



NEWS ADVISORY

May 24, 2021

For immediate release

West Broadway Island to Close for Environmental Restoration

The City of Missoula will temporarily close West Broadway Island for environmental restoration beginning on Thursday, May 27. City crews will post public notices at the site at least 48 hours before the closure begins, and the closure will be noted on the City's website.

Closure of the island will likely last about six weeks to address public health and safety concerns through clean-up and mitigation. The City of Missoula, which owns the property, renovated the island in 2019 as an accessible and family-friendly urban natural area. It opened in October 2019, a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic. The hope was that the improvements would draw the public to a new place to enjoy the riverfront. The disruption of the pandemic and other factors led the area instead to attract people living outdoors because of fear of virus transmission. The recent closure of the emergency winter shelter at Johnson Street and North Avenue, while the Poverello Center homeless shelter is operating at reduced capacity for COVID-19, has led to illegal camping on the island.

"The City of Missoula and our partners take very seriously the plight of our residents without stable housing, but we have to balance those interests with public safety, including the safety of people experiencing homelessness," Mayor John Engen said. "Camping in public parks is against our laws for good reasons around public safety and broad public use and enjoyment, and the Broadway Island is not a safe place to camp, nor does it have facilities to be sanitary. We are actively working to accommodate unhoused residents displaced by the closure."

City staff and local partners are working on identifying safe areas for camping near the city. In observance of the closure, the Missoula Police Department will continue to work collaboratively with the Mayor's Office, Parks and Recreation, and the MFD Mobile Support Teams to conduct extra patrols of the island to enforce state and local laws, including Trespassing, Littering, Illegal Camping, Open containers of Alcohol, and crimes involving illegal drug use. The primary goal will continue to be to educate potential violators of the closure and provide them with information for alternatives and other resources for aid.

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