



TOWN OF ROCKVILLE

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Founded 1862
Incorporated June 30, 1987

March 31, 2020

David Bernhardt, Secretary
United States Dept of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

We are writing today regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the open status of Zion National Park (Zion). As a local gateway community, we are extremely concerned about the health risks this poses to our residents. In addition, the risk to park employees, law enforcement and emergency personnel created by keeping Zion open goes against common sense.

In light of both Presidential, State and local directives to maintain social distancing and stay home, and with confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths increasing throughout the nation as well as the State of Utah, leaving Zion open to visitors both from within and from outside our state would seem to violate those directives. Here are a few facts which we feel support park closure:

- Even with the above-mentioned directives, Zion is averaging over 3,000 daily visitors, with between 49-70% arriving in vehicles with out-of-state license plates.
- Many of those out-of-state visitors are coming from areas with high levels of infection, i.e., California and Washington, potentially vectoring the disease to local Utah communities and park staff.
- The Southwest Utah Public Health Department recommends that all international and out-of-state visitors quarantine for 14 days. This is clearly not happening with park visitors, significantly increasing the risk of transmitting the disease to local communities as these people travel through the area.
- While the COVID-19 virus is in its early stages in parts of Utah, the State as a whole has seen a 25% increase in confirmed cases in the day over day reporting.
- Washington County, Utah has the highest percentage (25%) of residents in the State of Utah that are over age 65, an at-risk population.
- Zion is primarily a canyon, with narrow hiking trails following steep grades and cliffs, not always allowing for social distancing. Handrails, in places along these trails, cannot be sanitized as recommended.

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While we are aware Zion has taken steps to minimize risks, by allowing the park to remain open the risks still exist. The following article puts expert testimony to our concerns:

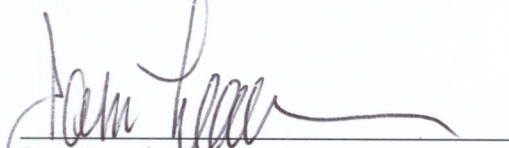
Washington Post on March 24, 2020:

Frank Zdravec, an epidemiologist and emergency medicine resident physician at the University of Utah: With packed trails and parks comes a higher risk of infection, thanks to the virus's ability to live on various surfaces for extended periods of time. According to Zdravec, a recent study showed that SARS-CoV-2 remains viable in aerosols for up to three hours. However, he says it's unlikely that you'll just walk through an infected air cloud while out hiking. "More likely, [the virus] is being transmitted by droplets with coughs or sneezes, and they only travel a short distance before being forced by gravity to land on surfaces," he says. "Contact with the virus that has been spread from droplets on many types of shared public surfaces may actually present more of a threat than aerosols. Zdravec adds that hiking itself is fine, but it's the ripple effect that concerns him. "We need to keep those gateway communities as burden-free as possible," he says.

We, therefore, ask that you authorize closure of Zion National Park until such time that the COVID-19 virus has been eliminated as a nationwide threat. Thank you for acting to protect the citizens of the United States of America while steps are taken to combat this virus.

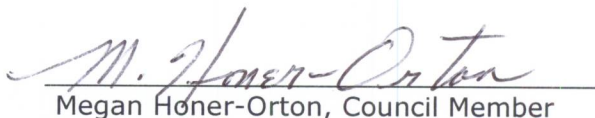
Respectfully,

TOWN OF ROCKVILLE


Pam Leach, Mayor


Terry Bell, Council Member


Jeff Ballard, Council Member


Megan Honer-Orton, Council Member


David Firmage, Council Member

cc: Governor Gary Herbert, State of Utah
Superintendent Jeffrey Bradybaugh, Zion National Park
Dr. David Blodgett, Southwest Utah Public Health Dept.
Senator Mitt Romney
Senator Mike Lee
Washington County Commission