



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

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The Honorable Paul Gosar, D.D.S.
Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gosar:

Enclosed are responses to the Questions for the Record received following the December 6, 2022, oversight hearing titled, *Lessons from the Field: Overcrowding in National Parks*, before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. These responses were prepared by the National Park Service.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

Christopher P. Salotti
Legislative Counsel
Office of Congressional and
Legislative Affairs

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Melanie Stansbury
Ranking Member

Questions for the Record
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Oversight Hearing
Lessons from the Field: Overcrowding in National Parks

Questions from Chair Porter

Question 1. What is the status of the visitor use management plan outlined in Zion National Park's 2001 general management plan?

Response: The National Park Service (NPS) initiated the Zion National Park visitor use management planning process in 2016. Public listening sessions were held in May 2016 to understand the evolving visitor experience and solicit visitor feedback on possible solutions. Also in 2016, the NPS presented a range of potential visitor use management strategies during public scoping. In July 2017, the preliminary management concepts were released for public review. The NPS has formally engaged Cooperating Agencies to participate in the planning relating to their special expertise or jurisdiction. They include Washington County, Kane County, Iron County, Garfield County, Town of Springdale, Utah Office of Tourism, Utah Public Lands Policy Office, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Current and next steps include:

- examining modifications to the range of preliminary concepts through testing new management strategies;
- continuing to develop priorities and protocols for near-term piloting of potential management strategies in key locations;
- analyzing visitor survey data collected from 2017 to 2022 to better understand visitor spending in the local and regional economy, visitor preferences, and visitor use patterns;
- conducting detailed socioeconomic analyses of the management plan alternatives at the regional and local levels;
- working with local universities to design and implement data collection systems to enhance the existing, robust visitor use and economic data sets;
- developing key visitor use management elements such as monitoring visitor use indicators and thresholds and identifying preliminary visitor capacities;
- continuing to meet regularly and be actively engaged with Cooperating Agencies in the plan development; these agencies have expressed concerns to NPS, DOI, and Congressional members regarding establishing visitor capacities and potential economic effects;
- evaluating the potential for phased implementation of the management strategies developed through the plan alternatives, using information gained from piloting and further data acquisition.

Question 2. Can you provide an estimate of when Zion's updated general management plan will be complete?

Response: The Zion General Management Plan (GMP) is not scheduled for an update at this time. The 2001 GMP called for two subsequent, tiered plans to assist in implementing the GMP. The first was the Wilderness Stewardship Plan which was completed in 2007. The second is the Visitor Use Management Plan which was initiated in 2016 and is still being developed (see response to Question 1 above).

Question 3. How have staffing challenges affected the visitor use management planning?

Response: Development and implementation of a comprehensive Visitor Use Management Plan remains a priority for Zion National Park. We depend on an interdisciplinary team of professionals from the park, region, and Denver Service Center to develop the Plan. Zion National Park team members are specialists in their operational areas including visitor services, commercial services, resources management, and facilities operations. Regional office and Denver Service Center staff are professional community, visitor use planners, and NEPA specialists. The park has one Visitor Use Manager/Community Planner that leads park-based efforts for visitor use planning, piloting and testing visitor use techniques and social science projects, the results of which inform the Visitor Use Management Plan effort. Park staff have been hired to operate pilot programs, particularly the Angels Landing Trail permit program, using permit revenue. The superintendent and members of the park management team also participate on steering and subject-specific committees for a Regional Recreation Management Plan, an effort being led by county commissioners with participation from State and federal land managers, tourism and recreation professionals, representatives of the business community and related stakeholders.

Question 4: What actions have Zion National Park taken to increase hiring and improve retention for their Park Service workforce?

Response: Allocation of staff has been modified to direct more staff to visitor services and facilities operations to meet demand from increased visitation. Zion National Park has taken a number of 6-month seasonal positions and combined them to form permanent, subject-to-furlough positions to provide service over a longer period of the year, as visitation increases have been most pronounced in Spring and Fall, such that a 6-month seasonal appointment no longer provides adequate coverage for many visitor services. This has created new opportunities for seasonal staff to acquire permanent positions, benefiting their career goals and boosting retention of experience and trained employees. As a result of combining seasonal positions, overall staffing in the park has declined slightly in recent years. Volunteers contribute thousands of hours yearly to assist in all operations, especially visitor services. The park has slightly increased housing units (3) and travel trailer pads (5) with utilities hook-ups, to help in retention given the lack of availability and affordability of housing in nearby communities.