



Y U R O K T R I B E

190 Klamath Boulevard • Post Office Box 1027 • Klamath, CA 95548

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Matt Mais

(707) 954-0976

mmais@yuroktribe.nsn.us

Yurok Tribal Council Closes Reservation to Non-Essential Personnel

Reservation residents asked to shelter-in-place, limit off-reservation travel

As part of a coordinated effort to protect local residents from the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Yurok Tribal Council voted to close the Yurok Reservation to non-essential personnel.

“We are at a critical juncture right now in terms of the risk COVID-19 presents to Tribal and on-Tribal citizens on the reservation. Prohibiting access to the reservation is one component of a multifaceted plan to prevent elders, those with underlying health conditions and all other residents from being exposed to the disease,” said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “The Tribe is employing every available tool to proactively address this unparalleled human health emergency.”

“The Tribe is taking every precaution to protect the citizens who are most vulnerable to the virus,” said Yurok Vice-Chairman Frankie Joe Myers. “We know from the not too distant past what an infectious disease can do to a community and we will do everything in our power to not let that happen again. We encourage everyone to practice social distancing and all other personal safety measures. We will get through this.”

“Under normal circumstances, visitors to our homeland are treated with warmth and hospitality. Due to the very real danger posed by COVID-19, we must take every action to ensure that our culture and traditions are passed on to the next generation,” added Serene Hayden, the Yurok Tribe’s Incident Commander.

To enhance the effectiveness of the closure, the Tribal Council requests that all reservation residents’ shelter-in-place and limit off-reservation travel as much as is feasible. The Tribal Council also set a curfew beginning at 10pm and ending at 4am. Now in effect, the Yurok Tribe COVID-19 Temporary Closure Order applies to nearly all non-residents. Individuals authorized to enter the reservation include but are not limited to the following: essential Tribal staff, law enforcement, first responders, commercial service providers, non-Tribal social service providers and through

travelers driving on the local highways and county roads. The Yurok Tribal Police Department has assigned extra patrols to enforce compliance of the ordinance. The Tribe is in regular communication with the Sheriffs from Humboldt and Del Norte Counties and both support the closure.

The primary purpose of the closure is to provide a greater level of protection for a disproportionate number of at-risk reservation residents, including elders and those with preexisting medical conditions. The disproportionate percentage of Tribal citizens who are more susceptible to suffering the most severe symptoms from COVID-19 is the result of a decades-long disparity in funding for medical services on reservations. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the federal Indian Health Service budget met just half of Tribal health needs, according to the US Commission on Civil Rights.

The closure is also a response to a concern about the region's austere healthcare system, which lacks the personnel and infrastructure to address a large-scale COVID-19 outbreak. For example, there are very few intensive care unit beds and ventilators in the hospital closest to the Tribe's headquarters in Klamath. From the Weitchpec side of the reservation, it is a two-hour drive to the nearest hospital, which is also significantly undersized.

To date, there have been no confirmed COVID-19 cases on the Yurok Reservation. However, there are a number of cases in the surrounding counties. On March 13, 2020, the Yurok Tribal Council declared a state of emergency to activate a preemptive response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Tribe also initiated its emergency management team. Led by Incident Commander Serene Hayden, the director of the Yurok Office of Emergency Services, and comprised of more than 80 trained staff members, the team is working seven days a week to address local impacts from the worldwide crisis. Currently, one of the team's main priorities is securing resources to make it easier for the whole reservation community to shelter in place for a sustained period of time. To start, the Tribe purchased a load of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as dry goods. The food items arrived today and Yurok Health and Human Services staff will soon be distributing it to elders and other at-risk community members.

All Yurok Tribal offices and Redwood Hotel Casino are closed to ensure the safety of patrons and staff. Pem-mey and Pek-tah Fuel Marts will remain open to local residents for the duration of the emergency as both provide essential services, but the operations at the stores have been modified to meet social distancing guidelines.

Please visit Yurokoes.org or any of the Tribal government's social media pages for current information on the Yurok Tribe's COVID-19 response effort. If you have a question, please call the Yurok Tribe's COVID-19 hotline at 1-888-225-8952.