



June 1, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Mark Ghaly,
Secretary of Health & Human Services
California Health & Human Services Agency
1600 Ninth Street, Room 460
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Sonia Y. Angell,
State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
P.O. Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

Dear Governor Newsom, Dr. Ghaly, and Dr. Angell:

As members of the Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team, we thank you for your continued efforts to guide California through the COVID-19 pandemic and to modify the statewide stay-at-home order to allow for a 'new normal'. Under your leadership, our region, including Madera, Mariposa, Tuolumne and Mono Counties, feel confident we have the resources necessary to address the spread of the virus. Case numbers remain stable, area hospitals are well prepared for potential patient surge, our surveillance strategies are well-established and our testing capacity continues to expand.

As representatives of our respective counties, we are asking you to relax the stay-at-home order to allow recreating in low-risk outdoor recreation areas, release guidance for the use of outdoor recreation areas and campgrounds, and allow for the reopening of the lodging industry and campgrounds to support the use of outdoor recreation areas.

As in other rural areas of the state where tourism and recreation are the primary economic drivers, those of us in the Yosemite-Sierra region find ourselves in a precarious spot on the road to resilience. We rely on visitors for our businesses and communities to thrive and need your assistance to allow safe and legal travel to resume within our four-county region. Throughout the pandemic, our four counties have been working closely with leaders of Yosemite National Park. We have collaborated on a regional plan for a phased reopening of Yosemite National Park in early June. We take our role seriously as stewards of this national treasure and we need to be ready for the Park's reopening.

We are currently asking for local discretion (working under the guidance of our health officers) to lift travel restrictions and phase in modified recreation lodging operations.

In coordination with the Park, we propose a 'soft opening' on or about June 5. This would include opening the Park to Wilderness Permit holders and holders of Half Dome day-use permits. It would not include lodging or other facilities in the Park, but would include these services in Gateway communities and adjacent National Forests. This would allow the Park and Gateway communities to gauge our plans with a smaller set of visitors.

Based on this soft opening, a larger opening, using a plan developed by the Park and approved by the Department of Interior, would occur on or about June 11. This would allow approximately half of the number of usual visitors to the Park to enter, including both day use and overnight visitors. Day use numbers would be limited by a reservation system that would require visitors to obtain a permit prior to coming to the Park. In order to ensure the safety of Park visitors and staff, Mariposa County will be coordinating mobile testing in Yosemite one day a week. This will be conducted through a CDPH-developed contract with Verily. We are also using the "Biobot" wastewater sampling to determine presence and estimate prevalence of COVID-19.

Yosemite National Park and adjacent National Forests are not only an important and beloved resource for Californians, they belong to all Americans. These land managers are facing a near impossible task of navigating the demands of the federal administration to open and provide access, while also complying with state requirements.

Under the current guidance, we are unable to provide guest services to the thousands of out-of-area visitors who are already arriving and recreating in our National Forests. Without campgrounds or lodging facilities that are open for leisure travel and very few public restrooms open, we are witnessing health and safety concerns, as well as unintended consequences to our natural resources. Dispersed camping has already caused multiple wildfires near our communities, and untold amounts of trash and human waste left near lakes and streams are polluting the water sources for millions of Californians.

Our region is requesting the ability to open campgrounds, lodging and other essential services near National Parks and forest destinations in order to mitigate health and safety concerns. We believe we can accomplish this in a safe and careful manner, with collaborative, regional planning under local county control.

We thank you for your consideration and are available to discuss further.

Respectfully,

Stacy Corless, Board Chair
Mono County Board of Supervisors

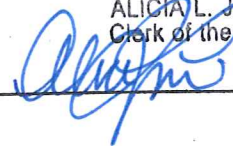


Sherri Brennan, Board Chair
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

I hereby certify that according to the provisions of Government Code Section 25103, delivery of this document has been made.

ALICIA L. JAMAR
Clerk of the Board

By: _____



Kevin Cann, Board Chair
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors



Jay Varney, Chief Administrative Officer
Madera County