Rocky Mountain National Park

Long Range Planning – Day Use Visitor Access Strategy

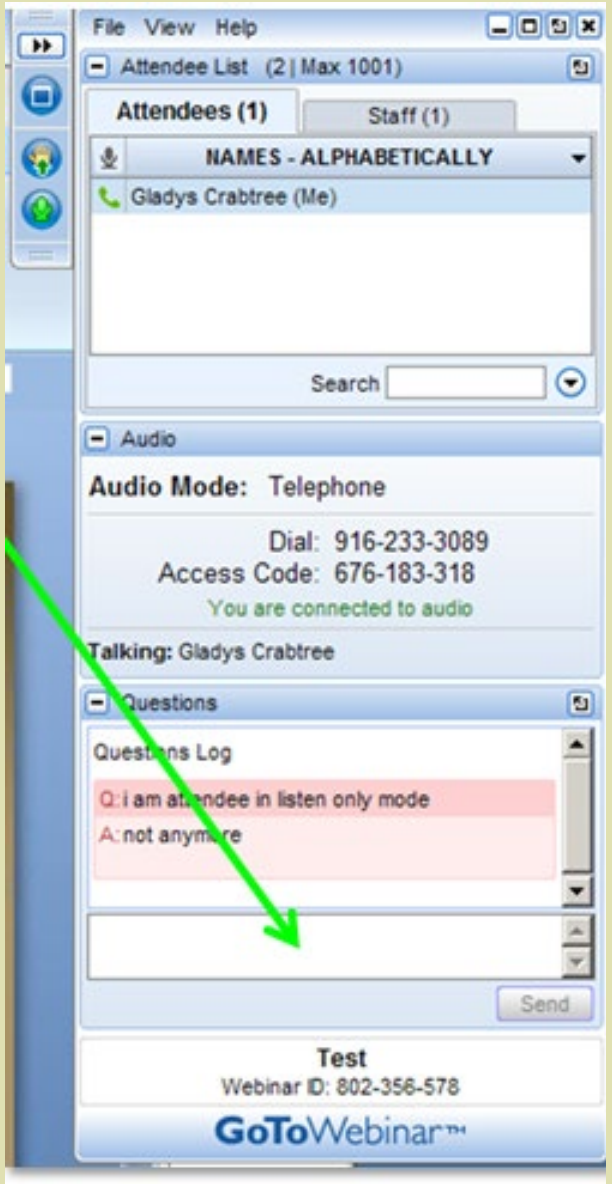
Welcome – Today's Agenda

- Webinar/Meeting Logistics
- Opening Remarks and Staff Introductions
- Presentation – Key Issues, Desired Conditions, and Conceptual Strategies
- Question and Answer Session

Live captioning is available via the link in the chat box

Go-To Webinar Control Panel – Submitting Questions

- As an attendee, you will be in listen-only mode during the webinar
- Type your questions at any time during the webinar into the Questions Box in the Control Panel
- Questions will be answered verbally at the end of the presentation, as time allows



Questions and Making Formal Comments

- To provide comments on the project, please visit the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) site at: https://parkplanning.nps.gov/ROMO_Duvas
- Follow the link for this project and click "Open for Comment"
  - Comment period begins May 21, 2021
  - Comments must be received by July 19, 2021

Questions or comments submitted during this webinar will not be considered formal comments on the project

Welcome

Thank you for joining us for the Virtual Civic Engagement Meeting on the Rocky Mountain National Park Day Use Visitor Access Strategy

Introductions

Rocky Mountain National Park Staff

- Darla Sidles – Superintendent
- John Hannon - Management Specialist - Visitor Use Planning
- Kyle Patterson - Management Specialist/Public Affairs Officer
- Cheri Yost – Park Planner

Other NPS Staff

- Doug Wetmore – Project Manager, Environmental Quality Division
- Rachel Collins – Project Manager, Denver Service Center, Visitor Use Management

NPS Mission

"...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

---National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C. §1

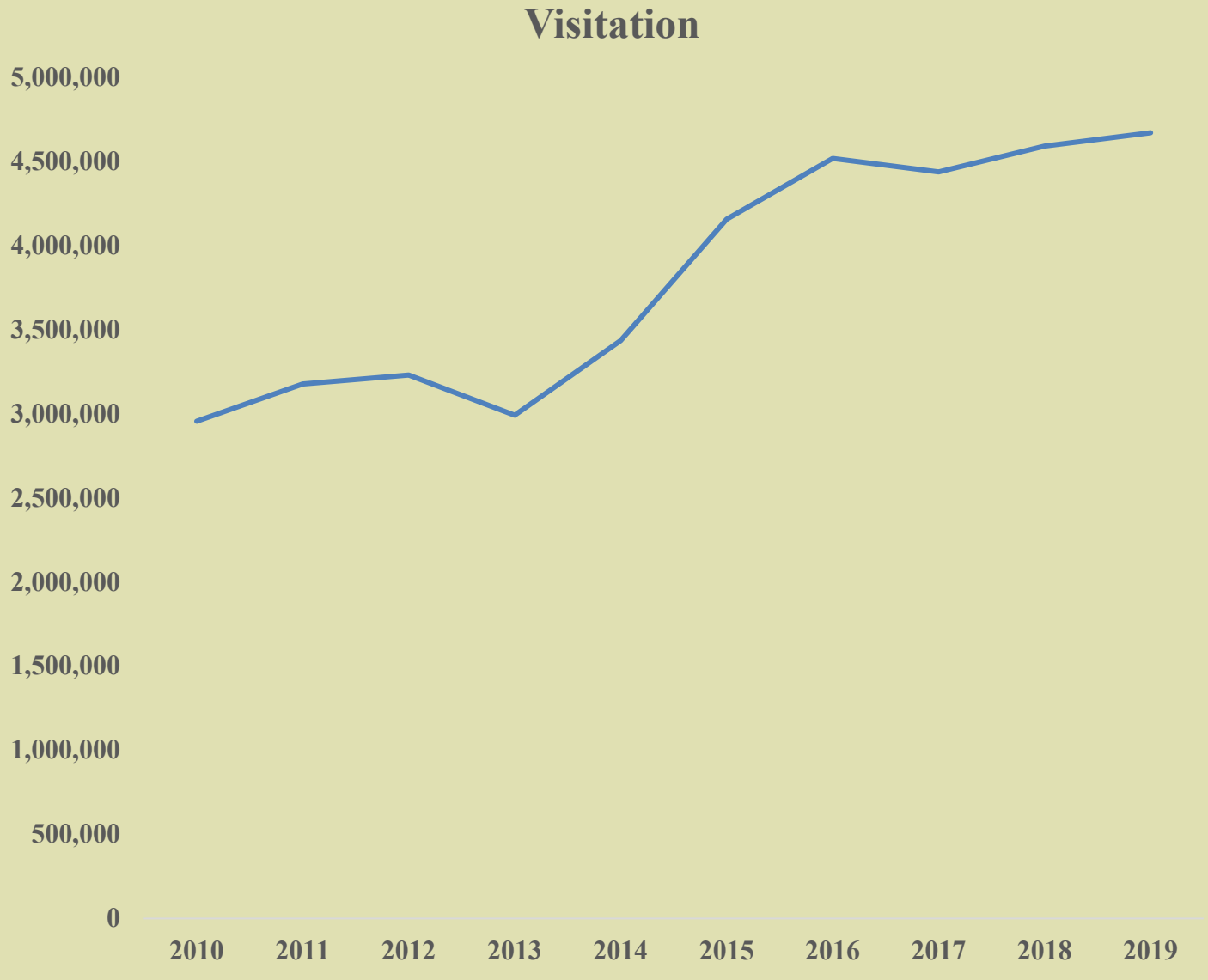
Purpose and Planning Process

The purpose of the Rocky Mountain National Park Day Use Visitor Access Strategy is to provide visitor access in a way that enhances the protection of the fundamental resources and values for which the park was created. The goal of the process is to identify strategies that will help protect park resources, offer varied opportunities for high-quality visitor experiences, enhance visitor and staff safety, and coincide with the park's operational capacity.

Day Use Visitor Access Strategy Planning Tenets

- Park natural and cultural resources
- Staff and visitor safety
- Visitor experience
- Park operational capacity

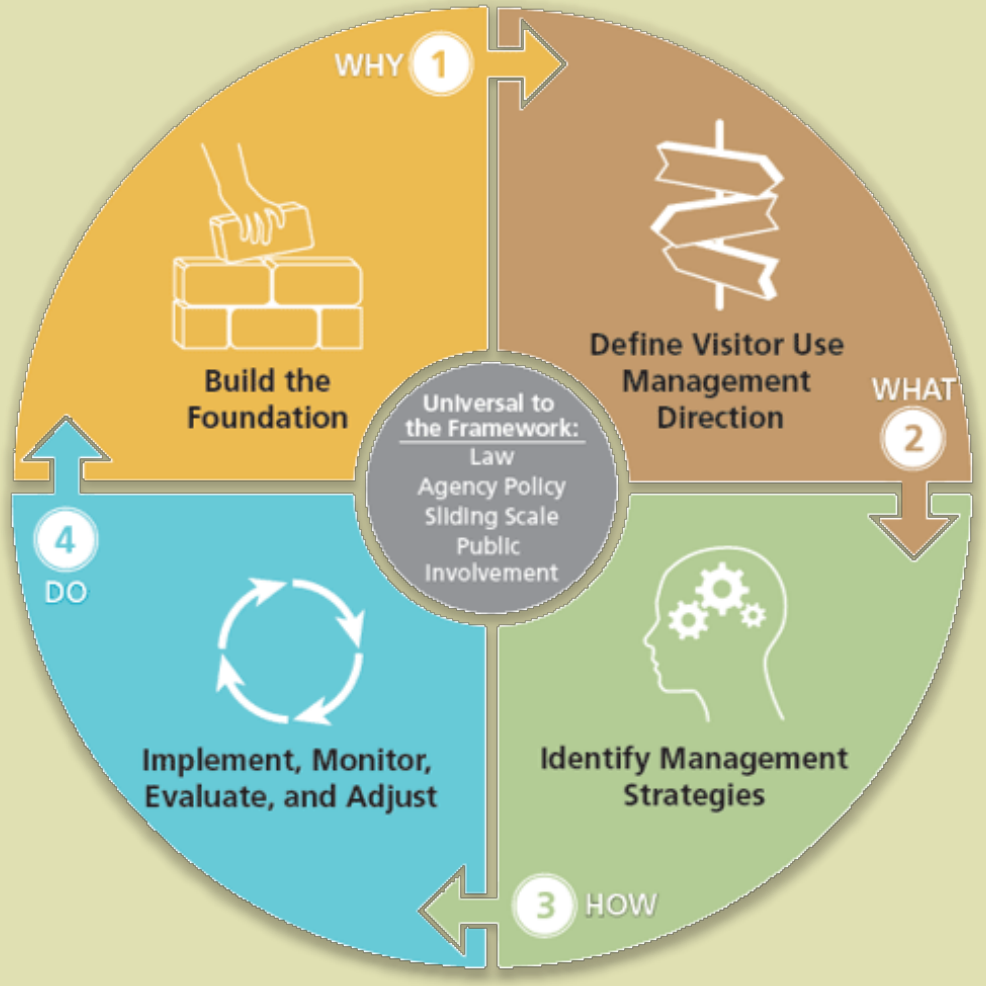
Rocky Mountain National Park



Recent Visitation

- 2019 was record visitation, with 4.6 million visitors, a 44% increase since 2012
- July, the most visited month, experienced a record 976,042 visitors
- June through July had 1.6 million visitors
- June through September had 3.2 million visitors
- The park was the third most visited national park in 2019 and fourth in 2020, even with Covid, timed entry, and fires

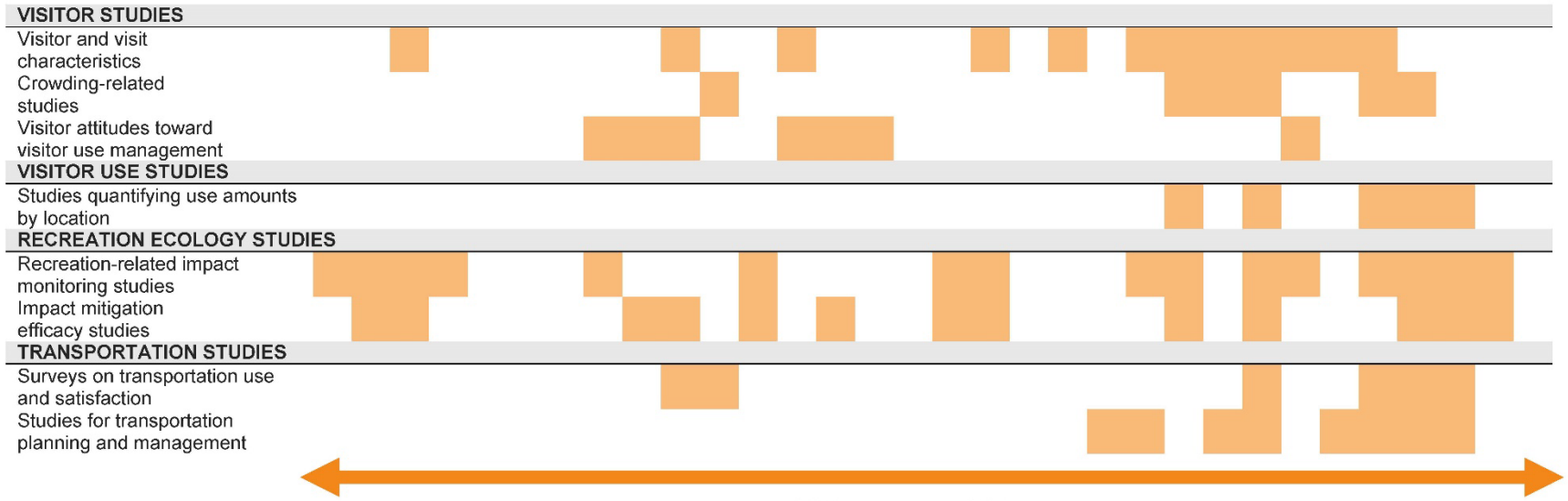
Interagency Visitor Use Management Framework



10 YEARS
INTERAGENCY VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
— ESTABLISHED 2011 —

Rocky Mountain National Park

Timeline of Visitor Use Management Social Science Research



Note: Dates ranges are approximate.

THE EARLY YEARS

Social science research on recreation in RMNP largely begins in the 1960s. Much of this research includes the first documentation of recreation impacts to environmental resources.
Key references include:

- Willard and Marr, 1963
- Brickler, 1969

THE BACKPACKING BOOM

During and following the backpacking boom of the 1970s, social science research expanded to include visitor attitudes about management and transportation. This shift reflects implementation of the backcountry overnight permit and shuttle bus system.
Key references include:

- Fazio, 1974
- Willard and Marr, 1974
- Trahan, 1977
- Henderson, 1983

THE EARLY MODERN ERA

From the late 1980s the middle of the 2000s, social science research diversified and became more systematic. These efforts included the first coordinated quantification visitor use on trails and research specifically designed to inform transportation planning.
Key references include:

- Biedleman, 1988
- Valdez, 1996
- Vaske, et al., 2002
- Bates, et al., 2006
- Wallace, et al., 2006

RECENT YEARS

Recent research integrates social science, recreation ecology, and transportation planning with quantitative, model-based methods.
Key references include:

- Taylor and Grandjean, 2009
- Newman, et al., 2010
- Lawson, et al., 2011
- Lawson, et al., 2016

Key Issues

- Visitor-created trails and trail widening throughout the park impact natural resources, cultural resources, and wayfinding

Key Issues

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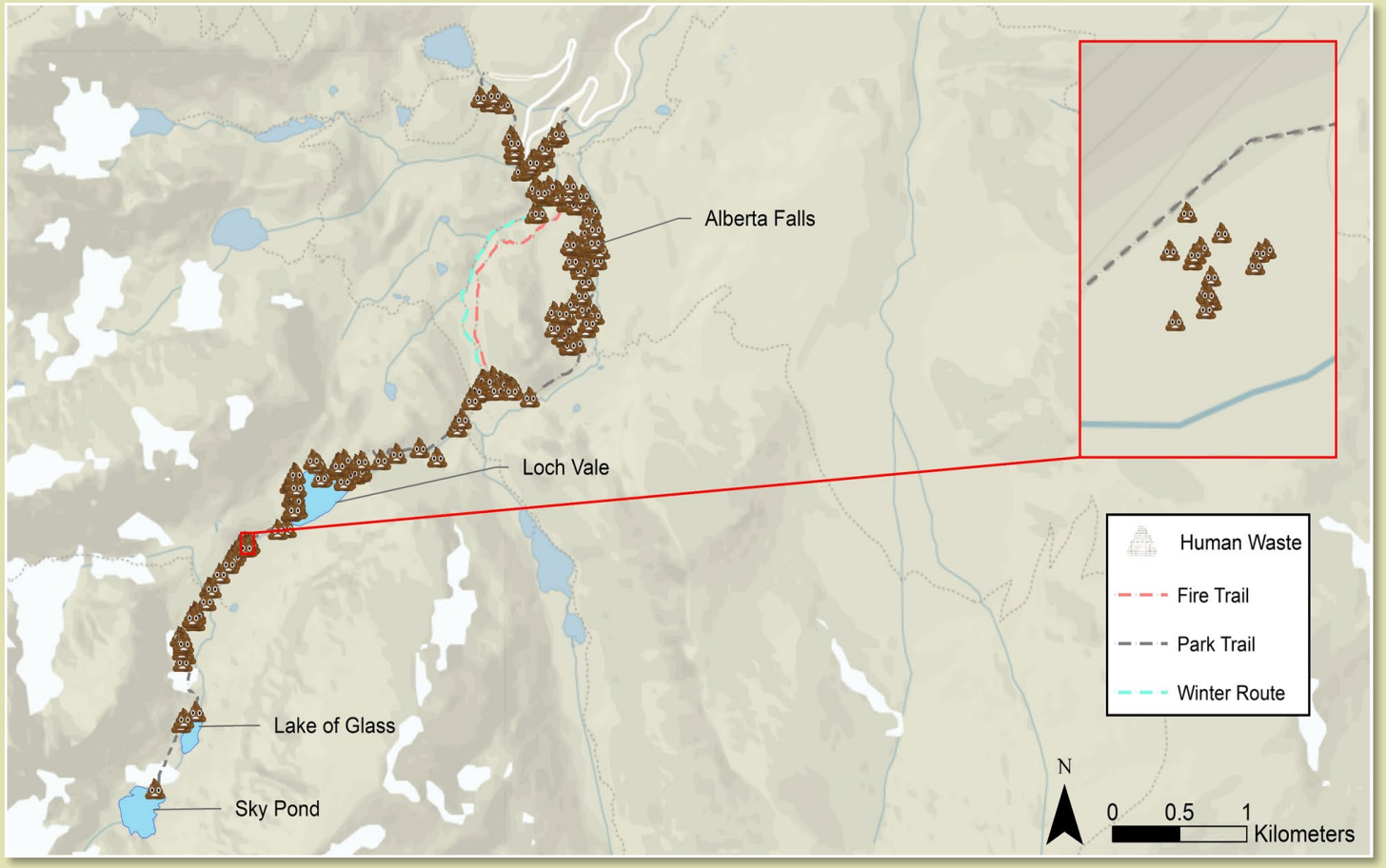
Key Issues

- Increasingly, human waste is found just off trail, which impacts soil, water quality, and the visitor experience



Key Issues

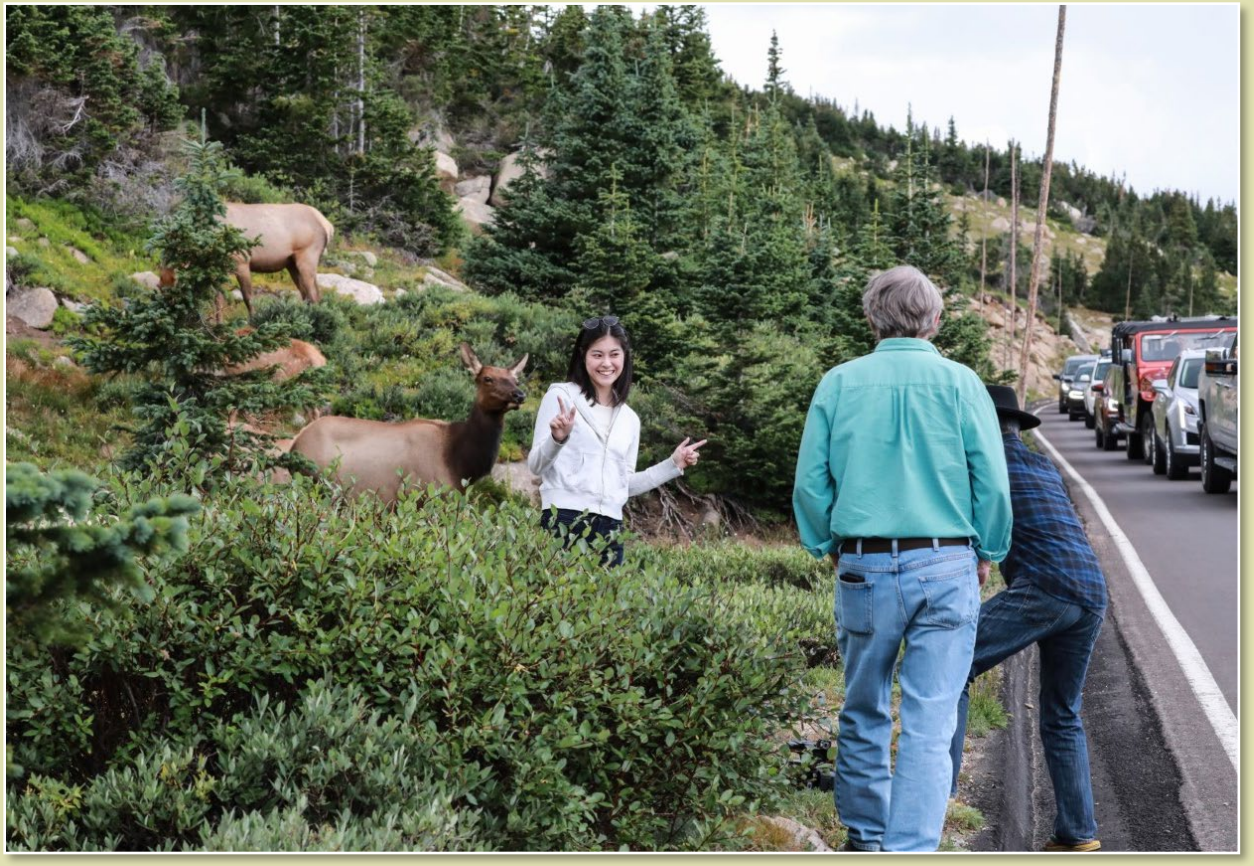
- Increasing numbers of vehicles contribute to air quality issues as well as illegal roadside parking, causing direct impacts on resources

- Periods of high visitor use lead to traffic and parking congestion, delays at entrance stations and shuttle stops, and displacement of visitors from their primary destinations

Key Issues

- Increasing numbers of vehicles and visitors throughout the park impact wildlife movement, migration, and breeding

Key Issues



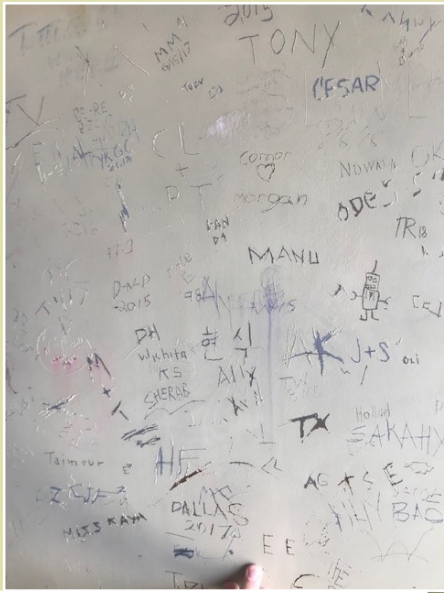
Key Issues

- Higher visitation results in conflicting uses in the same or adjacent areas, difficulty in accessing preferred destinations, and impacts on Wilderness and other recreation values

- During periods of high visitor use and congestion, visitors' frustration levels increase, leading to hostile interactions between visitors and park staff

Key Issues

- Higher visitation results in excessive wear and tear on facilities, decreased staff ability to maintain restrooms in a timely manner, and higher water use and wastewater generation than systems can support



Key Issues

- Higher visitation along with increased traffic volumes impede park staff's ability to provide basic park functions such as interpretive programs, daily maintenance, and emergency response

Key Issues

- Increased visitor use results in increased incidences of illegal campfires

Desired Conditions - Definition

- Desired conditions are statements of aspiration that describe resource conditions, visitor experiences and opportunities, and facilities and services for an area
- Wilderness Designation (95% of the park) provides the first set of desired conditions – characteristics such as: pristine, natural conditions, opportunity for solitude, unconfined recreation, and untrammeled

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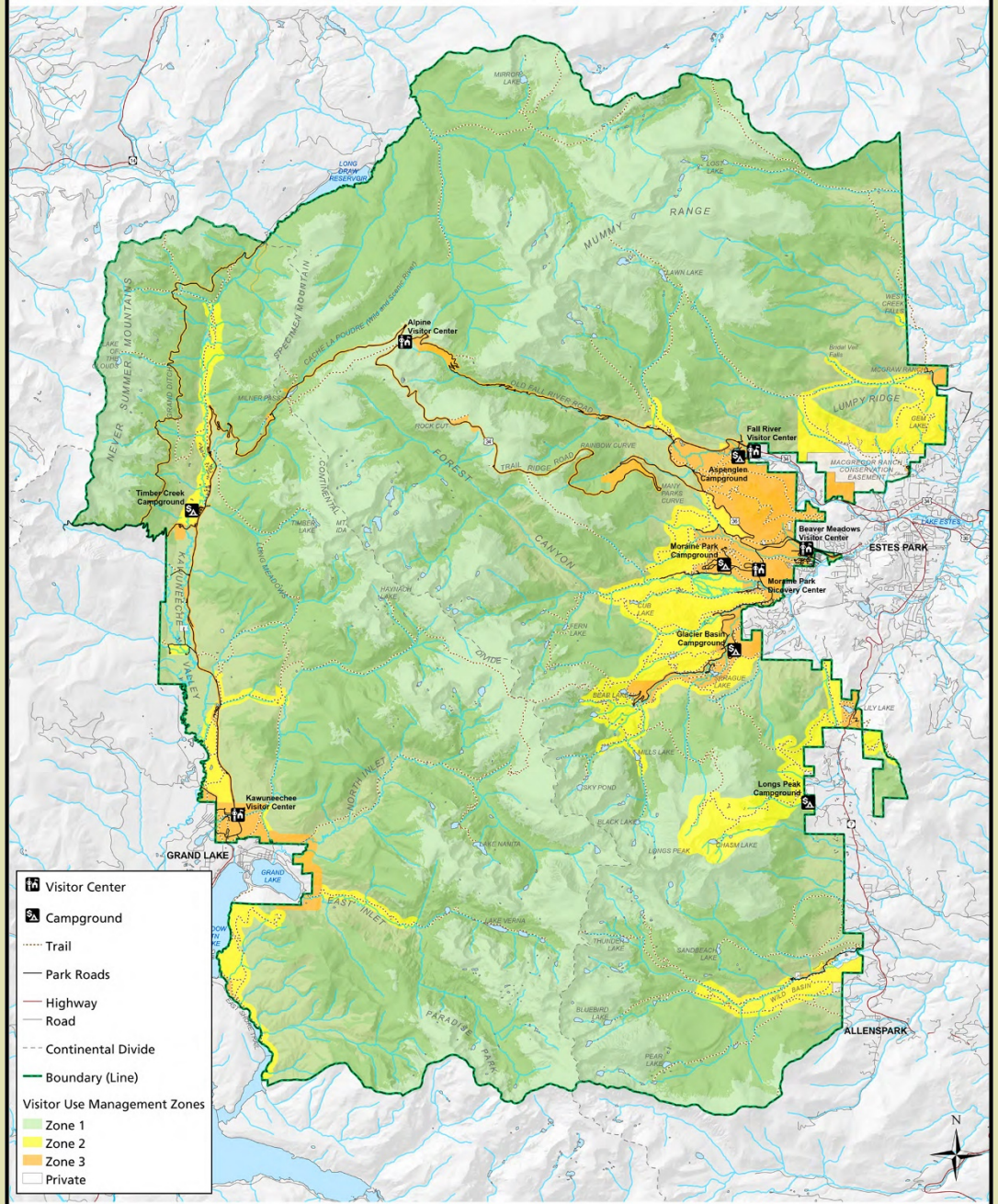
Proposed Visitor Use Management Zones

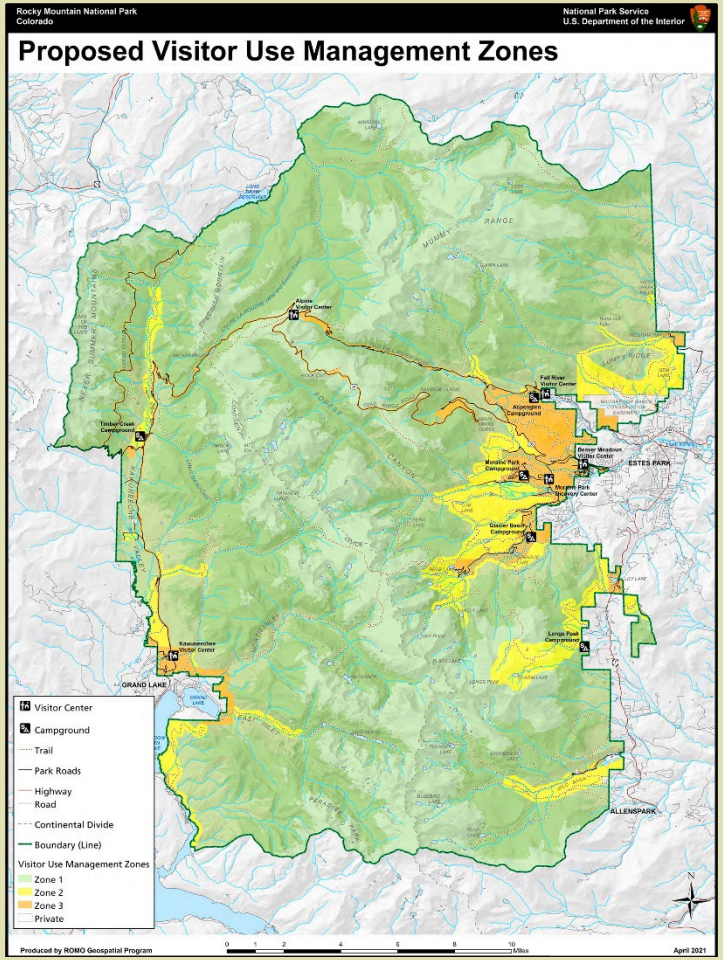


Produced by ROMO Geospatial Program

April 2021

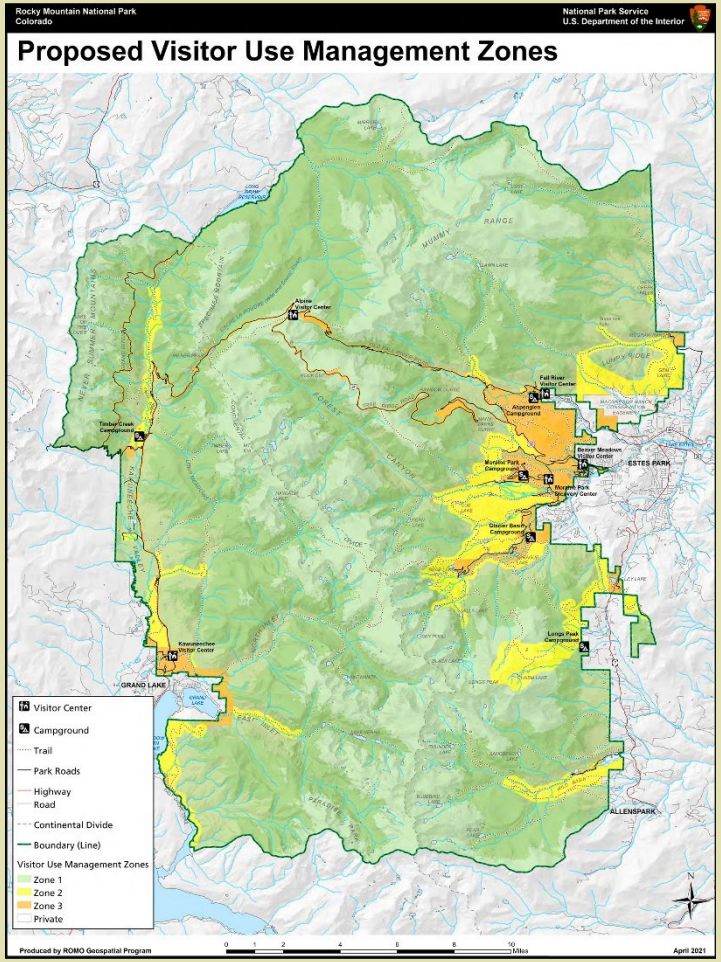
Desired Conditions (Attributes) – Zone 1

- Zone 1 is all in designated Wilderness
- This zone has low trail traffic and encounter rates
- Natural landscapes and Wilderness character are emphasized to the greatest extent



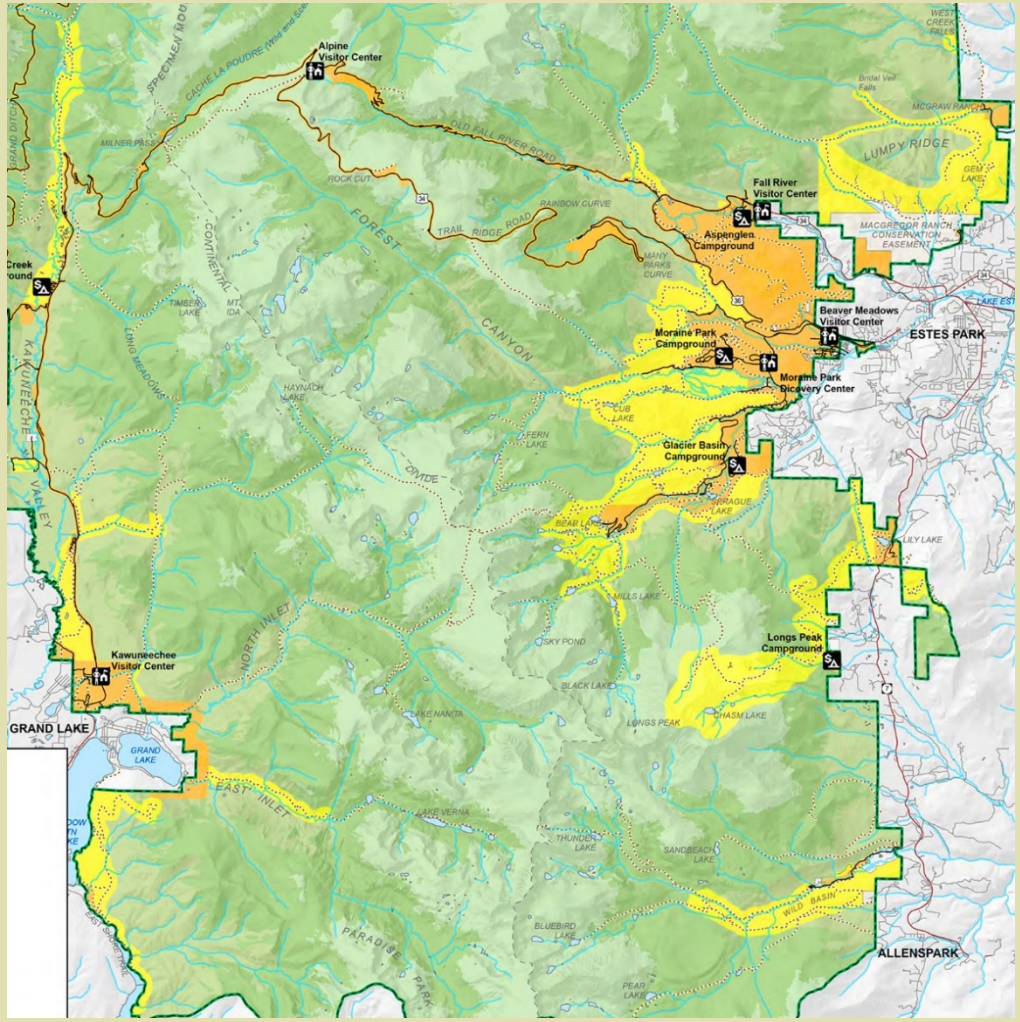
Desired Conditions (Attributes) – Zone 1

- This zone provides outstanding to moderate opportunities for solitude and self-reliance
- Ecological systems are substantially free from the influence of modern interventions
- Zone 1 consists of minimally maintained designated trails and cross-country routes



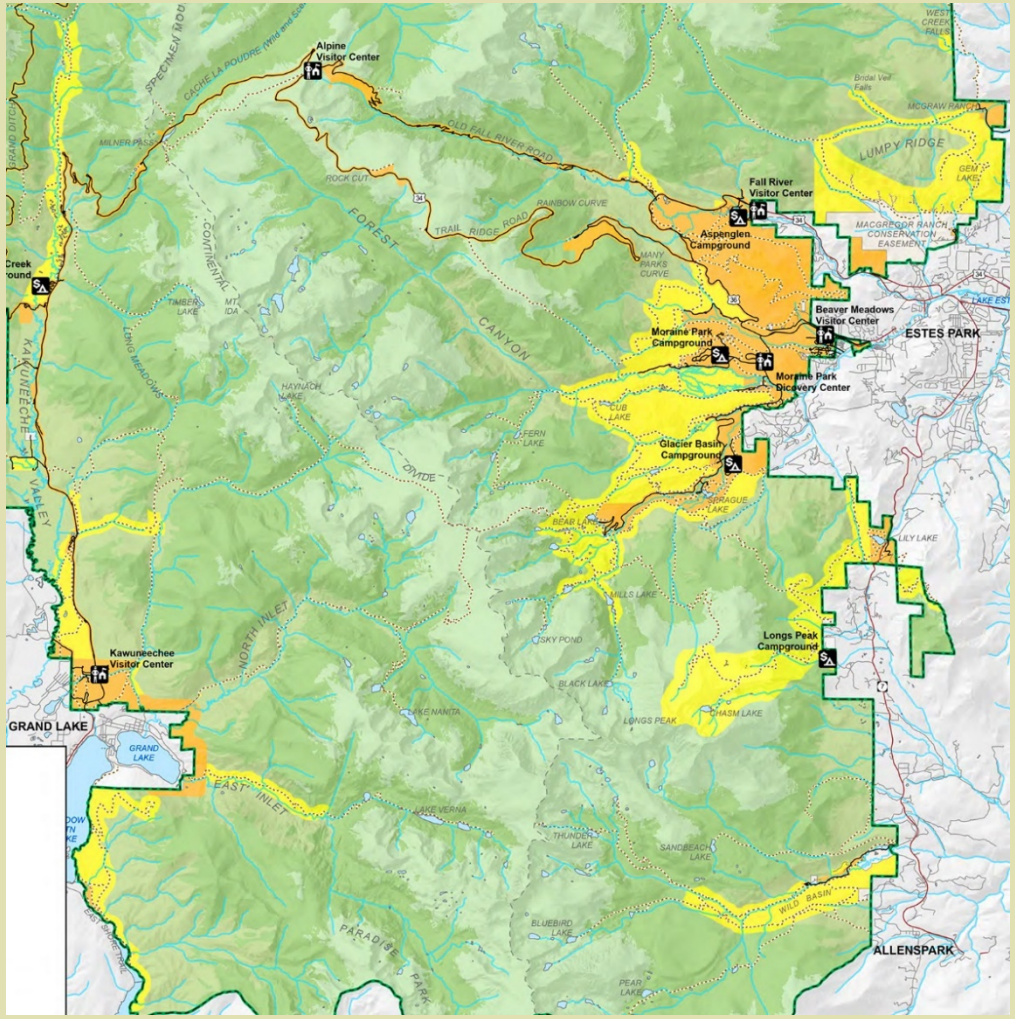
Desired Conditions (Attributes)– Zone 2

- Zone 2 is all in designated Wilderness
- This zone has moderate trail traffic and encounter rates
- A multitude of trail and destination options give visitors a wide variety of recreational opportunities closer to park facilities while still providing for some opportunities for solitude and lower human impact

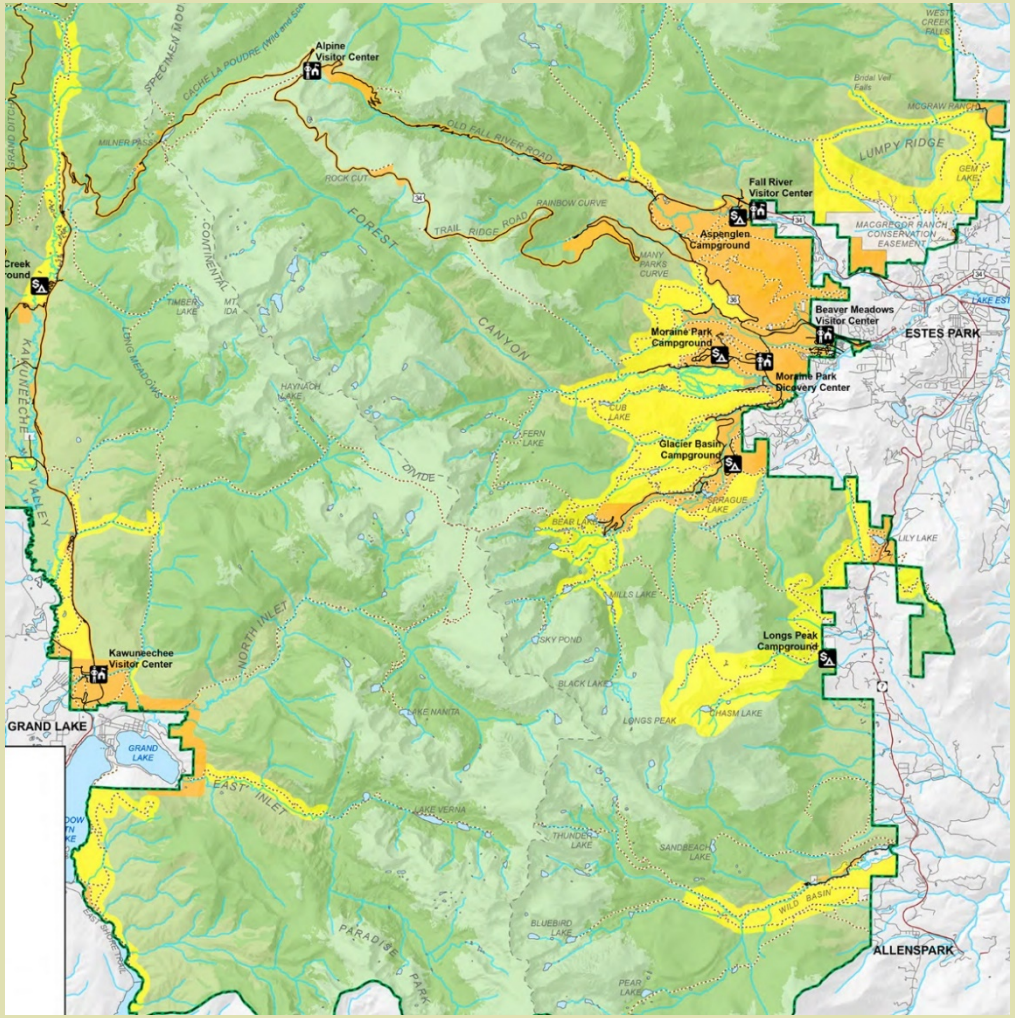


Desired Conditions (Attributes)– Zone 2

- Natural landscapes and resources are moderately managed to ensure visitor safety and optimize resource protection
- Visitors are more likely to encounter park staff on trails, and response times for emergencies are likely quicker
- Zone 2 generally includes formal trail corridors and trail infrastructure

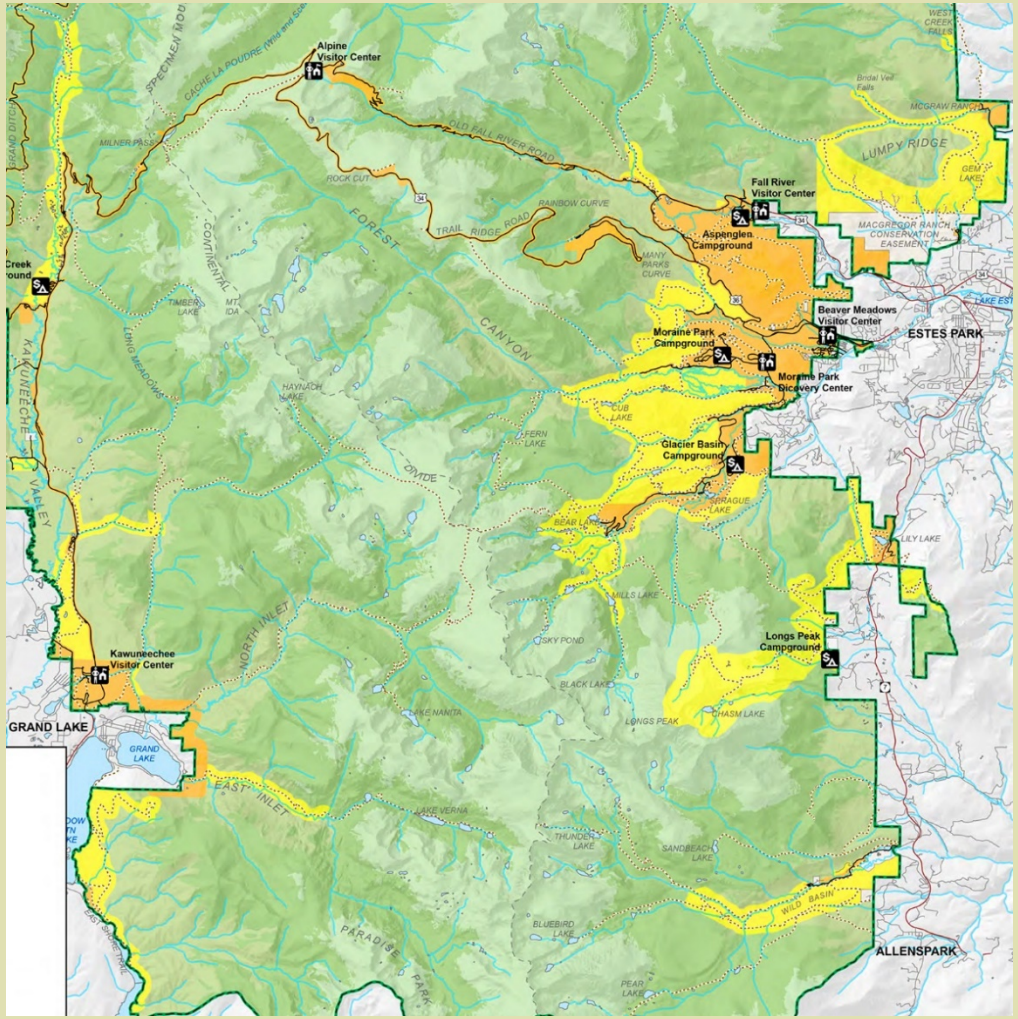


Desired Conditions (Attributes)– Zone 3



- Zone 3 is Non-Designated Wilderness
- This zone includes the highest concentration of visitors and visitor services, and high encounter rates with other visitors
- This zone encompasses developed areas such as roads, parking lots, roadside pull-offs, visitor centers, campgrounds, and the most accessible and maintained trails

Desired Conditions (Attributes)– Zone 3

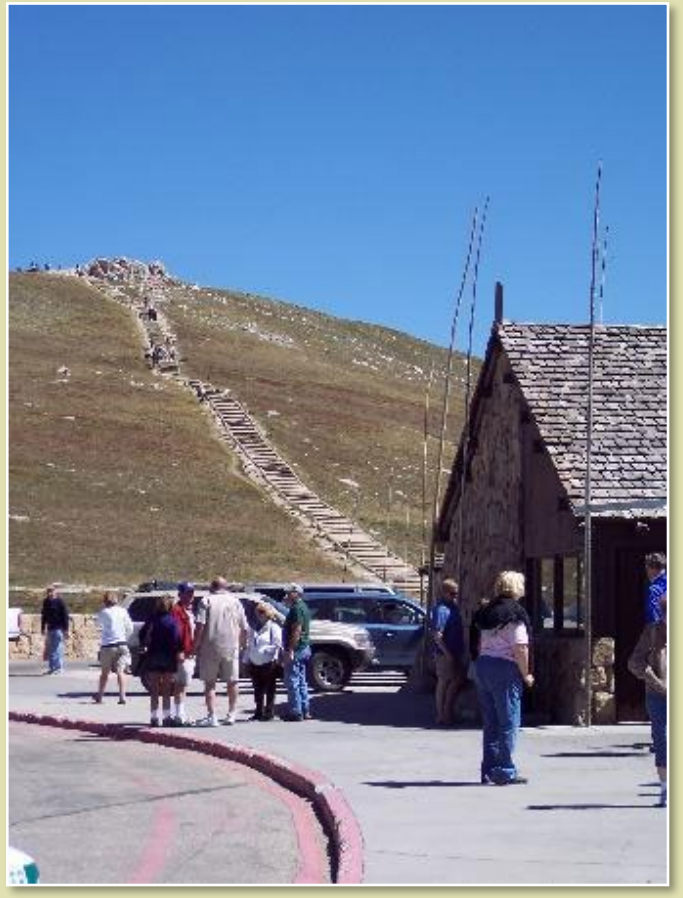


- Trail Ridge Road offers spectacular views from established infrastructure and overlooks
- This zone has a variety of easily accessible experiences such as scenic drives, wildlife viewing, interpretive programs, scenic vistas, and visitor centers
- Visitors connect with park staff and exhibits, developing stewardship for the park and its resources

Conceptual Long Range Management Strategies - Current Strategies

Since 2016, the park has piloted a variety of management strategies to address high visitation:

- Temporary vehicle restrictions
- Parking infrastructure improvements
- Shuttle system
- Piloted timed entry systems



Conceptual Long Range Management Strategies

Advanced Reservation or Timed Entry

- Advanced reservations for vehicles, parking spaces, and shuttle access
- Key benefit is to spread use throughout the day, making more efficient use of park infrastructure while improving the overall visitor experience
- Could be applied to the entire park, key locations, or specific areas

Conceptual Long Range Management Strategies

Parking-Related Strategies

- Managed entry system or metering for specific parking lots (one in, one out)
- Webcam or spot monitoring of parking lots
- Advanced or real-time messaging on parking status

Conceptual Long Range Management Strategies

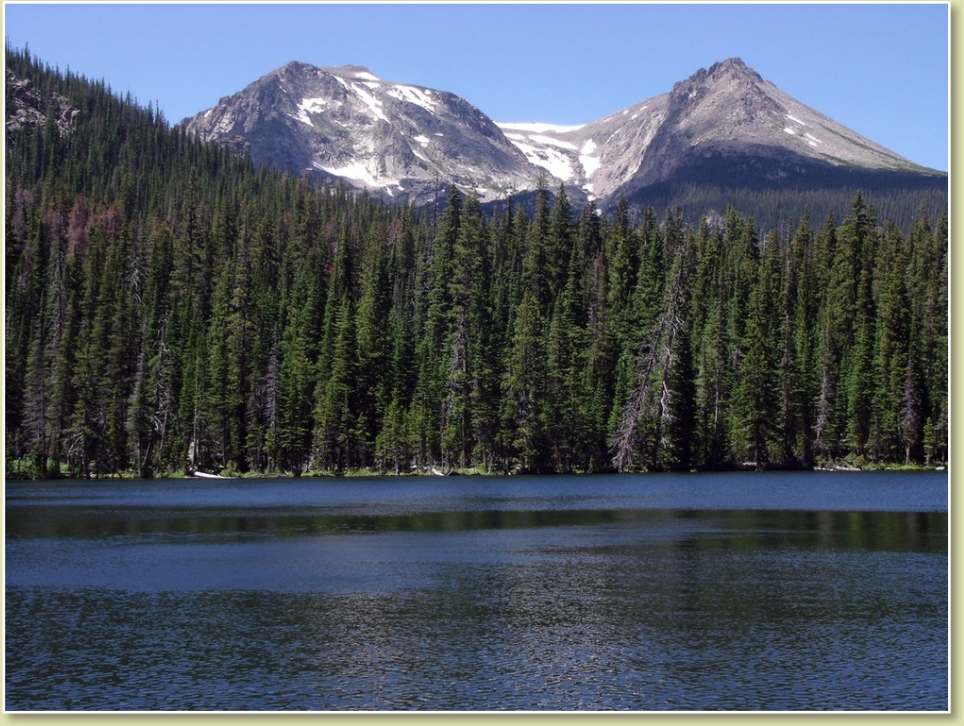
Transportation-Related Strategies

- Enhance use of Intelligent Transportation System
  - Increased use of variable message signs
  - Automatic gates to regulate flow of vehicles in specific areas, parking lots, or roads
  - Webcams and electronic systems to monitor parking and congestion; could feed into a smart phone application

Conceptual Long Range Management Strategies

Area-Specific Strategies

- Seasonal day hiking permit for high-use areas (such as Longs Peak)
- Area-specific temporary/seasonal closures for protection of resources



What's Next in the Planning Process

Process Step	Target Timeframe
Civic Engagement	May 2021
Review of Public Comments	Summer 2021
Civic Engagement Summary	Fall 2021
Additional research and data collection	Spring/Summer 2022
Using public comments, refine strategies and develop preliminary proposed action and alternatives	Late 2022
Start NEPA process/public scoping	2023
Prepare draft visitor use management plan	2023

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

- NEPA is the environmental analysis component of agency planning
- Defines a process that federal agencies must follow when proposing to take actions that have environmental impacts
- Ensures that information on the environmental impacts of an action is available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made
- Requires the use of an “interdisciplinary approach” to ensure that information from a variety of disciplines, including natural and social sciences and cultural resources, is integrated into analysis and decision making

How to Provide Formal Comments

- Beginning May 21, 2021, please submit comments to the NPS PEPC site
- This is your initial opportunity to comment in the planning process; more opportunities will follow during the formal NEPA process
- See details at:

  https://parkplanning.nps.gov/ROMO_Duvas

Public comments must be received by July 19, 2021

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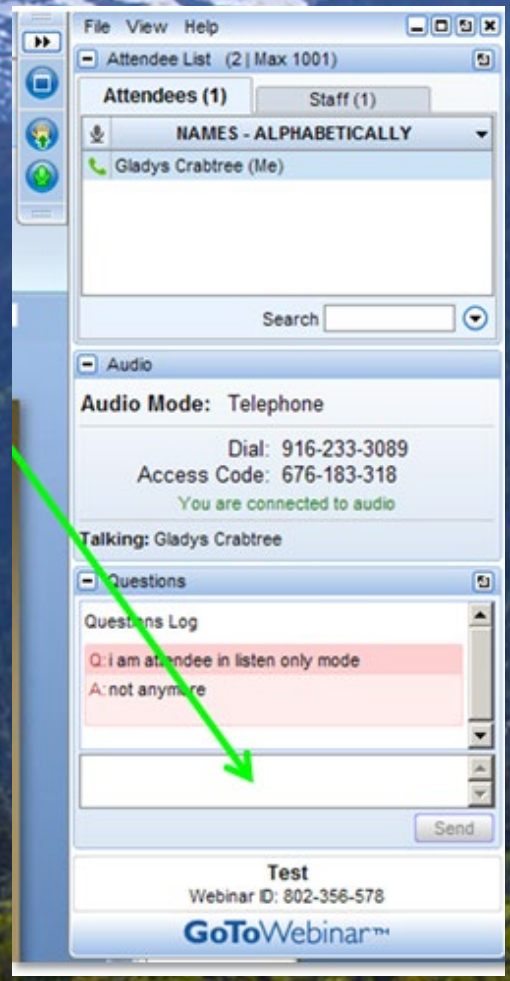
Questions?