Memorandum

To: Councilmembers and Media
From: Mayor Emily S. Niehaus
Date: 5/27/2020
Re: Special Joint Grand County Council, Moab City Council, and Town of Castle Valley Meeting

The Grand County Council will host a joint meeting with Moab City Council and Town of Castle Valley on Friday, May 29, 2020 at 10:00 am. The purpose of this meeting will be:

1. Call to Order
2. Council Member Disclosures
3. Citizens to Be Heard
   We are receiving public comments at our Zoom meeting by phone.
   **Dial:** (669) 900-6833   **Meeting ID:** 838 3079 4315
   **Password** (if needed): 114949
4. Presentations
   Presentation on the phased reopening and visitor access strategies for Arches and Canyonlands National Parks (Kayci Cook, Acting Superintendent, National Park Service Southeast Utah Group)
5. Action Items – Discussion and consideration of
   Approving Grand County, the Town of Castle Valley, and Moab City’s joint letter of support for the National Park Service’s visitor access strategy for Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, including a phased reopening plan and temporary timed entry system for Arches NP (Christina Sloan, Grand County Attorney)
6. Discussion Items
7. Future considerations
8. Adjourn

This meeting will be hosted by the Grand County Council and may be viewed on the County’s YouTube channel – search for “Grand County Utah Government”.

Per Executive Order 2020-5 issued by Governor Gary R. Herbert on March 18, 2020, this meeting will be conducted electronically

An anchor location will not be provided.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, individuals needing special accommodations during this meeting should notify the Recorder’s Office at 217 East Center Street, Moab, Utah 84532; or phone (435) 259-5121 at least three (3) working days prior to the meeting.

Mayor Emily S. Niehaus
May 29, 2020

David Vela  
Deputy Director  
Exercising the Authority of the Director  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street  
NW Washington,  
DC 20240

Dear Deputy Director Vela,

Grand County, the City of Moab, and the Town of Castle Valley hereby express their support for the phased adaptive recovery plan being implemented by the National Park Service for Arches and Canyonlands National Park to reopen them to public access. In particular, we express support for the use of a temporary timed entry system for Arches National Park to increase safe access to our Parks while instilling visitor confidence that we are committed to mitigating risk while they recreate in Grand County.

As communities emerge from isolation across the West, folks are eager to travel and get outside into their National Parks. However, Moab’s visitation numbers – which hover around 30% capacity for most of May - indicate that some visitors have been reluctant to travel for fear of exposure to COVID-19. In addition, Grand County has limited critical resources such as medical and emergency systems and an older population vulnerable to COVID-19, with many retirees. So, some of our local residents are similarly hesitant to welcome visitors into our community. For these reasons, it is important that the National Park Service be allowed to use all of its tools to keep our visitors, National Park Service (NPS) staff, and local residents and businesses as safe as possible in these unprecedented times.

As you know, visitation to Arches National Park has grown dramatically over the past decade and large crowds have become a fact of the Arches experience. Considering visitation patterns over the last few years, and adding projections of increased domestic, road-based recreational travel as a response to the coronavirus pandemic, reopening Arches National Park without an effective adaptive strategy in place could compromise the safety of visitors, NPS staff, and the local community. Unmanaged access is likely to result in crowding at the highly popular areas of Arches National Park, making adequate social distancing impossible and challenging NPS staff ability to meet sanitation standards for park facilities. These conditions could increase the potential for transmission of the coronavirus and cause illness for visitors, NPS staff, and members of our community. This, in turn, could cause the NPS to reduce public access to Arches again if staff become sick and are unable provide visitor services. High visitation and unmanaged crowding could also result in more frequent NPS traffic management actions, such as closing Arches NP to additional vehicle entry for a few hours when parking capacity is
reached, a frustrating experience for those who are turned away.

A temporary timed entry system would be an effective tool for the NPS to use as part of the adaptive recovery plan for Arches National Park. Timed entry would spread visitation out across the day and reduce the potential for crowding that makes social distancing a challenge. It will also provide visitor confidence that they will be able to enter the park instead of being turned away when the park reaches capacity. Temporary use of a timed entry system during the COVID-19 pandemic would be a significant positive step toward enhancing the safety of our visitors (and in turn, NPS staff and our local residents and businesses) and their Park experience.

We appreciate your consideration and support of our Southeast Utah Group of NPS units, and we look forward to working together, cooperatively, to continue to maximize safe visitation to our Parks.

Sincerely,

INSERT SIGNATORIES

Cc: Kayci Cook, Interim Superintendent, SE Utah Group (NPS)
David Vela  
Deputy Director, Exercising the Authority of the Director  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Vela,

I am writing on behalf of the Town of Estes Park to support Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) in its effort to implement a visitor access strategy as the Park reopens. This re-opening strategy includes a timed entry system to help manage access to the Park in a measured way, consistent with COVID-19 guidance. We believe this is the most effective method to provide for the safety of our community, Park staff, and shared visitors.

Visitation to RMNP has grown dramatically over the past decade and large crowds have become a fact of the Park experience. Based on visitation patterns over the last few years, reopening RMNP without an effective managed access strategy in place would make adequate social distancing impossible in the highly congested areas of the Park. Providing timed-entry visitor access would be a significant positive step toward limiting the pressure on the Park, ensuring the safety of our residents and guests, and providing a positive guest experience.

The Town of Estes Park has an older population vulnerable to COVID-19, with many retirees, and limited critical resources including medical systems. Social distancing measures are a vital component of our efforts to protect both our residents and our visitors. Any area where large groups of residents or guests congregate without the ability maintain adequate social distancing undermines our efforts to protect public health. RMNP is an immensely popular destination in our community, and as such, could pose a significant risk if measures to enable adequate social distancing are not enacted.

We strongly support the implementation of a timed-entry visitor access strategy for the Park.

Sincerely,

Wendy Koenig  
Mayor

Cc: Superintendent Sidles
Re-Opening Plan For Rocky Mountain National Park

Goal:
• Increase park access while providing the public a reasonable opportunity to comply with health guidelines

• Avoid scenarios where a re-opening visitation surge results in stakeholders inside and outside the park demanding the park to re-close

Considerations for Re-opening Rocky Mountain National Park

• Consistent with federal, state, local, and PHS guidelines
• Consistent with State of Colorado current "Safer at Home" phase that expires May 26:
  ✓ limit activities to your immediate community
  ✓ not travel more than 10 miles from your home to recreate or for vacation
  ✓ not travel to mountain areas
• Park seasonal hiring and housing challenges
• Installing safety mitigations, PPE for staff
Re-opening Date:
Wednesday, May 27

Phased Plan for reopening that considers how best to manage visitation

• Another year of record visitation in 2019 with 4.6 million visitors. Visitation for 2019 represents a 44 percent increase since 2012.

• July, the most visited month, experienced a record 976,042 visitors.

• June through July over 1.6 million visitors.

• June through September over 3.2 million visitors.
Rocky Mountain National Park

Goal: Increase park access while providing the public a reasonable opportunity to comply with health guidelines

Proposed strategy - timed entry permit system:

- Enables park visitation levels, pacing, and flow to occur commensurate with the park’s safe operational capacity
- Provides an improved visitor experience
- Can collect fees in advance and be able to communicate anticipated visitation levels with community and business partners for their own planning purposes
- Helps to prevent crowding and possible resurgence of virus, causing potential need to close again

Rocky Mountain National Park

Permits would be managed by recreation.gov, with the initial opening phase allocating ~60% of the park’s maximum parking capacity (13,500 visitors per day, or 4,800 vehicles).

The park will monitor our ability to operate with present health guidelines and adapt the system accordingly.
Proposed Timed Entry System

- Provides for advanced daily reservations for private vehicles.
- Includes advance payment of entrance fees.
- 90% on reservations available at release with 10% held for 2 day prior sale. Allows some last-minute planning flexibility.
- Applies to all areas of the park.
- Discourages visitors from coming to the area without reservations.

Visitors Per Booking Window

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Window</th>
<th>Timed Entry System</th>
<th>Typical June Visitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6am to 8am</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8am to 10am</td>
<td>3500</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10am to 12pm</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12pm to 2pm</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pm to 5pm</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communications Strategy

- Extensive media outreach
- Social media and park website outreach
- Ongoing work with partners and stakeholders to have consistent messaging to help visitors plan ahead
- Encourage overnight and multi-day visitors to come to the park and help allay their concerns with the level of congestion and crowding tied to day use
Questions?
Yosemite National Park
DRAFT Re-opening Plan

Yosemite Gateway Partners
May 18, 2020

DISCUSSION TOPICS

• Staying Aligned with Gateway Communities
• Proposed Approach to Re-opening
• On-the-Ground Management
Draft plan aligns the following:

- President’s Opening Up America Again Guidelines
- DOI Secretary Guidance
- California Pandemic Roadmap
- Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team
Approach to adaptively re-opening:

- Stay in frequent communication and coordination with state and local leaders to ensure alignment in re-opening.
- Test management approaches and adapt quickly.
- Build on successes to make progress toward full re-opening.
- Work with park partners, gateway communities, and adjoining federal land management agencies to offer alternatives and expand recreational and open space opportunities.
STAYING ALIGNED WITH GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

Park Focus and Primary Considerations:

- Protect the health and safety of employees, the local communities, and visitors
- Protect and manage park resources and infrastructure
- Provide for a safe visitor experience that adheres to public health recommendations
- Alignment with and support of Gateway Communities
- Quickly adapting and building on success
Monitoring will focus on the effectiveness of approaches in managing visitor concentrations. (Also: Entrance Stations, Mariposa Grove, Wawona)
PROPOSED APPROACH TO RE-OPENING

When California enters Stage 3, anticipated in June...

The Park will re-open at approximately 50% of capacity with mix of overnight and day-use.

Multiple access opportunities:

- Overnight reservation at concession-operated lodging
- NPS Campground Reservation
- Wilderness or Half Dome permit
- Commercial Tour (smaller vans)
- YARTS
- Manage Entry of Day-use Private Vehicles
- Overnight short-term lodging in Wawona, Foresta, and Yosemite West
### Private Vehicle Entry Calculations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valley Day-use Parking (MRP) to-date</td>
<td>1,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valley Roadway Vehicles</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Valley Day-Use Vehicle Accommodation</td>
<td>2,361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of Total Valley Day-use</td>
<td>1,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflate to account for 30% not visiting Valley</td>
<td>1,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parkwide Vehicle Day-use Vehicle Level (Initial Phase)</td>
<td><strong>1,700 Vehicles/Day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated Parkwide Overnight Vehicles</td>
<td><strong>1,900 Vehicles/Day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parkwide Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,600 Vehicles/Day</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Proposed Approach to Re-opening – Proposed Initial Vehicle Numbers**

*Proposed Initial Inbound Vehicle Numbers, 2020 vs. 2019*

- **June 2019 (Average Daily)**
  - Total Valley: 6300
  - Parkwide: 7700

- **Proposed June 2020**
  - Total Valley: 3170
  - Parkwide: 3600
PROPOSED APPROACH TO RE-OPENING — DAY USE ENTRANCE STATION MANAGEMENT

- Visitors will be encouraged to pre-pay park fees online, but on-site fee collection will still be necessary.
- Studying modifications to kiosks to improve operations
- Ability to purchase a ticketed entry for day-use through recreation.gov
- Focus during initial re-opening is on simplicity, adapting quickly, and building on successes.
PROPOSED APPROACH TO RE-OPENING – OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS

Camping
- Opening Lower Pines (60 sites) and North Pines (81 sites) at first
- Opening backpackers campgrounds for Yosemite Valley, Tuolumne Meadows and Hetch Hetchy
- Will evaluate other areas such as Hodgdon Meadows, Crane Flat, and Bridal Veil Campground later

Lodging
- Opening the Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite Valley Lodge, and Half of Curry Village
- Modified food operations throughout the park

Other
- Retail Outlets, Grocery Stores, The Ansel Adams Gallery, Bikes, Rafts, and pay-at-pump gas stations open
PROPOSED APPROACH TO RE-OPENING

Why manage entries?

- Concerns that demand will overwhelm gateways and park, creating crowded and unsafe conditions
- Provides certainty for day use visitors and predictability of visitation levels for local communities
- Provides data to actively manage demand through re-opening phases.
- Reduces close contacts between gate staff and visitors through pre-payment of entrance fees
ON-THE-GROUND MANAGEMENT:  HOW THE SYSTEM WOULD WORK:

1) Log into Recreation.gov

2) Select date of arrival
ON-THE-GROUND MANAGEMENT: HOW THE SYSTEM WOULD WORK:

3) Select Passes and Purchase Permit

4) Permits/QR codes emailed and texted:
On-the-Ground Management

Some potential adaptive approaches to managing visitor concentrations:

- Convert some trails to one-way
- Move some visitor services outdoors
- Limit number of entries into confined spaces
- Install social distancing signs
- Encourage use of face coverings whenever possible
The park has a continued focus on managing wildlife and other natural and cultural resources, including:

- Bear management, to reduce human-bear conflicts
- Peregrine nest monitoring, to maximize the routes open for climbing
- Habitat restoration and caring for the park’s resources
Successful re-opening will require:

- Protection of public safety
- Sustained access to park’s primary attractions
- Re-invigorate gateway economies
QUESTIONS?
Yosemite National Park may finally reopen as early as June, but with major changes: Visitors who want to spend the day at the famed Sierra Nevada destination would need a reservation and crowds would be limited to roughly half of normal.

Aimed at reducing the risk of spreading the coronavirus, the plan drafted by Yosemite park officials has not been made widely public and still needs approval from the Trump Administration’s Department of the Interior.

Yosemite’s pending move comes as several prominent national parks throughout the United States — including Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Joshua Tree — reopened in a limited way this week, some without hotels or restaurants.

Yosemite, which drew 4.4 million visitors last year, closed on March 20 as the coronavirus pandemic widened.
Park officials do not have an exact reopening date. But under their plan, when the park reopens — likely sometime in the next few weeks — park shuttle buses would not run in Yosemite Valley due to concerns from local health officials about crowds of people sitting in close quarters.

Visitors — who would be encouraged, but not required, to wear masks or face coverings — should expect changes. Many trails would be one-way. Bathrooms would be cleaned more often. And social distancing signs would be up at grocery stores and gas stations.

The Ahwahnee Hotel and Yosemite Valley Lodge would fully reopen, as would at least two campgrounds in Yosemite Valley. Curry Village would reopen at half capacity, and Housekeeping Camp would remain closed.

“We want to protect public health and we want to reinvigorate the local economy that depends so much on Yosemite National Park,” said Cicely Muldoon, acting superintendent of Yosemite National Park, in a conference call Monday with elected officials and business leaders from surrounding counties.

Muldoon and other park officials have not granted interviews to discuss the plan, although they have begun to outline details to leaders of Mariposa, Madera, Tuolumne and Mono counties.

On Tuesday, the Mariposa County Board of Supervisors voted to send a letter to the park endorsing it.

“I support what the park is doing,” said Mariposa County Supervisor Rosemarie Smallcombe. “Everybody is trying to determine how best to proceed to open our businesses and our tourism economy with a minimum impact on public health and our overburdened health care system. This is a good start.”

Local elected officials in Mariposa County say they support the effort because their economy has been decimated, despite worries that opening the park could bring in visitors who might carry COVID-19 and put their rural communities at risk. They say they hope that the park’s health safety guidelines and messaging to the public will reduce risk significantly.

“We’re cautiously optimistic,” Smallcombe said.

Muldoon, the superintendent, has said in recent meetings with local residents and officials that she hopes to open the park after Gov. Gavin Newsom moves the surrounding counties to Stage 3 in the state’s reopening plan. At that level, nearly all retail businesses, including restaurants, barber shops, gyms and hotels, can reopen, and people will be able to travel more widely for recreation.

At a press conference on Monday, Newsom said those changes are likely to be “weeks, not months away.”
Under Yosemite's draft plan, visitors with overnight reservations at hotels or campgrounds inside the park would be allowed to drive in without buying a ticket to the park ahead of time.

But visitors coming in for the day would be required to first purchase a day pass, or entry ticket, online at recreation.gov — a website that books campgrounds, tours and other reservations at national parks, national forests and other federal lands. Entry tickets are not yet for sale at that website.

In the first phase of reopening, up to 1,700 such passes per day would be sold at the usual entry rate of $35 per vehicle. Combined with the estimated 1,900 vehicles a day that would be expected to enter the park from people with overnight reservations at hotels and campgrounds, the total would be roughly half of the 7,700 vehicles a day that entered the park on average last June, according to park planners.

Cars that arrived at Yosemite's gates without a day pass would be turned around. Bus riders on the YARTS system, a regional transportation system that takes people in and out of the park from the surrounding counties, could get in without a reservation for the day, although YARTS buses would be running at limited capacity to ensure social distancing of passengers.

Parks experts say if the public follows health guidelines, the plan could work. If they don’t, and outbreaks occur, the park could close again.

“When the Great Smoky Mountains National Park opened a couple of weeks ago, they were overwhelmed,” said Phil Francis, chairman of the Coalition to protect America's National Parks, a non-profit group of former national parks employees. “People walked on trails that were supposed to be closed. They were in large groups. They didn’t wear masks. It was a big problem.”

Francis, a former Yosemite deputy superintendent, said he thinks it is too soon to open hotels.

“I understand the economic aspect. I really appreciate it,” he said. “But if you don’t do it right this time, you are probably going to have to close again. So it’s a lot better to move slowly and get it right.”
Yosemite park re-opening plan aims for early June, with limits