Welcome and thank you for standing by. Shelagh Forester is ready to begin the conference. For assistance during the call please press star, followed by the number zero.

Thank you and welcome. Thank you for joining I am Shelagh Forester with the National Park Service and we invited you to today’s webinar to provide details on the National Park Service road-based tour commercial use authorization or as we call it “CUA” requirements and Entrance Fee changes for commercial tours that take effect later this year. Today's webinar is presented by the National Park Service CUA program and Recreation Fee Program team. We have Samantha Towery, National Park Service CUA Coordinator, and Chris Williamson, National Recreation Fee Program Manager, on the call today. Due to the large number of people we have all participants in a listen only mode and at the end of the presentation we will provide an email address that has been set up to receive CUA and fee questions. The goal is to provide you in the tour industry with the details you need to plan for the new commercial use authorization and entrance fee requirements. This is the second webinar we’ve held for the industry and we plan to share additional details over the next few months. We will post a PDF of this slide presentation in the same location where you found the link to today's webinar on the NPS.gov webpage for your reference. In addition we will post a frequently asked question document later today. We already received a lot of questions from all of you and we have created a document that should be useful. We plan to post it after the webinar.

Today will explain how the commercial tour entrance fee structure will change on October 1, 2019 at all National Park Service sites that charge an entrance fee. There will be changes on October 1 and we will describe the National Park Service CUA requirements that will be effective on October 1, 2019. First this includes how CUA management fees will be collected at all NPS sites by the National Park Service. To get us started I will turn it over to Samantha Towery so she can share the history of commercial fees and CUAs in the National Park Service.

Thank you all for joining. Good afternoon everyone. You will see on the slide the CUA program has evolved over time. Prior to 1997 we issued commercial use licenses for any commercial activity that was not under a concession contract. In the mid-1990s we switched and started issuing what we called Incidental Business Permits (IBPs). IBPs were similar to the current CUA program but with no limits on how many IBPs we could issue. And related to the content today, prior to us implementing the commercial tour entrance fee schedule in 1998, that is the current entrance fee schedule we use today, the Associate Director issued a memo directing parks that would charge that commercial entrance fee schedule to not charge for road-based tour IBPs or CUAs. That memo is why most parks right now don't issue and charge for Road based commercial tours and why we are getting everyone on board and making sure we are complying with current legislation. The same year that the memo came out, it was actually superseded by the1998 Concession Management Improvement Act that directed us to issue CUAs to all commercial entities and that included road-based commercial tours and also to collect a reasonable fee at least cost recovery for those CUAs. Let's skip ahead to 2015 and in that year we started having in-person conversations with representatives from the industry and those included NTA and ABA and we also attended a bunch of different conferences that year and in subsequent years to continue to have the discussion and I think we participated in 20+ calls and different meetings and also it led us to this point and in 2017 we kicked off a public comment process and in the public comment process we introduce the idea of standardizing the CUA requirement and formally introduced the idea and introduced a seasonally based entrance fee. Because of the comments we received and also internal analysis that we conducted, we got rid of the seasonally based entrance fee and announced the new per person commercial entrance fees and CUA requirements in 2018. I will turn it over to Chris and she will start talking to you about the per person commercial entrance fee.

I am Chris Williamson and I manage the recreation fee program for the National Park Service. I want to provide a bit of history also. Since 1998 at park sites that charge per vehicle entrance fees commercial tours have been charged a flat rate based on the vehicle capacity of the vehicle that is used for transport. We had prices for 1 to 6 passenger vehicles and 7 to 15 passenger and 16 to 25 passenger capacity vehicles and vehicles that have passenger capacity of 26 or more. This vehicle based entrance fee schedule for tour operators has not changed in over 20 years. A large number of parks charge tours the same fee today to enter a park that they charged in 1998. For example, a large tour bus has paid the same rate of $300 to enter Grand Teton National Park for the last 20 years while over the same time period the private vehicle entrance fee has increased. At Park sites that charge per person entrance fees only, commercial tour operators have been charged per person entrance fees and these fees have increased over time. There are variations to the flat rate vehicle capacity or per person fee model within the NPS. For example, Grand Canyon National Park has a slightly different entrance fee structure for certain tours that enter the park. I think it is also important to note that the National Park Service currently only has 112 sites that charge an entrance fee out of a total of 419 NPS sites.

Like Sam mentioned we talked about updating the 20-year-old commercial entrance fee schedule for a number of years including conversations with commercial tour industry representatives. In the fall of 2017 we conducted an official civic engagement exercise which allowed the public to comment on a peak season entrance fee proposal. Taking many factors into consideration as Sam mentioned, the National Park Service announced in 2018 updated entrance fee rates for parks that charge entrance fees and a change to the commercial tour fee schedule and new CUA requirements for road-based commercial tour operators. Due to the commitment made to the commercial tour industry an implementation date of October 1, 2019 was set in order for the commercial tour industry to have 18 months’ notice to prepare for the changes that were going to impact them. The commitment we made was to provide 18 months’ notice of changes. Starting October 1, 2019, parks that charge a vehicle based entrance fee will not use the flat rate vehicle capacity model. This is the commercial tour fee schedule that I talked about earlier. All parks will charge commercial tour operators a per person entrance fee to each person in the group that is 16 or older. There will be no charge for tour drivers and tour guide operators. National Park Service charges entrance fees only to those that are 16 older so that will remain consistent with how the tour operators with be charged. The entrance fee will be charged to those sixteen and older. The change will allow the National Park Service to charge for the number of passengers in a vehicle which tour companies requested as it allows companies to plan for expenses more easily. As an example, when a tour arrives at a park the driver or tour guide should be ready to provide an accurate count of the passengers on the bus so the count needs to include how many passengers are 16 and older and how many are 15 and younger. There will be times National Park Service staff will need to manually verify those on board but it will not be a typical practice that happens every time someone pulls up to an entrance station or walks into a visitor center. National Park sites are divided into one of four groups for entrance fee purposes. On the slide we have posted the established per person for each of the four groups. We have $10 and $15 and $20. And since some parks may not have increased the fees to these rates yet, there are still some parks that will be operating under an older per person entrance fee on October 1. All parks should be in line with these rates by January 2020. The link on the slide leads to an NPS.gov entrance fee webpage that lists or has posted the entrance fee rates for most parks. The information will be helpful for you in planning your visits.

What about passes? When we mention passes we are referring to passes that are used for entrance at NPS sites that charge an entrance fee. Passes include annual, senior, military, fourth-grade and volunteer passes. Also, many sites have their own park specific annual pass. As we transition to the per person entrance fee for all road based tour operators, passes will not be accepted for commercial entrance which is in line with what is listed on the back of the pass. We posted an example here on the slide with the senior pass which has a statement that says the pass is valid only for private non-commercial vehicle entry. We will continue this policy for tour operators. There is a slight change related to passes for parks that primarily charge only per person entrance fees and those parks that have charged per person entrance fees to commercial tour operators in the past in some cases have accepted passes. Past guidance was to allow passes to be used to cover the entrance for these type of groups, but starting in October this will no longer be allowed. Essentially in the past a per person park sites and sites where you park a bus in a parking lot and walk into a visitor center, then pay the entrance fee, we accepted passes because we were not differentiating between private visitors and commercial groups who parked in the parking lot and walked to the park. Everyone was charged per person and passes were accepted, but now we need to count separately the commercial visitors from the non-commercial visitors and this is a change at parks that charge a per person entrance fee. Commercial tours will need to pay the per person fee for each of their customers, and passes will not be accepted for entry. Again I want to note that once the entrance fee is paid, it is valid for re-entry for the same group for whatever the length of stay is at that particular park site. Next Samantha will describe the CUA program so let's turn it over to her.

Thank you Chris. Before we dive into this I think it's important to explain exactly what a CUA is. It is short for commercial use authorization and allows an individual, group, company or other entity to conduct commercial activities and provide specific visitor services within a National Park unit. Again, a National Park unit includes parks, historic sites, battlefields and any area managed by the National Park Service. Federal law mandates we, the National Park Service, issue CUAs for commercial activities and visitor services that are an appropriate use of the park, that only have minimal impact or less on pack resources and park use, and that are consistent with Park purpose and management plan, policy and regulation. Remember CUAs authorize services in park areas, but are not concession contracts and also should not be confused with special use permits. You all are familiar with special use permits, but the exception of the sale of printed material, special use permits or SUPs never authorize commercial activity.

The requirement for a CUA is found in federal regulation 36 CFR 5.3.5.3 states it is illegal to conduct business in a park area without a permit, contract or other written agreement. The Concession Management Improvement Act, which I mentioned earlier came out in 1998, gives the NPS the authority to issue CUAs to allow commercial operations and also requires the NPS to collect cost recovery, at a minimum, for CUA administration and management. Think of it like the regulation 36 CFR 5.3 requires the permit and the 1998 Act tells us, the National Park Service, how to manage that permit system. The National Park Service issues CUAs cover a large range of commercial services. Depending on the park a CUA could cover guided hiking, or backpacking, or horseback riding and road base commercial tools and scuba diving. There are so many types of CUAs that it would take me 10 minutes to list all the CUA types we issue. Too many to name. To give you an idea of the program size and scope in 2017 we issued over 6000 CUAs and the CUA holders through the submission of the annual CUA report, reported to us that they brought in over half a billion dollars in total from Park-based or Park-dependent operations. Out of that half $1 billion the National Park Service collected less than .5% for us to manage the program. And of those different types of CUA's, the road-based commercial tour CUAs that we are talking about today, are the only type of CUA that have standard fees and a standard fee collection process.

And I think it's also important for everyone to understand how we define road based commercial tour. We define it as one or more persons traveling on an improved roadway that someone has sold for leisure or recreation purposes. Road-based commercial tours provide no other services except those incidental to road-based travel in a National Park Service area. That includes onboard interpretation and incidental stops at visitor centers or restaurant and wayside exhibits, bathrooms and those type of things. Guidance clearly states Park superintendents may allow minor and that is an important word, minor additional services like short day hikes and when I say short day hike, think a short walk in a developed area. Again the superintendent has discretion whether or not they want to allow additional services and if you want to offer those you need to make sure you're talking to the Park coordinator to see what the superintendent at that park has decided. It's also possible the company may need more than one CUA. If you want to offer additional services or if they are not considered minor, think, maybe a road based tour company wants to offer those tours but you want to offer backpacking trips and I realize that is a unique model and have no idea if it exists but if you have something similar to that, then you need a road based commercial tour CUA and a guided backpacking CUA. Also transportation only services like taxis or shuttle don't meet the definition I went over because they are not pre-packaged tours. They are on demand services and not repackaged. Remember even though those companies do not meet the definition of road based commercial tour, parks may still issue transportation CUA for those types of services if there's a need to manage those services and if they actually need to control the commercial vehicle traffic. Again the only type of CUA with standard fees are road based commercial tours and for transportation CUAs we have no standard fee collection process. You need to visit the NPS.gov website and use the map feature to access CUA contact information and contact that park to understand the requirements.

The way we collect the standard five dollar per person management fee depends on whether or not the park charges an entrance fee. For parks that are charging the per-person entrance fee, the five dollar per person fee is actually included in the per-person commercial entrance fee and think of it like this, if Park per-person entrance fee is $15, $10 of that is the entrance fee and five dollars of that is the CUA management fee and we include it in one bundle and you pay the fees in one lump. You will pay the total of $15 at the park entrance and we split it apart on the back end but you don't see that.

What happens when the visitors that you bring to the park are under 16? Chris mentioned this earlier. We don't collect entrance fees for visitors that are 15 and under but that does not mean we will not collect an entrance fee for those people. When we created this slide and actually during the last webinar, Chris please jump in if I'm not explaining this clearly or if you have something to add, originally what we wanted to do is have you pay the five dollar per person fee when you submit the annual CUA reports at the end of the operating season. What we are considering now are likely to do is allow you to pay the five dollar per person management fee for those visitors that are 15 and under when you go through the park entrance. We recognize based on feedback we received through the email address and a few calls we received that it would be easier for you to do pay those fees at the park entrance rather than at the end-of-the-year. So you can ignore this slide a little bit. We will still collect the CUA management fee for those under 16 but we are doing it at the park entrance station for those parks that have entrance stations. The frequently asked questions document that we will post later today further clarifies this so I encourage you to read the questions and reach out again through the email address if you have additional questions.

As I mentioned, at parks that don't collect an entrance fee, the five dollar per person CUA management fee still has to be paid. It will be paid when you submit the annual report at the end of the operating season. This is for parks that do not charge an entrance fee and you will be paying the five dollar per person CUA fee for everyone including both those 16 and older, and 15 and under, when you submit the report. Remember the annual CUA report is not specific to the road-based commercial tour operator. Every CUA holder, no matter what type of CUA they hold has to submit the annual report. It is a required submission and incorporated in the requirement in the standard CUA conditions that are part of the CUA application and actual authorization as well. Also, part of the OMB approved information collection we go through every three years. The external website link is at the end of the slide presentation. There is a downloadable annual report and you can download it to look at and see the questions that are on it to know what expectations we have for you when you report at the end of the year.

This is exciting and I think most of you are aware that we are planning to move to a new CUA online platform, The platform will allow digital application submission, application and management fee payment, and remember management fees will be for parks that don't charge per-person entrance fees and also, allow you to submit the required annual report I talked about earlier. We are currently developing this online platform and it will be in place by October 1, 2019. We also identified the road-based commercial tour will be one of the platform test groups. We are on track to streamline the application process for you before October 1. Keep in mind, contracting delays are out of our hands and you will need to be prepared to submit applications using the current process that is through each park and we will continually communicate with you and with park staff if a delay does occur. I'm not expecting a delayed to occur, but I want to put it out there because they do happen. We will keep in touch with you and let you know about the status of the online system.

A little more about the platform, you can fill out one application and it will allow you to apply to multiple parks at one time using that one application. The application will feed into a saved user profile. How I envision it is an interactive map so after you submit the information through the online application, you then indicate what service you want to provide and select the parks you want to visit. From there, you accept the park specific CUA conditions. Each park is allowed to create and require you to accept specific CUA conditions at the park and that is because the parks, and when I say parks I mean including monuments and battlefields and everything, are unique. They have to have the ability to create specific conditions. The system will allow you to digitally submit your application and from there everything is done through the system so no paperwork anymore. You will also be able to submit the annually required CUA report and pay any CUA management fees, including the five dollar per person management fee for parks that don’t charge entrance fees when you submit the annual CUA report. And I want to tell you that we will provide a lot of information about the online platform and will share that information through a similar system like today’s WebEx We will also do user training in the coming months. You will be fully prepared and hopefully as excited as we are that when you're ready to submit applications and when the National Park Service is ready for full implementation that everyone is on board and we all will know how the system works.

To cap off the end of the CUA portion of the presentation, I want to go over some frequently asked questions. These are included in the FAQ document that we will load on the CUA webpage letter today. 1. How do you prove that you have a CUA? Like all CUA holders you are responsible for providing your guide with a copy of the CUA and no, you do not have to print off all eight pages, you can print off the first page and provide it to the guide. Remember you do have to make sure the guide is aware of and has read the conditions of the CUA, including the park specific conditions. The guide will hand the CUA over at the park entrance. The CUAs that will be generated by the online platform are going to clearly state it is a road-based commercial tour CUA so that there are no questions at the park gate. Obviously have the guide keep the document on hand because as they are out walking around doing some short day hikes, park staff may request to see the CUA and the guide should be able to provide the CUA. Parks can also continue to develop their own ID system. Some parks are using cards or vehicle stickers and one park is piloting a QR code identification system. We don't know how that will work, but it may be something we integrate later into the online platform. The specific requirements for identification, if there are any outside of providing the CUA, will be included in the park condition of the CUA application and you will be aware of those of the time of application. If you show up without a CUA, I want to assure you, everyone is not going to be turned around. We don’t plan to turn away park visitors and we understand there will be some confusion when we implement the new requirements. What we have done is develop a non-permitted entry process that will allow you a short-term park entrance. If you show up without a CUA, you will be asked to fill out a form, or you can provide a business card, to park staff and pay the $300 application fee. The park staff will send the form or business card to the park CUA office and then you will need to use the new online system to quickly apply for CUA at that point. Rest assured, we will not kick anyone out right away. You will pay the $300 application fee if you show up without a CUA and that is the only time you'll pay that $300 application fee and will not be asked to pay it again but also you will pay the per-person commercial entrance fee as well. The last question, are all parks required to issue a road-based tour CUA? Yes, but we do realize in a few cases, implementing the standard road based process is hard and that is usually due to the fact that the site doesn't have the staff or an established fee program. Because of this we have a waiver process and parks can apply for a waiver to opt out of the standard road-based tour CUA requirement. Some reasons we would allow a waiver include like I said, park staff is too small or they cannot keep up with the CUA program or how the park is set up such as a super urban entry, and they don't have staff to manage a CUA program, then we will allow the NPS site to apply for the waiver. It is granted by the deputy Director of the NPS and a pretty high standard has been set for them to be granted the waiver because we want to standardize CUA requirements across the agency. We don't want to confuse it any more than it already is. The online system and our website will provide information about what parks have been granted a waiver and so far only one park has applied for and been granted a waiver and that is Stones River National Battlefield in Tennessee.

Now I will turn it over to Chris and she will talk more about how we use the fees we collect.

I’ll talk a little bit about how entrance fees are used. We feel this is a relevant piece of information we want to take this opportunity to share with you. Entrance and CUA management fees are used to enhance the visitor experience at park sites. At least 80% of the per-person entrance fee and 100% of the CUA fees remain in the collecting park to be used on projects to enhance the visitor experience such as improving parking lots, restrooms, trails, wayside exhibits, etc. the slide shows a great example of a trail improvement project. The National Park Service has highlighted and shared how fee dollars are used in the parks through the link posted on the slide. This webpage is called Your Fee Dollars at Work and takes you to an NPS.gov page that includes project examples from across various park sites as well as a map with links to individual park sites that have their own Fee Dollar at Work pages. I recommend checking these out to see how the money that you provide to the National Park Service is being used. With that I will turn it back over to Shelagh to close us out.

Thank you so much. I have some additional information on this slide for you to use as you plan your trips to the parks. You may have additional questions since on these new requirements and changing processes and the new online platform we are creating. Over the next few months we will continue to provide updates on the Commercial Use Authorization (or CUA) nps.gov website. I have posted the link into the chat. You can get the link from chat if you have not seen it before. This is the best place to check when you have questions. We also will add a Frequently Asked Question document here, and a pdf of today’s slides later today. On the slide I also added the entrance fees by park link so you can easily find the per-person entrance fee rate for the National Park Service site you plan to visit. Again we’ve included the link to the information on how the parks are using fee dollars to make park improvements.

Thank you again for joining us today. I posted a poll question in Webex to receive feedback on this webinar. Answering this will help us provide information for future training needs. Please provide us your thoughts on this question. We have also set up an email address for you to send us questions. This email address is CUA\_WASO@NPS.gov. We have taken questions that have been submitted to this email address to create the Frequently Asked Document. And I will post those later today. Thank you for providing detailed questions on the upcoming changes. That is the end of our presentation. Thank you everybody.