



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Starved Rock State Park and amenities to remain open to visitors during \$18 million trail improvement project**

*Hikers urged to confirm trail availability online prior to visiting*

SPRINGFIELD – Starved Rock State Park, including the Starved Rock Lodge and other park amenities, will remain open to visitors during an \$18 million trail improvement project that is expected to get underway this winter and continue through most of 2026.

The work will allow the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to reopen several closed trails and expand the hiking and recreational opportunities at Starved Rock, which is Illinois' most visited state park, attracting about 2.5 million visitors annually.

The park, in LaSalle County, features numerous timber trail bridges, stairways, boardwalks and retaining walls that have deteriorated over the years and require repairs or replacement. In addition to making trails safer and more accessible, the project will enable IDNR to better control erosion and protect plants and habitat from excessive foot traffic.

“It’s been 30 years since Starved Rock has benefited from a significant trail improvement project like this. Visitor safety is of the utmost importance to us,” said **IDNR Director Natalie Phelps Finnie**. “The park, the lodge, and other amenities will never close during this project. Even if one specific trail is temporarily unavailable, there will be other Starved Rock trails to enjoy, as well as additional state parks in the area that can be explored.”

Trails and canyons where work will take place include:

- **Tonti Canyon and LaSalle Canyon trail system** – Renovate or replace 10 separate trail bridges, install three new timber stairways, and install new timber boardwalks with fence.
- **Lower French Canyon River Trail Bridge and Jacob’s Ladder** – Replace three existing trail bridges, replace several timber stairways, install new timber stairways and fence, and expand the boardwalk from the bridge to the existing stairway on Jacob’s Ladder.
- **Pontiac Canyon** – Replace the trail bridge and replace the timber stairway and fence.
- **River Trail** – Replace several existing trail bridges and install new timber boardwalks with fence.
- **Campunula Trail** – Install a concrete path and replace the existing trail bridge.
- **Lodge Bridge to St. Louis Canyon** – Replace existing decking.

The Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB) is executing the project. It’s part of a total \$33.8 million state investment in Starved Rock State Park, which also includes constructing a sanitary wastewater system, upgrading the water filtration system, and replacing vault toilets.

“This project will enhance the accessibility of the pedestrian trail system and refurbish the iron filtration at Starved Rock,” **said CDB Executive Director TJ Edwards**. “We are proud to partner with IDNR to make necessary upgrades to improve a key recreational destination, while minimizing disruptions on park visitors throughout the construction process.

Visitors may notice work occurring as soon as this month as workers begin tree removal. Some hiking activities could be temporarily disrupted from time to time. Most of the visible construction, which will include transporting materials to the park via barge and helicopter, will happen in 2026. Construction will be staggered to minimize the number of trails closed at the same time.

“Quote here from Abby Farrell at the lodge,” said **Abby Farrell, area operations manager for ExplorUS**, which operates the Starved Rock Lodge on behalf of IDNR. “More quote here.”

Visitors planning trips to Starved Rock are encouraged to visit the park’s [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) in advance to confirm trail availability and plan accordingly. Updates will be posted weekly. Trails within the park west of the lodge and east of Parkman’s Plain will not be affected by the project.

“Quote here from State Senator Sue Rezin,” said **State Senator Sue Rezin** of Morris, whose district includes Starved Rock. “more quote here.”

“Quote here from State Representative Amy Briel,” said **State Representative Amy Briel** of Ottawa. “More quote here.”

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#### **About IDNR**

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is celebrating 100 years of conservation and service to the people of Illinois throughout 2025. The department was established July 1, 1925, as the Illinois Department of Conservation, bringing under one umbrella oversight of fish and game, forestry, public works, and lakes.

Today, IDNR’s work encompasses management of about 400 sites across Illinois, including state parks and historic sites; wildlife, fisheries, forestry, and natural heritage; Lake Michigan water allocation and coastal management; conservation police; mines and minerals; oil and gas; issuance of licenses, permits, and numerous grants; the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta; and the Illinois State Museum. Visit <https://dnr.illinois.gov> for more information.