



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

The Honorable Chris Stewart
2242 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

JAN 06 2019

Congressman Stewart:

Thank you for the thoughtful letter dated January 4, 2019 regarding the need to “resume operations” at our National Parks during this period of lapse appropriations. The amount of assistance and support provided by the state of Utah, local communities, non-profits, volunteers, and others through this period has been amazing.

The Administration’s understanding of the challenges presented is significant. I greatly appreciated your letter, because it came just as I was completing my review of this important issue. Over the last few days, I have carefully reviewed the National Park Service’s Contingency Plan and the legal grounding of both their current plan and a different approach.


Yesterday, I directed the Park Service to modify their plan in a way that better meets our dual responsibilities of conserving park resources and providing for the enjoyment of the American People. Last night, a modified plan was approved by the Office of Management and Budget. The National Park Service is communicating with various parks regarding this change over the coming hours and day.

I have enclosed the full copy of my directive, as well as a statement provided by the National Park Service today as an attachment to this letter. The directive provides for the use of recreation fee funds, where available, to clean up and maintain: restrooms and sanitation, trash collection, road maintenance – which includes plowing, campground operations, law enforcement and emergency operations, and staff entrance gates as necessary to provide critical safety information.

This approach means that many of the burdens being born by local communities should be addressed by Park Service personnel within days, particularly at the bigger parks such as Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks. If a prolonged lapse period occurs to the point that these fee accounts reach zero, I will need to make some additional decisions, and when doing so, I will certainly consider the option you suggested.

I fundamentally believe the steps we are taking today will better ensure our parks are protected for future generations, while still providing appropriate opportunities for the enjoyment of the American people today.

Respectfully submitted,


David Bernhardt
Acting Secretary
United States Department of the Interior

Attachment:

Memorandum on National Park Service Contingency plan and Use of Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Fees
National Park Service News Release