

# Mono County trout season opened Friday, but few places for anglers to stay — legally

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In what is becoming a succession of colossal bad government decisions, the move to open Mono County to trout fishing Friday proves bureaucrats and politicians are incompetent.

Don't get me wrong, I'm glad Mono County is now open to trout fishing (while nearby Inyo County is tentatively slated to open on June 1). The trout opener should never have been delayed in the first place. But this move shows a glaring lack of leadership top to bottom, and the inability of the county, state, and federal governments to work together to make this reopening viable. It is like a Three Stooges skit.

Part one of the fiasco: On May 15, the Inyo County National Forest announced it would not be opening any of its campgrounds, developed recreation sites, and parking areas through June 30. To their credit, that was before we were sure you couldn't get COVID-19 from a toilet seat. So there are still no facilities for the public on our forest..

Part two of the SNAFU: Both Inyo and Mono County health departments have requirements that motels, hotels, and condo owners can only rent to people who are in town on essential business. Some are actually asking for verification. So unless you have a work order or a doctor's order, you can't stay in a motel. Restaurants also remained closed by government order except for take-out, drive-up orders. So there's no room and board.

Part three's the charm: Yet, this past week, the Mono County Board of Supervisors voted to ask the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to open trout season. The state DFW granted the request immediately and – with one day of notice – trout season opened Friday.

At some level, I get the county supervisors. They were trying to help local businesses and the people who are normally employed by those businesses. Many of these businesses have already lost their best month of business. Without the trout opener, it's a question how many will be able to keep their doors open once they do get to reopen.

But for crying out loud supervisors, you couldn't have coordinated with your own health departments to make sure the restrictive orders on motels and hotels were not lifted to accommodate visitor? You could have decided to defy the state mandate and open up restaurants, perhaps with requirements?

I called a number of places I've stayed between Bishop

and Mammoth Lakes over the years, and they seemed genuinely terrified about the prospect of turning away anglers for fear the county or state would yank their permits. They are in an even more precarious situation.

Then we have the Sacramento bureaucrats, they are living in that bubble, where nothing is penetrating, especially not common sense. This is the agency that is still not listing its trout plants, preferring to continue to hide them like Easter eggs. They, of course, did not try to work with the Forest Service or the counties to make sure the region was ready for "trout opener," arguably the DFW's biggest event of the year.

Do you think a big contingent of wardens was sent to the region like most trout opener years? Yet, the DFW continues to plant trout (and do darn little else), just a continuing legacy of state government failures during the chaos.

Then we have the Feds. They are the slowest moving and least competent bureaucracy of all. If anyone had suggested to them that it might be a good idea to get campgrounds and parking areas open before (to work out bugs) or at the same time trout season reopened, there was probably stammering, "Our order says we're closed through Tuesday, June 30."

Let's see how long it takes the Inyo National Forest management to respond to this one. Does anyone want to bet it will happen before June 30? Not likely. Never mind that campgrounds in national forests are open all over the West, including California. This is just incompetence.

There were reports on social media feeds all day on Saturday about the good fishing at Crowley Lake, some big rainbows caught at Convict Lake, the hot trout bite on the East Walker River and Bridgeport Reservoir. The few open businesses were mobbed. That is the good news.

The bad news is that there have also been reports of

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trash strewn around and stacking up around closed USFS parking areas and gated campgrounds. Apparently, a lot of people do not know how to poo in the woods, thinking in front of a locked door at a parking area restroom is where you are supposed to go. There were anglers parking off the edges of roads in the brush, and many

are camping in places all over the forest not intended for campers, often damaging habitat. There are also the usual reports of anglers keeping over-limits and killing trout on closed waters because wardens are scarce.

Anyone with half a brain would have seen all the bad stuff coming. END

# San Bernardino National Forest closes stretch of Deep Creek due to crowding

Trying to cope with “unsustainable overcrowding,” the San Bernardino National Forest closed a 2 ½-mile stretch of Deep Creek between Devil’s Hole and Splinter’s Cabin parking area. The road to Splinter’s Cabin and the parking area there was also closed. The area is also closed to foot traffic. The closure is set to last for a year, but could be lifted sooner.

The popularity of the creek’s swimming holes has created a growing traffic and parking problem on the narrow Forest Service roads leading to the creek, according to the agency.

“We need to take a pause for the safety of everyone and protection of the river so we can come up with a plan for visitors to sustainably recreate,” said Marc Stamer, District Ranger. He said the crowding was so severe that visitors parked illegally recently blocked emergency vehicles from reaching an injured person which mandated a helicopter evacuation. On another day, the traffic was so severe that a Highway Patrol unit was stuck in traffic for a “few hours.” This led to a temporary closure of the road to relieve congestion. During the closure, Forest staff said it will work toward creating a recreation management plan for the area to address congestion and parking, as well as other challenges in managing this section of Deep Creek, including illegal campfires, graffiti, and trash.

The Forest Order closing the area is set for one year

and may be lifted early or expanded. The closure covers the creek going north (downstream) from the Splinters Cabin Trailhead to Devils Hole. The picnic area and Splinters Cabin Road (Forest Road No. 3N34C) will also be closed to vehicles and foot traffic. Thru-hiking the area on the Pacific Crest Trail will be allowed, however, starting the trail from Splinters Cabin will not be allowed at this time. END

