



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Nez-Lizer urge National Park Service to keep Grand Canyon National Park closed due to COVID-19

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation received notice on Thursday that the National Park Service plans to reopen Grand Canyon National Park on Friday, when Arizona’s current stay-at-home order expires. On Tuesday, Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey announced a phased reopening of select business sectors across Arizona. While many people are eager to come out of isolation, many others remain worried about a potential spike of positive COVID-19 cases and whether Arizona is prepared for reopening.

“We are disappointed to see that Arizona is reopening. The Navajo Nation spans northeast Arizona where COVID-19 has devastated our communities. The Navajo Nation is blessed to be surrounded by natural beauty, including the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Chaco Canyon, and Canyon de Chelly, just to name a few. Our federal partners need to understand that we have a voice in how these parks impact our communities. We welcome the economic benefits that tourists bring, but we are also fearful of the potential negative impacts and had hoped that when the Grand Canyon closed on April 1, the park would remain closed until our positive COVID-19 numbers have flattened,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

President Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer wrote to U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt and National Park Service Deputy Director Raymond Vela on March 24, seeking a partnership with the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to plan activities in light of the high tourist traffic flowing through the Navajo Nation. However, the Grand Canyon did not close until April 1, 2020 after Secretary Bernhardt was in receipt of a letter from the Coconino County Health and Human Services Director and Chief Health Officer who recommended the full closure of the park.

On April 13, President Nez and Vice President Lizer again wrote to Secretary Bernhardt requesting a partnership with the Navajo Nation on the requested closure of all the national parks and public lands located on or near the Navajo Nation. In response to that letter and subsequent conversations between the Navajo Nation and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Superintendent Shott made the decision to maintain the closure of the public boat ramp at Antelope Point Marina until the Navajo Nation’s position has changed.

“This is the type of partnership we need from our national park neighbors,” said President Nez. “When Superintendent Shott reached out to my office about the reopening of Antelope Point Marina, I informed him that my position had remained the same, which is that I want to see these parks and recreation areas closed until the Navajo Nation’s infection rate has slowed and flattened. I am impressed with his leadership, and hope that all our neighbors see that when we work together, we will overcome this deadly virus.”

“Some may say, ‘Life is not without risk, but for me and our Navajo relatives, one death is one too many. The Navajo Nation is not willing to risk the lives of our Diné relatives nor the lives of those visiting our beautiful lands. Our Nation is still under daily and weekly curfews, our essential businesses are only supplied for the needs of our residents and not supplied for the influx of travelers. Even a slow phase of reopening one of the largest tourist destinations in the world will overwhelm our communities,” said Vice President Myron Lizer.

The Grand Canyon National Park website provides only a notice to their visitors travelling through the Navajo Nation that if travelling through Navajo, they must wear face masks at public facilities and businesses to slow the spread of COVID-19. NPS fails to mention that the Navajo Nation has existing Public Health Orders in place that require many other precautions individuals must adhere to.

“We cannot dictate what the federal government does with national parks, and I understand people want to recreate and visit our beautiful sites and landmarks, however, the Grand Canyon should inform their visitors of our existing Public Health Orders, our curfews, and that our Nation is closed to tourism. I also hope that the Grand Canyon discourages visitors from traveling through Navajo Nation, instead of only educating on our requirement on the use of face masks,” added President Nez.

On Tuesday, President Nez and Vice President Lizer extended the Navajo Nation’s declaration of a state of emergency and the closure of Navajo Nation government offices until June 7. Visitors travelling through the Navajo Nation during curfew hours will be cited. As of Thursday, the Navajo Nation reached a total of 3,632 positive COVID-19 cases and 127 deaths. In addition, preliminary reports from a few health care facilities indicate that approximately 515 individuals have recovered from COVID-19, with more reports still pending.

All Navajo Nation Public Health Orders and additional public health information can be found at <https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19>. Grand Canyon National Park will reopen the South Entrance at 6:00 am MST. The Park’s East entrance will remain closed until further notice.

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