



## MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Visitation to Zion National Park in 2010 was 2.68 million, rose to 3.66 million in 2015, and is expected to top 4 million visitors for 2016. The park's scenic high plateaus, maze of narrow, deep canyons, and striking rock towers continue to be a popular destination for local, regional, and international visitors seeking opportunities such as hiking, scenic driving, backpacking, canyoneering, photography, and wildlife viewing, among other outdoor activities. This increased visitation has resulted in over-capacity issues on park shuttle buses, on frontcountry trails, and at key destinations and facilities, particularly in the narrow Zion Canyon corridor.

Park visitor capacity issues are not new to Zion National Park. In 2000, with congressionally appropriated funding, the park implemented the current shuttle bus system to help protect park resources and to manage parking and traffic congestion issues in Zion Canyon. A variety of other site-specific measures have been implemented recently to help manage visitor use levels while protecting resources; however, park visitation continues to grow and peak periods are expanding. With increasingly concentrated use and overwhelmed facilities, we are concerned with health and safety issues; diminishing quality of visitor experiences; and associated impacts to soils, vegetation, water, wildlife habitat, soundscapes, and cultural resources.

The National Park Service (NPS) is charged with balancing visitor use with perpetual protection of the spectacular cultural and natural resources for which the park was established in 1909. With a mission focused on timeless stewardship, I believe that it is essential that the National Park Service take proactive measures to maintain this extraordinary park for the public now and into the future. For this reason, the park has embarked on the development of a visitor use management plan (Zion VUM Plan). As we develop this plan, we are beginning to test a number of strategies related to managing visitor use. Visitor capacities for key areas of the park will be established as an important basis for the plan.

In May, the park held a series of public listening sessions to gather input on issues related to park visitation and to learn more about our visitors and nearby communities and what is important to them. Those observations were used to develop possible management strategies that the park could use to help balance visitor use and resource protection.

During the next phase of the NPS planning process (project scoping) we again request your suggestions and comments. Scoping activities will include holding public open house events and providing opportunities for you to offer your thoughts on the proposed action and draft management strategies for the Zion VUM Plan. As the planning process continues, strategies considered during scoping may be incorporated into alternatives that eventually will be incorporated into the draft Zion VUM Plan.

As we examine proactive ways to manage the park for the future, I encourage you to stay connected and be an active participant in this important planning process. In this newsletter, you will find a number of ways to learn about the planning process, how to provide comments, and where to access additional information. With your continued help, we will develop a plan that provides exemplary visitor experiences in Zion National Park while protecting its extraordinary resources and values.

Thank you for your interest and participation in the development of the Zion VUM Plan. We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey S. Bradybaugh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jeff Bradybaugh  
Superintendent

# Why is a Visitor Use Management Plan Needed?

The park has seen record visitation four of the past five years with nearly 3.7 million in 2015—450,000 more visitors than in 2014. Over the past 10 years, visitation has increased 35%. The majority of visitors go to Zion Canyon - a 6-mile narrow corridor along the Virgin River. Given these changes, updated guidance for providing visitor opportunities and protecting resources is needed. The purpose of the Zion VUM Plan is to identify strategies for managing visitor use and access including, but not limited to, the appropriate levels of use in Zion's frontcountry areas, consistent with the long-term stewardship of parkwide cultural and natural resources, past planning efforts, and the provision of high-quality visitor experiences.

This plan is needed to address a wide range of issues associated with rapidly growing visitation and changing use patterns, including:

- visitor health and safety concerns
- diminishing quality of the visitor experience
- natural and cultural resource impacts
- heavy strain on park facilities and the ability to perform daily operations
- effects to and from adjacent communities



## Key Planning Objectives

The Zion VUM Plan also presents an opportunity to connect to the next generation of Zion National Park advocates and stewards and to consider strategies that benefit visitors, nearby communities, and the environment. The objectives of the plan include:

- Identify management strategies and appropriate use levels that promote the long-term stewardship of park resources and high-quality visitor experiences.
- Continue to offer visitors high-quality national park experiences that facilitate safe access and opportunities to learn about Zion National Park's fundamental resources and values, while protecting park cultural and natural resources for future generations.
- Provide visitors with multiple opportunities to access information at various levels and locations.
- Provide an appropriate range of park facilities and services that are commensurate with designated use levels, reduce crowding, and minimize adverse effects to park resources.
- Continue to proactively engage key park partners and stakeholders.

## Zion VUM Plan Proposed Action

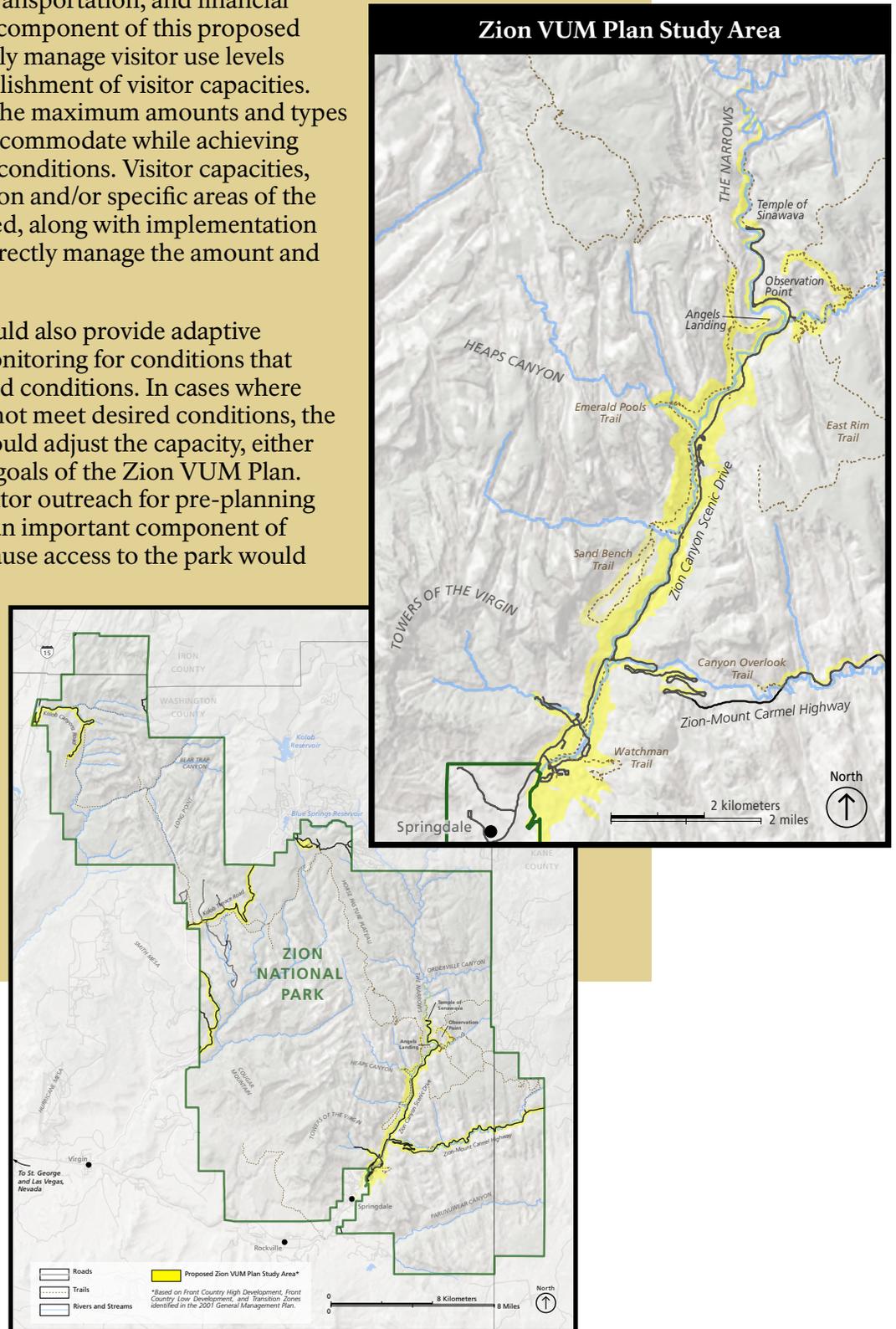
The Zion VUM Plan planning team has developed a proposed action—the initial NPS proposal to address the purpose and need for taking action. The proposed action was developed based on input from stakeholders and public “listening sessions,” NPS staff expertise, and knowledge and understanding of similar issues occurring at other parks throughout the national park system. The proposed action (see next page) represents one alternative that will be considered during the Zion VUM planning process.

In addition to the proposed action, the National Park Service will consider a no-action alternative and other action alternatives and strategies that will be formulated based on public feedback gathered during the scoping period. Management strategies that could be considered in the alternatives are outlined following the proposed action. As the planning process continues, an environmental assessment with these alternatives will be presented for public review and comment. The National Park Service will not select an alternative for implementation until after a final Zion VUM Plan is completed.

## Proposed Action

The proposed action is focused on managing visitor use to ensure that natural and cultural resources are protected and that opportunities for high-quality experiences are available to visitors. The primary focus of the proposed action is on the frontcountry areas of Zion National Park, including the most developed and visited sites (see map). Management strategies would aim to meet desired conditions as well as health and safety standards within the capabilities and related constraints of facilities, transportation, and financial resources/staffing. A key component of this proposed action would be to directly manage visitor use levels in the park through establishment of visitor capacities. Visitor capacities define the maximum amounts and types of use that an area can accommodate while achieving and maintaining desired conditions. Visitor capacities, which could vary by season and/or specific areas of the park, would be established, along with implementation techniques that would directly manage the amount and time of visitor access.

The proposed action would also provide adaptive management through monitoring for conditions that do not match park desired conditions. In cases where observed conditions do not meet desired conditions, the National Park Service would adjust the capacity, either up or down, to meet the goals of the Zion VUM Plan. Facilitating improved visitor outreach for pre-planning purposes also would be an important component of the proposed action because access to the park would be encouraged, albeit in different ways or at different times. Continued protection of wilderness and wilderness character in backcountry areas would be accomplished by continuing to implement and monitor already established guidance and related thresholds.





## Management Strategies

Potential strategies that could be considered in support of the proposed action or other alternatives are noted below. These strategies have been divided into Zion canyonwide strategies and destination-specific strategies that correspond to key locations in the Zion VUM Plan study area. These strategies may eventually be incorporated into preliminary draft alternatives that will be developed later in the planning process and possibly alternatives carried through the draft Zion VUM Plan.

### Zion Canyonwide Strategies

To directly manage the number of visitors in Zion Canyon at any one time in support of desired conditions, Zion National Park may:

- Establish visitor capacities for Zion Canyon (and/or specific areas in the corridor) and manage visitor access through implementation of a timed-entry system, reservation system, or other mechanism. Possible strategies might include:
  - Under a timed-entry system, visitor access via the shuttle system into upper Zion Canyon locations would be scaled throughout the day to not exceed capacity at designated up-canyon locations.
  - Under a reservation system, visitors would secure reservations for access to Zion Canyon, not to exceed capacity at designated locations; some “nonreservation” access would be available but would be reduced over time as visitors become familiar with a reservation system.
- Develop infrastructure for managing and administering a timed-entry, reservation, or similar system.
- Modify shuttle stops into flag stops, which enable shuttles to continue cycling through Zion Canyon if/when visitor pick-ups/drop-offs are not in demand.
- Relieve congestion at South Campground by changing first-come, first-served campsites to reservation-only campsites.
- Redesign the south entrance area to reduce traffic congestion and queues for improved shuttle bus, pedestrian, and bicycle access with the potential for limited additional parking (e.g., additional travel lanes, including an express lane and kiosk station).
- Construct a multimodal trail through a portion of Zion Canyon to encourage modes of travel other than motorized (e.g., walking and bicycling) and provide connectivity with shuttle stops and points of interest.

To facilitate visitors planning for their visit to the park, Zion National Park could implement strategies to provide visitors with additional park pre-planning tools on the web and/or “apps,” and other pre-arrival information on wait times for park entry, shuttle bus boarding, and parking availability. In addition, the park could

- Make visitors aware of benefits and opportunities available during the late fall, early spring, or winter to encourage use during nonpeak periods rather than during busier summer months, shoulder seasons, and other peak periods. A key part of this strategy would be to identify how NPS staff and resources might be provided to support such distribution of use.
- Develop necessary software/IT improvements to facilitate integrated visitor-timed entry / entry reservations with associated camping reservations and other recreational use permits sought by visitors prior to their stay in the park.

To enhance visitor experience and recreation opportunities, the park could pursue the following:

- Hardening some of the designated frontcountry trails to better delineate trail routes and increase sustainability, thereby reducing impacts to soil and vegetation.
- Identify and provide enhanced interpretive exhibits on lesser-used trails.
- Develop shuttle, trail, and pathway connectivity to enhance pedestrian accessibility to key visitor use and services destinations to alleviate unsafe roadside parking/pedestrian situations.
- Adding picnic tables at key locations and benches along trails.
- Explore technology to prepay entrance fees prior to arrival and an automated gate pass system to facilitate entrance.

Other key canyonwide management strategies the park could pursue are noted below.

- Support commercial service operations that promote park desired conditions and address visitor use concerns.
- Adaptively manage transit system, traffic congestion, and parking availability in concert with timed entry/reservation systems and facility capabilities.
- Enforce seating capacity on shuttles (68 people per shuttle).
- Explore shorter shuttle run configurations with service between the visitor center, campgrounds, parking lots, and museum.
- Increase access to facilities and services for visitors with disabilities.
- Reduce language barriers by providing park information in multiple languages, including signage.
- Maintain and rehabilitate facilities, key natural habitats, historic resources, and cultural landscapes to ensure visitor safety and appreciation and resource sustainability in perpetuity.



## Destination-Specific Strategies

### *Angels Landing and the Narrows*

- Safety, human waste management, and natural resource impacts are concerns under current use levels. Through study, establish visitor use thresholds and monitor use, evaluate the need for managing use levels on Angels Landing and in the Narrows through a timed-entry, permitting, or reservation system and implement when established thresholds are exceeded.

### *East Entrance*

- Visitors traveling through the park between the south and east entrances and enjoying the park along the Zion–Mount Carmel Highway without extended stops for hikes, etc., would purchase a regular entrance pass and could travel this route at any time without reservations.
- Seek opportunities for partnerships or other means to establish a visitor orientation facility and public restrooms near the east entrance to support visitor use and educational opportunities in this part of the park.

### *Zion-Mount Carmel Highway – Tunnel*

- Future tunnel traffic capacity concerns exist under current use levels. Based on tunnel capacity studies, the park would project future traffic loads and devise techniques to manage tunnel capacity such as
  - Increase wait time at the tunnel for oversized vehicles to reduce the number of daily times the tunnel is closed to two-way traffic.
  - Establish specific times for oversized vehicles to pass through the tunnel to reduce the number of daily times the tunnel is closed to two-way traffic.
  - Establish an automated traffic signal system to manage tunnel traffic.

### *Zion-Mount Carmel Highway – East and West of Tunnel*

- Define road shoulders and appropriate visitor vehicle turnout locations.
- Define locations for pedestrian quiet walkways from vehicle turnouts where appropriate.
- Add interpretative opportunities, materials, and exhibits in safe and appropriate locations.
- Rehabilitate and protect historic resources associated with the historic road and tunnel.

## *Kolob Canyons*

- Evaluate the feasibility and appropriateness of adding restroom facilities at key frontcountry locations.
- Establish visitor capacities for Kolob Canyons (and/or specific areas in the corridor) and manage visitor access through implementation of a timed-entry system, reservation system, or other mechanism if needed. Possible strategies might include:
  - Under a timed-entry system, visitor access into Kolob Canyons locations would be scaled throughout the day to not exceed capacity at designated locations.
  - Under a reservation system, visitors would secure reservations for access to Kolob Canyons (not to exceed capacity) at designated locations; some “nonreservation” access would be available but would be reduced over time as visitors become familiar with a reservation system.

## *Kolob Terrace*

- Define trailhead parking, road shoulders, and appropriate vehicle turnout locations.
- Define locations for pedestrian quiet walkways from vehicle turnouts where appropriate.
- Add interpretative opportunities, materials, and exhibits in safe and appropriate locations.
- Rehabilitate natural resources and protect wilderness character associated with Zion Wilderness use through the backcountry permit system and associated monitoring.

## **Other Collaborative Local and Regional Planning**

As Zion National Park addresses key issues in the park as part of the Zion VUM Plan, the National Park Service would continue efforts to strengthen relationships with its local, state, and federal partners. Specific management actions the park would continue to support include:

- Partner with state and regional agencies and organizations to address tourism, visitor use, and resource-related issues. Develop engagement and outreach materials to reach a broad array of stakeholders.
- Continue to partner with the Town of Springdale, Washington County, and others to support efforts designed to enhance regional transit opportunities, reduce traffic congestion, and manage demand for parking.
- Develop communication materials for local/regional business owners, local governments and state agencies, the Town of Springdale, and authorized commercial services regarding use of the shuttle system and other important messages that need to be communicated to visitors before their arrival to the park.
- Share accurate, multiagency information regarding availability of campgrounds in and around the park and encourage appropriate use of these areas, particularly during busy times of the year.



## How to Comment

Zion National Park is asking for public feedback on the proposed action from October 23 to November 23, 2016.

During this period, the public is encouraged to comment on the management strategies that are being considered and identify any issues or concerns you may have. Please keep in mind when you are commenting that your rationale or reasoning is the most valuable information we can receive, so please be specific.

You may submit your comments at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website (<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/zion>). Once on the website, select “Open for Comment” to provide your thoughts on the possible management strategies. Comments may also be submitted in writing to the address provided at the end of the newsletter.

## Give Us Your Feedback

We would like your observations and responses on the proposed action and possible management strategies presented on the previous pages. To assist you in developing your comments, please consider the questions below:

- The National Park Service is evaluating a reservation and/or timed-entry system during periods of high use to protect park resources and improve visitor experience in Zion Canyon. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of these types of systems? What ideas do you have on how these types of systems might be implemented?
- Which of the other potential Zion canyonwide strategies do you feel would be most helpful in meeting the plan purpose and need?
- Which of the potential destination-specific potential management strategies do you feel would be most helpful in meeting the plan purpose and need and why?
- Are there other management strategies that we should consider as we develop alternatives for the plan?





# You're invited

The National Park Service will be hosting open house events, and one online webinar. The purpose of the meetings is to present the proposed action and draft management strategies on the visitor use management plan, gather your comments, and respond to questions. Please join us and share your ideas on the proposed action and management strategies at the following locations:

## **Monday, October 24, 2016**

5-7 pm Pacific Time  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas Student Union  
Building, Room 205  
4505 South Maryland Parkway  
Las Vegas, NV

## **Tuesday, October 25, 2016**

5-7 pm Mountain Time  
Hurricane Community Center, Meeting Room 107  
63 South 100 West  
Hurricane, UT

## **Wednesday, October 26, 2016**

12-2 pm Mountain Time  
Zion Lodge Auditorium  
Zion Canyon  
Zion National Park, UT

## **Wednesday, October 26, 2016**

5-7 pm Mountain Time  
Canyon Community Center  
126 Lion Blvd.  
Springdale, UT

## **Thursday, October 27, 2016**

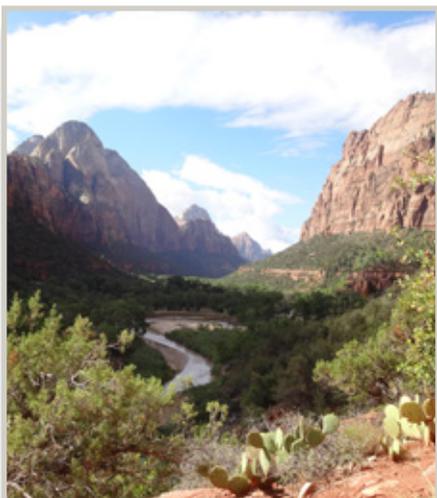
5-7 pm Mountain Time  
Southern Utah University  
Sharwan Smith Student Center, Cedar Breaks  
Room 141  
Cedar City, UT  
*Note: Park in Lot A10 on 200 South, between 500  
and 700 West*

## **Friday, October 28, 2016**

5-7 pm Mountain Time  
Salt Lake City Marriott University Park  
Aspen Meeting Room – 5th Floor  
480 Wakara Way  
Salt Lake City, UT

## **Tuesday, November 1, 2016**

5-7 pm Mountain Time  
Kanab City Library, Multipurpose Room  
374 North Main  
Kanab, UT



The National Park Service will also be hosting a webinar on Monday, October 31 from 12:00 p.m. until 1:30 p.m. (MDT). The live webinar will be open to the first 100 participants that register and will include a formal presentation describing the plan and possible management strategies followed by a question and answer session. Register for the webinar through the following web link:

<https://nationalparkserviceevents.webex.com/>

Event Number: 660 176 631

After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the webinar.

# Zion National Park Visitor Use Management Plan Newsletter

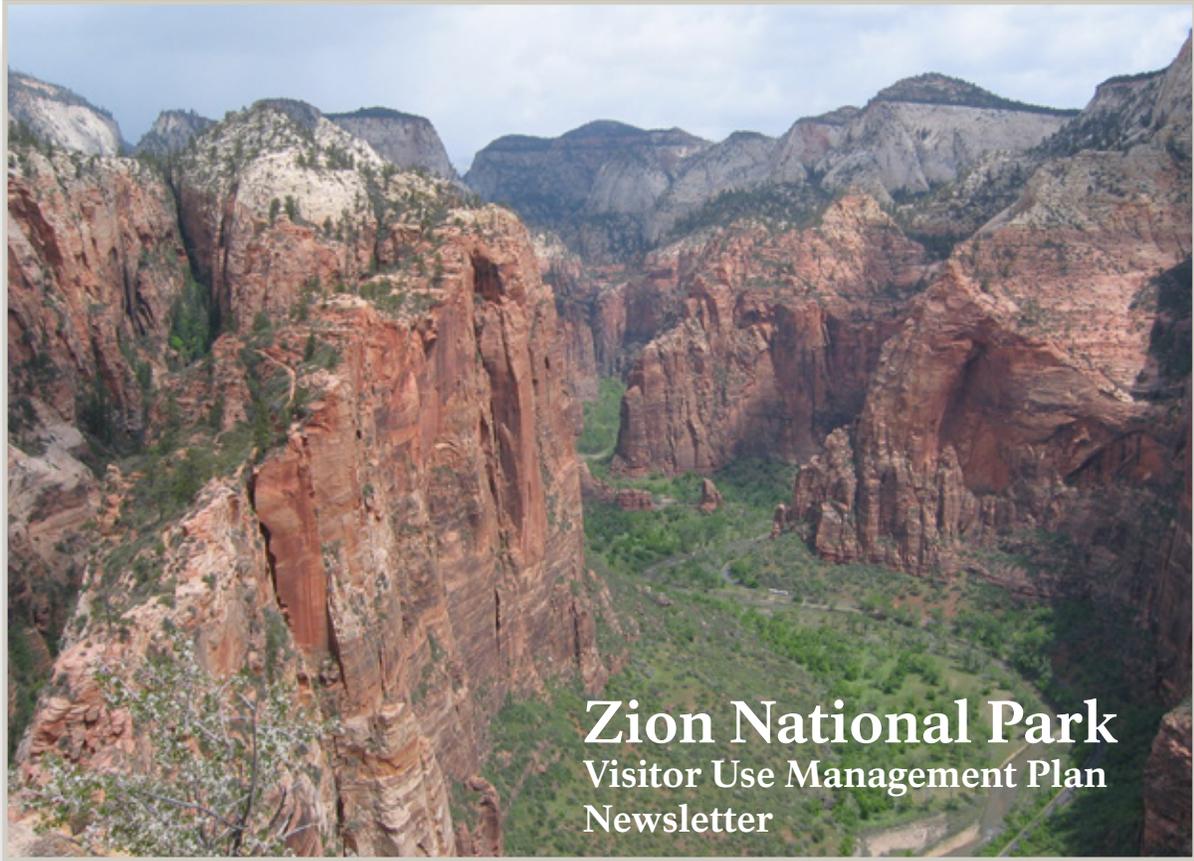
## Planning Schedule

The table below shows the major steps in the planning process and when those events will take place.

Milestone	Completion Date
Civic engagement (listening sessions and focus groups)	May 2016
Development of draft management strategies	July / August 2016
<b>Public scoping</b>	October 24, 2016 to November 23, 2016
Develop and refine preliminary alternatives	Winter 2016 / Spring 2017
Public review of preliminary alternatives	Summer 2017
Prepare the Draft Zion VUM Plan and environmental assessment	Fall / Winter 2017
Public review of the draft plan / environmental assessment	Spring / Summer 2018
Decision Document	Fall 2018

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# Zion National Park Visitor Use Management Plan Newsletter



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United States Department of the Interior  
Zion National Park  
ATTN: VUMP  
Springdale, UT 84767

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