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MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

For immediate release

Mount Jumbo South Zone closure extended

Jumbo's "L" and US West trails remain open

In consultation with state wildlife biologists, Parks and Recreation has extended the Mount Jumbo South Zone winter wildlife closure beyond the expected reopening date of March 15. Despite this winter's lower-than-average snowpack, forage grasses in Jumbo's North Zone have not matured sufficiently to provide adequate food for the approximately 100 elk that spend the winter on Mount Jumbo's lower southern slopes.

Most of Mount Jumbo is closed annually on December 1 to protect wintering wildlife. The closure protects the Jumbo elk herd and other animals who rely on Jumbo's lower elevations for food and cover during the winter and early spring. Conservation Lands Manager Jeff Gicklhorn considers the Jumbo elk herd a unique natural and cultural resource for Missoula. "Not many cities in the country have the privilege of having a wild elk population that can be seen from their downtown. By working together, we can ensure this precious resource is protected and sustained for future generations to enjoy."

The North and South zone winter closures accommodate the herd's natural movements, allowing them to migrate from lower elevations in early spring to higher elevations as the weather warms and food becomes more plentiful. When warmer temperatures stimulate vegetation growth on Jumbo's upper slopes, the elk naturally migrate into the still-protected North Zone, and the South Zone is opened to the public. The North Zone, which includes all points north of the Saddle Road, remains closed until May 1 or later. The "L" and US West trails are open all year.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks wildlife biologist Ryan Klimstra emphasizes the importance of protecting the herd during the critical early spring period when they emerge from winter in their weakest physical state. "For elk and deer, the spring green-up can't come soon enough—so they can start replenishing the physical reserves they lost over the winter," Klimstra says. "Making sure the elk have adequate food to replenish their resources before reopening the mountain is critical for their long-term protection and well-being." Respecting the seasonal closure also helps ensure the elk remain wild and avoid becoming habituated to people and pets, which can lead to aggressive behavior and negative impacts on their health and natural behaviors, Klimstra added.

Parks and Recreation staff regularly monitor elk presence throughout the winter with assistance from the [citizen science Elk Spotters Program](#). Starting in early March, staff begin twice-weekly monitoring of spring vegetation in the North Zone. Resource managers balance elk presence, vegetation green-up, and spring weather forecasts to determine an appropriate South Zone opening date. Warmer temperatures forecasted for the week of March 18 will speed up vegetation growth, creating favorable conditions for the South Zone to open in the next few weeks.

The City of Missoula thanks residents for their support in protecting Mount Jumbo's unique natural resources. During the winter closure, visitors must stay on the "L" and US West trails and leash their pets to protect wildlife. Report wildlife closure violations by calling 911. For real-time updates, residents can visit the Parks and Recreation's [Conservation Lands Closures webpage](#) and look for signs at trailheads.

Visit missoulaparks.org for maps and more information, or phone 406-721-PARK (7575.)

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