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GALLATIN CITY-COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Date: March 22, 2020

To: Cam Sholly, Superintendent, Yellowstone National Park
David Bernhardt, U.S. Secretary of the Interior

From: Matt Kelley, MPH
Health Officer
Gallatin City-County Health Department

Subject: Immediate and temporary closure of Yellowstone National Park

Dear Sirs,

As lead public health official in Gallatin County, Montana, I am writing this letter to request and urge the Department of the Interior to order the immediate and temporary closure of Yellowstone National Park. I make this request not only as the Health Officer in Gallatin County but also as resident of a county that borders and northwest corner of Yellowstone.

I am extremely concerned that the ongoing operations of Yellowstone will have a deleterious impact on our shared effort to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Gallatin County included the community of West Yellowstone, Montana, a remote tourist mecca with very limited health care services. Gallatin County also borders Park County, MT, where the northern entrance to the park is located in Gardiner, MT. Our shared ability to respond to the ongoing COVID19 outbreak will be greatly complicated and imperiled by the arrival of thousands of tourists to our community.

It is imperative that you understand that Yellowstone is not simply an expanse of wide open land. It is a massive tourist attraction that attracts millions of people to our communities from all over the world. Most of those tourists congregate in visitor's centers, rest rooms, gift shops, restaurants, and park attractions. In West Yellowstone, the off-season population of roughly 1,300 swells exponentially (into the tens of thousands each night) as tourist season happens. In the County seat of Bozeman, we see thousands of tourists every day during the spring and summer. If you fail to take action to curtail this mass migration of tourists, it will imperil the ability of local health care, public health, and government resources and may cost lives. Our hospitals have limited capacity and we are doing all we can to preserve their ability and to bend the curve.



In light of President Trump's request that all Americans avoid crowds larger than 10 people, it would seem that closing the park and discouraging visitors would be a simple and easy decision. I urge you to make it without delay.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to a timely reply.

Sincerely,

Matt Kelley, MPH
Health Officer
Gallatin City-County Health Department
215 W Mendenhall
Bozeman, MT, 59715

cc. Don Seifert, Gallatin County Commissioner
Montana Governor Steve Bullock

