

PROJECT MONITORING SUMMARY

Park: Yellowstone

Project Title: Fairy Falls Trailhead Temporary Parking Area

Proposed Construction Date: Spring 2017

Visitation in Yellowstone has increased 21% from 2014 – 2016. Traffic and crowding have increased at even greater rates in the focal park corridor from West Yellowstone to Old Faithful. Due to increasing popularity from social media and guidebooks, demand to visit the Midway Geyser Basin area, view Grand Prismatic Hot Spring, and get a photo of this thermal pool from above via the Fairy Falls Trail has grown at particularly high rates. This has led to extensive challenges related to parking and traffic congestion, visitor crowding, safety, resource impacts, staffing, and park operations in the Midway area and throughout the surrounding corridor.

In summer 2016, Yellowstone National Park implemented a Transportation and Vehicle Mobility Analysis conducted by an outside contractor that monitored parking and road performance throughout this corridor. A pilot study documenting visitor behavior and levels of crowding was also conducted in three of the park's most heavily visited geyser basins, including Midway. Social trails and vegetation loss due to visitor impacts were also mapped in this area in 2015.

If the temporary parking area is constructed at the Fairy Falls Trailhead, the park would implement monitoring protocols to collect additional data on transportation system capacity and performance, visitor behavior and crowding, and resource impacts, both before and after the opening of the Fairy Falls Trailhead and temporary parking lot. Data would be collected in ways that would allow it to be compared to results of the 2015 - 2016 analysis. The goal of this monitoring would be to understand how this temporary parking area affects availability of parking, flow of traffic, visitor crowding and behavior, resource impacts, and park operations, both in the immediate vicinity of Midway Geyser Basin / Fairy Falls Trailhead and throughout the larger West Yellowstone to Old Faithful corridor.