

Rock Creek SRA gets closing reprieve

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Last week the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) announced temporary closures from fall to spring of 29 Nebraska State Park areas, including Rock Creek in Dundy County.

Friday, Rock Creek received a reprieve, as did three other state recreation areas (SRAs), because local community leaders stepped up to keep them open.

NGPC had planned to close all services and vehicle access to 24 SRAs and five state historical parks (SHPs) from Sept. 16 to May 1.

Walk-in activities such as picnicking, bank fishing, photography, wildlife viewing, hunting and trail use will be allowed from sunrise to sunset.

The park areas are to be gated and/or posted a short distance from the entrance.

Rock Creek, Pelican Point, Oliver Reservoir and Cottonwood Lake SRAs will now remain open during the winter, thanks to the community leaders.

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In addition, volunteers are working to provide staffing and funding to reinstate events this fall and winter at Arbor Lodge, Fort Atkinson and Buffalo Bill Ranch SHPs and Alexandria SRA.

Kirk Nelson, West Regional Manager of the Parks Division for NGPC, said Monday that employees of the Fisheries Division working at Rock Creek Fisheries are organizing local volunteers to keep Rock Creek open.

“They told us they’re going to keep it open for fishing and recreational purposes,” he added.

“Basically, they have to commit to do everything,” Nelson noted. “Nebraska Game and Parks won’t provide anything.”

He said that in the past NGPC has compromised about closing SRAs, saying it would help for the moment.

However, “We didn’t fix anything, and kept the area open for six months and then went home.”

Now, NGPC is admitting that its budget won’t allow it to fix antiquated toilets, roads, water and electrical systems and roofs at many of its properties.

Rock Creek is a small lake north of Parks, a very picturesque spot, Nelson said, with good fishing and nice, primitive camping. The toilets are probably over 30 years old and don’t meet federal standards, Nelson noted.

Nelson cautioned that although NGPC is temporarily closing many SRAs and SHPs for the season, “If the money situation doesn’t get better, we will close them permanently. Then a community can decide if it will take over and maintain” the parks.

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“That’s fine with us because we won’t be able to take care of it.”

He likened the situation to Champion Historical Park and Lake, which was taken over by Chase County this past summer.

Nelson said NGPC’s focus is “One hundred percent to shift the emphasis and resources to areas of higher priority and higher need,” with more visitors.

“We’re robbing Peter to pay Paul,” he stated. “It’s unfortunate. There are too many areas that have too much stuff that needs to be fixed. Our systems are antiquated.”

NGPC has more than \$30 million of deferred maintenance needs and also must meet compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and environmental requirements.

Money saved from reduced costs for things such as trash contracts, fuel and road maintenance will be transferred to buying materials for priority maintenance projects.