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Department of
Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Two popular Mat-Su Valley state park campgrounds reopened

(Palmer, AK) – Campers are once again flocking to the reopened Byers Lake Campground in Denali State Park and the South Rolly Campground in the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, after federal funding allowed removal of more than 8,000 hazardous beetle-killed spruce trees.

“These trees presented a significant safety issue for campers, and their removal has allowed us to reopen these popular campgrounds to the public,” said Alaska State Parks Superintendent Stuart Leidner.

The parks had been closed since spring of 2019, due to concerns that the ongoing infestation of spruce beetles had killed or weakened enough trees to create a safety hazard for campers, he said. The concern was that dead or weakened trees could fall on campers.

Of the \$2 million Spruce Beetle Hazard Mitigation and Fuels Reduction funds the USDA Forest Service provided to the state, approximately \$400,000 was spent on tree removal to reopen the campgrounds. Wildland firefighting and State Park personnel with the Department of Natural Resources, as well as a private timber harvest contractor, cut down and removed the trees, allowing the campgrounds to reopen on Friday, June 26.

The first weekend after reopening, both campgrounds were nearly full of visitors eager to take advantage of the summer weather and long daylight hours to recreate outdoors, and to avoid some of the pressures of social distancing and other restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Leidner said.

Leidner credited the coordinated efforts by Division of Forestry wildland firefighting crews and Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation staff, plus the hard work of the private contractor, for the success of the effort. He also offered special credit to the U.S. Forest Service and Senator Lisa Murkowski for realizing the need and coordinating the effort to make the funds available.

“If not for the USDA Forest Service funds, these parks would still be closed, as our division simply didn’t have the resources to tackle the problem alone,” Leidner said.

The reopening of Byers Lake and South Rolly campgrounds does not mean the end of the beetle-killed tree removal, which will continue at other recreation sites throughout the Matanuska-Susitna region, he said.

To find up-to-date campground open status throughout the state:

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/asp/open.htm>

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