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RMNP BACKCOUNTRY

Lottery for coveted camping permits announced

New system selected after overwhelming demand crashed online system twice

By John Meyer
The Denver Post

In years past, a Rocky Mountain National Park ranger pulled names out of a hat at the wilderness office so a crowd of folks who coveted summer wilderness camping permits could purchase them the day they went on sale in an orderly manner.

Now, because overwhelming demand crashed the online system and halted the process twice since it failed to launch on schedule almost three weeks ago, park officials have opted for the online version of the old random hat draw.

Backpackers who want to apply for wilderness camping permits can submit their names through Sunday at 5 p.m. for an online drawing. On Tuesday, according to a park news release, names will be “randomized and drawn for access to the online reservation request application.”

Reservations were supposed to begin March 1, but the process was halted after high volume crashed the pay.gov system, forcing park officials to put everything on hold. A resumption of the process crashed the system again on March 10. The lottery plan is designed to resume reservations for July through October without overwhelming the system again.

Those who want to get in the lottery should click on a link posted on the park’s website. That brings up a form asking for your email address, the subject of your request and other information. The subject should be “Backpacking Camping Random Drawing.”

According to a news release, those names drawn beginning Tuesday morning will receive an email with instructions on how to proceed.

“There is the potential for further names to be drawn,” the park’s news release stated. “There will be no need to submit a name again for subsequent drawings as names will be drawn from the original applicants. The timing of future drawings will be based on the volume of applicants.”

It is important to note that this regards wilderness backpacking camping permits only. Developed campground reservations are handled with a different system through Recreation.gov. Reservations for those can be made six months in advance but many sites this summer have already been reserved.

Some spots become available thanks to cancellations, though. For example, at one point Thursday morning there were no spots available in the Moraine Park Campground for June, July and most of August. A few minutes later, a spot became available for one weekend night in July.

For a complete explanation of the process for backcountry permits and how to take part in the lottery, visit nps.gov/romo/playourvisit/wilderness-camping.htm.

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Working it out

Front Range gym owners, happy to welcome back more members, focus on proving 3 feet is a safe proximity



Amber Alexander works out on a bicycle at Planet Fitness on Wednesday in Lakewood. Planet Fitness owners have worked hard to keep their gyms open under COVID-19 restrictions. They have shut down machines to ensure six-foot distancing between members, installed cleaning stations so members can wipe down machines before and after use, and purchased electrostatic sprayers to clean equipment regularly. Photos by Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post

By John Meyer The Denver Post

With all of Colorado at Level Blue or Yellow on the state’s COVID-19 dial, many gym owners are finding it easier to run viable businesses because they can operate at 50% capacity, considerably more than they were allowed for most of 2020.



Valentin Ramos lifts weights as he works out in the weight room at Planet Fitness in Lakewood on Wednesday. Members must remain spaced at least six feet apart and wear masks indoors.

Gyms in Level Blue counties, and those in Level Yellow counties with 5-Star certifications, are able to allow up to 175 people into their facilities after having been limited to 25% or 10% capacity for much of last year. Those limits followed a 12-week shutdown imposed last spring by Gov. Jared Polis.

“We’ve been through hell and back,” said Jason Jost, whose family owns eight Planet Fitness facilities along the Front Range. “A year ago, we wouldn’t have thought we’d be here today. It just shows the resilience of our team, our stakeholders, our members. We had lines out the door, the first day we opened.”

But while the new capacities are a big help for big-box gyms, boutique studios still teeter on the brink because even with the limit set at 50%, they’re already operating at the maximum they can accommodate in smaller spaces while still enforcing six-foot distancing. They already were on shaky financial ground because they got little help last year

GYMS » 3c

Colorado ski areas could see multiple feet of snow next week from spring storms

By John Meyer
The Denver Post

If you’re a skier or snowboarder, you might want to ask for some time off next week if you have some vacation days to burn. A series of spring storms will bring remarkable amounts of snow to most Colorado ski areas, according to OpenSnow meteorologist Joel Gratz.

“Friday and Saturday will be warm and dry,” Gratz wrote in his latest update Friday morning. “Then we will track three storms during the following seven days. The first storm will bring snow Sunday through Monday, the second storm will bring snow Tuesday through Wednesday, and

the third storm will bring snow Friday through Saturday. Each storm will deliver the best powder to a different area of Colorado.”

Two Front Range areas that got bombed last weekend are due for more salvos. Gratz is forecasting 19 inches at Echo Mountain on Sunday through Tuesday, with another 18 to follow the next five days. He sees 18 for Eldora on Sunday through Tuesday, and 15 the next five days.

Winter Park and Loveland will see similar numbers. Winter Park is due for 17 inches Sunday through Tuesday, with 16 more the next five days. Loveland can expect 18 inches Monday through Tues-

SNOW » 4c



Mary Ellis Ollinger, 17, center, waits with her family Sunday for a bus at Eldora Mountain Ski Resort. They traveled from Fairhope, Ala., to spend their spring break in Colorado.

Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post

You probably need new running shoes

Here's how to upgrade what's on your feet

By Talya Minsberg
© The New York Times Co.

If you run, you're a runner. And if you're a runner, especially one who has hit the pavement more in the past year, there's a good chance you need to upgrade your running shoes.

"The most important thing for us is that you're moving, that's great," said Kate Reese, a manager at Brooklyn Running Co., a running shop in New York City. "But if you're starting to feel beat up, a footwear change can help."

The good news? Even if you haven't changed your sneakers in years, you most likely do not need the latest carbon-fiber technology or the coolest new shoe. You just need guidance to find your best fit.

Start with the bottom of your current shoes

To begin, look at what you've been working with

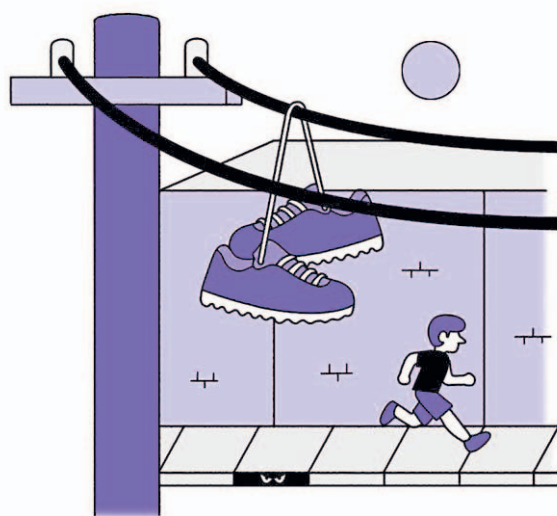
Have you been running with an old pair of trainers? A pair of shoes you bought years ago, or ones you purchased on a whim a few months back? How many miles do you think you've run in the past few months? And do you have any aches or pains?

When a shoe begins to wear down, the support and cushioning becomes less effective. The bottom of your shoes will give you some guidance as well. If you notice the tread is worn out, or even "balding" in some places, it's a sign that you are due for a new pair of sneakers. The patterns of wear and tear will also provide clues as to how you load your weight as you run, and these markers could be helpful when you look for your next pair of shoes.

Next, head to a local running store

A specialty shoe store should be staffed by local runners who know the sport and have had their own aches and pains.

Ideally, a staff member will take a look at your feet



If you're starting to feel sore in new ways after a run, or the soles of your shoes are wearing down, it likely is time for new shoes. Jackson Gibbs, © The New York Times Co.

and watch you walk or run to evaluate your stride.

You want a conversation where you have the opportunity to run or walk (on a treadmill or outside) in a handful of shoes and discuss goals and concerns, such as specific pain points or training plans.

You may try on a variety of shoes with different levels of arch support and

cushioning. Make sure you have about a thumbnail-width of space between your toes and the end of the shoe, and pay attention to what feels most comfortable.

Finding expert advice has become easier during the pandemic, thanks to the emergence of virtual running-shoe appointments. Many running

stores now have the option of making a video appointment and will ship a selection of shoes to you. Expect all of the same service you would get in person, including some walking tests and discussions around any specific physical concerns and running goals. Make sure to read the fine print before taking any shoes out for a test drive, as some retailers take returns with minimal hassle while others may have more restrictive return policies.

Regardless of where you try your new shoes, you should have a Goldilocks moment when you find the right fit, something only you — and not the experts — can identify.

"It should feel very intuitive, very natural, like an extension of your foot," Reese said. "I encourage people to walk around or jog around or even get on a treadmill. It should feel as if it's moving with you. It should be aligned with where your foot wants to move."

Expect to spend around \$130 on a good pair of run-

ning shoes, and focus on function and fit over fashion. That new sleek shoe you saw a photo of in a health magazine may not be the one that works for you. Reese urges runners to think of their shoes as a tool being purchased for a purpose, not as a fashion statement being made in the park.

Know when it's time to move on

Shoes should be replaced, on average, after every 350 miles run, experts say. But runners wear through their shoes based on their routines; trail runners may wear through shoes differently than a former college line-backer. You can safely assume that if you continue running, you will need to invest in new pairs of shoes pretty regularly.

Take note of what you like and don't like — considering cushioning, stability and the weight of the shoe. Then make sure to mentally note how supportive your shoes feel as the miles and minutes tick on.

GYMS

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from federal Paycheck Protection Program funds. Most of their instructors are independent contractors, rather than employees, and PPP funds are based on the number of employees a business has.

The Colorado Fitness Coalition, formed last fall to represent the industry in discussions with state health officials, is lobbying for a reduction of the six-foot rule to three feet. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now recommending that schools be allowed to operate with three-foot distancing.

Karey Goebel, who owns One Yoga Denver, said the six-foot rule limits her to 16 people in a room that accommodated 40 prior to the pandemic. She says her business has been running "on fumes" for the past year and could benefit "tremendously" if the six-foot spacing rule was cut to three feet.

"I would want to know that the three-foot distance was safe," Goebel said. "It would be the difference between us faltering like we are, and going back to the way things used to be. From a business perspective, that would be good, but from a societal perspective, I would want to make sure everyone was safe — my teachers, my students."

Sarah Brittenham, who owns a Barre Forte studio in Washington Park, says the six-foot distancing rule will be the "biggest obstacle" for small studios going forward if it remains in place.

"We can't operate at 100% capacity with six-foot distancing," Brittenham said. "If they were to say, 'You can now be three feet from each other, with a mask on at all times,' that would be night-and-day difference for us."

The same goes for Front Range Orangetheory studios.

"For studio businesses, the social distancing is what is having the biggest impact on being able to help more people work out right now," said Orangetheory regional manager Kelsey Donahue. "We have multiple studios where every single class is full, and we can't add more classes to the schedule. Unless there is a change in the social distancing requirement — which, with our mask enforcement, with our cleaning protocols, I believe we are able to do safely — we can't grow as a business with the current restrictions."

Even for Jost's Planet Fitness locations, which can allow 175 people and rarely reach that number, they would like to see the six-foot requirement reduced because then they could utilize more of their treadmills.

"We really don't need more capacity," Jost said. "What we're really trying to have them look at is reducing our social distancing, especially with our cardio (equipment). We're hoping the state looks at the study that the CDC is



Assistant manager West O'Neil uses an electrostatic cleaner to sanitize equipment between workout times Wednesday at Planet Fitness in Lakewood. Photos by Helen H. Richardson, The Denver Post



Left: Brandon Chang completes tricep extensions on the cable machine. Right: Gyms are enforcing a distance of six feet between members right now, but owners hope that can be reduced to three feet, to allow for increased use of equipment, even if overall capacity remains the same. That change would greatly assist smaller studios, said Sarah Brittenham, owner of Barre Forte studio in Denver.

doing with the schools and expands it to other industries."

The Josts aren't complaining, though. Their facilities are able to operate much like they did before the pandemic, albeit with mandatory masks, heightened cleaning protocols and enhanced ventilation systems.

"We're counting our blessings, there is no doubt," said Rich Jost, Jason's brother. "California is just starting to reopen their gyms. We have lost friends in the franchise system out there. I just don't know how they're doing it — no revenue for 12 months. We still have to pay our bills."

5-Star certifications, allowed by the state and administered by counties, have helped gyms expand their capacities. The Josts saw another benefit in the program, which basically certified that businesses were doing more than state rules mandated.

"I think 5 Star has helped," said

Robin Jost, Jason's wife. "We can really promote that we had to go through this rigorous checklist to be 5-Star certified, which then makes our members feel safer."

Each county's certification checklist was different. So was the process by which counties chose the inspectors. For example, Jefferson County contracted a construction permit company.

"They were very well versed in what the requirements were, impressively knew what they wanted," Jason Jost said. "In Arapahoe County, they used their existing building department; we had a plumbing inspector."

In one case, an inspector must have been favorably impressed by what she saw, because she came back the next day and bought a membership, he said.

Inspectors examined invoices for upgraded ventilation filters, Jason Jost said. They checked for state-mandated COVID-19 sig-

nage. They checked to make sure mask mandates were being observed and took pictures of the sanitizing chemicals clubs were using, making sure they were listed by the EPA as products that work against COVID-19. They checked for signatures on the cleaning checklists clubs keep on file and the health checklists employees have to fill out every day before work.

The Colorado Fitness Coalition estimates that about 150 Colorado gyms and studios have closed permanently because of financial losses caused by COVID-19. They also say the industry in Colorado has seen a 50% drop in users and a 32% "reduction in workforce."

Gym and studio owners are hoping a new COVID-19 dial coming in April will help clubs big and small, including giving them permission to operate with three-foot distancing. They also are following the progress of a bill

in Congress, the GYMS (Gym Mitigation and Survival) Act of 2021 sponsored by Rep. Mike Quigley (D-Ill.), that would give gyms federal assistance. Three Colorado congressmen — Reps. Jason Crow, Joe Neguse and Ed Perlmutter — have signed on as co-sponsors.

"There is definitely light at the end of the tunnel," said Donahue, who is a member of the fitness coalition's advisory board, as is Robin Jost. "Colorado has done what seems to be an incredible job with the vaccines. We have already seen a lot of members come back. We're excited for the future, but I do think there are a lot of gyms that are just barely hanging on, and a lifting of restrictions can't come soon enough."

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