

Exeter Township's Daniel Boone Homestead to close

Reopening of site depends partially on volunteers, state officials say

By **Darrin Youker**
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The Daniel Boone Homestead will close Dec. 1, and the state has given no indication that it will reopen.

State officials said Monday that reopening the Exeter Township site, managed by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, will depend partially on the availability of volunteers to staff the buildings and manage events.

Boone was one of 11 historic sites the museum commission identified for possible closure across Pennsylvania.

The announcement Monday was part of sweeping cuts the Rendell administration unveiled to close budget gaps.

The 319 layoffs announced Monday include 85 at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

The Boone grounds will remain open to the public, but buildings will close and events will cease after Dec. 1, said Kirk Wilson, a spokesman for the museum commission.

Wilson said he could not comment on what the staffing level at Boone will be because specific layoffs won't be finalized until later this week.

Reopening Boone and other historical sites will depend on whether the layoffs are permanent and the willingness of friends groups to plan events or volunteer to open buildings for tours, Wilson said.

"We need to fully understand the impact of the furloughs and get a sense of the interest in friends groups," he said.

Daniel Berg, president of the Friends of the Daniel Boone Homestead, said he had no indication the state was going to close the homestead.

"It's a complete shock to me," he said. "We were trying to make the site as viable as we could."

Volunteers already are extremely active at the homestead, said Cherie Berg, Daniel's wife and one of the site's volunteers. The friends group organizes lecture series and manages the gift shop, she said.

"I am extremely disappointed," she said. "We are losing a valuable resource."

The homestead, birthplace of famed American pioneer Daniel Boone, features a number of 18th- and 19th-century buildings that tell the story of the Boone family's time in the Oley Valley.

This summer, the museum commission announced it would close the buildings at Conrad Weiser Homestead and not actively operate the site. Monday's announcement did not include any additional cuts at the Weiser site, Wilson said.

Most of the Weiser staff already has been laid off or transferred to other sites. The one remaining position was not cut, Wilson said.

The Friends of the Conrad Weiser Homestead group is trying to create a management agreement to reopen the buildings to the public.

Also on Monday, the state said proceeds from gas leasing will make it possible to keep all state parks open this budget year, but many will see reduced hours. State officials had said as many as 50 could have been closed with state budget cuts.

(Reporter Erin Negley and The Associated Press contributed to this story.)

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The Daniel Boone Homestead in winter.