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## MISSOULA PARKS AND RECREATION PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

For immediate release through March 19, 2024

### **Mount Jumbo South Zone to reopen to the public Tuesday, March 19**

**North Zone to remain closed until approximately May 1**

Mount Jumbo's South Zone, which includes all points south of the Saddle Road, will reopen to the public at **6 a.m. on Tuesday, March 19**.

In consultation with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) wildlife biologists, Parks and Recreation extended the Mount Jumbo South Zone winter wildlife closure beyond the scheduled March 15 opening date to protect the approximately 100 elk that spend the winter on Mount Jumbo's lower southern slopes. With warmer spring weather in the past few days and accelerating vegetation growth, the herd has moved to the North Zone, allowing the South Zone to reopen.

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 regularly monitor spring vegetation status further in Mount Jumbo's North Zone. Resource managers balance elk presence, vegetation green-up, and spring weather forecasts to determine an appropriate South Zone opening date to protect overwintering elk. This year's slight extension for the South Zone allowed for warmer weather to arrive and for critical vegetation to grow to meet the necessary trigger.

Jumbo's North Zone, which includes all points north of the Saddle Road, will remain closed until approximately May 1, depending on weather conditions or elk presence.

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.

For more information, call (406) 721-PARK (7275.) Visit [missoulaparks.org](#) for maps and more information.

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