools: No sharing of tools for the duration of the event. Volunteers are encouraged to use their own personal tools. If a tool is supplied by the BTA or another volunteer, it should be sanitized before and after use.

Showers and Bathrooms: We recommend volunteers bring their own bathroom supplies for their own safety, even though some may be provided. Face coverings are required inside a bathroom. Hand sanitizer is required to be available to event participants and should be used. Signage regarding this guideline should be easily seen.

Food Service and Eating: Food may be provided to event participants as long as it is individually plated by a server wearing a face covering and gloves. Water should always be available, with hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes to stand with it. Food consumption should follow the social distancing requirement of a 6’ minimum. The serving area should only have two people present at a time, such as the server and the person picking up their food. Signage regarding this guideline should be easily seen.

BTA Volunteer Participation in Partner Events
We do not control our partner’s events from going forward or being cancelled. BTA Volunteers who are asked by a partner to participate and represent the BTA at these events are not required by the BTA to do so. Volunteers may decide to attend and represent the BTA, but they do so at their own risk and should take all possible precautions for sanitization and social distancing.

The Buckeye Trail Shop
The Buckeye Trail Shop is managed by a 3rd party contract. The physical Buckeye Trail Shop in Yellow Springs is currently open, but may close from time to time due to local conditions related to the Coronavirus. Online sales generally continue as normal.

BTA Office Operations
Travel by BTA staff around the state has been limited due to local adherence to Coronavirus related orders. Similarly, the Shawnee office of the BTA is closed to the public; however BTA staff can be reached in person by appointment under Ohio Department of Health guidelines and limitations. While Ohio schools are limited, mass gatherings limited, BTA staff members are working virtually from home and generally spend one unique day in the physical office. We will reassess which staff members can work more regularly from the office as Covid-19 vaccines become available to them.

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 at the Beall Farmstead (restrooms, etc.) are available at this time, except during BTA special events following the other Covid-19 guidelines mentioned above.

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 and Serpent Mound Shelters 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 as well as sanitizing surfaces you come into contact with.

BTA Annual Budget and Operations
In 2020 we had to make tough decisions to limit expenses where possible. The BTA Board of Trustees Finance Committee stayed ahead of the curve early in 2020 as the impacts of the Coronavirus evolved quickly. In part due to their adaptation, the generosity of the BTA membership, and the hard work of staff and key volunteers, the BTA survived the first year of the Covid-19 economic downturn. The 2021 budget more or less returns to the pre-Covid-19 status. This means that staff and key volunteers will be getting back to projects with expenses that were delayed in 2020. Please be patient with these project leaders as they continue to adapt and begin to get back into the swing of projects we had come to expect.

We continue to do our best to use common sense in this exceptional situation with an abundance of caution for the health and safety of our BT family. The Coronavirus continues to be terribly inconvenient and stressful for everyone and sadly tragic for some. We are a relatively small organization, but we care very much about our BT family. We hope that vaccinations and immunity give us more hope throughout 2021 and that in the meantime we are criticized for doing too much, not for doing too little.

Thank you for your understanding throughout this uncertainty,

Andrew Bashaw
Executive Director
Buckeye Trail Association

BTA Event Checklist – Coronavirus/Covid-19
- Have you reviewed or researched the land owner or managers Coronavirus/Covid-19 policies and are able to adhere to them?
- Do you have the land owner or managers permission?
- Do you have, or have you arranged for, extra hand sanitizer and extra face covering to be present at the event? (Contact the BTA Office for assistance)
- Do you have and have you posted the recommended signage at registration, bathrooms, food serving areas? (Contact the BTA Office for assistance)
- Do you have the leader capacity to split a larger group into smaller groups of 10 or less for the duration of the event?
- Are you able to lead/guide volunteers and event participants to follow the BTA Coronavirus guidelines?
- Are you willing to ask volunteers and event participants to leave the event if they cannot follow the BTA Coronavirus guidelines?
If anyone were to take a photo of your event in progress, will it show how we cautiously adhere to the limitations recommended by state or local authorities to help people enjoy the outdoors together, or will it show a violation that could be reported to the Ohio Department of Health?