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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
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March 31, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

I write to express my concerns about National Park Service (NPS) areas remaining open during the COVID-19 crisis. According to recent media reports, many national park areas are being flooded by visitors despite guidance by the Centers for Disease Control to practice social distancing and as more State and local governments are issuing directives to prevent community transmission.

Although some outdoor spaces managed by the National Park Service may be able to remain open during this challenging time, it should not be unduly burdensome to close a NPS-managed area for reasons related to COVID-19. Local NPS managers should be empowered to make decisions in the best interest of their employees, visitors, and the local communities they live in. I implore you to do whatever you can to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and prevent our national parks from becoming "hot-spots." This may include closing more areas that currently remain open and deferring to state and local decision makers if an order is issued limiting work or movement to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Like you, I care deeply about the unique challenges facing small businesses and especially small businesses in rural areas of the country. I understand that national parks are often the only source of business for many rural communities surrounding these areas. However, we must all do our part to help flatten the curve and avoid the unnecessary spread of this virus.

Sincerely,



Senator Joe Manchin III
Ranking Member