

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Carefully reopening parks

Beaches and play spaces remain closed, but some areas are accessible to public with restrictions

By **MARY BYRNE**
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Although beaches, parks, and some athletic fields and courts were allowed to reopen with restrictions as of May 25 per Gov. Charlie Baker's four-phase plan for reopening the state, Franklin County's communities are taking a cautious approach to reopening their recreation areas.

In Greenfield, many of the city's outdoor recreation spaces — tennis courts, dog parks and the swimming area — remain closed, but the Recreation Department recently announced its own phased approach to reopening many of them.

"It's been a constant cycle of edits and adjustments all along here to keep everybody healthy and safe," said Recreation Director Christy Moore.

The guidelines from the state include requiring facial coverings when it isn't possible to social distance, limiting gathering size to 10 people or less, and restricting athletic court and field use to non-contact sports where equipment isn't shared.

Greenfield's plan is meant to balance the benefits of recreation while operating within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines set forth for social distancing, sanitation and disinfecting measures, according to a press release from the Recreation Department.

"It is important to remember that



STAFF PHOTOS/PAUL FRANZ

Pavilions, playgrounds and the beach at the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area are not yet open. Sand was still piled up on the beach, below, and the dam was still open, but some people were wading Thursday.

at any time, the guidelines are subject to change and may be revised as needed," the statement reads.

Although the city hasn't announced yet when certain facilities will be accessible to the public again, the Recreation Department's first phase indicates tennis and pickle ball courts, as well as the dog park, are preparing to reopen.

"We ordered several weeks ago



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STAFF FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Sunburn Beach in Charlemont is a popular swimming area where the North River joins the Deerfield River. Now owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the swimming area was never closed and is open to the public.

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hand sanitizing units for our court facilities, so we're waiting for those to come in," Moore said. "We have signs for each facility to encourage wearing face coverings, hand-washing and sanitizing."

Moore added that a number of courts still need new nets installed.

"Because of COVID, all the spring preparation was on hold," she said. "We need to get the courts ready and get the water turned on for all these facilities."

She noted that the department also needs to hire seasonal employees.

"Obviously there's a lot more training that's going to happen this year," she said.

Moore said the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area and related concessions and restrooms are beginning to prepare for reopening.

Under the guidance for beaches reopening, capacities at beach locations should be managed so 12 feet of distance can be kept between towel groups on the beach, facial coverings are required where social distancing isn't possible, and no groups of more than 10 are allowed to gather.

Moore said when the swimming area does reopen, she anticipates addressing the issue of overcrowding, particularly as the weather heats up.

"I'm excited and encouraged we'll be able to have more opportunities for the public, but obviously we need to ask them to continue abiding by all the guidelines," she said, such as social distancing, hand-washing and wearing masks. "We're all looking forward to some more outdoor recreational opportunities."

In Orange, all parks in the community, with the exception of playground structures, were reopened May 25 with certain restrictions, according to Colin P. Killay, superintendent of highways, cemeteries and parks. In addition to contact sports being prohibited, organized games are currently not allowed under the state's guidelines.

"Face coverings are required in all parks, and gatherings of more than 10 people are strictly prohibited," Killay wrote in an email.

Signs from the Orange Board of Health are posted in the parks, explaining guidelines under the first phase of reopening, Killay said. Additional signs are expected to be

posted this week, he said.

According to Killay, the company supplying the portable bathrooms at the parks and beach at Lake Mat-tawa will be cleaned daily during the pandemic.

He said the beach is up to your own risk, as it always is.

"Anyone that uses the beach is asked to follow the guidelines in place under the Phase 1 opening," he said. "The Board of Health will monitor the beach and reserves the right to close the beach at any time if the guidelines are not followed."

According to the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Sunburn Beach in Charlemont and the beach at Lake Wyola State Park in Shutesbury, which were not previously closed, are remaining open to the public.

However, DCR asks the public to refrain from visiting these parks and other state parks during times of peak use, and to observe social distancing, wear facial coverings and participate only in non-contact recreational activities.

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