

# Visitor Use Management Strategy Public and Stakeholder Engagement Report

Glacier National Park  
November 2023

## Executive Summary

From August 16 to September 30, 2023, the National Park Service (NPS) sought public input on a Visitor Use Management Strategy to better understand issues and opportunities for visitor use and visitor experiences at Glacier National Park for the 2024 summer season.

The goal of park managers is to learn about park values of visitors, perceptions of a desirable experience, perceived issues, reactions to the reservation system pilots, and what management strategies or solutions interest visitors. The key issues that arose during this comment period were traffic congestion and visitor movement challenges, road and valley closures as a result of traffic congestion, staff capacity and visitor use impacts on park operations, infrastructure capacity and visitor use impacts on aging facilities, visitor use impacts on natural and cultural resources, and impacts on the quality of visitor experience at key locations. This public input will inform how park managers approach visitor access in the summer of 2024. The approach for summer 2024 will be informed by the following factors:

- Lessons learned from the last three summers of reservation system pilots
- Visitor use monitoring and social science research
- Feedback from local businesses and communities
- Law, regulation, and policies that pertain to the NPS
- Feedback from the public, Tribes, park partners, and stakeholders

## Background

Glacier National Park has become an extremely popular destination. Over the past two decades, annual visitation has increased from approximately 1.5 million to more than 3 million, with most visitation occurring between June and September. While this increase in visitation is a sign of more people connecting to and enjoying all that the park has to offer, increasing visitation also presents challenges for natural and cultural resource protection, the quality of the visitor experience, visitor and staff safety, the timeliness of emergency response, and park staff's ability to maintain aging facilities and perform daily operations such as educational services and custodial duties.

The park has piloted a reservation system for three years. The pilots were initiated in summer 2021 as a response to longstanding issues such as traffic congestion, infrastructure capacity, and visitor use impacts on park resources. In addition, the pilot reservation system addressed acute circumstances, including staffing shortages, increased visitation in northwest Montana, and the need to ensure traffic did not back up onto US Highway 2. In subsequent years, park staff have continued to pilot reservation systems, exploring their viability as a tool to effectively achieve desired conditions for visitor experiences and resource protection.

## Timeline

The park published a news release on August 16, 2023, with information about the strategy, a link to comment on the project, information for accessing the virtual public meeting and attending in-person open houses, and a link to a *StoryMap* for the plan at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/0f3e3fed838847d1ac97340124854b54>. The provided information about the park background, park purpose and significance, popular destinations, and key issues. The park encouraged the public to submit comments through the NPS's Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website at: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectId=118357>. Written comments were also accepted by US mail, email, or through in-person submission at the public open houses.

The park held one virtual public meeting and two in-person open houses during the engagement period. During the virtual public meeting, at which park and project staff provided an overview of the key issues, lessons learned from previous pilot reservation systems, and how to provide public comments. Park and project staff also responded to questions submitted during the virtual meeting. During the in-person open houses, park and project staff engaged in small-group conversations, providing members of the public with an in-person opportunity to learn more about the reservation system pilots. The dates, locations, and times of the public meetings are provided below:

- [Virtual Meeting](#)
  - Wednesday, August 23, 2023
  - 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. MT
  - Microsoft Teams Call-In
  
- In-Person Open House #1
  - Monday, August 28, 2023
  - 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. MT
  - St. Mary Visitor Center, 50 Going-to-the-Sun Road, Browning, MT
  
- In-Person Open House#2
  - Tuesday, August 29, 2023
  - 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. MT
  - Cedar Creek Lodge, 930 2nd Ave W, Columbia Falls, MT

The NPS considered all comments from members of the public, including comments received directly by the park through US mail or email, and those entered in PEPC. The use of public comments is ongoing, and comments will continue to be evaluated as the strategy for 2024 and beyond is developed. A total of 1,408 pieces of correspondences were received during the public engagement period. This report summarizes the suggestions and concerns expressed in comments received during the civic engagement period.

# Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	I
BACKGROUND.....	I
COMMENT ANALYSIS .....	1
DEFINITION OF TERMS .....	1
COMMENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY.....	1
CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED.....	1
HOW IS NPS USING THESE COMMENTS?.....	2
COMMENT SUMMARIES.....	3
PROMPTING QUESTIONS AND COMMENT SUMMARY STRUCTURE.....	3
TOPIC QUESTION 1: WHAT EXPERIENCES IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU? .....	3
TOPIC QUESTION 2: WHAT DOES YOUR IDEAL EXPERIENCE AT GLACIER NATIONAL PARK LOOK OR FEEL LIKE? .....	5
TOPIC QUESTION 3: WHAT MOST DETRACTS FROM THE QUALITY OF YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE PARK, IF ANYTHING? .....	6
TOPIC QUESTION 4: WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM THE THREE YEARS OF MANAGED ACCESS PILOTS AT GLACIER? WHAT WORKED WELL FOR YOU? WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER? .....	8
TOPIC QUESTION 5: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MISSION CALLS US TO ENSURE FAIR AND EQUITABLE VISITOR ACCESS WHILE PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY EXPERIENCES AND PROTECTING THE PARK AND ITS RESOURCES. WHAT STRATEGIES SHOULD THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CONSIDER TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS? .....	10
TOPIC QUESTION 6: DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER THOUGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU FEEL WE HAVE NOT COVERED? .....	11

# Comment Analysis

## Definition of Terms

**Correspondence:** A correspondence is the entire document received from a commenter and includes letters, written comment forms, comments entered directly into the PEPC database, and any other written comments provided either at the public meetings, by postal mail, or in person at the park.

**Comment:** A comment is a portion of text within a correspondence that addresses a single subject such as “purpose and need” or “other management suggestions.” The comment could also question the accuracy of the information provided in the newsletter, question the adequacy of any background information, or present reasonable alternatives other than the potential actions presented in the newsletter.

**Comment Summary:** A grouping that is centered on a common subject. Comment summaries combine similar comments.

## Comment Analysis Methodology

Correspondence was received by hard copy letter via US mail or submitted in-person during the public open-housed, emailed, or entered directly into the PEPC system. The project team entered letters received through the US mail, in-person, or email into the PEPC system for analysis. Once all correspondences were entered into PEPC, each was read, and comments were categorized into topic questions. Once a correspondence was broken into topic questions, all comments under a topic question were summarized and comment summaries for each question were created. When creating comment summaries, every attempt was made to capture the full breadth of comments submitted.

## Correspondence Received

The following tables were produced by the NPS PEPC database and provide information about the numbers and types of correspondence received, organized by various demographics. The tables present data on the number of correspondences received by correspondence type, organization type, state, and country.

**TABLE 1. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY CORRESPONDENCE TYPE**

Correspondence Type	Correspondences
Web Form	1,374
Visitor Comment Sheet	31
Email	2
Letter	1

**TABLE 2. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY COUNTRY**

Country	Correspondences
United States	1,385
Canada	19
Romania	1
United Kingdom	1
Australia	1
Cambodia	1

**TABLE 3. CORRESPONDENCE DISTRIBUTION BY STATE**

State	Correspondences	State	Correspondences	State	Correspondences
Montana	760	North Carolina	16	Kentucky	6
Minnesota	43	New York	15	Louisiana	6
Washington	39	Ohio	15	Wyoming	5
California	32	Maryland	14	Kansas	4
Texas	31	Georgia	14	Nevada	3
Florida	30	Iowa	13	New Hampshire	3
Wisconsin	29	Utah	12	West Virginia	3
Idaho	24	North Dakota	10	Vermont	2
Colorado	21	Indiana	10	Mississippi	2
Unknown	21	New Jersey	7	South Carolina	2
Arizona	20	Oklahoma	7	Alaska	2
Illinois	20	Nebraska	7	Connecticut	1
Michigan	18	Tennessee	7	Delaware	1
Pennsylvania	18	Massachusetts	7	District of Columbia	1
Virginia	18	Alabama	7	Maine	1
Missouri	17	South Dakota	6	Virgin Islands	1
Oregon	17	Arkansas	6		

### How is NPS using these comments?

All of the comments we received were helpful in that they provided insights into the diverse perspectives held by the public. While general support or opposition to past actions was informative, the most helpful comments described why and how commenters held particular perspectives. The descriptions of how the pilots either supported or detracted from visitor experiences, rather than the number of times a particular perspective was heard, were key inputs to informing park management as they considered how to approach the 2024 summer season. This approach to comment analysis ensures park managers make informed decisions that consider visitor perspectives and experiences, operational needs, and resource conditions as the NPS continues to refine our approach to resolve the identified issues and ensure meaningful and enjoyable visitor opportunities.

## Comment Summaries

### Prompting Questions and Comment Summary Structure

Six topic questions were posed to commenters.

1. What experiences in Glacier National Park are most important to you?
2. What does your ideal experience at Glacier National Park look or feel like?
3. What most detracts from the quality of your experience in the park, if anything?
4. What did you learn from the three years of managed access pilots at Glacier? What worked well for you? What could have been better?
5. The National Park Service mission calls us to ensure fair and equitable visitor access while providing high-quality experiences and protecting the park and its resources. What strategies should the National Park Service consider to achieve these goals?
6. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share? Is there anything you feel we have not covered?

Within the comment summary that follows, major concepts and unique perspectives are represented from the comments received during the public engagement period.

### Topic Question 1: What Experiences in Glacier National Park are most important to you?

Experiences that were most important to commenters varied across many different aspects of the park. Key experiences included nature experiences, recreational activities, attending park programs, accessible activities, and public access to specific locations and lodges. Some experiences were acknowledged many times over; including viewing and encountering wildlife, benefitting from the solitude and wilderness of the park, the ability to access and stop at scenic pullouts, staying at the in-park lodges, walking or biking Going-to-the-Sun Road, and recreating on lakes within the park. Hiking the park's trails was one of the most mentioned experiences, with commenters specifically mentioning their love of clean hiking trails, the many different levels of hiking available (i.e., long, high-elevation trails and short, family-friendly trails), and hiking off trail. Many other experiences were shared and are noted below under their respective topic.

In addition to the experiences below, commenters noted that sharing all these experiences with family and friends, making memories, and passing on experiences and traditions from one generation to the next were extremely important. Several commenters stated that the ability to include their whole family at the park (i.e., accessibility for older visitors and easy hikes for younger visitors), was the most important experience available. Some commenters noted that having the same experiences now that they had as a child was considered their most important park experience, while other commenters felt that being surrounded by like-minded individuals with the same love for the park was one of the most important park experiences. Getting away from technology, spending holidays or special occasions in the park, and experiencing the park over different seasons were also noted. Lastly, many commenters felt that being safe during any park experience was the most important experience the park could offer.

## **Nature Experiences**

---

Commenters emphasized the importance of feeling connected to nature while in the park. Commenters appreciated the opportunity for diverse wildlife encounters, ranging from insects to moose. The ability to experience a variety of flora and fauna was commonly mentioned. Commenters stated that it was important to them that they feel rejuvenated and calm after immersing themselves in the solitude and wilderness the park offers. Commenters mentioned seeing the northern lights, sunrises and sunsets, waterfalls, stargazing, and seeing the mountain mist in the early morning.

## **Recreational Activities**

---

Commenters appreciated the range of activities for all skill levels within the park. Commenters commonly mentioned camping, backpacking, climbing, biking, horseback riding, and more advanced hiking trails. Commenters noted that hobbyists utilized the park for painting, birding, photography, research (e.g., ecology, anthropology), and writing. Commenters enjoyed general exploration of the park via both traditional cycling and e-biking. Commenters also enjoy winter recreational activities, such as snowshoeing or skiing.

## **Water Recreation**

---

Commenters appreciated the opportunities for water recreation within the park, including swimming, relaxing on the shoreline, kayaking, and snorkeling. Commenters also mentioned whitewater rafting, floating on the creek, and riding historic boats as important activities for them to be able to take part in at the park. One commenter specifically noted ideal places for fishing, including Bowman Lake, Flathead River, Hidden Lake, Gunsight Lake, St. Mary Lake, and downstream of Many Glacier Hotel.

## **Programs/Tours/Amenities**

---

Commenters enjoyed programs or tours (e.g., Red Bus) that incorporated educational elements. Commenters specifically suggested ideas for new or additional programs in the park, including Native America Speaks programs, ranger programs, campground talks, and brown bag sessions. Some commenters preferred independent exploration and appreciated the availability of information from interpretive signage or the visitor center.

## **Access**

---

Elements of park access that contribute to good visitor experiences include flexible itineraries, ability to move through the park and explore during non-peak times, and spontaneous or impromptu visits. Commenters expressed that they enjoy the park more when there is a lower density of visitors and available parking, which allows for more time spent enjoying the park and less time waiting in queues or circling parking lots. Commenters also noted that less traffic on roads allows for quicker and safer access to major interest points within the park. Some commenters preferred the idea of the park having no reservations or camping permits to keep access as open as possible.

## Locations

---

Commenters noted a number of places within the park that contributed to memorable park experiences, including various lakes around the park, Grinnell Glacier, the Dusty Star Observatory in St. Mary, Swiftcurrent Pass, and various rivers and trails. Commenters mentioned Going-to-the-Sun Road the most out of any location, stating it was one of the most important aspects to their visit. Commenters visited specific locations for a variety of reasons (e.g., hiking, site-seeing, backpacking). Overall, commenters enjoyed the natural scenery, wildlife, and experiences (e.g., stargazing, boating) that these locations had to offer.

## Lodges

---

Commenters enjoyed overnight stays at lodges within the park, including Lake McDonald Lodge, Many Glacier Hotel, the two park backcountry chalets, and East Glacier Lodge.

## Topic Question 2: What does your ideal experience at Glacier National Park look or feel like?

Commenters explained their ideal experience at the park, and noted the components below as important features to their ideal trip.

### Lack of Congestion or Overcrowded Areas

---

Commenters noted that they enjoy peaceful, quiet, un-crowded experiences, particularly while hiking, biking, backpacking, camping, paddling, horseback riding, and sightseeing. Commenters stated their desire for less crowded scenic experiences and opportunities to access pullouts and parking areas along scenic drives.

Many commenters emphasized the importance of being able to experience the park in solitude, without crowds. Some noted that their favorite hiking experiences occurred when they did not see another person for long spans of time, if at all. Commenters added that wildlife encounters are often some of the most memorable aspects of park visits and occur less frequently when there are more people in the park. Commenters want to be able to see wildlife in their natural habitat and relatively undisturbed by human (and pet) activity.

### Ranger Interactions

---

Commenters noted that they enjoy interactions with park rangers who are able to answer their questions or teach them something new about the park. Commenters noted that they valued ranger programs and other educational opportunities throughout the park.

### Facilities

---

Commenters emphasized the importance of clean restrooms that are accessible to visitors with disabilities, as well as other park facilities. Commenters requested restroom facilities that are open, clean, and where the number of available restrooms matches the levels of visitation (i.e., shorter lines for accessing restrooms). Commenters preferred to have access to good food,



water, and quick snacks throughout the park. Commenters also noted that they appreciate nearby and on-site lodging opportunities, and wanted more access to them. It was also noted that visitors enjoy the opportunity for overnight lodging, camping, and hiking. Commenters desired more access to camping and in some cases, expanded camping opportunities (i.e., larger campgrounds and easier reservation systems). Commenters also desired more opportunities for paddling, including access to rental services.

## **Entry and Parking**

---

Commenters advocated for easy and flexible systems to manage park entry and parking, specifically those that, if a reservation system is needed, allow for flexibility in the release of permits throughout the year and provide multiple opportunities for the same time frame (e.g., a certain number released 6 months out, 3 months out, and the week before). For some visitors, an ideal trip involved no reservation systems or reservations that did not allow for early entrance or exemptions to the permit requirements (e.g., boat or tour reservations). Similarly, commenters advocated for a quick, simple, and efficient trip planning and parking system. Commenters noted that they prefer to be able to locate an open parking space quickly and easily near the trailhead or overlook of their choice. Commenters noted that multiple construction closures that occur at the same time within the park negatively impact their experiences, as they can compound congestion issues in other areas of the park, noting that reducing overlapping construction would improve the experience. Commenters also highlighted the need for improved access to parking for visitors with disabilities.

## **Alternative Transportation in the Park**

---

Commenters noted the need for a convenient, efficient, and free or low-cost shuttle system as an alternative to driving a personal car. Commenters requested that this shuttle system provide access to key destinations, run on a predictable and reliable schedule, and run frequently enough to reduce wait times and make it advantageous for visitors to use the shuttle system. Some commenters noted the need for shuttles from locations outside the park as well as shuttles between in-park locations. Other than shuttles, commenters noted that they enjoy biking opportunities throughout the park and suggested that additional biking infrastructure would reduce traffic and parking issues that impact visitor experiences.

## **Topic Question 3: What most detracts from the quality of your experience in the park, if anything?**

### **Congestion**

---

The most common response from commenters was that overcrowding and congestion within the park detracts from the overall experience. Commenters experienced congestion on trails, shuttles, within parking lots, and at key locations within the park. Locations noted as experiencing the highest levels of crowding and congestion included The Highline and Hidden Lake Trails near Logan Pass and the Trail of the Cedars. Congestion in parking lots was most notable at Logan Pass and Avalanche and to a lesser degree in St. Mary. Commenters also noted congestion at pullouts along the Going-to-the-Sun Road, particularly those near Logan Pass.

Several commenters felt that the reservation system was not effectively reducing congestion in key areas like Logan Pass, particularly due to visitors arriving prior to reservations being required, leading to full parking lots before 7:30 a.m.

## **Permits/Reservations**

---

Although some commenters were in favor of a reservation system, citing decreased congestion and improved opportunities for parking, many commenters generally disliked the reservation system, stating that it is confusing and difficult to plan far in advance. Commenters noted communication and technology as some of the barriers to accessing permits/reservations. Some commenters also found it difficult to obtain vehicle and camping reservations and disliked passes for roads (e.g., Going-to-the-Sun Road). Some locals were especially frustrated, stating that they can no longer access the park because reservations are so limited. This topic is discussed in greater detail in Topic Question 4 under Exemptions. Commenters further noted that visitors are taking advantage of the system by reserving other permit types (i.e., camping, backcountry, boating permits) to gain entry into the park, greatly limiting access for others and leaving campsites vacant.

## **Parking**

---

Commenters stated that the lack of parking, despite having a reservation, causes frustration and detracts from the overall experience. The parking at Logan Pass was specifically mentioned as an area with significant congestion. Commenters stated that the lack of parking at trailheads frequently disrupted visitor itineraries.

## **Shuttle**

---

Some commenters that utilized the shuttle system expressed concern about the inconsistency of the service and long wait times. Some commenters suggested the park work toward a more robust shuttle to better accommodate visitors and reduce parking congestion. Overall, commenters wanted to see more shuttle options. Specifically, commenters suggested additional shuttle access to trailheads for hikers, shuttle service from outside the park (from the community or parking lots at park entrances) to popular locations in the park, starting the shuttle service at Logan Pass earlier, providing some shuttle services specifically to backpackers, continuing shuttle service after Labor Day, and charging for shuttle service to fund fueling and maintenance. Several commenters suggested the park make the shuttle service mandatory.

## **Traffic**

---

Commenters noted that they experienced significant wait times from long traffic queues, both at entrance stations and within the park, particularly citing long wait times at Lake McDonald (likely tied to construction), the West Glacier Entrance, and several areas along Going-to-the-Sun Road. Traffic along Going-to-the-Sun Road was attributed to large recreational vehicles and some queuing related to people waiting for parking spaces. Commenters stated that the construction by Lake McDonald and poor road conditions (e.g., dust, potholes) contributed to slower traffic and congestion, which detracted from their experience.

## Visitor Experience

---

Commenters expressed concern over the following issues related to negative impacts on visitor use and experience: excessive trash, dogs within the park, abrasive or disruptive visitor behavior, lack of trail etiquette and visitors not practicing Leave No Trace, visitors approaching or disrespecting wildlife, and lack of facility upkeep (e.g., unsanitary restrooms). Commenters suggested a stronger presence of rangers to enforce park rules and regulations. Commenters generally perceived the park as understaffed, which had a negative impact on both park management and visitor experience.

### **Topic Question 4: What did you learn from the three years of managed access pilots at Glacier? What worked well for you? What could have been better?**

## Reservations

---

Commenters noted their support or opposition for the reservation systems that have been piloted in recent years and how these strategies have affected park visits over the last few years. Commenters in support of the system felt it was effective in reducing congestion. Specifically, commenters cited improved access to parking at key destinations such as Logan Pass and reduced traffic and congestion. Some commenters in support of the reservation system noted that the reservation system was easy to use and access, although this viewpoint was not shared by all commenters. Commenters in opposition of the system noted their frustration with needing multiple reservations for the park, calling it confusing and difficult. Some commenters also expressed frustration about having to plan so far in advance (e.g., booking lodging and plane tickets) without the guarantee of obtaining road passes. Some commenters stated that some visitors hoard road passes to allow for flexible itineraries, which can limit access for others. Many commenters noted the need for flexibility in any system. Commenters provided the following suggestions regarding the reservation system:

### Type

- Timed entry. Some commenters appreciated that permits did not have a specific entry window. Additional commenters noted that timed entry would address people taking advantage of exemptions and long queues at the entrance stations and that they appreciated the effectiveness of timed entry systems at other park units. Other commenters seem to be using “timed entry” as a general term for reservations.
- Location-specific entry. Reservations currently allow entrance to distinct regions of the park. Popular locations (i.e., Going-to-the-Sun Road) should have their own reservation. Some commenters noted that the different reservation systems for different locations in the park added to the confusion and frustration of needing many different reservations to access the park and that it was difficult to get reservations for the areas they preferred to visit. Other commenters expressed support for different systems for different locations, stating that it gave them flexibility in their trip planning and allowed them to visit some part of the park even if some of the reservations were full.

- No reservations for specific areas (e.g., Apgar)
- Specific areas need to have a minimum 2-day vehicle pass to provide flexibility in the event of unforeseen circumstances such as bad weather or closures or allow for overnight hiking trips. These locations include North Fork, Many Glacier, and Two Medicine.
- Multiple reservations options (e.g., 1-day, 2-day, 3-day, etc.)

### **Timing for Summer 2024**

- Commenters provided feedback on pre-6 a.m. entry.
  - Some commenters suggested that pre-6 a.m. entry is problematic because it allows people without a reservation to enter the park, creating congestion and parking issues at popular destinations.
  - Others noted that pre-6 a.m. entry was an important element of the system to maintain, with suggestions to allow entry to those who are in line before 6 a.m.
- Commenters suggested the following:
  - Do not require reservations on Memorial Day weekend or after Labor Day
  - Do not allow entry without reservation any earlier than 4 p.m.
  - Require reservations for the entire day, suggesting that visitors will make an effort to show up outside those hours and add to crowding and congestion for visitors with reservations.

### **System**

Individual commenters suggested the park implement the following changes to the reservation system:

- Implement a deposit on reservations through recreation.gov that is refunded to the visitor when the reservation is used and forfeited if it is not
- Allow for the purchase of more than one ticket per email/sign-in to accommodate groups who require more than one vehicle
- Provide a solution to reservations being sold out within minutes of their release for visitors who cannot be online at those times due to other responsibilities
- Return to rolling release reservations

Commenters provided specific strategies that the park could implement to address these issues including the following:

- Allow for the trade of permits between family members because plans can often change.
- Allow a maximum of only two itineraries per reservation.
- Allow visitors to assign two names to a vehicle access pass to allow the same group to hike or otherwise interact with the park separately while not using multiple reservations.

## Exemptions

---

Commenters felt that the reservation system favors visitors from outside the state of Montana. Primarily commenters from Montana stated that the reservation system limits access for locals and residents by reducing spontaneity. Some commenters specifically noted that the reservation system had reduced their desire to go to the park. However, other local commenters appreciated the reservation system, mentioning benefits that included a greater quality of life outside of the park, reduced pollution and better natural resource protection, and an overall better visitor experience.

Commenters suggested that locals should be exempt from needing a reservation to access the park, and suggested the park implement a system in which locals can prove their residency in neighboring communities, counties, or the state. Other commenters suggested that motorcyclists, annual passholders, veterans, or other specific groups should be exempt from needing a vehicle reservation. Several commenters suggested the park provide locals and residents a certain number of free days of entry every year where reservations are not needed.

**Topic Question 5: The National Park Service mission calls us to ensure fair and equitable visitor access while providing high-quality experiences and protecting the park and its resources. What strategies should the National Park Service consider to achieve these goals?**

## Accessibility

---

To achieve fair and equitable visitor experiences, commenters suggested increased accessible infrastructure, including the following:

- Additional accessible trails and boardwalk paths
- Additional benches on trails for those with mobility issues or health conditions
- Installation of lower pit toilets in the backcountry to be more accessible for children
- Additional trail markers
- Additional bathrooms
- Consider private vehicle parking at Logan Pass be limited to visitors with disabilities.
- Increase accessible parking spaces parkwide

## Internet Access

---

Multiple commenters urged the park to ensure that those who may have difficulty accessing or using digital technology are still reasonably able to plan for a visit and have a high potential for park access when arriving. Some commenters noted the reservation system prevents the elderly from entering the park because older age groups often struggle with technology and changing systems. A few commenters suggested the park provide the option to secure a reservation through calling the park on the phone; keep a certain amount of reservations first-come, first-served to distribute to those who were unable to use the website; or have printed versions of the reservation process available at the park.

Additionally, some commenters noted a belief that the reservation system favors those who have a fast internet connection and free time to access the reservation site when permits are released. One commenter specifically noted that there is a pronounced inequity with broadband access on Tribal lands. Other commenters reported issues with internet access on the east side of the park. This lack of connectivity influences the ability to obtain next day reservations if staying on the east side of the park. Some commenters suggested the reservation system change to a lottery system so that obtaining a reservation does not depend on a visitor's internet speed and availability to be at the computer.

## **Language Barriers**

---

Commenters expressed their concern that the current reservation system excludes visitors who do not speak English. Additionally, commenters noted that those who do not speak English may not understand park rules and policies. These commenters emphasized that park communications should be in multiple languages to ensure all visitors have access to information.

## **Wealth Inequality**

---

Commenters noted that those with financial issues may not have access to the internet or have the available funds to make a reservation. Commenters noted that despite the low fee for access, park access still favors those with disposable income. Several commenters noted their frustration with the additional fee charged by the reservation website. Commenters suggested lowering the cost to access the park, dropping the cost entirely, discounting the cost for those with low income, and implementing a refund policy for cancellations as to not deter individuals from making reservations in the first place. Commenters also noted that wealth inequality also impacts people's ability to afford lodging within or proximal to the park, make camping reservations, and participate in concession or other fee activities in the park such as boat tours, rentals, and bus tours. As these were noted as additional ways to gain access to the park outside the reservation system, this impacts access for this user group.

**Topic Question 6: Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share? Is there anything you feel we have not covered?**

## **Amenities**

---

Commenters praised, criticized, and offered suggestions for amenities in the park. Some commenters supported the installation of dishwashing sinks at Many Glacier for washing and greywater dumping. Commenters criticized the cleanliness of park restrooms; one commenter provided suggestions to assist with this issue beyond simply cleaning the restrooms more, including creating signs asking visitors to close toilet lids, installing and leaving windows open, and providing hand sanitizer stations. Additional commenter suggestions included keeping the visitor centers open later to help visitors better access the park and providing reasonably priced food and beverage services within the park.

## **Biking/Cycling**

---

The majority of comments on cyclists suggested the need to separate cyclists from vehicles. The most prominent comments involved bicycle use on Going-to-the-Sun Road. Commenters suggested that cycling on the Going-to-the-Sun Road should be restricted to times that the road is not open to vehicle traffic in order to increase driver and cyclist safety. In contrast, other commenters requested the park expand bicycle access to Going-to-the-Sun Road by closing the road to vehicles during certain times or days.

In addition, many commenters suggested the park enforce various limitations on cyclists. One commenter requested that the park prohibit cyclists on all roadways during the day for car/cyclist safety. Commenters suggested the park prohibit cyclists in the park during the peak season. Commenters suggested limiting cycling access to specific parts of Going-to-the-Sun Road during peak season.

## **Boating**

---

Some commenters requested the park prohibit all motorized vessels on lakes in the park, and stated that motorized boat noise disturbs other visitors and wildlife, and the oil and gas they use can damage water quality. One commenter discussed the boat inspections at Two Medicine, stating that the new boat inspection station located outside the park is inconvenient and increases traffic, congestion, and emissions. The commenter requested the park move boat inspections back to the ranger station at the entrance to the campground.

## **Camping**

---

Many commenters expressed concerns with campground reservations, particularly the number of camping reservations that go unused. Commenters shared their frustration at campsites being empty despite camping reservations being sold out, because no-shows take up a site others could be using. Commenters requested a more robust cancellation policy for campsite reservations, including fees or fines for cancelling, or penalties for cancellations, including not being able to book another reservation for a certain amount of time. Commenters requested the park implement a way to release campground sites not occupied by a certain time. A few commenters suggested that the park automatically cancel a permit if the visitor does not arrive on the first day; and then offer the remaining days in the reservation on a first-come, first-served basis.

In addition, some commenters provided general suggestions to improve the overall camping experience. One commenter suggested the park lower the campground reservation limit from two weeks to five to seven days to allow more visitors to camp in the park. One commenter suggested the park should have more than one camp host in each campground to always have someone on site to help visitors.

## **Reservations and Park Access**

---

Commenters suggested a variety of options for reservation systems and access to the park including:

- Restricted public access to the park during two 60-day periods annually
- Limiting access to certain locations in the park during certain times
- Providing shuttle-only access to high use areas in the park

## **Cellular/Wi-Fi**

---

Some commenters expressed their opposition to improvements to cellular service or Wi-Fi in the park, stating that because the park is natural and remote by nature, visitors should not be spending time on their phones. In contrast, other commenters requested improved cellular service and Wi-Fi for safety/emergencies and to better access park resources. Several commenters noted that proper internet is necessary if utilizing a reservation system at the park.

## **Cultural Resources**

---

Commenters praised the park's inclusion of Tribes in their decision making. Commenters requested the park continue to prioritize access and employment for Indigenous people when creating park policy. Commenters specifically discussed how changes to the park can impact the local Tribes and how Tribes should be made collaborators in applicable park efforts.

## **Enforcement**

---

Commenters requested the park implement stronger enforcement of park rules, including rules for inappropriate trail and campground behavior including pets on trails as well as bicycling and vehicle use. Many commenters were primarily concerned with visitor behavior on trails, and how behavior (i.e., littering, disturbing wildlife, pet violations, destruction of property, and leaving designated paths) was handled. Commenters stated that a greater ranger presence at the more popular areas would deter visitors who break the rules from robbing others of a peaceful and fun visit. Commenters also stated that park rangers should be utilized more efficiently, with more focus on addressing violations rather than managing or directing parking lot use.

## **Entrance Stations**

---

Some commenters suggested increasing entrance fees.

Commenters also provided suggestions on how to improve wait times and congestion at entrance stations. Suggestions included:

- License plate readers/reservation number reader
- Express lane(s) for shuttles, permit holders, or those with reservations
- Carpooling incentives, such as reduced fees

Some commenters suggested the park consider moving the location of the reservation check point for car reservations on the west side to another location within the park. Suggestions for a new location included east of Lake McDonald Lodge, near the Apgar picnic area, and Avalanche. One commenter suggested that this move would allow visitors to access Apgar and Lake McDonald Lodge without requiring a car reservation, increase the use of the current park shuttle system, address issues with Apgar vendors who have expressed concerns with reduced



foot traffic since the implementation of the reservation system, minimize traffic in West Glacier that currently impedes local residents from accessing their homes, restore access to Polebridge and North Fork region, and provide a check point for access to Going-to-the-Sun Road for increased control of location-specific congestion.

## **Exemptions**

---

Many commenters requested that the park provide some form of exemption from reservations for locals/residents. Some commenters found it disheartening that locals were no longer able to utilize the park the same way as in the past, including the ability to take spontaneous trips. Some commenters defined “locals” as residents of the state, while others defined them as residents within a certain mileage of the park, in certain nearby counties, or in a certain zip code.

Some commenters stated that the park could determine a visitor’s local status through the zip code on their identification card or by license plate. Commenters suggested several ways to facilitate local visitors without requiring a reservation, including implementing “locals only” days or weekends, providing a pass to locals or a “locals punch card” with a certain number of free days per month, creating a yearly pass only sold to locals, and retaining a certain number of reservations for local residents only. Some commenters requested the park allow locals to visit at any time, while other commenters felt that local residents should not get special treatment regarding reservations and should be required to plan ahead just like any other visitor.

In addition to exemptions for locals, commenters also requested reservation exemptions for employees who work in the park (i.e., concessionaires and guides), individuals with special circumstances who are not able to guarantee their time off (i.e., first responders), visitors with America the Beautiful passes or visitors who contribute to the park, guests in local hotels, veterans, and people with disabilities.

## **Going-to-the-Sun Road**

---

Commenters expressed concerns with future policies or changes to Going-to-the-Sun Road and suggested the following:

- Implement one-way traffic on alternating days during peak hours
- Install guard rails to improve safety
- Close off the road during peak season to personal vehicles and only allow shuttles
- Create more short loop trails along the road to help break up congestion in the more popular areas
- Open the road earlier in the year and keep it open later to expand visitor access options
- Provide more pullouts along the road to reduce the number of visitors holding up traffic by slowing down to admire the views
- Move to shuttles only because of deterioration of the road and the effects of wildlife.

## **Incentivizing Off Times and Seasons**

---

Commenters requested the park implement incentives to promote visitor use of times and days outside of peak times and seasons. One commenter suggested promotions for off-season

activities, such as fall leaves, spring wildflowers, and winter snowshoeing or Nordic skiing. Another commenter suggested that more of the park should remain open in the winter.

## **Natural Resources**

---

Commenters requested the park consider new ways to improve the park's impact to nature and visitor health, including moving to battery-powered campground maintenance equipment, controlling noxious weeds like knapweed and toadflax, and no longer using rotenone in lakes when introducing fish.

## **Prohibit Personal Vehicles**

---

Several commenters requested the park consider completely prohibiting personal vehicles from the park and making the park a shuttle-only area. Other commenters suggested limiting personal vehicles of certain lengths or widths, including campers, and restricting personal vehicle use to specific areas, such as restricting them from the alpine portion of the park.

## **Parking**

---

Commenters noted that one of the biggest deterrents from visiting the park was parking. To help combat parking congestion, commenters suggested the park invest in additional parking facilities in or outside the park, expand current parking lots, expand parking availability on the sides of the roads, or implement fees to park at more popular locations. Commenters suggested limiting parking at Logan Pass to an hour or less to keep visitors cycling through the area and requiring visitors to take a shuttle to the area for longer hikes. One commenter suggested not allowing visitors into the park without a reservation before 6 a.m. because a large amount of parking is already occupied by late morning for visitors who do have reservations.

Additionally, some commenters requested the park create or expand dedicated horse trailer parking at the trailheads, specifically at Red Eagle Lake, Cracker Lake, and Poia Lake.

## **Programs**

---

Commenters expressed support for the use of park programs, particularly the night sky programs. One commenter requested the park provide their night sky program tickets online rather than only in the park. Commenters also suggested new programs for the park, including Blackfeet entertainment at park lodges, campfire talks at the campground or amphitheaters, and off-season programs. One commenter suggested an informal program that would allow people to donate bear spray and other park equipment for use by other visitors.

## **Safety**

---

Commenters provided several suggestions for the park to increase safety for their visitors, including:

- Clearing out underbrush to prevent fires
- Reducing the speed limit from 45 miles per hour to 35 miles per hour due to dense trees, wildlife, and cyclist and hiker presence

- Installing signs with information about wildlife danger and the need for bear spray
- Re-installing the West Glacier stoplight
- Keeping the roads closed from midnight to 6 a.m. for the protection of wildlife

## **Survey Question**

---

One commenter suggested the following additional questions the park should ask the public: Do you recreate on any other federal land in the area? If so, has that experience changed in the past several years? Do you have any suggestions for things that the NPS might learn from other agencies?

## **Socioeconomics**

---

Commenters discussed the socioeconomic impacts of park management choices on surrounding businesses. Several commenters who run businesses in the area noted that the changes to the park, particularly the reservation system, has negatively impacted their revenue. One commenter who runs an Airbnb in the area noted that over the last three years, guests have opted to visit the park less and less. The commenter further stated that fewer guests use their Airbnb now than in past years. Another commenter who owns and operates several small businesses in the area explained the negative impact that the reservation system has had on their businesses, including loss of revenue, lowering of rates, not hiring as many employees, and even keeping one of their businesses closed over the summer. In contrast, several commenters noted that private business profit should not be prioritized over resource degradation and public visitor experience at the park.

## **Visitor Education**

---

Commenters urged the park to enhance/increase education to park visitors regarding the general use of the park. Commenters stated that any visitors who enter the park should be required to read general rules, answer questions about the park rules, or watch a video on park rules. One commenter suggested placing signage at trailheads explaining these rules. Another commenter suggested including a mandatory video to online purchases. One commenter suggested shuttles could play recorded messages about these topics. The topics commenters requested the park include in these educational tools included animal interactions, trail etiquette, proper protocol for human waste and trash, and Leave No Trace.

## **Website**

---

Several commenters voiced their frustration with both the park website and with recreation.gov. Commenters noted that the park website did not provide enough notice about the new reservation system. Some commenters noted that while the desktop website more clearly displayed notification of the need for a reservation, the notice was less visible on the NPS App and mobile site (e.g., on tablets or smartphones) and could be missed. Several commenters explained how they were turned away from the park due to not seeing any information about the need for a reservation online.

Many commenters stated that they were opposed to NPS using recreation.gov for reservations in general because it is a private company that charges additional fees. Commenters provided suggestions regarding recreation.gov, such as discontinuing its use for a new NPS-operated website or requesting recreation.gov to update the website to accommodate more users and improve user experience.