



[TUOLUMNE SEAL] [MADERA SEAL]

[MARIPOSA SEAL]

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, 1st Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dr. Sonia Y. Angell,
State Public Health Officer
California Department of Public Health
P.O. Box 997377, MS 0500
Sacramento, CA 95899-7377

May 15, 2020

Re: Consideration of Allowing Local Jurisdictions to Reopen Campgrounds in Stage 2

Dear Governor Newsom and Dr. Angell,

The Yosemite Gateway Partnership is pleased you have allowed local jurisdictions the ability to accelerate through Stage 2. As you are aware, CDPH has posted many of our County's variances this week. We appreciate your recognition that one size does not fit all. The diversity of this State requires our State leaders to take into account the vast differences that exist throughout California and your recent actions regarding allowing variances is an example of such an approach.

The Yosemite Gateway partnership is a multi-agency coordination team that has been working collaboratively since the onset of the emergency to implement a plan for the various phases including containment, mitigation, surge and recovery. Our partnership includes Tuolumne, Mariposa, Madera and Mono Counties, Yosemite National Park and the Stanislaus and Sierra National Forests. Collectively our region is equivalent to or larger than the 5 states of Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut, New Jersey, and New Hampshire.

To that end, we wanted to alert you to a pressing issue regarding campgrounds in many rural jurisdictions, including all of our Counties. Our Counties are the home to the Stanislaus, Sierra, Inyo and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests and Yosemite National Park. These beautiful natural resources are attractions to many visitors, both residents and non-residents. While the State has allowed outdoor recreation, the State also continues to deem tourism and hotels/lodging as non-essential. We understand CDPH staff has affirmed that camping is not currently permitted. We are supportive of a phased opening working with all of our partners to ensure a collaborative coordinated approach to opening that provides the greatest capacity for implementing the guidelines the state has deemed necessary.

The issue we face is regardless of the State's orders regarding camping not being permitted we continue to experience thousands of visitors to our forests each weekend. All of our counties actively advertised in print media, social media, and radio outside of our counties the need to stay at home sharing your message. The reality is the number of visitors from out of county continue to increase. Facilities such as restrooms and garbage bins are not open however, we have received reports and photographs that individuals are not only engaged in camping but are vandalizing gates to access areas that are closed, and leaving garbage, and all forms of human waste, on the landscape and adjacent to waterways. This poses a public health threat as garbage and other matter that is not properly disposed of will find its way into our waterways.

Not all visitors are engaged in destructive behavior. Many individuals just want to be in nature and recreate in order to relieve the stress of our current circumstances. We have received a plethora of correspondence from individuals pleading with us to reopen the forests and allow camping as a recreational activity. Thus, we ask that you reconsider your stance on camping and move camping into Stage 2. Camping is a recreational activity that can occur within the State's guidelines for social distancing. Further, our rural Counties ranging from Madera at 35% public lands, Mariposa at 51%, Tuolumne at 77 %, and Mono at 93% public lands all rely heavily on coordination with our state and federal partners. Our seasonal businesses are certain they can be part of our solution in implementing the states guidelines. We believe that campgrounds have the ability to implement mitigation measures similar to what is required of restaurants such as reserving spaces at a lower percentage, spacing campsites out to ensure physical distancing occurs and ensuring shared facilities are cleaned more frequently.

We would like to work with federal, state agencies and the private sector that manage the forests and the surrounding area to implement a phased reopening in order to ensure the maximum degree of coordination, and cooperation implementing the guidelines previously discussed. We are concerned that if we are unable to coordinate with the State to allow such a phased reopening, the federal agencies may be directed to proceed to reopen the Forest and National Park completely. More harm will be done if the latter occurs and therefore we respectfully request camping be deemed a recreational activity that is expressly allowed in Stage 2.

Regards,

Tuolumne County
Madera County
Mono County
Mariposa County

CC: Senator Borgeas
Assemblyman Bigelow