

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 1, 2026

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Jessica Bowron
Acting Director
National Park Service
1849 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum and Acting Director Bowron,

We write to express concern with the National Park Service's (NPS) decision to eliminate Yosemite National Park's reservation system, and the resulting impact that decision is having on the Park. The increased visitation we have seen without the reservation system, mixed with the reduction in staff and resources over the past year, leaves us deeply concerned about how the Park will be able to manage visitation safely and effectively protect park resources during 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 long been issues that diminish what should be a world class experience. 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 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 renowned natural resources.

In response to these challenges, Yosemite implemented a reservation system during the summers of 2020-2022 and 2024, which both greatly improved visitor experiences and supported visitation to the Park by spreading visitation across the peak summer months. In fact, the 2024 reservation system resulted in more than 4.1 million visitors, which was the fifth highest visitation to Yosemite in the Park's history. The reservation system had the ability to both increase access to the Park, while responsibly managing visitation and limiting degradation to park resources. Throughout this process, Yosemite deliberately engaged the public and interested parties in a transparent civic and stakeholder engagement process over multiple years.

However, in February 2026, NPS decided to cancel this successful reservation system without providing any scientific justification or evidence of public stakeholder engagement. According to NPS data, March 2026 saw a 45% increase in visitation compared to the same time last year. According to widespread reporting and testimony from our constituents, the Park has seen bumper-to-bumper traffic around the valley floor, hiking trails backed up with people, and parking lots full in the early mornings causing visitors to illegally park off-road on vegetation and in meadows.

This situation is further complicated by the Administration's reductions in staff, which has created critical gaps in park operations. Key science and park safety staff have been rerouted and stretched thin to handle traffic monitoring and park maintenance, which hinders Yosemite's ability to manage wildfire risk, ensure visitor safety, and conserve the treasured natural resources throughout the Park.

Given the self-imposed impacts of this decision, we respectfully request responses to the following questions:

- How much staff time is dedicated to traffic and entry-gate management, visitor services, and other duties outside of staff's typical responsibilities?
- What scientific evaluations and public stakeholder engagement processes were conducted that led the Park to conclude that a reservation system was not necessary in 2026?
- NPS's February 18, 2026, press release announcing the Superintendent's decision to eliminate the reservation system states that the "decision follows a comprehensive evaluation" and the Superintendent is quoted referencing "our data." We request copies of the aforementioned comprehensive evaluation and data.
- It has been reported to our offices that multiple bears have already been hit by vehicles this summer. Increased visitation, picnicking in areas of the Park with no trash receptacles, and continued staff shortages in the campgrounds are all factors that contribute to more bear and other wildlife conflicts with visitors. How does the Park's leadership plan to mitigate these factors to preserve wildlife in the Park?
- Traffic congestion hinders the ability for park staff to reach their destination and conduct their work, such as invasive plant crews who are unable to treat many areas in the valley and emergency services unable to respond to public safety concerns. How does the Park's traffic management plan accommodate the movement of park employees if there is gridlock?
- What current studies are being done to monitor visitor impacts to wildlife, meadows, air quality, and the Yosemite Valley ecosystem?
- Many parking lots in the Park have been full almost every single day of the summer so far, especially during holiday weekends. Many first-time visitors to Yosemite have to spend hours looking for a parking spot instead of enjoying the surrounding natural resources. How is the Park's leadership planning to mitigate this?
- Should the 2026 peak season become too burdensome for the Park, will you commit to reinstating a reservation system similar to the system put in place in 2024 that reflected a multi-year public and scientific process?

Given peak summer visitation is rapidly approaching, we look forward to hearing from you to understand your plans to balance visitor access without degrading natural resource conservation or hindering visitor experiences. Thank you for your immediate attention to this issue.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator