



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Smoky Mountains
National Park

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Great Smoky Mountains News Release

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Park Announces Cancellation of Synchronous Firefly Viewing Event

Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials have canceled the synchronous firefly viewing event in a continuing effort to support federal, state, and local efforts to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and to adhere to the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Every year in late May or early June, thousands of visitors from across the country gather near the popular Elkmont Campground to observe the naturally occurring phenomenon of *Photinus carolinus*, a firefly species that flashes synchronously. In 2019, 28,958 people from all 50 states and 19 countries entered the lottery for shuttle access to view the fireflies at Elkmont. Passes were distributed to people from 42 states, Canada, and the Federated States of Micronesia. An estimated 1,000 people view the fireflies each night, including participants from the lottery and campground users.

“The synchronous firefly viewing area at Elkmont simply isn’t spacious enough to safely allow hundreds of people to gather under the current health guidance,” said Superintendent Cash. “While disappointing, the safety of our employees, volunteers, and visitors continues to be our number one priority.”

Park officials also noted that the shuttle service to the event would not support current CDC guidelines, particularly the six-foot distancing requirement between individuals. Due to on-site parking limitations, the shuttle service is the only transportation mode for visitor access during this period, except for registered campers staying at the Elkmont

Campground. At this time, Elkmont Campground remains closed. The National Park Service is working servicewide with federal, state, and local authorities to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. Park managers will continue to evaluate regional conditions and work with local communities to assess dates for an orderly reopening of park facilities in a manner that provides for the health and safety of employees, volunteers, partners, residents, and visitors. The park will notify the public when park operations resume through our website at www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/conditions.htm and social media platforms.

Park rangers remain available to answer questions via email or phone during business hours at (865) 436-1291, (828) 506-8620, or [GRSM Smokies Information@nps.gov](mailto:GRSM_Smokies_Information@nps.gov). For more information about the synchronous fireflies, please visit the park website at <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/fireflies.htm>.

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Background: Since 2006, access to the Elkmont area has been limited to shuttle service beginning at Sugarlands Visitor Center during the eight days of predicted peak activity in order to reduce traffic congestion and provide a safe viewing experience for visitors that minimizes disturbance to these unique fireflies during the critical two-week mating period. Parking passes for access to the shuttle are normally distributed through the lottery that takes place in late April.