RESOLUTION - ACTION REQUESTED 2020-298

MEETING: June 9, 2020

TO: The Board of Supervisors

FROM: Kevin Cann, District IV Supervisor

RE: Ratify Joint Letter of Support Regarding Relaxing the Stay-At-Home Order

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 Relax the stay-at-home order to allow recreating in low-risk outdoor recreation areas and campgrounds, and allow for the reopening of the lodging industry and campgrounds to support the use of outdoor recreation areas (Supervisor Cann).

Removing the Stay-At-Home order for our region would allow Local Health Officers to certify overnight accommodations guidelines and work in concert with Yosemite National Park for a controlled reopening. At least 1700 cars with not secure lodging in the park and must be served in the gateway communities.

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.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF BOARD ACTIONS:
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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.

**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:**
Letter to Gov Newsome from Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team  (PDF)

**RESULT:** ADOPTED BY CONSENT VOTE [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER: Merlin Jones, District II Supervisor
SECONDER: Marshall Long, District III Supervisor
AYES: Smallcombe, Jones, Long, Cann, Menetrey
June 1, 2020

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

Dr. Mark Ghaly,  
Secretary of Health & Human Services  
California Health & Human Services Agency  
1800 Ninth Street, Room 460  
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

Dear Governor Newsom, Dr. Ghaly, and Dr. Angell:

As members of the Yosemite Gateway Area Coordination Team, we thank you for your continued efforts to guide California through the COVID-19 pandemic and to modify the statewide stay-at-home order to allow for a 'new normal'. Under your leadership, our region, including Madera, Mariposa, Tuolumne and Mono Counties, feel confident we have the resources necessary to address the spread of the virus. Case numbers remain stable, area hospitals are well prepared for potential patient surge, our surveillance strategies are well-established and our testing capacity continues to expand.

As representatives of our respective counties, we are asking you to relax the stay-at-home order to allow recreating in low-risk outdoor recreation areas, release guidance for the use of outdoor recreation areas and campgrounds, and allow for the reopening of the lodging industry and campgrounds to support the use of outdoor recreation areas.
As in other rural areas of the state where tourism and recreation are the primary economic drivers, those of us in the Yosemite-Sierra region find ourselves in a precarious spot on the road to resilience. We rely on visitors for our businesses and communities to thrive and need your assistance to allow safe and legal travel to resume within our four-county region. Throughout the pandemic, our four counties have been working closely with leaders of Yosemite National Park. We have collaborated on a regional plan for a phased reopening of Yosemite National Park in early June. We take our role seriously as stewards of this national treasure and we need to be ready for the Park's reopening.

We are currently asking for local discretion (working under the guidance of our health officers) to lift travel restrictions and phase in modified recreation lodging operations.

In coordination with the Park, we propose a 'soft opening' on or about June 5. This would include opening the Park to Wilderness Permit holders and holders of Half Dome day-use permits. It would not include lodging or other facilities in the Park, but would include these services in Gateway communities and adjacent National Forests. This would allow the Park and Gateway communities to gauge our plans with a smaller set of visitors.

Based on this soft opening, a larger opening, using a plan developed by the Park and approved by the Department of Interior, would occur on or about June 11. This would allow approximately half of the number of usual visitors to the Park to enter, including both day use and overnight visitors. Day use numbers would be limited by a reservation system that would require visitors to obtain a permit prior to coming to the Park. In order to ensure the safety of Park visitors and staff, Mariposa County will be coordinating mobile testing in Yosemite one day a week. This will be conducted through a CDPH-developed contract with Verily. We are also using the "Biobot" wastewater sampling to determine presence and estimate prevalence of COVID-19.

Yosemite National Park and adjacent National Forests are not only an important and beloved resource for Californians, they belong to all Americans. These land managers are facing a near impossible task of navigating the demands of the federal administration to open and provide access, while also complying with state requirements.

Under the current guidance, we are unable to provide guest services to the thousands of out-of-area visitors who are already arriving and recreating in our National Forests. Without campgrounds or lodging facilities that are open for leisure travel and very few public restrooms open, we are witnessing health and safety concerns, as well as unintended consequences to our natural resources. Dispersed camping has already caused multiple wildfires near our communities, and untold amounts of trash and human waste left near lakes and streams are polluting the water sources for millions of Californians.
Our region is requesting the ability to open campgrounds, lodging and other essential services near National Parks and forest destinations in order to mitigate health and safety concerns. We believe we can accomplish this in a safe and careful manner, with collaborative, regional planning under local county control.

We thank you for your consideration and are available to discuss further.

Respectfully,

Stacy Corless, Board Chair
Mono County Board of Supervisors

Sherri Brennan, Board Chair
Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors

Kevin Cann, Board Chair
Mariposa County Board of Supervisors

Jay Varney, Chief Administrative Officer
Madera County

I hereby certify that according to the provisions of Government Code Section 25103, delivery of this document has been made.

By: [Signature]