RESOLUTION - ACTION REQUESTED 2020-266

MEETING: May 26, 2020

TO: The Board of Supervisors

FROM: Kevin Cann, District IV Supervisor

RE: Ratify Joint Letter of Support Regarding Reopening Campgrounds

RECOMMENDATION AND JUSTIFICATION:
Ratify a Joint Letter of Support to the Governor’s Office and California Department of Public Health Requesting Consideration of Allowing Local Jurisdictions to Reopen Campgrounds and Additional Activities in Stage 2.

The action being requested is the ratification of the attached letter from the Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team which collaborated on behalf of our respective counties. The counties of Madera, Mono, Tuolumne, Mariposa and Yosemite National Park have been meeting weekly on issues of regional and mutual concern. This Multi-Agency Coordination Team (MAC) consists, to varying degrees, of the Board Chair, County Counsel, Sheriff, Health Officer, Administrative Officer, and Human Services Director from each member county. We have realized major benefits from this real time communication allowing each entity to understand the actions of the others and, to the greatest extent possible, act in unison. From the initial challenges of clinical and surge capabilities to current planning for controlled business and National Park reopening the team has perceived significant mutual benefit. Employee safety, testing, tracing, park opening, levels of visitation, and impacts on gateway counties currently pervade the discussions.

The attached letter responds to a current regional problem being experienced at many day use trailheads and closed campgrounds. Despite the non-essential travel ban, closed US Forest Service areas in Tuolumne, Mono, and Madera are being inundated with day users and out of bounds campers every weekend. Human waste, trash, and resource impacts are at unacceptable levels. A regional relaxation of campground and day use area closures would allow USFS and private entities to reopen restrooms and other visitor services. While these impacts have not yet become problematic in Mariposa County it is important that we act as a region.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:
On March 19, 2020, a statewide Stay at Home Order was issued by State officials in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That was followed by the Board’s April 7, 2020, ratification of a letter in support of closing Yosemite National Park to visitors. With conditions improving, the Board approved, on May 19, 2020, a letter in support of the Park reopening.
Resolution - Action Requested 2020-266

ALTERNATIVES AND CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION:
Do not ratify the letter, and direct staff to draft a letter withdrawing the County's support of the concept.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:
No financial impact

ATTACHMENTS:
5.20.2020 - Joint Letter to Governor's Office and CDPH from YGACT regarding Campgrounds in Stage2 (PDF)

RESULT: ADOPTED BY CONSENT VOTE [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER: Merlin Jones, District II Supervisor
SECONDER: Miles Menetrey, District V Supervisor
AYES: Smallcombe, Jones, Long, Cann, Menetrey
Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team

May 20, 2020

Via Email
Rhys.Williams@gov.ca.gov

Via Email
Sonia.Angell@cdph.ca.gov

Senior Advisor - Emergency Management
The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
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

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

Dear Governor Newsom and Dr. Angell,

The Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team is pleased you have allowed local jurisdictions the ability to implement additional activities in Stage 2. We appreciate your recognition that one size does not fit all. The diversity of California requires our State leaders to take into account the vast differences that exist. Your recent action regarding allowing variances is an example of such an approach.

The Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team is a multi-agency 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 5 states in the union.

As a coordinated entity, we believe the risks associated with opening many of the activities associated with Stage 3 can be mitigated in our region. This would allow operations to have a ‘soft opening’ before the lifting of the limitations on non-essential travel.

A particular area of concern regards campgrounds and private RV parks in 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 deems 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 approach. This will ensure successful implementation of state guidelines while mitigating risk.

Despite the State’s orders regarding non-essential travel, we continue to experience thousands of visitors to our forests each weekend. The number of visitors from out of county continue to increase even with our counties actively messaging our stay at home campaign in print media, social media, and radio outside of our counties. With facilities closed, including restrooms and garbage bins, sites have been vandalized by those trying to gain access, garbage has been dumped, and human waste left on the landscape. This poses a public health threat as the waste creates contamination, draining into our waterways.

Additionally, with increased forest visitors engaging in dispersed camping, there is an increased wildfire risk. Mono County has already experienced a fire from dispersed camping. We know that the fire risk is upon us now, compounding the need to allow local jurisdictions to implement local determinism assisting us as we work towards community safety.
Opening campgrounds and private RV parks would reduce these harmful behaviors while allowing for relatively safe activities. Our seasonal businesses are certain they can be part of our solution in implementing the State’s guidelines. We believe that campgrounds and private RV parks have the ability to implement mitigation measures, such as ensuring physical distancing occurs, and shared facilities are cleaned more frequently. 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.

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. We would like to work with our federal and state agencies as well as the private sector, that manage the forests and the surrounding area to implement a phased reopening. This would ensure the maximum level of cooperation in implementing the California’s guidelines. We are concerned that if we are unable to coordinate with the State on a phased reopening, the federal agencies may be directed to proceed to reopen the Forests and National Park without phasing.

Regards,

Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Counties
  Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, Sherri Brennan
  Madera County Sheriff, Jay Varney
  Mono County Board of Supervisors, Stacy Corless
  Mariposa County Board of Supervisors, Kevin Cann

Cc: Senator Andreas Borgeas
    Assemblyman Frank Bigelow