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Promoting an Optimal State of Wellness in Lake County

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Clear Lake Expected to Reopen to Local Residents Only Saturday Non-Essential Travel Remains Restricted

Gary Pace MD, MPH

Lake County, CA (May 6, 2020) – On Sunday, March 22, the fourth day of Lake County’s Shelter-in-Place Order, I had to make the very difficult decision to close Clear Lake.

At the time, COVID-19 activity was blossoming in the Bay Area and neighboring Sonoma County, and representatives of Lake County’s hospitals and other key medical partners were indicating they needed time to make preparations to deal with a potential local surge. Relatively little was known about the virus at that time, and we had very little capacity to test, due to global supply chain restrictions. With 23% of our population over the age of 65, and many more known to be otherwise vulnerable to severe viral complications, I felt we had to take every precaution we could.

The weekend of March 21 and 22 came, and we had a considerable influx of visitors from outside of the County using our lake and other adjacent services, despite the fact Governor Newsom had already issued a statewide Stay-at-Home Order. The risk of a devastating surge in Lake County was significant, and Clear Lake was serving as a magnet, drawing activity that threatened public health.

I felt I had to shut it down, to protect the well-being of all Lake County residents. However, I am aware what a central feature Clear Lake is for Lake County, and what it means to residents; for many, it is a point of pride or even the reason you moved here.

More than six weeks have passed since March 22, and thanks to the tremendous efforts of local residents, we are in an importantly different place.

We have confirmed just eight total cases of COVID-19, and there has been less evidence of community spread here than had been anticipated. While multiple infections within households have been documented, we have not seen geographic pockets of significant community viral activity. Raw sewage has been tested, and the most recent results seem to indicate a positive trend.

While success of preventive measures is difficult to verify, I am convinced the evidence available affirms Shelter-in-Place has had a meaningful effect, and it is likely lives have been saved as a result of the precautions we have taken.

Now, with the economy reeling, and true human costs associated with cessation of normal activities and isolation mounting, it is time to take additional steps to move forward, and do so safely.

Nearly two weeks ago now, on April 23, we began to allow fishing from Clear Lake's shorelines, and fishing from kayaks and other hand-propelled vessels shortly followed. I have been encouraged that social distancing practices have generally been observed, and we have not seen a related rise in local infections.

Unless there is a significant change in COVID-19 activity that must preclude the possibility, I expect Clear Lake and its public boat ramps will once again be open to the public Saturday, May 9, allowing lake use by residents to resume, while observing social distancing. Ramp monitoring for the Quagga Mussel program will likewise resume. More detail will be provided later this week.

This long-anticipated change will come as a part of our efforts to align with Governor Newsom's changes to the statewide Stay-at-Home Order, and the beginning of Stage 2 of COVID-19 recovery. In time for Mother's Day, low-risk retail businesses such as florists, clothing stores, booksellers, home goods stores and sporting equipment stores, and the manufacturing and supply chain businesses that support them, are expected to be allowed to reopen on a limited basis. Retail stores are expected to offer curbside delivery, and "big box stores" and shopping malls are expected to remain closed.

Very probably as early as tomorrow, Governor Newsom will issue new Orders, and Lake County will align with those, and work in earnest to evaluate our current readiness to proceed through the phases of Stage 2 recovery. More information on what that process is expected to look like is available here: <https://www.counties.org/csac-bulletin-article/governor-announces-loosening-state-order>

I have a need to emphasize that Shelter-in-Place is expected to continue beyond this week.

Non-essential travel will remain restricted, and with that, hotels will remain closed except in limited circumstances; as a service to our lodging partners, we expect to maintain our current exemption process, to ensure lodging is provided only for permitted and essential purposes. Even though the lake will be open, now is not the time to visit Lake County.

Many businesses will remain closed, including both indoor and outdoor dining at restaurants; to-go orders will stay the norm for a while longer.

All of this will be in consistency with the Governor's Orders, and if his directives are not what we expect, I will have to revise our plans, as well; the State Orders control, and we can be more restrictive, not less. To the extent we are granted local control, we must remain vigilant in taking steps that are consistent with the threats we face.

I also cannot emphasize enough that significant risks associated with COVID-19 remain present in our communities. While hospitalizations and patients in Intensive Care have generally declined, of late, there are areas around the country, particularly areas outlying those where earlier outbreaks occurred, where infections remain a serious concern, and cases and even deaths will likely rise, to some degree, as the economy is reopened.

If we see a surge in cases in Lake County, or the State experiences a significant uptick, we may have to go back to greater restrictions. The Governor has described this process as likely to include some

“togglng” back and forth, loosening and retightening of restrictions, as opposed to reopening being a “switch” that can be flipped.

Particularly as we loosen restrictions, it is essential that people:

- Maintain social distancing and keep good hygiene
- It remains strongly recommended that people wear masks when out.
- Vulnerable populations (over 65 and/or with chronic medical conditions) should continue to stay safe at home.
- We discourage people from crossing county lines, since this is an important way that the virus spreads.

For Lake County-specific Coronavirus information, please continue to visit the Lake County Health Services Department’s website, <http://health.co.lake.ca.us>.

The Lake County Coronavirus Response Hub has additional valuable resources: <https://lake-co-ca-coronavirus-response-lakecoca.hub.arcgis.com/>

If you still have questions, send an email request: MHOAC@lakecountyca.gov.

You can also call during business hours: 707-263-8174

Thank you for continuing to respect and protect your neighbors, by exercising precautions, as consistent with State and local Health Orders.

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