

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
BUDGET
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
JUDICIARY
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Secretary Burgum,

As the National Park Service reviews the Visitor Access Management Plan (Plan) for Yosemite National Park, I am writing to express my strong support for the Park's efforts to better manage the visitor experience and reduce overcrowding through a permanent online reservation system. I also want to underscore that the successful implementation of this Plan is contingent on sufficient staffing, including seasonal staff. Without the proper workforce, Yosemite will be unable to effectively manage visitation in the peak summer months.

Yosemite National Park is the crown jewel of the National Park System, yet overcrowding, vehicle congestion, limited parking, and long lines have diminished what should be a world class experience, particularly for first time visitors. In peak summer months, visitors are greeted not by the magnificent views of El Capitan, but with miles of gridlocked traffic, honking horns, and the oppressive smell of vehicle exhaust fumes. Particularly for first-time and international visitors, this is a far cry from the awe-inspiring sights Yosemite is known for. Not only does this affect visitors, but it also leads to significant pollution and degradation of the Park's immense natural resources.

In response to these challenges, Yosemite implemented a temporary reservation system during the summers of 2020-2022 and again in 2024, which greatly improved visitor experiences and made visiting the Park a higher quality experience. Throughout this process, Yosemite deliberately engaged the public and interested parties in a transparent civic and stakeholder engagement process over multiple years. Moving forward with a permanent reservation system, as envisioned by the Plan and the public, is a necessary step toward creating a more sustainable and positive experience for all visitors. Last week, the National Park Service released its 2024 visitation data, showing that Yosemite welcomed pre-pandemic visitor numbers but without the excessive congestion. The reservation system helped distribute visitors more evenly throughout the day, week, and peak summer season.

The uncertainty surrounding the Plan's approval is directly affecting visitors who are trying to make their summer plans now, as well as gateway businesses who depend on summer tourism to survive. In addition, the Plan can only succeed if Yosemite has the necessary staff. The Administration's decision to eliminate seasonal employees, rescind job offers, and reduce staffing has created critical gaps in park operations, which will only worsen during the summer. Without sufficient staff, visitors will face long lines, trash will accumulate, and vital water and wastewater systems will be neglected. Additionally, reduced staffing will severely hinder

Yosemite's ability to manage wildfire risks, jeopardizing both the park and surrounding communities. With rangers stretched thin, visitor safety and the successful implementation of the reservation system are at serious risk.

I look forward to working with you to implement a visitor management system that balances visitor access with natural resource conservation. Thank you for your immediate attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Padilla". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Alex Padilla
United States Senator