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Please read the entire article, it is important for everyone's safety and well-being.  **Above all things... Please be safe.**  **By Alex Kuffner**  Journal Staff Writer  Posted Apr 6, 2020 at 4:05 PM  Updated Apr 6, 2020 at 5:53 PM  PROVIDENCE — The trout fishing season in Rhode Island traditionally starts at 6 a.m. on the second Saturday in April with an opening day event that brings out thousands of anglers to ponds, rivers and streams all around the state.  The Department of Environmental Management canceled the big celebration this year because of the coronavirus outbreak, and had been agonizing in recent weeks over how to honor a generations-old fishing tradition without abetting the spread of disease.  On Monday, the DEM announced the immediate, early opening of a select number of water bodies that agency staff believe have enough space for people to keep a safe distance from each other while they fish. As part of the scaled-back plan adopted under an emergency regulation, the agency is also staggering fishing days with the aim of keeping crowds from forming at any one spot.  **TO OUR READERS:** *This content is being provided for free as a public service during the coronavirus outbreak.* [*Sign up for our daily or breaking newsletters*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0011o-Qqn8W-0ZPGd2Q4OXkWIetyRdJ1Azf7pDzb29C-SPT5ruCNzD2_KJqnP9yQ5nFZSRY42fhCdn2IOrcVQSzPHOmAr8W8O-7VkktDAPjtIQYaG-E3Goyn9wWcbNobSSYCVAeFehYyQ6nEEFDp9r4laOnmnNWHEwk4V25AdUcgZ4=&c=PHW9EOQHuIP2PYag_eVff3cvnP7-_rufFXa_BT-6-AHmLZDNWvu-HQ==&ch=1a7cqq8f9FIkRQfkGH5DXfAF-w9jZp-pkvz-SdPD6Ii5kXdLkhRdPQ==) *to stay informed. Please support local journalism by* [*subscribing to The Providence Journal.*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0011o-Qqn8W-0ZPGd2Q4OXkWIetyRdJ1Azf7pDzb29C-SPT5ruCNzD2_KJqnP9yQ5nFEW7YxzEvn7x9BSU5fPWYw7CLpizhPM8Ll2Eqlb0BNEo7YzcyRK1OCtDRmGKBMTi6B8IbdRp65nZP_A5ZKgY7T2JaymwQ3nGXBnvHKcMchB00KUf-0jUA-k_lqK--epLivfiRgwPWZk9sjQ-N1xg916BOSLKTMCFF-eyeXXuqahftD7b4i-35-pXDNTeMwVJvgo_eUcJmSLqzPU4p6mex9A==&c=PHW9EOQHuIP2PYag_eVff3cvnP7-_rufFXa_BT-6-AHmLZDNWvu-HQ==&ch=1a7cqq8f9FIkRQfkGH5DXfAF-w9jZp-pkvz-SdPD6Ii5kXdLkhRdPQ==)  DEM director Janet Coit pointed to the importance of trout fishing to many Rhode Islanders in explaining the effort to offer up some semblance of the spring season. Opening day is one of the state’s largest outdoor sporting events, a ritual that as many as 20,000 people take part in.  “There’s always a lot of excitement around it and we wanted to still give people this opportunity,” she said in an interview.  It’s all part of the agency’s work to thread the needle, by offering up places where people can still escape to the outdoors but in a manner that’s consistent with the state’s overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic.  The effort has led to an ever-evolving set of rules. State officials initially encouraged people to visit state parks and other outdoor spaces while following social distancing guidelines.  But when crowds began to form in Lincoln Woods, Goddard Memorial and other state parks as the weather warmed, Governor Gina Raimondo announced last week [that all state parks and beaches would have to be closed to the public](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0011o-Qqn8W-0ZPGd2Q4OXkWIetyRdJ1Azf7pDzb29C-SPT5ruCNzD2_KJqnP9yQ5nFDyJaBdQeSu5ALH7hluJ9OthS9EQakz_VLGGsvW53jU0aiV66jvr4pX0kZHkHU6kunFLcNC29vb0bopF_Xbvy3q429bl2Y5muyITTh8Dee9ukFjgA6OuHv1TViYgBPGqghdORJzGOjRMl4YtPSaBOzTnFQU_2eRAO&c=PHW9EOQHuIP2PYag_eVff3cvnP7-_rufFXa_BT-6-AHmLZDNWvu-HQ==&ch=1a7cqq8f9FIkRQfkGH5DXfAF-w9jZp-pkvz-SdPD6Ii5kXdLkhRdPQ==) -- while lesser-visited state management areas would remain open.  Coit said there were no issues this past weekend, the first since the order was enacted on Friday.  “We were out there in full force and it was really successful,” she said.  As for the changes to the fishing season, she acknowledged that she didn’t know if they would work or whether additional restrictions would have to be put in place down the line.  “We think we can do this safely if people can respect the rules,” she said.  In February, weeks before the extent of the outbreak was widely known, the DEM started stocking rivers and streams with some 54,000 rainbow, brook, golden and brown trout in preparation for opening day. The work to release the hatchery-grown fish continued into last month, but as more information about the virus became available, the agency avoided children-only fishing ponds and other smaller water bodies.  In total, about three-quarters of the usual fishing spots are open to the public. But among the places left off the list are popular ponds in state parks, including those in Lincoln Woods, Pulaski Park in Chepachet and Meshanticut State Park in Cranston.  Restocking will occur but, to minimize crowds, will not be announced in advance.  The decision to open the season early was modeled on a similar move in Connecticut. Fishing started up in Connecticut a couple of weeks ago and there have been no problems so far, said Coit, who has been in touch with her counterparts there.  In Rhode Island, a 2020 fishing license is required for anglers 15 years of age or older. Under the emergency regulation, people with last names beginning with A through M can fish only on even-numbered calendar days, while those with last names beginning with N through Z are allowed out on odd-numbered days.  Parking will also be restricted over the next two weekends and portable toilets have been removed from fishing sites as a public health precaution.  During the COVID-19 pandemic, “fishing should be enjoyed as a solitary experience, with just the members of your immediate household, and not as a group activity,” the DEM said in a news release.  The agency reminded people to congregate in groups of five people or less and maintain a distance of six feet from each other. It also urged people to be conscious of crowds and leave if the numbers of people appeared to be too high.  Environmental police officers and DEM staff will be present at fishing locations to assist anglers, answer questions, and monitor fishing spots for compliance, and the agency may adjust the fishing season if necessary.  The list of places open for fishing can be found online at [**http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/fish-wildlife/freshwater-fisheries/troutwaters.php**](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0011o-Qqn8W-0ZPGd2Q4OXkWIetyRdJ1Azf7pDzb29C-SPT5ruCNzD2_KJqnP9yQ5nF09gMgAb7TLUI5O8gkpEscQ37v9wbdFKzbEt-HYIOBccaNv7PKFIu0VBQPoo1k-WbVwhQFHtKKXk81Ep2o-CB_2ozzAEFWKaU2FEU__k_4lgInTy4ajWnK9NiNSomR9QkVaBnajc6az2FOyg03v14FENIHo-QCNNrHy0Le0xHi_I=&c=PHW9EOQHuIP2PYag_eVff3cvnP7-_rufFXa_BT-6-AHmLZDNWvu-HQ==&ch=1a7cqq8f9FIkRQfkGH5DXfAF-w9jZp-pkvz-SdPD6Ii5kXdLkhRdPQ==).  **akuffner@providencejournal.com**  (401) 277-7457  On Twitter: [**@KuffnerAlex**](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=0011o-Qqn8W-0ZPGd2Q4OXkWIetyRdJ1Azf7pDzb29C-SPT5ruCNzD2_KJqnP9yQ5nFEpuzlxPlM8ZWoOgoRTQzHkbF9S2vRr6bbvlEVXEgYNa7dCvMEx1zWHDLNj6sNh8ckT7bmtH57pERVIaaltHPD3xA3LthWHz-PUUnFkWGlDo=&c=PHW9EOQHuIP2PYag_eVff3cvnP7-_rufFXa_BT-6-AHmLZDNWvu-HQ==&ch=1a7cqq8f9FIkRQfkGH5DXfAF-w9jZp-pkvz-SdPD6Ii5kXdLkhRdPQ==) | | | | |