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NEWS

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South Whidbey Island State Park campground closed for 2015 season

Failing and diseased old-growth trees in campground pose public safety concern

OLYMPIA – May 8, 2015 – Washington State Parks is taking action to ensure public safety by closing the campground and group camp at South Whidbey Island State Park for the 2015 season. The action addresses concerns posed by failing and diseased old-growth trees in the campground portion of the park.

Park staff preparing for the upcoming camping season recently noted that several large Douglas-fir trees in the campground had snapped and fallen across campsites. State Parks Stewardship Program staff responded and sought help from a Department of Natural Resources forest pathologist. Tree assessments found advanced levels of heart rot in the stems of large old-growth trees. Many of the remaining old trees in the campground also were found to exhibit characteristics, suggesting that they also are infected with advanced levels of heart rot, a condition that can result in falling trees and limbs.

“We are very sorry for any inconvenience to our customers who have camping reservations at the park, but we are concerned about their safety,” said Don Hoch, State Parks director. “Being out in old forests always carries a degree of risk for outdoor users, but camping means people are spending extended periods under the trees, which potentially exposes them to greater danger. Our first priority is to keep our visitors safe.”

Campers with reservations for the 2015 season are urged to telephone the State Parks camping reservation center at 1-888-CAMPOUT (1-888-226-7688) for assistance in transferring reservations to a campsite in another park or to receive a full refund for cancellation.

South Whidbey Island State Park is one of the few lowland areas in the Puget Sound region that still supports old-growth forest. Giant trees dot the park landscape. Many of the unique features of old-growth forests, including accumulations of coarse woody debris and multi-storied stands, are the consequence of pathogen activities: root rot, stem decay fungi and dwarf mistletoe all increase with tree stand age.

The park remains open for day-use. Director Hoch said State Parks will begin a site-planning process late this summer or early fall to determine the future of the campground portion of the park.

About South Whidbey Island State Park

South Whidbey Island State Park is a 347-acre park with 4,500 feet of saltwater shoreline on Admiralty Inlet. The park is known for its old-growth forest, tidelands and breathtaking views of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. For more information, visit:

<http://www.parks.wa.gov/585/South-Whidbey-Island>

About Washington State Parks

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission manages more than 100 state parks and properties totaling approximately 120,000 acres. The Commission provides a variety of recreation opportunities for citizens and provides stewardship protection for a diverse array of natural, cultural and historic resources. State Parks' statewide programs include long-distance trails, boating safety and winter recreation.

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