

## **APPENDIX E**

---

### **VISITOR USE PERMIT SYSTEM AND FORMAL VISITOR USE STUDIES**



## **VISITOR USE PERMIT SYSTEM AND FORMAL VISITOR USE STUDIES**

Three alternatives in the Saline Valley Warm Springs Final Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (plan/EIS), alternatives 2, 3, and 4, include the concept of a mandatory no-cost permit system for overnight stays at Saline Valley Warm Springs Area. This permitting system was modeled after the Visitor Use Permit system proposed in the Death Valley National Park Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan (NPS 2013). For alternative 5, the preferred alternative, the National Park Service would gather data on visitor use patterns through visitor use studies. These strategies are explained in this appendix.

### **VISITOR USE PERMIT SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY (ALTERNATIVES 2, 3, AND 4)**

The National Park Service would phase in a mandatory no-cost permit system for all overnight camping in the primitive camping areas at Saline Valley Warm Springs Area under alternatives 2, 3, and 4. The permit application would include a proposed itinerary disclosure to aid in search and rescue, as well as to inform visitor use statistics. Permit terms and conditions would apply. Permits would be issued through multiple venues, including via the internet and in person at visitor contact stations both inside and outside of the park. The National Park Service could implement an overnight camping fee in the future. The exact fee would be determined based on National Park Service (NPS) policy and comparability study, and this would include an independent public process to implement.

### **Permit Implementation Program**

#### **Phase One: Develop and Establish a Multi-Access-Point, No-Cost Permit System**

Representatives from the Interpretation, Resources Management, and Visitor Protection Divisions would work with the Interdisciplinary Team Program Manager and Wilderness Coordinator to establish a no-cost online permit system that would provide the necessary visitor safety and resource protection information for overnight camping in primitive campgrounds. The permit application would include a proposed itinerary disclosure to aid in search and rescue, as well as to inform visitor use statistics. Permits would be date and party specific, but not location specific.

Simultaneous to the roll-out of the no-cost online permit system, no-cost permits would be made available at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center and the Stovepipe Wells Visitor Contact Station, in an electronic format, a hard copy format, or both. Permits may be made available at the Scotty's Castle Visitor Center and the Lone Pine Visitor Center, depending on availability of staff and overall feasibility. Backcountry patrol rangers would be supplied with hard copy permit forms and associated information, in order to facilitate the issuance of no-cost permits and dissemination of visitor safety and resource protection information. All personally identifiable information associated with permits would be managed as per NPS policy. The data regarding permits issued from all sources would be compiled semi-annually by the wilderness coordinator for consideration in Phase 2.

The data gathered in the implementation of the permit system would be stored by appropriate Death Valley National Park (park) staff, and all personal information would be maintained under procedures to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The no-cost, mandatory permit system would be maintained for 3 years, with the goal of educating park visitors about the regulations to promote visitor safety and resource protection. At the end of 3 years, the National Park Service would move to Phase Two of the permit system.

## Phase Two: Evaluation

To commence the evaluation phase, appropriate park staff would convene an Interdisciplinary Team to review the data gathered during the first 3 years of mandatory permit implementation. The Interdisciplinary Team would consist of Park Fee Manager, at least one other representative of the Visitor Protection Division, and at least one representative of the Interpretation Division.

The Interdisciplinary Team would conduct a two-part analysis. That analysis would focus on the following:

- the effectiveness of the permit system in achieving its goal of educating park visitors about the regulations to promote visitor safety and resource protection at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area, and
- the concentration of park visitor use at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area, and whether there are visitor use conflicts or resource impact concerns associated with that use.

The Interdisciplinary Team would document the results of both analyses and use them to decide about the need, appropriateness, and feasibility of implementing a fee-based permit system modeled on (or adapted from) the no-cost permit system the National Park Service implemented for three years. When considering a fee system, the Interdisciplinary Team would examine staffing levels and follow the guidance of NPS *Management Policies 2006* that “no fees will be collected in circumstances in which the costs of collection would exceed revenue.” If fees have been recommended for the other primitive campgrounds, then they should also be considered at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area to promote consistency across the park’s backcountry areas. The Interdisciplinary Team would prepare a report for the park Superintendent and provide a recommendation about whether to modify or maintain the permit system. This recommendation should address the issue of fees.

## Phase Three: Implementation

The National Park Service would implement the decision of the park Superintendent, as advised by the Interdisciplinary Team, regarding the future direction of the permit system. The options could include, but are not limited to the following:

- maintain the pilot, mandatory no-cost permit program with no or negligible modifications
- maintain the pilot, mandatory no-cost permit program with minor modifications, to include fees for the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area and would provide a useful management tool for reducing visitor use conflicts and resource management damage or adverse impacts and potential seasonal use allocations when visitor use exceeds capacity.

If any fee system is implemented, it would be according to applicable laws and NPS policy, which would involve a comparability study for similar recreational facilities in the region and an open process to include input from the interested public. The park Environmental Protection Specialist would maintain the administrative record for this process.

## FORMAL VISITOR USE STUDIES (ALTERNATIVE 5)

The draft plan/EIS included the mandatory no-cost permit system as part of alternative 5. The intention of the mandatory no-cost permit was to collect data on visitor use and distribute information on the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area. Currently, the NPS camp host informally collects information on visitor use.

During the public comment process, the National Park Service learned that visitors often collect informal visitation data as well; however, these data do not provide the National Park Service with the consistent visitor information needed to determine visitation trends. Due to the comments received and the need for reliable data, the National Park Service revised the preferred alternative in this final plan/EIS to include formal visitor use studies, which could include ways to count visitors at both high and low use periods. These data would help the National Park Service understand current visitor use trends and impacts. The National Park Service would monitor the data collection and if it were determined that the data collected were not accurate or appropriate, the National Park Service would consider requiring visitors to register or to obtain a permit to camp at the Saline Valley Warm Springs Area. Further, if the National Park Service were to change the requirements park-wide for developed backcountry campgrounds in the future, these changes would also apply to camping at Saline Valley Warm Springs Area.

## REFERENCES

National Park Service (NPS)

- 2006 *Management Policies 2006*. National Park Service, Washington, D.C.
- 2013 *Death Valley National Park Final Wilderness and Backcountry Stewardship Plan and Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact*. July.

