



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 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 more than 2 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," said **IDNR Director Natalie Phelps Finnie**. "The park, the lodge and other amenities will never close during this project. Even if a specific trail is temporarily unavailable, there will be other beautiful trails to explore, as well as the Starved Rock Lodge and additional nearby state parks for visitors to enjoy."

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 is executing the project. It's part of a total \$37.2 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 may include transporting materials to remote areas of 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.

"We want to reassure our guests that Starved Rock Lodge, its hotel, restaurant, gift shop and event spaces will remain fully open throughout the duration of the project. We will continue to host weddings, conferences, family getaways and seasonal events as planned," said **Abby Farrell, area operations manager for ExplorUS**, which operates the Starved Rock Lodge on behalf of IDNR. "We encourage everyone to continue visiting, supporting local tourism, and checking trail conditions online before arrival to plan their visit."

"Starved Rock brings millions of visitors to our region each year, supporting local restaurants, hotels and small businesses," said **State Senator Sue Rezin** of Morris. "I have worked for years with IDNR to help secure funding for much-needed infrastructure improvements at Starved Rock, and I am happy to see this commitment to repairing the park's aging trails and bridges. These upgrades will make the park safer, more accessible, and ensure that Starved Rock remains a world-class destination for outdoor recreation."

"This funding for Starved Rock State Park means so much to me and my communities. As someone who worked closely with this issue for years with my predecessor, former state Rep. Lance Yednock, I am thrilled that our advocacy has paid off to deliver this critical boost to one of Illinois' most sought-after natural beauties," said **State Representative Amy Briel** of Ottawa. "Families and individuals statewide enjoy Starved Rock — this pet-friendly, family-oriented oasis offers relaxation and adventure for so many to get outside and enjoy. The funding we received in February to improve beaten-down pathways, modernize park facilities, and implement a new wastewater system to protect public health has led us here today, and I am more than excited to see how these improvements bring even more visitors to our local getaway."

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.

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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.