



Memo To File

A. Project Information

Park Name: Zion National Park (ZION)

PEPC Project Number: 88446

Project Title: Angels Landing Pilot Permit Program Implementation

Project Location:

County, State: Washington, Utah

Project Leader: Susan McPartland

B. Description of the Current Action (Project Description)

Visitor use at Zion National Park (ZION), a unit of the National Park Service (NPS), has dramatically increased in recent years leading to periods of substantial crowding and congestion, overtaxed facilities, resource impacts and over-extended staff. In 2010, the park received 2.7 million total visitors and in 2019 visitation reached nearly 4.5 million. ZION is currently experiencing visitation levels at approximately 20,000 individuals per day for extended peak period months. Visitors are often not aware that their visit to ZION may include long wait times that directly impacts the amount of time they have to experience the park. Angels Landing is a very narrow trail that drops off over a thousand feet along the edge. The one-half (0.5) mile section of Angels Landing begins at Scout Lookout and is one of the premier hikes at ZION with over 300,000 visitors making the ascent in 2019. Years ago, NPS installed a system of chains to help visitors make the climb and in most areas, only one-way foot traffic is feasible. Under current conditions, the trail is often crowded and creates a gridlock along the chains, movement becomes very difficult, and some visitors take unsafe actions or feel pressured to move quickly. A line then forms at Scout Lookout, overwhelms limited restroom facilities, and exacerbates safety concerns, especially on very hot days when there is limited shade and no access to water. Crowding also leads to natural resource damage, particularly to desert plants and highly erodible soils in high-use areas.

To address these concerns, ZION initiated the 2017 Angels Landing Visitor Use Scientific Study with the Resource Systems Group, Inc. to understand hiker patterns along the trail and how visitors experience the trail. In 2019, results from the research were used to pilot an informal means of managing hiker flow on the chains section over five (5) holiday weekends as well as provided expectations on high visitor levels. Multiple methods were used to communicate the dates that the NPS would be managing visitor access to Angel Landing to include News Releases and Facebook Posts (NPS 2019 a-d; NPS 2020). Using various staffing models, park officials metered hikers onto the trail, and retaining hikers at the Grotto trailhead in proximity to water, shade, and restrooms. The informal pilot period allowed the park to understand levels and rates of visitor use that alleviate congestion and safety concerns along the trail as well as improved visitor experience and were well received by the public. In 2020, a formal Angel's Landing Pilot Permit Program was developed to run from July to November. However, because of the park having to adapt to COVID-19 safety measures the formal pilot permit program was postponed indefinitely.

In 2021, the ZION Leadership Team opted to manage Memorial Day weekend as a "planned event" because of an anticipated 85,000 visitors over the weekend. Rather than managing lines for Angels Landing forming at Scout Lookout where there wouldn't be any shade or water, ZION staff opted to move the waiting line to the Grotto where more amenities were available to the public (NPS 2021a). Metering rate was set at 120 individuals departing the trailhead per hour to meet the quality benchmarks of the 2017 Zion National Park Visitor Use and

Trail Study. The Incident Command System (ICS) Operations Section focused on five (5) geographically based Branches. The Branches included: 1) Preventative Search and Rescue (PSAR) and Interpretation, 2) Entrances and Canyon Junction, 3) Angels and Grotto, 4) All-Hazard and Parking, and 5) Plaza and Scenic Drive. All-Hazard and Parking was expected to manage emergencies and the parking issues as they arise. The organization of ICS provides the ability to adaptively manage for any unforeseen circumstances. Other 2021 holiday weekends did not engage the ICS system.

2021 May: Memorial Day Weekend

- **Incident Objectives:** To meter visitation on the chained section of Angels Landing to reduce crowding and increase quality of experience
- **Dates/Time:** May 28-31, 2021 (4-day event)
- **Public Outreach:** Press Release: Zion National Park Prepares for Crowds Over Memorial Day Weekend, May 21, 2021 (NPS 2021a)
- **Line Location:** Grotto
- **Staff Positions:** 3 at Grotto Trailhead, 2 at Angels Landing Trailhead; two shifts at each location
- **Fees:** No
- **Results:** Visitation was three percent higher than weekend before. Total visitation over 79,000 for the four-day weekend.

2021 July: July 4th Weekend

- **Incident Objectives:** To meter visitation on the chained section of Angels Landing to reduce crowding and increase quality of experience
- **Dates/Time:** July 2-4, 2021 (3-day event)
- **Public Outreach:** Press Release: Zion National Park Prepares for Crowds Over July 4th Day Weekend, July 1, 2021 (NPS 2021b)
- **Line Location:** Grotto
- **Staff Positions:** 3 at Grotto Trailhead, 2 at Angels Landing Trailhead; two shifts at each location
- **Fees:** No
- **Results:** Visitation was six percent higher than weekend after. Total visitation over 74,000 for the four-day weekend

2021 August: Civic Engagement on Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC)

- **Public Outreach:** Press Release: Zion National Park Accepting Comments on Proposed Lava Point Campground and Day-use Permit Lottery Amenity Fees, August 13, 2021 (NPS 2021c)
- **Comment Period Open:** August 13, 2021- September 12, 2021

In August 2021, ZION proposed to pilot a formal day-use permits for Angels Landing. As part of civic engagement for the proposal and an associated fee, the public was asked for feedback during a comment period. ZION received nearly 3,000 comments from 1,000 individuals to PEPC between August 13 and September 12, 2021. Additional input was also received during meetings with local stakeholders. Various broadcast news and social media outlets were monitored by ZION staff to remain apprised of public opinion on various platforms. Overall, comments showed greater support than opposition for the implementation of the pilot program for Angels Landing, with most people anticipating a higher quality experience during their time in the park. Those who were opposed were concerned at the loss of spontaneity and with various aspects of implementation and rollout of the program. Much of the feedback received asked for additional details of how the program would work. Below, the major themes of public feedback are presented along with a park reply that addresses to each topic.

2021 September: Labor Day Weekend

- **Incident Objectives:** To meter visitation on the chained section of Angels Landing to reduce crowding and increase quality of experience
- **Dates/Time:** September 3- 6, 2021 (4-day event)
- **Public Outreach:** Press Release: ZION Preparing for Busy Labor Day Weekend, September 2, 2021 (NPS 2021d)
- **Line Location:** Grotto
- **Staff Positions:** 3 at Grotto Trailhead, 2 at Angels Landing Trailhead; two shifts at each location
- **Fees:** No
- **Results:** Visitation was 21% higher than weekend after. Total visitation over 70,000 for the four-day weekend

2021 December: Pilot Program Communication

- **Public Outreach:** Press Release: Want to hike Angels Landing in Zion National Park? Apply for your permit starting on January 3, 2022 (NPS 2021e),
Comment Analysis and Response, December 3, 2021
News Conference

In 2022, ZION plans to formally pilot a day-use permit program to hike Angels Landing. Administered solely through [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov), the program is aimed at providing a fair process to improve visitor experience along Angels Landing and protect park resources. Permits will be required at all times of the year and times of day. Starting on April 1, 2022, hikers must have a permit when accessing any portion of the Angels Landing trail. Visitors continue to be able to hike the West Rim Trail from the trailhead at the Grotto to Scout Lookout without a permit.

Permits are to be issued for three (3) different time slots each day. Each time slot represents a time range during which a hike may begin from the Grotto in Zion Canyon. For example, an individual holding a 'Before 9 AM' permit may begin their hike any time prior to 9 AM at the Grotto for the specified calendar day.

ZION expects to share information regarding the system as well as any updates on the official park website, [rec.gov](https://www.recreation.gov), PEPC, social media, and with news releases. Preliminary details and guidance for 2022 are as follows:

Permits

- Angels Landing permits are available only through lotteries on [Recreation.gov](https://www.recreation.gov).
- Angels Landing permits are not available at any office in ZION.
- Angels Landing permits are valid for a single day and a hike should begin at the Grotto trailhead (shuttle stop 6) during the time slot indicated (start time before 9 AM, between 9 AM and 12PM, and after 12P M).
- Visitors must factor in travel time, any shuttle wait time and similar considerations to assure they arrive at the Grotto Trailhead within their permit time slot

Lottery Applications

- Each application authorizes up to six (6) individuals per trip.
- Lottery applicants must use their name as it appears on photo identification when applying for Angels Landing hiking permit and will be listed as the permit holder on awarded permits.
- The names of the permit holder and alternate may not be changed once the application is submitted.
- People applying multiple times as permit holder/alternate permit holder will have their lottery applications canceled without refund
- Successful lottery applicants will be charged a three dollar (\$3) per person fee.
- The permit holder or alternate must show a photo identification card that matches the permit holder or alternate listed on the Angels Landing permit at the permit checkpoint. Permits are non-transferable.

- The permit holder or alternate and all members of the hiking party must be present at the permit checkpoint at the same time to proceed.
- Even if you have a permit, environmental or trail conditions may result in NPS closing the trail and permit holders would not be allowed to do the hike.

Seasonal Lottery

The spring seasonal lottery application period is January 3-20, 2022 and covers hiking dates from April 1 – May 31, 2022. Applicants may enter the seasonal lottery once and apply for a permit up for up to six (6) people, including the applicant. When applying, up to seven (7) dates or date ranges and corresponding hike start times may be selected in preference order. On January 25, 2022 applicants will be notified of the results by email, and successful applicants will have until the end of the month (January 31, 2022) to confirm their permit.

Day-before Lottery

Additional lotteries will be conducted the day before the desired hike date. Applicants may enter the day-before lottery between midnight (12:01 AM) and 3:00 PM. Applicants will be notified of the results by email by 4:00 PM. Applicants may apply for a permit for up to six (6) people, including the applicant, and may select multiple preferences for hike start times.

For both seasonal and day-before lotteries, applicants may enter each lottery once and apply for a permit up to six (6) people, including the applicant. When applying, up to seven (7) dates or date ranges along with preferred start times may be selected in preference order. There is a six dollar (\$6) non-refundable application fee. Applicants awarded permits will be charged a three dollar (\$3) per-person fee. Permits may be printed after they are successfully awarded.

Adjustments should be anticipated over the course of the season and into following years. These adjustments could include changes to group size, months when advance lottery applications will be accepted, number of permits being issued, and changes due to overcrowding being caused at other locations in the park.

C. Description of Previous Compliance Documentation

Decision Document Name: CE: Angels Landing Visitor Management Pilot Study Plan
Memo: Angel Landing Pilot Permit Program [POSTPONED]

Decision Document PEPC ID: 88446

Decision Document Approval Date: 5/23/2019 & 3/26/2020

D. Notes

Future efforts to adaptively manage visitor use on Angel Landing will be documented prior to implementation and would continue to include a debrief or discussion on lessons learned from previous events and/or information that could be used to help shape any future events or management strategies. Copies of news releases, press, social media posts, and other forms of media used to communicate these events to the public would continue to be monitored to demonstrate the NPS commitment to public outreach, civic engagement, and visitor enjoyment.

E. Recommended by Park Section 106 Coordinator

NHPA Specialist:

Courtney Mackay

F. Conclusion

I certify that the existing NPS NEPA document has been reviewed and there are no substantive differences between the current proposal and its associated environmental impacts and the proposal and impacts as described in the existing NEPA document and associated decision document. The proposed work conforms to the NPS *Management Policies* and *Cultural Resource Management Guideline*.

Superintendent: _____

Jeffrey Bradybaugh

G. References

NPS. 2019a. Press Release: "Zion National Park Presidents' Day Weekend Expectations" (February 12, 2019). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-presidents-day-weekend-expectations.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2019b. Press Release: "Zion NP Prepares for Crowds over Memorial Day Weekend" (May 15, 2019). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-np-prepares-for-crowds-over-memorial-day-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2019c. Press Release: "Zion National Park Anticipated Busy 4th Weekend" (June 27, 2019). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-anticipates-busy-july-4th-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2019d. Press Release: "Zion National Park Prepares for Busy Labor Day Weekend" (August 28, 2019). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-prepares-for-busy-labor-day-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2020. Press Release: "Zion National Park Presidents' Day Weekend Expectations for 2020" (February 12, 2020). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-presidents-day-weekend-expectations-2020.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2021a. Press Release: "Zion National Park Prepares for Crowds Over Memorial Day Weekend" (May 21, 2021). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-prepares-for-crowds-over-memorial-day-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2021b. Press Release: "Zion National Park Anticipates Busy 4th of July Weekend" (July 1, 2021). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-anticipates-busy-4th-of-july-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2021c. Press Release: "Zion National Park Accepting Comments on Proposed Lava Point Campground and Day-use Permit Lottery Amenity Fees" (August 13, 2021). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-accepting-comments-on-proposed-lava-point-campground-and-day-use-permit-lottery-amenity-fees.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2021d. Press Release: "Zion National Park Preparing for Busy Labor Day Weekend" (September 2, 2021). Website. <https://www.nps.gov/zion/learn/news/zion-national-park-preparing-for-busy-labor-day-weekend.htm>. Accessed 12/1/2021.

NPS. 2021e. Press Release: "Want to hike Angels Landing in Zion National Park? Apply for your permit starting on January 3, 2022!" (December 3, 2021). *Website*. To be published.