

Yurok Tribe issues reminder about reservation closure

May 27, 2020



The Yurok Reservation will remain closed until at least July 1 to protect Tribal elders, who are essential to the continuation of the Tribe's traditional culture, and to safeguard the community as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases increases in two neighboring counties.

"With the holiday weekend coming up, we want to remind everyone that the Yurok Reservation is closed to non-residents. We deeply regret any inconvenience this may cause, but it has to be done," said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. "Due to the elevated infection rates in the two counties, it is extremely important for the reservation community to continue sheltering in place and practicing physical distancing. Wearing personal protective equipment when outside of the home is also strongly recommended. The health of our elders and the perpetuation of our traditional heritage depends on it."

Del Norte and Humboldt counties, located to the north and south of reservation, recently received variances from the state to implement Stage 2 of the California Resilience Roadmap. Stage 2 permits certain

businesses, such as office-based businesses, car washes and curbside retail, to begin reopening following the approval of a modified operation plan. In the past week, both counties have seen spikes in confirmed COVID-19 cases, including the first two COVID-19-related fatalities in Humboldt. Both involved senior citizens.

Since March 13, the Yurok Tribe's Incident Command Team has worked day and night to protect Tribal citizens during this public health emergency. On a weekly basis, the Tribe is delivering food and supply boxes to help approximately 500 vulnerable citizens stay home as much as possible. The Tribe is conducting regular check-ins with Tribal elders. The Tribe waived all internet fees for April and May to assist those who are struggling as a consequence of the crisis. The Yurok Indian Housing Authority did not charge rent to those in Tribal rental homes during the same period of time.

There are curfew and shelter-in-place orders in place on the reservation. These orders apply to all reservation residents and businesses. The Yurok Tribal Council is regularly reviewing the orders and will make announcements when each has been lifted.

When the reservation is reopened, it will be a slow and deliberate process. The Yurok Public Health Task Force has developed a phased, COVID-19 Reengagement Plan to guide this effort. The detailed blueprint is meant to mitigate potential risks associated with reopening.

The Yurok Reservation is located in an area with very few medical resources and limited coronavirus testing. According to the United Indian Health Services, approximately 60% of the tribal citizens living on the reservation are either elders or individuals who have underlying medical conditions.