



## Memo To File

### A. Project Information

**Park Name:** Rocky Mountain National Park  
**PEPC Project Number:** 112708  
**Project Title:** Pilot Timed-Entry Permit System 2023  
**Project Location:**  
**County, State:** Boulder, Colorado  
**County, State:** Grand, Colorado  
**County, State:** Larimer, Colorado

**Project Leader:** John Hannon

### B. Description of the Current Action (Project Description)

Rock Mountain National Park plans to implement a pilot timed entry permit system in 2024 (TEPS 5). The pilot will be the same as 2023 (TEPS 4) with one minor change: the rest of the park reservation system ends one week earlier than as piloted in 2023, ending on October 15, 2024. The Bear Lake Road Corridor timed entry reservation system will continue through Sunday, October 20, 2024, consistent with TEPS 4. This memo confirms that the project description, environmental analysis, and justifications documented in Pilot Timed-Entry Permit System 2023 (PEPC 112708) are accurate and adequate for the proposed 2024 pilot.

#### Pilot Timed-Entry Permit System 2023 (PEPC 112708) (Project Description)

Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) is managing for significant increases in visitation. Visitation to ROMO has grown dramatically in recent years, increasing from fewer than 3 million visits in 2010 to a peak of 4.6 million visits per year in 2019, making ROMO the third most visited national park in the country that year. Visitors experience a high level of congestion in many areas of the park from late May through October. Rapid growth in day use visitation has impacted natural and cultural resources, diminished the quality of the visitor experience, increased visitor and staff safety concerns, and created a heavy strain on the park's facilities and staff ability to perform daily operations.

To help address these issues, the park piloted temporary timed-entry permit systems (TEPS) in 2020, 2021, and 2022 as part of a public use limitation to maintain public health and safety (see PEPC 96659 for 2020/2021; PEPC 106478 for 2022). ROMO will pilot TEPS again in 2023 as a temporary day use visitor management strategy while the long-range Day Use Visitor Access Strategy is being completed. Each iteration of TEPS had adjustments to the system, including targeted parking capacity percentages, area-specific management of the Bear Lake Road Corridor, and changes to the percentages of permit release time and dates.

All the TEPS pilots provided for advanced daily reservations for private vehicles. Common to all temporary pilots, reservations are made through recreation.gov, cost \$2 per day, and are released one month in advance, with at least 10% of reservations being held for sale one or two days before the visitation date (the number of reservations released the night before has increased each year, see below for details on the percentage). The booking system is for arrivals, in blocks of two hours. There is no length-of-stay requirement; visitors may leave the park at any time. Park entrance passes are required in addition to a reservation.

Traffic and parking data from previous years inform park management of temporary TEPS pilots. The park continues to experiment with temporary pilot solutions to test their ability to protect resources and improve the overall visitor experience

while taking into consideration the existing operational capacity and staffing. Below is an overview of Pilot TEPS (2020-2022):

- TEPS 1 (2020) targeted approximately 60% parking capacity or estimated 4,800 vehicles/13,500 visitors per day. TEPS 1 required one parkwide permit from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m. from June 4 to October 13, 2020. The park made 10% of reservations available two days before.

- TEPS 2 (2021) targeted approximately 75 to 85% parking capacity or 6,250 vehicles/17,500 visitors per day. TEPS 2 utilized two permit systems: one for the Bear Lake Road Corridor from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m. and one for rest of park (excluding the Bear Lake Road Corridor) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. This system was implemented May 28 through October 11, 2021. The park made 25% of reservations available the day before.

- TEPS 3 (2022) targeted approximately 90% of parking and transit capacity or 7,200 vehicles/20,000 visitors per day. TEPS 3 continued to utilize two permits: one for the Bear Lake Road Corridor (from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m.) and a rest of park permit system (excluding the Bear Lake Road Corridor, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.). This system was implemented May 27 through October 10, 2022. The Hiker Shuttle and Park and Ride Shuttle were fully operational. All visitors were still required to have a timed-entry permit and park pass. The park made 30% of reservations available the day before.

The park will pilot a number of modifications during TEPS 4 (2023). TEPS 4 provides the same 90% of parking and transit capacity as TEPS 3. The rest of park permit timeframe will be from 9 a.m. and end one hour earlier at 2 p.m.; the Bear Lake Road Corridor permit times will remain the same (5 a.m. to 6 p.m.). TEPS 4 will also increase the number of reservations released for purchase the night before to 40% (from 30% in 2022). The park is planning to extend the end of the reservation season based on visitation data collected in October 2022. Timed-entry permits would be required from May 26 to October 22, 2023, an additional twelve days over previous pilots.

Reservations will continue to be available at Recreation.gov, cost \$2, and be released one month in advance. The park will implement solutions to improve visitors' ability to purchase reservations the day-of at the park and/or in the local area if there are reservations available. Ideas include offering public access computers and printers at visitor centers when reservations are available, although this is dependent on NPS access policies and improving Wi-Fi connectivity. In addition, the park continues to work with Recreation.gov to improve their check-out procedure. The park is adjusting the re-entry policy for TEPS reservation holders. This policy will address issues with visitors checking in during their reservation window only to leave immediately after, returning at a more personally preferred time, thus defeating the purpose of the timed-entry system that is piloted to reduce congestion at peak times. This policy will only apply to Bear Lake Road Corridor permits, and the park may experiment with different re-entry times.

This year, park staff will pilot a robust monitoring program to test the efficacy of temporary pilot visitor use management strategies in meeting park goals and desired conditions. This program builds upon ongoing methods of data collection but implements more specific and long-term methods to monitor conditions.

Park staff, park residents (including private in-holders) and authorized guests, tribal members (non-recreational, traditional use), wilderness and front country campers with a reservation are exempt from the TEPS. Commercial Use Authorizations (CUA), Special Use Permits (SUP), Concessioners and Commercial Tours do not need timed-entry permits for their trips into the park; their permitted use is accounted for in the overall reservation system and constitutes less than 3% of park visitation. Park staff, at their discretion, may issue waivers to park visitors who experience bona fide technology barriers or challenges that prevent them from utilizing TEPS.

Piloting TEPS is intended to inform a long-term Day Use Visitor Access Strategy that follows the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council Framework. The park engaged the public and various stakeholders in this long-term planning process in 2021, holding virtual meetings and an open comment period as part of this pre-NEPA project (see PEPC 100042). ROMO will engage the public, tribes, and stakeholders on various day use visitor management strategies during Winter 2022/23. This process will include opportunities for the public to attend in-person and virtual meetings on long-term visitor use management and to comment on visitor use management strategies through PEPC. Pilots are intended to experiment and inform the long-term planning process and to test and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies.

**C. Description of Previous Compliance Documentation**

**Decision Document Name:** Pilot Timed-Entry Permit System 2023

**Decision Document PEPC ID:** 112708

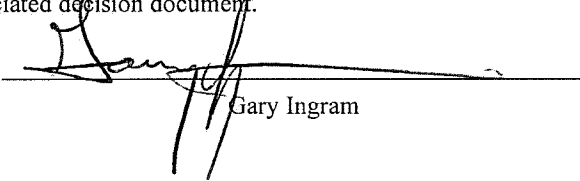
**Decision Document Approval Date:** December 15, 2022

**D. Notes**

**E. 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.

**Superintendent:**

  
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Gary Ingram

**Date:**

8 Nov 2023