

[THIS IS AN UNEDITED REALTIME TRANSCRIPT. I AM A NATIONALLY-CERTIFIED CLOSED CAPTIONER, BUT THIS IS NOT A CERTIFIED TRANSCRIPT, IT IS TO BE USED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY -- KATHY ROBSON]

>> AMY: Good morning. It's Thursday, may 14, probably a little after 10:00A.M. Thank you guys for joining this. This is the Carbon County Covid-19 incident briefing. I am Amy Hyfield, Deputy Public Information Officer with the Carbon County Covid-19 incident management team. And I'm here with Jeff Gildehaus, would you like to introduce yourself

>> JEFF: Hi, folks, Jeff Gildehaus, I work for the Custer-Gallatin National Forest in Red Lodge, Montana. Good morning.

>> AMY: Just wanted to introduce myself a little bit. As I am usually behind the screen in these incidents. I am the deputy P.I.O. with the group, a volunteer firefighter and EMT and P.I.O. with Red Lodge fire rescue. My day job I'm the executive director of a family foundation here in Red Lodge. So first off, like to start with some thank yous. I would like to seasoned thank you out to everyone who's taking care of our kids right now. Teachers, childcare providers, the people that are making lunches and sending those out to school children. Thanks for what you're doing. It's hard work, adapting to the whole incident has been a challenge but I really appreciate you guys. Any thanks you'd like to give, Jeff?

>> JEFF: Thanks everybody for being patient with us, with our public lands out there. You know, we've shut everything down initially but we're getting

ready to start opening things up. We have your best interests and those of you public lands in mind. Thanks for being patient with us

>> AMY: A few housekeeping things, if you would like to submit a comment do so in the chat function. Also, we will post the recording to this a Facebook as well as Instagram and our link on our carbon alert web page. We will also get back with questions on the same platforms. And Kathy Robson has been very generous to closed caption and provide transcript of these that we will make available afterwards. Thank you, Kathy. Our little incident briefing here just to give you a rundown of what we'll talk about, as usual we'll talk about where we are in the state and the County in terms of Covid-19. We'll hear some information from the Custer-Gallatin national forest. Then we would like to talk about the event mitigation plan or the Covid-19 mitigation plan review that the Carbon County incident Covid-19 incident management team is offering right now. So, just a little information on where we are. I know most of you know that you can access the map to show you the number of active cases, number of cases we have had in the state. So I want to give you a little rundown. We do not have any active cases of Covid-19 in Carbon County as of right now. In the entire state, there are only three active hospitalizations. The number of new cases that we are getting on a daily basis is low. But it's not zero, we are still getting one or two popping up in

counties.

The ratio of our active cases to the number of tests given is fairly low.

And as I've heard Dr. George explain this gives us an indication that we are currently doing enough testing to be able to capture the people that are sick in our area.

And we continue to try to make sure that the testing that we're doing is able to identify people that may be sick and that especially that need healthcare resources.

We're doing well in the state. This makes it able for us to open up the state in the phased reopening plan that you see going on right now.

While we are doing well, I want to remind people that this does take all of us to make sure that we continue to do well.

So that hand washing, the cleaning, the making sure you're covering your cough and making sure you're wearing a mask in public where social distancing is difficult are all still very important for us to do, even though we're seeing low numbers of cases in our state.

I also wanted to talk a little bit about why we're doing all this.

We have been into a shutdown for, gosh, weeks that we're still opening up now slowly. And it's been about two months since we have had Covid-19 really start to impact our state.

So just a reminder that what we're doing is really to protect those of us that are the most vulnerable.

Those that are older, those that have pre-existing conditions that may make them more susceptible to the disease.

Even though we are opening up the state, there are still some of those who fit that more vulnerable category who are still staying at home.

And that is the advice from the state.

We have seniors and others in our assisted living facilities and nursing homes that have not been able to have visitors for weeks.

Because they are vulnerable. The actions we have in place are to try and protect us.

We're also trying to protect our healthcare system.

We want to make sure that our healthcare system can care for everyone including those that have Covid-19.

We need to make sure that our emergency room, our hospitals, our healthcare providers can help out those that are sick with this virus as well as those that have heart attacks, strokes, and as we have increased visitation to our area the visitors that come in and may have accidents or other health issues.

We're also trying to protect our essential workers.

The workers that are in the grocery store and the post office.

Those that are in healthcare and that are working in our assisted living and nursing homes.

We're trying to do what we can to help protect our neighbors. We're also trying to do all of this to help protect our economy.

We understand that people want and need to go to work.

We need to have our businesses open, our restaurants, our lodging establishments, our national forests open.

And learn how to live with this virus in this new normal and in our new economy.

One of the things in the phased reopening, the statements that the governor put out within that document and within the directive, that hits me the most around this whole phased reopening, is this statement.

And that's that first and

foremost people don't want to get sick, they don't want to get others sick.

The governor is confident most Montanans will take the creek directive, and that refers to the rephased opening, seriously and understand their role in cutting off the chain of transmission to save lives and minimize long-term impacts to the economy.

Just the highlight that this is all, it's all of our individual responsibility and all of our collective responsibility to do what we can and I think that Montanans know that, and they want to do the right thing. And so that's why we are doing this phased reopening in the way that we are.

So why are the phases important to this reopening?

Why have we not just opened the floodgates and said everybody go and have fun.

Right now, we need to learn to live with this virus.

Until we have a vaccine, until we're able to make sure that our most vulnerable will not get infected.

And the rest of us won't get infected.

We need to learn to live with coronavirus and Covid-19.

We're doing it through the rephased plan.

This allows to us look at the impact of each step and what that opening up is impact it's having on the communities.

We're trying to make this a data-driven process.

We're looking at what the rates of infection are, if we're getting clusters in any areas of the state after these steps are taken.

That data takes a little while. There's an ink cue base period, it takes a while for people to identify they're sick, and then go to their healthcare provider.

Then it takes a while to get the

tests back.

There is a little bit of a time to collect that data so that we can make those hopefully steps into the next phase in a way that is more -- that is a more data driven and so that we can keep an eye on what is going on in our state in our counties.

Really a lot of this is that we don't want to go backwards.

We are opening up the state and we're hopefully going to be able to keep infection to a minimum and keep our protecting all of those things that I referred to earlier.

But we really don't want to have to take a step backwards and start to restrict things.

It is more important for us to try to go along with the plan that has been put in place and look at the data, look at how this is impacting our communities so that we continue to move forward, we can continue to open up the state more, and get to that pointed where we're -- we've learned to live with this virus and able to go out and have a little bit more fun.

Really quickly, who has changed, and I know a lot of you know this.

The stay at home order waffles lifted April 27, a couple of weeks ago A reminder that for our most vulnerable, those over 65, those that have other pre-existing conditions are still encouraged to stay at home.

Businesses have been open for a little over two weeks.

Our restaurants, our bars, distilleries have been open for a little over a week.

They opened on Monday, may 4.

We are now with the delay in the virus affecting people, our testing coming back, we are starting to see the impact of opening those things.

Right now looks like pretty good footing.

>> JEFF: It's great

>> AMY: We are going to be opening gyms and theaters and pools with reduced capacity and with physical distancing standards and sanitation, that's true for all of the things opening, may 15.

That's the next step in this phase.

So we'll be able to see what the impact of doing that will be.

And I also want to comment that we are having more people moving around.

And we are having visitors coming into the state.

And right now, it is a requirement that if you are a coming to the state from the outside of Montana for nonwork related purposes that you self quarantine for 14 days or the duration of your stay, which ever is shorter, before you go out and explore Carbon County. We are appreciative to the people who are.

Some people may not and we have people that are passing through the state on their way to other destinations who do not to have self quarantine.

We'll getting people coming in, Carbon County is one of the most beautiful and best places to be in one of the best states to be in the country.

They're coming here to visit our national forests.

They're coming here to go and drive along the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone and to visit the BLM land to the east.

And so we need to see what the impact of people moving around within our County and within our state is going to be before we can safely move to that next phase.

So thinking about changes, and what's going on within the state and the County, let's talk about the Custer-Gallatin national forest.

So what are the forest plans for the summer?

>> JEFF: Well, we still plan to operate much as we do every summer with bringing seasonals on and working on our trails, our campgrounds, wildland fire suppression response, we have crews to do that, minerals, the whole host of activities we work on during the summer.

To that end, we've been bringing our seasonals on after they quarantine for 14 days.

So that we're protecting our community and the people around us, in our office and public that we're going to be interfacing with, from at least the extent we can, and make sure that our folks are safe to go to work with each other as well as on the district and around the public.

We've taken those extra precautions in bringing our workforce on.

It takes a little longer to do that but that's what we're doing.

Our front office is still closed, we hope to open that soon.

In the meantime, the foyer out front is open, and we post information there as well as on Facebook.

So those are two information sources that people can utilize. We're happy to announce that this Friday, may 15, our concession operated campgrounds, which are limber pine, GreEnough lake, Park Side, Rattin, Sheridan, bay tin and Woodbine all of the campgrounds are open for the public.

They are also this year only, 100% reservable.

Which allows all of the sites to be reservable for the public offering more opportunity and assurance that if you want to camp in our campgrounds, can make that reservation and assure that that site will be available when you get there.

The rest of our camp grounds and rec sites, trail heads and the

like, picnic grounds, open Memorial Day weekend, may 22.
>> AMY: I'm glad you mentioned Memorial Day weekend.
That is coming up.
That is sort of the unofficial start to summer in our area
>> JEFF: Yes.
That is the big day.
When everybody likes do start coming to the forest and real numbers, we've seen a lot of use already in the dispersed areas, spots outside of the campgrounds.
We have seen an increase in use for the last five to ten years in our campgrounds and in the camp sites out in the forest, like the main fork of Rock Creek, toward Glacier lake.
With that comes increased demand for those spots.
So in the last few years we've noticed that we have started getting some folks Homesteading. And we do have a 16-day stay limit here on the forest for out in the general forest area. But that's 16 days staying.
It's not two day stay, five days go back to work, two days stay, five days go back to work, two days stay again.
That's not the intent.
When people leave their campers during the week it denies other public the use of that same area and the eastern enjoyment of that area and it's not very considerate to the public.
It's also illegal.
To abandon equipment and campers and things like that on the national forest.
So to that end, we ask you, please, so that everybody can enjoy this great place that we have, come and camp, enjoy it, take your toys and toy haulers back home with you, and come again and stay again so everybody can have the same opportunity that you have had when you've been out here.
The other thing we've noticed, is a real increase in UTV and

ATV use on the main transportation roads.
Like the glacier lake road. That road is not for transportation use, it's a main transportation road with a lot of traffic on it.
We're really concern about public safety.
We have had accidents, lots of close calls, and it's becoming to the point that we really need people with the UTVs, ATVs, use the motorized trails we've decide for that use and refrain from using the main line roads for recreation use.
It creates safety concerns for everyone and we ask your cooperation in that.
>> AMY: So Covid-19, we are as I mentioned learning to live with that.
Are there any changes that we should expect within the forest, or in accessing the campgrounds, and other facilities that either pertain directly to Covid-19 or the phased reopening within Montana?
>> JEFF: Thankfully our camp sites are spaced apart, and in the forest.
We want folks to honor the maximum group sizes and physical distancing and things like that. We're taking the extra precautions when we clean our outhouses, our vault toilets, to clean them to a standard that eliminates Covid-19 with really good products and cleaning procedures.
But that lasts about as long as we're there.
To that end we're going to post the last cleaning date on all of our outhouse and vault toilet facilities.
It's up to the public to take on their own personal responsibility for washing their hands, physical distancing, not coming on to the forest if they're sick and potentially spreading Covid-19 to others.
That remains the same.

Those are the primary spots where we have common touch surfaces is the outhouses. We will be cleaning those regularly and post that cleaning schedule on there for you.

>> AMY: As a frequent user of the forest I appreciate that. Another big event comes with Memorial Day weekend is the Beartooth Pass opening. Weather permit traditionally happens.

What's the scoop?

>> JEFF: Well, you know, they're going to be able to open Beartooth Pass at least to the Montana-Wyoming state line. Up on top, I do not know right now, where we're sitting with the park service coming up from the other side with their proposed delays on opening part of the park that way.

Stay tuned that.

We hope that the pass opens all the way through pretty quickly but it looks like at least this side will be open Memorial Day weekend.

>> AMY: As soon as the pass opens of course the pass leads us right into Yellowstone national park.

Do you have any updates, do you know anything about the park.

>> JEFF: Well the park is opening here may 18 on the Wyoming side which is the south entrance and the east entrance. Until we get past into phase 2 I believe into Montana, the Montana entrances will not be open until then.

It's a long way around for folks around here to go to the east entrance through Cody or the south entrance through Jackson. And that lower loop through canyon and old faithful and around to lake junction and stuff, that will be open but you can't go out to west Yellowstone, you can't go out to Mammoth and go that direction right now in the park. That will be what it is until

they establish further openings toward Montana in coordination with Montana and the restrictions we have in place here.

>> AMY: Excellent.

And I know you mentioned that we can find updates on your Facebook page

>> JEFF: Absolutely

>> AMY: We'll put the URL up there, Asano will put it in the comments.

You mentioned being able to reserve camp sites.

Where should people do that.

>> People can go to recreation.gov.

There is one more, Cascade camp ground, which isn't going to be open on the 15th because the west fork of Rock Creek Road is closed.

We check those roads that are still closed weekly and try to get them open by Friday, we will post any road openings by Thursday evening on our Facebook page so that folks can make plans when there's more places to go to.

Right now, the west fork of Rock Creek Road is open, to basin campground but closed above that.

The main fork of Rock Creek Road is open to the second gate which is about a mile above M.K. campground.

That's currently where the snow is.

You may not think it is because the road is bare in front of the gate but we don't open those until people can get through all the way and turn around.

Which is pretty important if you pull a 40-foot toy hauler?

>> I can appreciate that.

Thanks for those updates, Jeff, we'll see if we have questions at the end.

I just have a little bit more information.

One comment going back to gatherings and events, we're in phase 1.

Montana directive and the Incident Management Team is saying that gatherings and events of more than 10 people are not recommended. That has to do with going back to this phased reopening and the steps we're taking to make sure that we are keeping people safe. And that we can keep our economy safe and that we can keep our healthcare system safe. We've gotten questions around, you know, I want to have a gathering, I want to have let's say a wedding reception, I want 50 people but we're going to socially distance. How is that different from a restaurant that currently right now is allowed to have tables of six that are separated. And so wedding receptions right now are not allowed but that restaurant is. This is how I've looked at it and how it's been explained to me by some very intelligent people in public health including Dr. George and our public health nurses here. When you are going to a restaurant the expectation is that those individual tables of up to six are acting as their own unit. And that they are not interacting with the other tables in that establishment. So that kind of social distancing is allowed. When you're having a wedding reception, where you've got a bunch of friends and family getting together that kind of expectation isn't still there. So people are going to enter mingle a little bit more. They're going to be interacting, that's the point of having these kinds of events and gatherings, to be able to see each other and celebrate or to be together to commiserate in some cases. That's the difference between

the two kinds of events. And that's why we're saying that gatherings of 10 or more are not recommended right now in this phase. When we move to phase 2 we move up to having 50 people or fewer. What we're really asking, I know people want to celebrate, they want to get together, but limit's just wait so that we can make sure we can move to the next stage, that we are helping to protect the people that we're trying to protect, trying to learn to live with the virus. That being set we understand that all events are different. Because people were coming to us with a bunch of questions around their events, we decided to put this forum throughout and the review process out there for people that would like to find out if their plan is going to be okay. Or if they should make some modifications. This is recommended but it's not required. We're not requiring that you have these plans submitted. But we do heavily encourage it so that you are able to be confident that what you're doing is in line with the guidelines, and with best practices. So we want to help prevent cases, we want to help prevent clusters, we want to help our community be able to learn to live with this virus, and not have an incident where we have got a bunch of cases crop up, and maybe we would potentially have to deal with that. So what people can do if they would like to have us look over their plans is you can go to carbonalert.org or carbonCountyeconomy.org and we have a link to a form where you can submit information, and information about your plan, about your event, and then our public health officers, our public health nurses look that

over and get with you whether the plan for your event aligns with the current died lines and the current directives and the current best practices.

I do encourage you to go to the directive itself, and to the opening -- reopening the big sky plan that we also have linked on our web pages.

And look at the F.A.Q.s.

They're updated fairly frequently by the state and they can help to give you more guidance around what are the expectations and what you guys should be doing to make sure that you're going to have an event that will align with everything and also keep people safe.

>> This is a huge challenge, it impacts almost every segment of our society.

The fire season is coming upon us.

Predictive talks about a normal fire season for us, with an increased risk for wildfire in the western part of the state, latter part of the summer.

Anybody that has seen how we fight fire know that is it takes a lot of people and a lot of coordination to do that.

We have been spending a lot of time as an agency along with wild land firefighting agencies to figure out how to deploy firefighters and other resources in a way that will protect them, with the current Covid-19 threat.

Our fire camps will look much different.

The resources we use, and what order we use them are going to be much different.

To that end, normally we're not hiring emergency firefighters for the forest service this time of year.

But we're hiring more firefighters.

And those job announcements for Montana only are going tout, and open, to people that want to

become firefighters starting may 15.

On USA jobs, that's the website. If you are still looking for an opportunity to work for the forest service, to help fight fire, get what, you get another shot at applying for those jobs. There's not a ton of them but we're going to all get more firefighters to help us with initial attack here.

That's the primary way we're going to keep from having to get big fire camps going, to attack this.

It starts early with enough resources to keep them from getting big.

>> AMY: And I have to say the fires that I've been on it's been such a pleasure to work with forest service firefighters.

Red Lodge fire and rescue hems with the initial attack, really good people out there.

>> JEFF: Yes.

And we want to keep them healthy

>> AMY: Absolutely.

>> JEFF: We have a big summer ahead of us

>> AMY: Absolutely.

Show do we have any questions, anything that we did not cover?

>> We have one question.

Is there roadwork --

>> Not down by Long Lake.

I believe Wyoming has announced a work project that will be just past Beartooth Lake, I'm not sure when it's going to start. I believe there will be road construction in that area this summer.

Beartooth Lake area, right.

The second most asked question we get in our office where are the bears.

The bears are out, the bears are circulating around, I've heard some pretty interesting stories about a couple of the grizzly bears that were denned up around here.

We had one that was up by the lake fork and she's over on Soda

Butte creek now.
She took a pretty long path to get there.
The bears are out ban wandering around looking for food.
Hopefully not your garbage can or anything else you leave out.
This summer, again, honor our foot storage order and put your coolers and everything that is an attractant to a bear away in a bear proof container, or inside the vehicle.
It only takes one good bear incident where they get rewarded and all of a sudden they're coming back every day.
That was easy and think wanted more easy.
Let's keep it from happening.
>> AMY: I'll address one question that we get often, that's when will phase 2 start. And truth be told we don't know. I wish I had a crystal ball
>> JEFF: Me too
>> AMY: And I understand that that uncertainty is very unsettling.
It's very difficult.
Anyone who knows me knows I am a serious planner.
Not knowing when that event, that phase 2, and the opening up that happens, not knowing that is very frustrating.
We're encouraging people especially with planning events to think about what they may have to do if their events in phase 2, what they may have to do if their event is in phase 3. When we get into phase 3 we're still going to be living with this virus.
It's still going to require some special sanitation, fiscal distancing.
We want to keep those best practices up.
And so think about what you may do in those different phases.
Feel free to submit that information to the event review forum so that we can help give you guidance.
This is recommended, it's not

required.
And then, also do think about what might happen if we have to roll back some restrictions. And unfortunately, that's just kind of the way it is.
We are all hoping that we move into phase 2 and that we are able to start enjoying things a little bit more together that we are able to open things up a little bit more.
But we want to do it cautiously, safely, and at the right time. That takes all of us doing all of our parts in following the guidelines, in washing our hands, in making sure we're being good in public and being kind to each other.
>> JEFF: Yes.
The forest service, you know, it's inevitable there's going to be changes and we'll adapt and manage with those.
With the entire goal in mind to provide the best quality services and opportunities that we can provide the public on our hub lands.
That's the bottom line.
Thanks for watching.
>> Thanks so much.