

Oconee expecting record crowds for eclipse

County offices, libraries to close at noon Monday

BY STEVEN BRADLEY
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — With Oconee County expecting unprecedented tourism for Monday's total solar eclipse, officials are taking steps to prepare for the crowd.

The county officially announced in a news release Thursday that government offices and facilities will close at noon Monday as a safety measure for the eclipse that afternoon, citing an expected "record number of visitors for this event."

County council unanimously approved the move at Tuesday's regular meeting after a recommendation from Sheriff Mike Crenshaw.

"From all indications and meetings I've had with Emer-

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ECLIPSE: Traffic issues also expected

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gency Services, we're probably going to be seeing people in Oconee County in numbers that we've never seen before in our history," he said. "With everything being already full — we've got some extra folks on hand, extra folks in 911, but a lot of folks potentially are coming Monday and (closing early) may give those non-essential offices a possibility to get home, because we expect possibly some traffic issues if the numbers come that are predicted."

Parks, recreation and tourism director Phil Shirley told The Journal the county's parks began getting reservations 11 months in advance — which is the earliest they were available — and have been booked for about three months.

Shirley said the parks have a limited supply of special glasses for viewing the eclipse, but likely only for campers at the parks.

"Once everyone is checked in, we may

any day-use participants in the parks, but that's pretty much it," he said. "Outside of camping, the parks are open until we reach capacity for viewing. We do expect a high volume of day-use visitors and boat launches, so my advice would be to find your spot early and plan on staying put to hold your spot."

Shirley called it "pretty impressive" the distance many visitors were traveling to view the eclipse and said it was indicative of the tourism the area could expect.

At High Falls County Park, there are 120 reservations comprised of visitors from the following locations: Georgia (31), South Carolina (30), North Carolina (27), Florida (19), Pennsylvania (3), Alabama (2) and one each from New York, California, Delaware, New Jersey, Texas, Massachusetts, the District of Columbia and Virginia.

At South Cove, 104 total reservations have been made from the following states: North Carolina (33), South Carolina (18), Georgia (17), Florida (12), Virginia (8), Maryland (4), New York (3), Penn-

sylvania (3), Alabama (2) and one each from Rhode Island, Minnesota, Connecticut and Ohio.

The 30 reservations made at Chau Ram County Park are from Florida (8), South Carolina (7), North Carolina (6), Georgia (5) and two each from Texas and Virginia.

Among the government facilities closing at noon Monday are manned convenience centers, the landfill, rock quarry, courthouse and affiliated

offices, and the county's administrative complex.

All branches of the Oconee County Public Library — except the Westminster branch — will also close at noon and will not reopen. Since the Westminster branch normally opens at 11:30 a.m. on Mondays, it will not open at all Monday. All branches will reopen Tuesday at their normal times.

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