

WELLNESS CONNECTION

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EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT - Dr. Kim Shinew Discusses How Best to Utilize our State and National Parks During the COVID-19 Pandemic



By Seth Yoder

This month Seth Yoder had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Kim Shinew and discuss how best to utilize our State and National Parks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Shinew is a professor in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism and has been at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign since 1993. The majority of her work is in the area of Equity and Access for underserved populations specifically providing access to parks and green spaces to these populations.

Q. As more people begin to emerge from the quarantine they will want to take advantage of outdoor activities particularly at our State and National Parks. Are there things we should be aware of before we start planning our trips?

A. While outdoor public spaces are safer than indoor spaces we should remember to continue to practice social distancing, wear masks when safe distancing cannot be maintained, and carry some type of hand sanitizer to keep hands clean.

Q. While at a State or National Park there are going to be a number of activities we could do and sites we could see. Are there any activities you would recommend, and if so what can we do to best prepare ourselves?

A. The great thing about activities at State and National Parks is they can often be done with limited contact with others. Activities like hiking, mountain biking, and kayaking are great examples of activities that can be done with little to no contact with other visitors. A couple of things to remember when preparing to visit a State or National Park is to make sure the activity you are interested in is open to the public (for example, canoe

rentals). I would also recommend visiting a park that has a variety of activities in case your first option isn't available you can always resort to plan B.

Q. There are so many great State Parks around Illinois. Will all of the State Parks be open this summer and is there a way we can find out more information about which parks will be open and what services will be available?

A. All Illinois State Parks are currently open, but it is important to keep in mind that not all facilities and services may be open within each park. It will be important to continue to check the park website or call the visitor center for the most up-to-date information as you prepare for your visit.

Q. Do you have any final thoughts or advice you would like to share?

A. State and National Parks are great places to visit and often have the most sought after attractions. However, that also means they draw the largest crowds. If you're looking for an escape to the great outdoors without all the people – forest preserves and national forest service lands may be just what you're looking for. Illinois has great forest preserves scattered all over the state and many of them provide the same or similar activities you will find at a state park.

For more information on state and national parks and forest preserves please check out the links below:

[National Parks](#)

[Illinois State Parks](#)

[Illinois Forest Preserves](#)

