

Yurok Tribal Council closes reservation to non-essential personnel

April 21, 2020



As part of a coordinated effort to protect residents from the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Yurok Tribal Council voted to close the Yurok Reservation to non-essential personnel.

“We are at a critical juncture right now in terms of the risk COVID-19 presents to Tribal and on-Tribal citizens on the reservation. Prohibiting access to the reservation is one component of a multifaceted plan to prevent elders, those with underlying health conditions and all other residents from being exposed to the disease,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “The Tribe is employing every available tool to proactively address this unparalleled human health emergency.”

Yurok Vice-Chairman Frankie Joe Myers said the Tribe is taking every precaution to protect the citizens who are most vulnerable to the virus.

“We know from the not too distant past what an infectious disease can do to a community and we will do everything in our power to not let that happen again. We encourage everyone to practice social distancing

and all other personal safety measures. We will get through this,” Myers said.

Serene Hayden, the Yurok Tribe’s Incident Commander, added, “Under normal circumstances, visitors to our homeland are treated with warmth and hospitality. Due to the very real danger posed by COVID-19, we must take every action to ensure that our culture and traditions are passed on to the next generation.”

To enhance the effectiveness of the closure, the Tribal Council requests that all reservation residents shelter-in-place and limit off-reservation travel as much as is feasible. The Tribal Council also set a curfew from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m.

Now in effect, the Yurok Tribe COVID-19 Temporary Closure Order applies to nearly all non-residents. Individuals authorized to enter the reservation include but are not limited to the following: essential Tribal staff, law enforcement, first responders, commercial service providers, non-Tribal social service providers and through travelers driving on the local highways and county roads. The Yurok Tribal Police Department has assigned extra patrols to enforce compliance of the ordinance. The Tribe is in regular communication with the sheriffs from Humboldt and Del Norte counties and both supports the closure.

To date, there have been no confirmed COVID-19 cases on the Yurok Reservation. However, there are several cases in the surrounding counties. On March 13, the Yurok Tribal Council declared a state of emergency to activate a preemptive response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Tribe also initiated its emergency management team. Led by Incident Commander Serene Hayden, the director of the Yurok Office of Emergency Services, and comprised of more than 80 trained staff members, the team is working seven days a week to address local impacts from the worldwide crisis. Currently, one of the team’s main priorities is securing resources to make it easier for the whole reservation community to shelter in place for a sustained period. To start, the Tribe purchased a load of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as dry goods. The food items arrived Monday and Yurok Health and Human Services staff made plans to distribute it to elders and other at-risk community members.

All Yurok Tribal offices and Redwood Hotel Casino are closed to ensure the safety of patrons and staff. Pem-mey and Pek-tah Fuel Marts will remain open to residents for the duration of the emergency as both provide essential services but the operations at the stores have been modified to meet social distancing guidelines.

Visit [Yurokoes.org](https://yurokoes.org) or any of the Tribal government’s social media pages, for current information on the Yurok Tribe’s COVID-19 response effort. If you have a question, call the Yurok Tribe’s COVID-19 hotline at 1-888-225-8952.