

## Continued Emergency Meeting – March 27, 2020

### COVID19 Meeting with the Local Emergency Management Planning Committee

The Graham County Board of Commissioners met Monday, March 27, 2020 at 12:00 noon by teleconference with the Local Emergency Management Planning Committee to discuss the COVID19 issues within the county. All board was present. Committee members present: Manager Garland, Attorney Jay Coward, Health Director Beth Booth, Health Nursing Supervisor Lorita Eller, EM Director Larry Hembree, Town of Robbinsville Mayor Steve Hooper, Town of Lake Santeetlah Assistant Administrator Emily Hooper, Graham County School Superintendent Angela Knight, Town of Fontana Dam Mayor Rob Hardy and Town of Fontana Dam Administrator Zelerie Rogers, USFS Ranger Andy Gaston, DSS Director Cris Weatherford, Sheriff Joe Jones and Lt. James Hyde with the Graham County Sheriff's Department, NCDOT Brian Burch and Appalachian Community Health Center Administrator Tina Lee.

1. Chairman Wiggins called the meeting to order.
2. Chairman Wiggins stated that Swain County has its first confirmed coronavirus case. EM Director Hembree stated that the Governor is going to put NC in a Shelter in Place later today. Director Hembree stated that the Cherohala Skyway is closed as of late yesterday afternoon but Deals Gap is having some problems and questions about enforcement so the closure will be moved to Hwy 129 at the Cheoah Dam. Director Hembree stated that he has had calls about how would we get the ambulance past the barriers if an accident occurred.
3. Chairman Wiggins stated that we do not have the labor to do more at this time and we are having issues with lodge owners closing their businesses as well. Chairman Wiggins stated that we have important issues to deal with and we have a limited number of people but I assure you we will find out who has violated the ordinance and they will be charged later.
4. NCDOT Brian Burch stated that he was most concerned about the hard close and this is the most complaints that have come to NCDOT.
5. Chairman Wiggins stated that our preference would be to close at Deal's Gap but our officers do not have the authority to arrest. Chairman Wiggins stated that the DA is telling Sheriff Jones that he does not have the authority to charge people if he is in Swain County.
6. Commissioner Orr asks if the State would be able to give the county supplies to close the roads. Brian Burch stated that this would not be an option.
7. Chairman Wiggins stated that it would help when the detour is over, then US HWY 129 can be more controlled.
8. Brian Burch stated that he cannot tell the county what to do but he is asking to try a different way than hard closure. Chairman Wiggins stated that he wanted US 129 closed at Tapoco and traffic needing to go into Tennessee can go around Meadow Branch through Fontana.
9. Chairman Wiggins stated that it is the time of the year that the houseboat owners need to check on their property and they need to allow them to pass through to check on their houseboats and leave.
10. Zelerie Rogers asks if the Highway Patrol could help man Deals Gap. The board all agreed that with the Statewide Stay in Place using the Highway Patrol would probably not be an option.
11. Chairman Wiggins stated that we will do the best we can and most people have been supportive and we will have to rely on the trust factor at this time until the detour is closed. Chairman Wiggins stated that Murphy and Haywood Counties have (17) Intensive Care Beds for all our people and Mission would not have room for Graham County Citizens if Buncombe County starts to see a rise in the virus so we need to be as diligent as possible in keeping folks away from here.
12. Brian Burch stated that he had spoken with Dirk Cody and he was requesting to be on the April 7<sup>th</sup> agenda.
13. Kevin Hensley, Graham Star Editor asks if the county will issue permits for workers. Manager Garland stated that they are doing the best that they can to get the permits for the workers out but due to our email system going down we have struggled and do have a back log but we will work over to get these put through. Editor Hensley stated that he would be glad to put something on their Facebook page or in the paper so people can ask questions on what is going on here in the county with the closures. Editor Hensley stated that he would be glad to assist Chairman Wiggins in doing a YouTube video explaining why the commissioners are putting this

into place. Chairman Wiggins stated that he expects Governor Cooper will order a Shelter in Place and stated that people can get out to go to the doctor or to purchase essential items and groups will be reduced to 10 or less. Chairman Wiggins stated that we would have to rely on people to do the right thing. Attorney Coward stated that the Governor would be doing a press release at 4:00 p.m.

14. Commissioner Orr stated that she still thinks that it is a good idea for the county to send flyers with the papers. Editor Hensley stated that he would be glad to help and the county could do an insert at a reasonable price. Commissioner Orr stated that we needed to information about Telehealth to get out as well. Tina Lee stated that she would be glad to post information on their website as well and they are doing the Telehealth and taking new patients.
15. USFS Ranger Andy Gaston stated that he has firefighters who are now assisting him and we appreciate the limited exposure at the campsites, etc. which will protect against wildfires. Ranger Gaston stated that they closed the shooting lanes on Atoah so the commissioners will probably hear some complaints about that. Ranger Gaston stated that people are already breaking locks on the toilet facilities and they will go around the barricades but they have barricaded Horse Cove Campground. Ranger Gaston stated that there would be trash pile up if there is camping around the lake. Ranger Gaston stated that they are fine with a hard closure on the Skyway and the reflective signs are the safest for motorists. Ranger Gaston stated that they would be fine with a barricade on the North River Road to prevent traffic from Tennessee on the gravel road. Ranger Gaston stated that there is a gate up at the entrance of Santeetlah Road but they will cut that lock so barricades would be best. The board agreed to barricade this road Ranger Gaston stated that Rick Franklin does not have authority to stop camping on Big Snowbird but the county can restrict the camping. The board wanted Rick Franklin to get with Sheriff Jones on the camping restrictions.
16. Mayor Hooper stated that he received a call concerning an elderly person who is being cared for by family members from Tennessee and they were worried about not being able to get to them. The board agreed that they needed to make application for a permit and they will review on a case-by-case basis.
17. Chairman Wiggins stated that this meeting would continue to March 29<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 noon.

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Dale Wiggins, Chairman

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Lynn Cody, Vice-Chairman

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Keith Eller, Member

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Jacob Nelms, Member

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Connie Orr, Member

ATTEST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Kim Crisp, Clerk to the Board