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## Categorical Exclusion Approval - Draft

**Project:** Implement Wilderness Backpacking and Overnight Use Permit System Program

**PEPC #:** 103882

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### Introduction

This memorandum with attachments, and the information in the project record, documents and completes the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and requirements for implementing the Wilderness Backpacking and Overnight Use Permit System proposal.

### Program Description

See Attachment A

### CE Citation

On the basis of the impact assessment in Attachment A, park interdisciplinary review, public review and comment, and the information in the project record, this project is Categorically Excluded (CE) from further NEPA analysis in accordance with DO-12, Section 3.3:

C.5. Installation of signs, displays, kiosks, etc.

D.3. Minor changes in programs and regulations pertaining to visitor activities.

D.5. Designation of trailside camping zones with no or minimal improvements.

Additional supporting information for this determination is in the following attachments and administrative record:

- Attachment A: Wilderness Backpacking and Overnight Use Permit System
  - Project Information; Background; Purpose, Need, and Program Goals; Proposed Actions; Applicable Law and Policy; Impact Assessment; Public Comments
- Attachment B: Proposed Superintendent Compendium Language 36 CFR 1.5 and 1.7
- Attachment C: Proposed Backcountry Permit to be Issued for Backcountry Overnight Use - Example

### CE Justification

### Final Agency Decision

*TBD after public review and comment*

### CE Approval and Decision to Implement

I find that the action fits within the categorical exclusion above. Therefore, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No extraordinary circumstances apply.

**Superintendent:** To be signed after public comment **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
David Smith, Superintendent  
Joshua Tree National Park

# ATTACHMENT A

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## PROJECT INFORMATION

Park Name:..... Joshua Tree National Park  
Project Title:..... Wilderness Backpacking Permit System  
PEPC Number:..... 103882  
Project Location (County/State): ..... San Bernardino/Riverside Counties, CA  
Administrative Record Location:..... Joshua Tree National Park Headquarters

## BACKGROUND

In JOTR's founding documents, as well as the 2000 Backcountry and Wilderness Management plan, opportunities of solitude are identified as desired conditions for these areas. A consistent uptick in visitation and in turn wilderness backpacking poses a threat to existing solitude conditions.

The implementation of this permit would serve to better protect park resources through mandatory educational components. Education may also promote visitor safety and increase access to trip details may also help JOTR protect backpackers when necessary. Should the Superintendent of JOTR approve this permit system, and amendment to JOTR's Compendium would be completed.

The 2020 NPS Preliminary Project Planning Report "Overnight Use and Trail Management" examined overnight use, trail use, trailhead and parking lot congestion, and related visitor experience challenges and management solutions. The report identified challenges in managing Wilderness/Backcountry use, specifically that visitors are unaware of backcountry policies and ethics (i.e., Leave No Trace) and set up camp in sensitive areas leading to resource damage or impacting solitary and primitive recreation experiences. The report recommended several recommendations: More consistent and regular backcountry ranger shifts for increased NPS presence in the backcountry

- Education for new visitors about JOTR's designated wilderness
- Clearly marked wilderness boundaries in the park along trails and routes
- More signage and information regarding the park's 1-mile-from-roads policy for backcountry camping

Improving education through the backpacking permit system is a necessary means of mitigating resource damage and personal safety concerns that arise from unconfined wilderness backpacking.

# PURPOSE, NEED, and GOALS

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to address backcountry/wilderness visitor and resource concerns by implementing a Backpacking Permit System and identifying designated campsites at high use, high impact locations.

The purpose of establishing a new backpacking permit system for overnight use within JOTR is to improve resource protection by providing education materials on protecting natural and cultural resources, and backcountry wilderness restrictions.

## NEED FOR PERMIT SYSTEM

### Increase in Backcountry Wilderness Use

Starting in 2013, JTNP has nearly tripled in visitation, and backcountry use has increased by 116%. The increase in backcountry use has come from both overflow car campers and backpackers. Using JTNP Visitor Use Statistics (IRMA<sup>1</sup>) Figure 1 shows an increase of 17,583 backpackers between November 2010 and November 2019.

Use of JOTR backcountry boards has changed from occasional backpackers to a combination of backpackers and underprepared visitors in search of a place to camp for the night when drive-in campgrounds are full. Increased demand for campground sites has resulted in the area one quarter to one mile out from overnight parking lots becoming heavily used with potential impacts to wilderness, natural, and cultural resources. Or, camping in day use areas where wildlife can be impacted due to nighttime visitor presence.

While wilderness areas remain vast and expansive at JOTR, concentrated use in areas like the Boy Scout Trail may adversely affect the wilderness solitude visitor use experience.

### Proper Backcountry Visitation Requires Better Planning

JTNP finds that underprepared backcountry visitors tend to ignore regulations. Users ignoring regulations can cause resource impacts and safety issues.

Registration tags from backcountry boards show most underprepared campers depart from the northern terminus of Boy Scout (Keys West), Juniper Flats, and Twin Tanks, staying one night with an average party size of two. Park staff has observed the increased occurrence of improperly outfitted visitors utilizing the backcountry as a form of backup plan in response to full formal campgrounds. Behaviors cited by park staff often include visitors dragging wheeled coolers into the backcountry and setting up camps with large footprint tents which are better equipped for formal campgrounds with hardened surfaces.

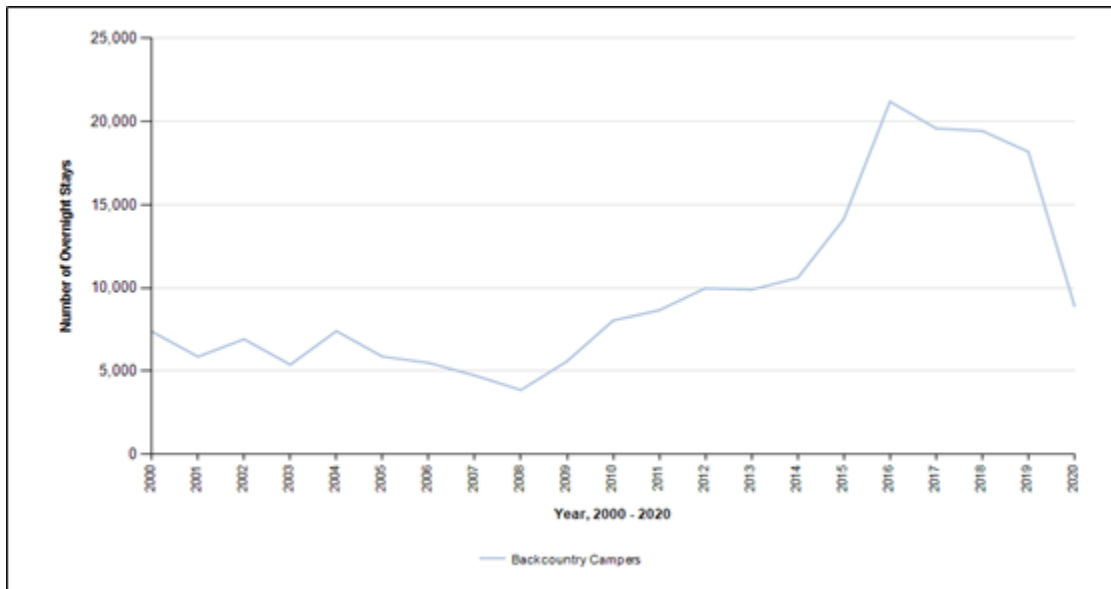
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<sup>1</sup> Integrated Resource Management Application (IRMA). National Park Service application that tracks visitor use statistics.

These events cause backcountry impacts to vegetation and unnecessary creation of social trails.

The existing permit system does not provide adequate education for backcountry users on the proper use of the backcountry. The proposed permit system requires permittees to view an educational video and authenticate they have reviewed the information.

FIGURE 1. IRMA DATA DISPLAYING OVERNIGHT STAYS BY YEAR



### Outdated Backcountry Use Regulations

The current regulations do not provide adequate information to backcountry users, nor do they provide a system in which we can track backcountry use to protect resources and aid in search and rescue.

**Inadequate Information.** In what is attributed to lack of awareness, backpackers generally do not know if they are camping within an acceptable location. The existing Superintendent's Compendium requires backpackers hike out one mile and camp 500-ft off a trail, and due to a lack of information and signage, backpackers find it difficult to know whether they are camping at an acceptable site. Currently there are no mile markers on the trails and many campers are unable to recognize where they're allowed to camp overnight along the trails. Placement of signs, as proposed in the new permit program, would contain information about where campsites should be placed (500 ft off trail, on hardened soil surfaces, etc.), Leave No Trace principals (Pack out trash, cat hole use for human waste, etc.) and reinforce no campfire rules. Enhanced maps would be available to help backcountry overnight users better discern acceptable campsites.

**Visitor Use Data.** The existing program does not collect sufficient data related to the amount, location, or duration of backcountry overnight visitor use. Additional itinerary data is necessary to identify popular camping zones originating from specific backcountry board locations. This data can then be used to inform and target future

management actions and funding proposals. Having additional visitor itinerary data could provide information for controlling heavily used backcountry resources.

## Resource Protection

Monitoring backcountry overnight use indicates users sometimes select campsites that contain sensitive botanical and wildlife resource, and sometimes camp within rock structures that have sensitive cultural resources.

Resource damage that occurs in backcountry areas is often related to improper campsite setup. An improper campsite setup can damage sensitive plant species or impact important wildlife habitat. Visitors have also been known to camp within rock structures that have sensitive cultural resources.

Criteria for selection of campsites is part of the proposed permit program.

## Threat of Wildfire

Illegal campfires have become more common in park wilderness areas. Fires outside of developed campgrounds pose one of the greatest threats to long term survival of Joshua trees and unique desert habitat. Building fire rings moves rocks from their native location, inadvertently impacting cultural resources.

The threat of wildfire events is identified as the most pressing issue related to wilderness backpacking at JTNP. Illegal campfire rings have been consistently observed in backcountry areas and presents a risk for triggering a large-scale wildfire (Figure 3). The devastating toll of the Dome Fire in Mojave National Preserve accounted for the death of as many as 1.3 million Joshua trees (25% of the Preserve's forest). It has been reported in past studies that there is an 83% mortality rate for Joshua trees within the burn area of a major wildfire. Cultural and wildlife resources can also be significantly impacted from wildfires. Educating backcountry users on the risk of wildfire and emphasizing the restriction on building fires in wilderness areas would help mitigate wildfire risk.

While the Dome Fire was started by unfortunate natural causes (lightning), it remains a cautionary tale of the impacts that one wildfire event could have on JOTR resources. Park management should take every action possible to ensure that preventative measures related to wildfire genesis from anthropogenic factors are implemented and enforced. By requiring an educational component to the permitting process, visitors will be made aware of existing fire regulations, risks, and safety measures to help reduce the likelihood of a visitor created fire.

**FIGURE 2. EXAMPLES OF ILLEGAL CAMPFIRE RINGS**



### Visitor Safety

The current system of managing overnight backcountry use does little in the way of providing visitors with an education on the hazards of wilderness backpacking in the desert. Summer use has increased dramatically in recent years, raising concerns by park Emergency Medical Services and rescue staff.

Visitor safety is a top priority at JOTR, and safe visits lead directly to better experiences at the park. The current system of managing overnight backcountry use does little in the way of providing visitors with an education on the hazards of wilderness backpacking in the desert. Depending on the time of year, backpacking at JOTR presents different challenges and risk factors. A new permit system is needed to present the opportunity for education to be administered before backpacking trips. The proposed permit system would require that visitors provide an itinerary for their backpacking trips. An itinerary would improve search and rescue efforts for backpackers who may be distressed and do not return according to their itinerary.

### **PROGRAM GOALS**

Goals represent the overarching vision for the program. This program will implement a series of processes and actions to establish a backcountry overnight permit program to meet the following goals:

- Improve the visitor experience and protect cultural, natural, and wilderness resources that visitors come here to enjoy.
- Collect visitor use statistics from the recreation.gov system to inform future park planning and decision making.
- Improved public education resulting in increased visitor safety and improved sustainable use of backcountry resources

# PROPOSED ACTIONS

## Permit Program Overview

Described below are the actions being proposed to implement a Backcountry Overnight Use Permit System. The actions are categorized as follows:

- Information for an applicant to: Obtain a permit; Select a parking lot for point of departure; Check-In Requirements; and Selecting a backcountry campsite.
- JTNP proposed actions necessary to implement and monitor the Backcountry Permit System program
- Future Actions

## Permit System – Permittee

**Were  
is a Permit  
Needed:**

Backcountry Permit. JTNP is proposing to establish a permit requirement for overnight wilderness backpacking on lands under the administrative jurisdiction of JTNP National Park in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, CA. JTNP has proposed zones for backcountry overnight use (see Figure 3). An example of what content would be on the permit, see permit example found in Attachment C.

Camping. Camping is allowed as shown in Figure 3. Backcountry permit holders using the Boy Scout Trail would be required to stay in designated campsites. Camping in areas other than Boy Scout Trail would be at large using criteria below.

Boy Scout Trail: Designated Campsites (See Figure 4).

All Other Backcountry Areas/Trails: At Large (See During Trip Requirements for campsite selection criteria) See Figure 3.

Parking. Backcountry trips would be initiated from one of 13 backcountry overnight use parking lots and backcountry board areas as listed below (See Map).

Table 1. Backcountry Parking Areas (Backcountry Boards)

Name and Location	Number of Backcountry Parking Spots
Black Rock	4
Cottonwood Spring	34
Upper Covington	6
Geo Tour Road	5

Indian Cove (Boy Scout)	12
Juniper Flats	8
Key West (Boy Scout)	42
North Entrance	10
Pine City	10
Pleasant Valley	4
Porcupine Wash	6
Turkey Flats	9
Twin Tanks	32

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**How to Obtain  
a Permit:**

There are three ways to obtain a permit: 1) Online through Recreation.gov; 2) By Phone; and 3) In person at Joshua Tree Headquarters Office. Specific information is as follows:

**Recreation.gov**

Permits can be obtained by booking Recreation.gov, 6 months in advance, up to the same day of a trip (subject to availability).

**Phoneline**

Permits can be obtained over the phone by calling:

Recreation.gov Reservation Lines:

Toll Free: (877) 444-6777

International: (606) 515-6777

TTD: (877) 833-6777

**In Person**

Permits can be obtained in person at the following location”

Joshua Tree National Park

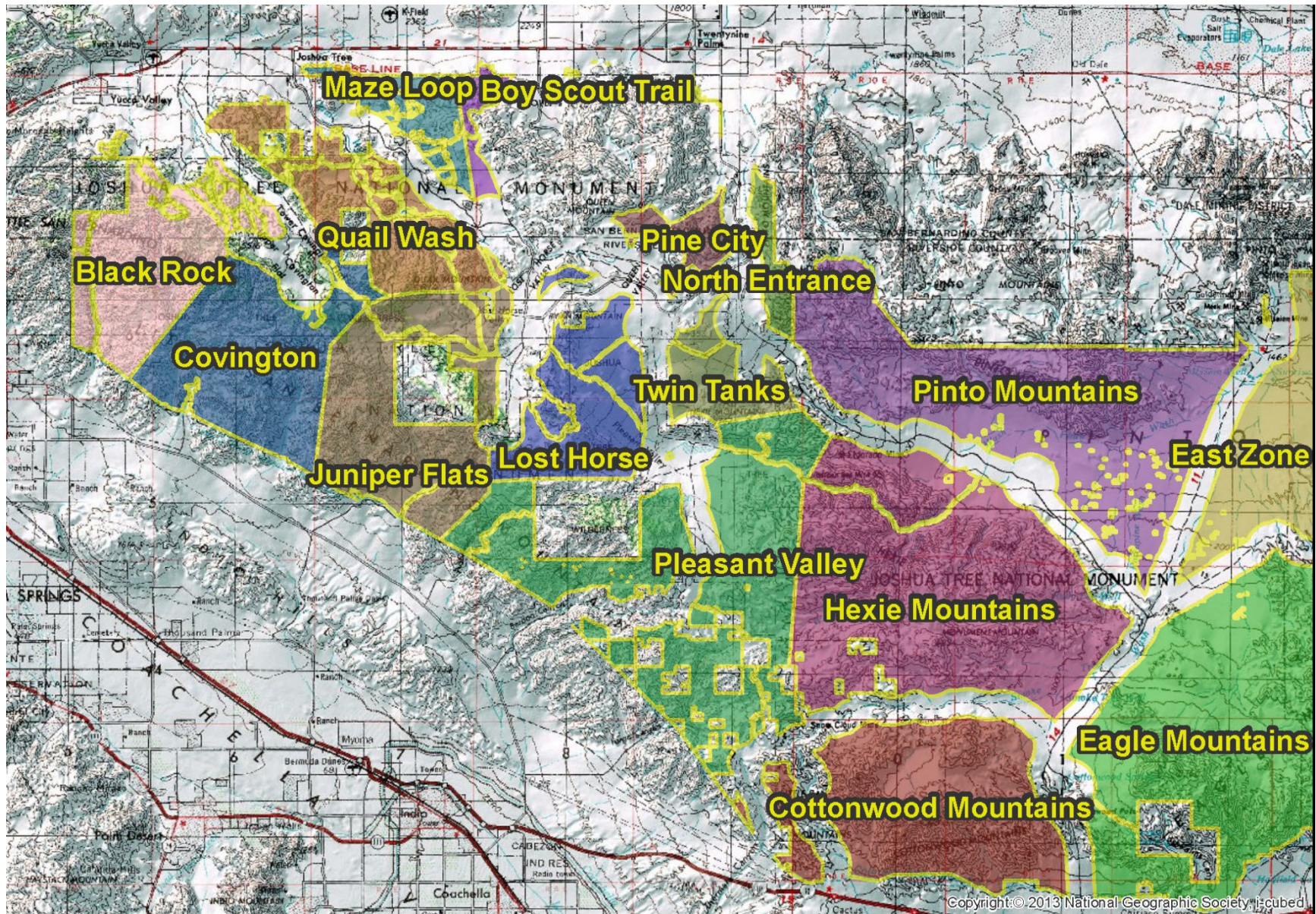
Building 104, Permit Office

74485 National Park Drive

Twentynine Palms, CA 92277-35



FIGURE 3. PROPOSED OVERNIGHT USE ZONES





Permits can be obtained at this location November through April between the hours of 8:00 am to 12:00 pm, Wednesday through Sunday.

- Permits are issued subject to availability.
- Permits cannot be obtained by calling or emailing park staff.
- Same-day, or future permits can be issued at this office.  
Quantity of same day reservations is limited.

**Cost:** The cost of the permit would be a flat rate of \$6 per permit and only a credit or debit card is accepted. A single permit would allow for a range in group size of 1 to 12 visitors.

**Pre-Trip Requirements:** Before receiving a permit, users would be required to view and acknowledge they have read and reviewed JTNP backcountry education information and a backpacking educational video. participate in mandatory education to influence positive experiences including protection of cultural sites, wildlife, vegetation, soils, and tribal values (e.g., short checklist, short video, etc.). A mandatory would accompany the granting of permits. Permittees will be required to check-in prior to hiking out either over the phone or in person and at any visitor center. Check-in data will be provided to park staff for assessing use levels, SAR response, and permit regulations. Check-in would be a required action under these permits to yield accurate usage data and allow the park to effectively monitor the backcountry if necessary.

**During Trip Requirements:** Campsite Selection

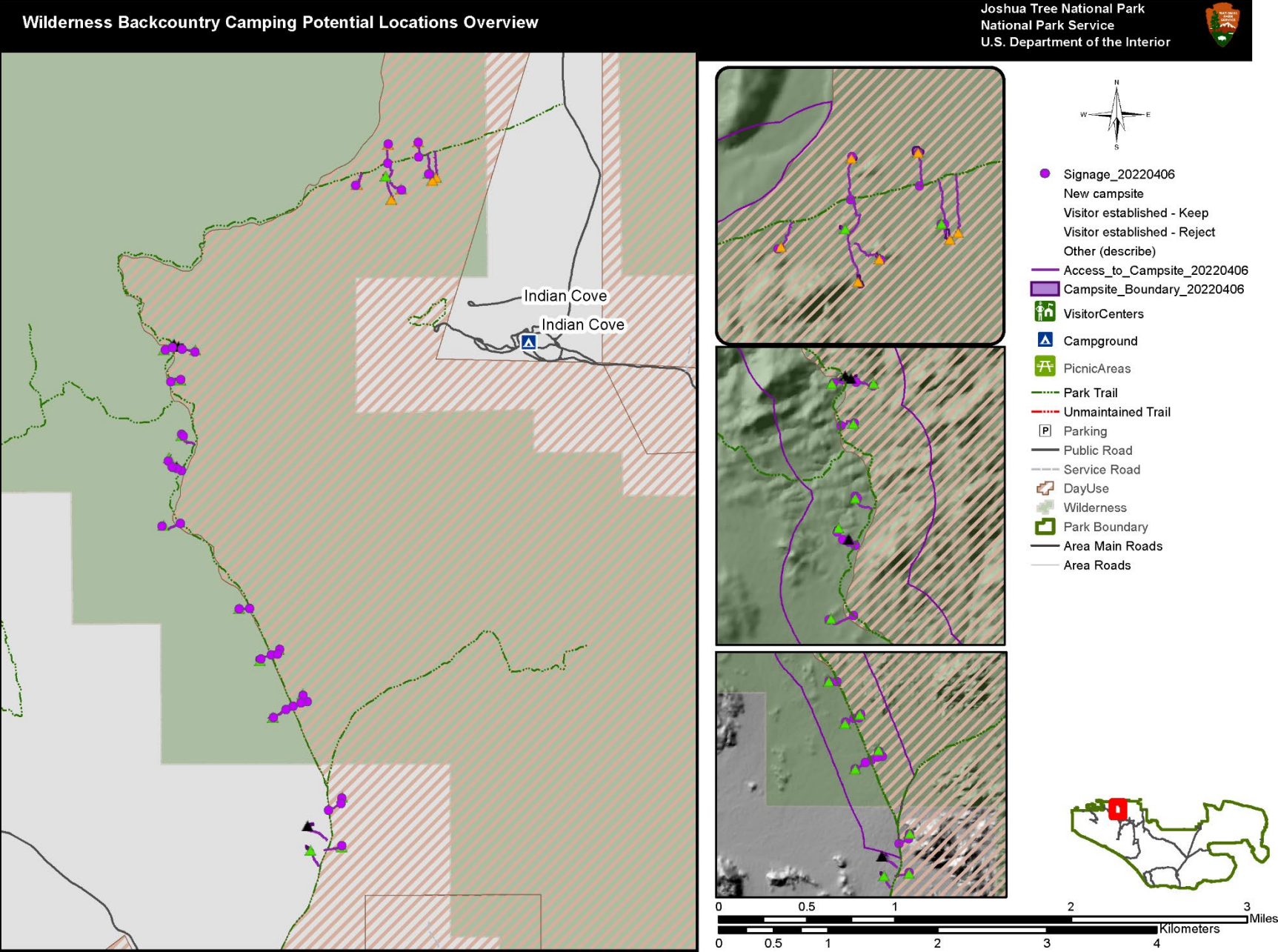
Boy Scout Trail (BST). BST has established site specific campsites (See Figure 4).

All other Backcountry Overnight Zones. All backcountry overnight permit holders selecting campsites in zones identified on Figure 3 would select a site using the following criteria:

Required Criteria (Compendium Enforced)

- Already impacted site or hardened surface
- One mile or more distance from roads
- Fully within wilderness boundaries
- Outside of day use designated areas

FIGURE 4. CAMPSITE DESIGNATIONS FOR BOY SCOUT TRAIL



### Campsite Considerations for Safety and Resource Protection

- Out of view from the trail/road
- Avoid rock shelters and overhangs
- Avoid washes, base of a cliff with exfoliating rock above
- Avoid high flow areas with no escape route

### Implementation and Monitoring Actions

The following actions would need to be performed by JTNP to prepare and operate a permit program

- Boy Scout Trail - Install wayfinding signage to designated camping sites. Install signs at designating campsites.
- Stand-up a permit office at JTNP Headquarters
- Conduct patrols to check permits and monitor permit compliance
- Post Instruction Signage at Each of the Backcountry Boards

### Future Actions

Campsites will be designated along other trails and other Backcountry Overnight Zones as resources are available. The designation of these campsites is subject to environmental (NEPA) and cultural resource (NHPA Section 106) compliance. By using established criteria for selecting campsites, it is expected these actions would not cause significant impacts and would not trigger any extraordinary circumstances that would require an Environmental Assessment. It is expected environmental compliance could be completed using the Categorical Exclusion 3.3.D.5 (Designation of trailside camping zones with no or minimal improvements).

The criteria used for designating future campsites is as follows:

- Already impacted site or hardened surface
- Existing social trail to campsite from established trail
- Avoid sensitive resources (cultural sites, water sources, springs)
  - Use known GIS data, work with park subject matter experts
- Avoid Cultural Resource Sites, avoid rock shelters and overhangs, conduct archeological surveys
- Avoid new damage (cryptos, plants, habitat)
- Consider Joshua tree refugia and fire risk; designated sites may have higher probability of having an illegal fire

Future Campsite Designations. Designating campsites would be done as resources are available. As campsites are designated, they would be made available on the Rec.gov on-line reservation system.

Although subject to change, the following areas would be next for creating designated campsites:

- Pine City
- California Riding and Hiking trail Segment south of Twin Tanks.
- Juniper Flats

Install wayfinding signage to designated camping sites. Install signs at designating campsites.

## **APPLICABLE LAW AND POLICY**

The NPS regulations allow superintendents to implement public use limits to protect park resources, equitably allocate use of areas, protect public health and safety, and avoid conflicts among user groups. Public use limits may be adopted following a written determinations and publication of the use limitation in the park's Compendium. In addition, under CFR Section 1.6, Permits, The National Park Service may adopt a permit system to implement a public use limit enacted under 36 CFR Section 1.5.

This proposed interim use limit is consistent with NPS Management Policies, which allow the issuance of permits for activities requiring some degree of management control to protect resources. This action is not of a nature, magnitude, or duration such that it would result in a significant alteration of the public use patterns of the park. The proposed permit program is not highly controversial.

The proposed change to the Superintendent's Compendium (36 CFR 1.7.b.) can be found in Attachment C.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

### **Baseline (Existing) Conditions**

Overnight backpacking is currently occurring at JTNP with a non-fee permit. The current permit operates under a self-registration system, where visitors wishing to use the backcountry fill out a physical permit onsite at a backcountry registration board of their choice. There exist no use quotas aside from group size limits and parkwide overnight stay allowances. There is no required education component to receiving a permit. There exists no requirement to leave a detailed itinerary for park use.

Under current management as established in the Superintendent's Compendium, wilderness camping is allowed with a non-fee, self-registration system and can be obtained at one of thirteen backcountry boards or at a park visitor center during normal hours of operation (36 CFR Sec. 1.6 2.10a). Under 36 CFR Sec. 2.10, overnight stays at JOTR are limited to 30 days within a calendar year. Between October 1 and May 31, the limit is 14 days. Parking for overnight wilderness use is restricted to backcountry registration boards. Backcountry/wilderness camping must occur at least one mile from legally open roads and at least 500 feet from designated trails and water sources. Finally, group sizes are limited to 12 people in wilderness and 24 in the backcountry transition zone. Large groups may subdivide to meet group size limits by camping 1 mile apart.

## Change in Public Use Conditions if Overnight Wilderness Backpacking Permitting is Implemented:

The new permit system would require registration be completed prior to a backpacker's trip. Visitors would pay a \$6 permit fee to register for overnight backcountry use through recreation.gov. Additionally, a mandatory education component (watching a short video) would be included in the permitting process. Visitors would also be required to include a brief itinerary and check-in before beginning backcountry trip. Table 2 shows a summary of the proposed changes in comparison to the existing permit system.

Table 2. Existing wilderness backpacking requirements versus proposed permit changes.

	<b>Fee</b>	<b>Advanced Registration</b>	<b>Check- in Process</b>	<b>Itinerary</b>	<b>Education Component</b>	<b>Enforcement</b>
<b>Existing</b>	\$0	None	None	Not Required	None	Difficult to Enforce
<b>Proposed</b>	\$6	Yes, Via Recreation.gov	Yes, In- person or phone	Required via permit application thru Recreation .gov	Required Education Video and Acknowledgement that you reviewed the material	More monitoring, better enforcement

## Environmental Screening Form

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Potential for Impact</b>	<b>Potential Issues &amp; Impacts</b>
<b>Air</b> Air Quality	None	Campfires are not allowed in the backcountry. No air quality impacts are expected with the proposed action.
<b>Biological</b> Nonnative or Exotic Species	Potential	Issue: Backcountry users are a vector for spread of non-native species.  Impact: The permit system will not cause an increase in backcountry users; however, creating designated campsites could over time have more concentrated use and increase the likelihood that non-native species can get established in these areas.
<b>Biological</b> Species of Special Concern or Their	None	The park's natural resource staff have been part of identifying campsite locations, these campsite locations have been located outside of T&E habitat.

Habitat <i>T&amp;E Species</i>		
<b>Biological</b> Vegetation <i>Undisturbed vegetation communities</i>	Potential	Issue: Selecting backcountry campsites where campsites are not designated.  Impact: Although the permit program is not expected to increase the amount of backcountry camping, in areas where campsites are not designated, backcountry users may inadvertently select areas where there are undisturbed vegetation communities, and these may get trampled.
<b>Biological</b> Wildlife and/or Wildlife Habitat including terrestrial and aquatic species <i>Wildlife Habitat</i>	None	Impact: Campsites have been located in areas outside of prime wildlife habitat and unique wildlife habitat types.
<b>Cultural</b> Archeological Resources <i>Archeological Resources</i>	None	Impact: Within the larger proposed Area of Potential Effect (APE), some archeological resources are present. However, activities are only being approved in locations where there are no identified cultural resources of any kind.
<b>Cultural</b> Cultural Landscapes <i>Cultural Landscapes</i>	None	Impact: The Keys Ranch cultural landscape is nearby but is not overlapped by any proposed campsite location.
<b>Cultural</b> Ethnographic Resources	None	Archeological specialists from the park surveyed all the proposed campsites, campsite locations have been located away from ethnographic resources.
<b>Cultural</b> Museum Collections	None	The action will have no effect on museum collections.
<b>Cultural</b> Prehistoric/historic structures	None	Cultural resource staff were part of the Team to designate campsite locations, campsite locations are not located close or nearby prehistoric/historic structures.
<b>Geological</b> Geologic Features	None	The proposed action would have no effect on geologic features.
<b>Geological</b> Geologic Processes	None	The proposed action would have no effect on geologic processes.
<b>Lightscapes</b> Lightscapes	None	The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to increase backcountry overnight use, although campers do use artificial light at night, this use is not expected to be more than before the program would be implemented. The proposed action would have no effect on lightscapes.
<b>Other</b> Human Health and	Potential	Issue: Visitor Safety  Impact: The proposed permit system would require the permittee to provide an itinerary for their trip. The NPS will be monitoring

<b>Safety</b> <i>Visitor Safety</i>		backcountry boards and parking lots and would notice if a party has not returned according to their itinerary. The itinerary would give our search and rescue team an indication where to find the backcountry hikers. Positive effect.
<b>Paleontological</b> Paleontological Resources	None	Campsites were surveyed prior to designation; no paleontological resources were located in designated campground sites.
<b>Socioeconomic</b> Land Use <i>Income</i>	Potential	Issue: Permit Fees  Impact: The fee associated with obtaining a permit is not considered cost prohibitive and would not be a deterrent for people wanting to do a backcountry overnight trip at JTNP.
<b>Socioeconomic</b> Socioeconomic	None	
<b>Soundscapes</b> Soundscapes	None	The implementation of the proposed action is not expected to increase backcountry overnight use, although campers would be introducing sound in a natural environment, this human generated sound is not expected to be more than before the program would be implemented. The proposed action would have no effect on introducing more sound (pre-project) into the natural environment.
<b>Viewsheds</b> Impacts to open space and views	None	The proposed actions would not have an impact on open space or views.
<b>Viewsheds</b> Viewsheds	None	The proposed actions would not have an impact on viewsheds.
<b>Visitor Use and Experience</b> Recreation Resources <i>Visitation</i>	Potential	Issue: Visitation  Impact: The permit system is not expected to increase backcountry visitation.
<b>Visitor Use and Experience</b> Visitor Use and Experience <i>Visitor Experience</i>	Potential	Issue: The proposed permit system imposes additional requirements on the visitor.
<b>Water</b> Floodplains	None	Impact: Campsite locations have been located outside of floodplains.
<b>Water</b> Water Quality or Quantity	None	Water availability in the backcountry is scarce and backcountry users are expected to bring their own water. The permit has provisions for human waste disposal meant to reduce impacts on water quality and other potential effects.
<b>Wilderness</b> Wilderness <i>Solitude/Primitive</i>	Potential	Issue: Wilderness Solitude  Impact: With the collection of additional information with the permit program, JTNP can better understand where backcountry visitation is popular. Should any area get too crowded, permits available can be



		reduced. This would preserve wilderness solitude. NPS wilderness policy guidance will be followed and completed prior to decision to implement the program. Additional wilderness analysis includes preparation of “necessary and appropriate” analysis for commercial use of wilderness, and Minimum Requirements Analysis.
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Mitigations

- If concealed archeological resources are encountered during project activities, all necessary steps will be taken to protect them and to notify the Park Cultural Resources Manager or Archeologist.

**Response to Comments**

Before deciding on whether to approve this proposal, the JTNP Superintendent will review all public comments related to this proposal.

This section will summarize the public comment and provide a response to the comments received from the public after the 30-day public review and comment period.

# Attachment B

Proposed Superintendent Compendium  
Language  
(36 CFR 1.5 and 1.7)

**Joshua Tree National Park**  
**Determination of Public Access, Restriction, or Condition**

**Affected Area/Topic Common Name:** Wilderness Backpacking Regulations

**Location of Affected Area:** Entire park

**Nature of Action/Restriction/Closure:** Amend backcountry camping regulations to reduce resource impacts and make it easier to comply with the permit system.

**Level of Scope of Closure/Restriction:**

Proposed Regulatory Language (36 CFR section/wording):

36 CFR §2.10 – CAMPING and FOOD STORAGE

§2.10(a) The following camping activities:

- A permit is required for backcountry/wilderness camping. Overnight Backcountry camping permits may be obtained through the Recreation.gov reservation system or the Joshua Tree National Park Head Quarters, building 104, 74485 National Park Drive Twentynine Palms, CA 92277-3597.
- Camping at large is allowable in the following Backcountry Zones.
  - Black Rock
  - Covington
  - Eagle Mountains
  - East Zone
  - Hexie Mountains
  - Juniper Flats
  - Lost Horse
  - North Entrance
  - Pine City
  - Pinto Mountains
  - Pleasant Valley
  - Quail Wash
  - The Maze
  - Twin Tanks
- In the Boy Scout Trail Backcountry Zone, camping in Joshua Tree Wilderness is limited to 17 designated camping areas.

(14) Parking within the park for overnight backcountry/wilderness use is restricted to backcountry parking lots.

(15) Backcountry/wilderness camping must be at least 1 mile from any backcountry board, at least ½ mile from any road, at least 200 feet from any trail, and out of sight of any road or trail.

(16) Group size limit for day and overnight use is 12 people in all areas. Large groups that are subdivided to meet group size limits must camp at least one mile apart in the backcountry and hike at least 10 minutes apart.

(20) Four- to Six-inch-deep Cat holes must be used to dispose of human excrement and all toilet paper must be packed out.

**Definitions:**

“Road” is defined as any open public road, any open service road, or any inholding road, as delineated in the NPS GIS data.

“Trail” includes both maintained trails and unmaintained trail corridors as delineated in the NPS GIS data.

“Camping at Large” camping within Joshua Tree National Park Backcountry Zones where a campsite can be selected based on criteria.

“Designated Campsite” is defined as an area within a Backcountry Zone where camping is allowed in areas established by NPS and numbered.

“Cat Hole” – A hole dug for the purpose of depositing human excrement. The holes is covered with soil to prevent biological contaminate entering the ecosystem.

**Justification:**

Reservation Camping

Camping in Joshua Tree National Park is an intensive use and under high demand. These conditions are established to protect the natural and cultural resources in the park, provide for the enjoyment of the public, and improve public safety. Limitations on numbers of days and group size using the backcountry are necessary to achieve this protection while providing equitable access to the park, revisions on maximum group sizes, definition of backcountry zones, clarification on parking for overnight back country access, and disposal of human refuse.

**Definitions for allowable backcountry camping.**

These changes are proposed by the Wilderness Backpacking Permit Committee to facilitate the new permit system. For the new system to be valid and enforceable, we want it to be reasonable for backpackers to comply with the regulations without damaging park resources. Proposed changes include the reduction of boundaries which are restrict camping at large, defining designated campsites in areas prone to damage in sensitive resource areas and disposal of human waste.

Under current regulations, it is not possible to legally camp within the first 6-8 miles of the North Entrance along the CRHT, it is highly difficult to legally camp in the Black Rock area, and it is illegal to camp along the CRHT in the Covington Flats area. The amended regulations will allow visitors to use these areas in a low impact manner.

This regulation is designed to not allow abuse of the backcountry permit system by non-backpackers. Users must park at a backcountry parking lot, have a permit issued through

Recreation.gov or an NPS ranger, and must hike a mile from a backcountry parking lot and half a mile from a road.

The compendium language requiring users to camp 500 feet from water sources would be removed because all extant water sources are within designated Day Use Areas where overnight backpacking is not allowed.

Soil compaction and impacts to plants and soil crusts are increased as users hike further across country. Therefore, we propose reducing the current requirement that users camp more than 500 feet from trail to require users to be at least 200 feet from trail and out of sight of the trail. We believe this will reduce unintended impacts. This is similar to many other NPS units and National Forests requirements.

Current regulations allow users to camp with groups of 13-24 people as long as they are outside wilderness. However, the area in compliance with the current regulations (including being more than 1 mile from roads) is extremely small and impractical for use by any group, therefore groups of 13-24 are already effectively not allowed in all but a few selected slivers of land. It is exceedingly unlikely that any such group would be camping in compliance with the regulations outside wilderness, and it would be inconsistent with wilderness character to allow such a group to camp within wilderness. Therefore, we propose simplifying the regulations to only allow groups of 12 or fewer to camp in all areas.

Definition of campsites within backcountry zones is necessary to slow and abate negative impacts to sensitive resources. Requiring visitors to use specified camping locations reduces unintended impacts to sensitive biological and cultural resources. Protecting these resources enhances a visitor's park experience by allowing natural resources to thrive separate from camping activities. Defining sites also allows park managers to open and close sites when an area requires recovery or revegetation.

Defining Backcountry zones allows park managers to change permit quotas in specific zones when conditions dictate a reduction would have a positive impact to resources or increase when a reduction is no longer needed. This also allows closure of an area in the event of an active or anticipated danger to resources or visitors.

Limiting backcountry overnight users to specified parking areas allow park managers to monitor the arrival and departure users. This will also enhance park employee's ability to determine if unpermitted overnight stays are actively taking place on a day-to-day basis. This will provide an opportunity to educate unpermitted users on the benefits to taking part in a backcountry overnight permit system.

Observation of human feces is becoming a common in Joshua Tree National Parks's wilderness areas. In an effort to abate the impacts on the visitor experience and contamination of the biological environment, clarifying the use of cat holes for feces deposit and disposal will mitigate the unintended impacts of unregulated deposits.

**Proposed by:** Wilderness Backpacking Permit Committee

**Proposal Implementation Date:** Oct 2022, in conjunction with the new wilderness backpacking permit system.

**Method of Public Notification:**

Reviewed By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief Ranger

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DETERMINATION:      Approved

Not Approved

Superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Attachment C

Proposed Backcountry Permit to be Issued for  
Overnight Use - Example

**Back Country Wilderness Permit**

Joshua Tree National Park

**US Department of Interior**

National Park Service

Permit # \_\_\_\_\_

**PERMIT INFORMATION**

Order Summary:

**PAYMENT INFORMATION**

Permit Holder

Permit Date

Vehicle Information

Mailing Address

Destination Zone

Entry Point

Date

Exit Point

Date

Number of Nights

Group Size

Activity Type \_\_\_\_\_

Campsite #(s) and/or Zone(s)

**It is your responsibility to have this permit in possession during stay in required permit areas.****Need to Know**

- ☐ I will pack out trash, toilet paper, and leave the area as it was found.
- ☐ To prevent catastrophic fire, no campfires are allowed in the backcountry.
- ☐ I/We may use a camp stove to prepare meals and/or carry pre-cooked meals.
- ☐ I understand that we must hike on trails, rock expanses, or in washes.
- ☐ Excrement must be packed out or buried in "cat holes" six to eight inches deep and at least 200 feet away from trails and water resources. It is preferred that all excrement be packed out. As an alternative, it can be buried in "cat holes."
- ☐ Food and Water Caches are allowed up to 14 days and must be tagged with my permit information and packed in a hard sided animal-resistant container.
- ☐ I have viewed and understand the Leave No Trace videos from the permit application process.
- ☐ I understand that Natural and Cultural Resources must be left where found.
- ☐ I understand it is suggested to carry a map, compass, and first-aid kit.
- ☐ I understand cell phone service is unavailable in most areas. It is recommended to let a friend/family member know of my travel plan and carry a satellite communication device.
- ☐ I will have a printed copy or image of my permit accessible for inspection by a park representative.



# Regulations

## 36 CFR §2.10 – CAMPING and FOOD STORAGE

- A permit is required for backcountry/wilderness camping. It is a self-registration system and can be obtained at Recreation.gov or at a park visitor center during normal hours of operation.
- Group size limit for day and overnight use is 12 people. Larger groups must obtain a special use permit.
- Camping within the park is limited to 30 days within a calendar year. Between October 1 and May 31, the camping limit within the park is 14 days, in any combination of visits or consecutive nights. These limits apply to all overnight visits, including backcountry stays, campground stays, or any other overnight activity.
- Parking within the park for overnight backcountry/wilderness use is restricted to backcountry parking lots.
- Backcountry/wilderness camping must take place, one mile from backcountry parking, at least a half mile from legally open roads and at least 200 feet from designated trails.
- Fires are not allowed in backcountry and wilderness areas.
- To protect wildlife from pets and pets from wildlife, pets are not allowed on backpacking trails.
- Service animals are not subject to the park's pet policies and, when accompanying an individual with a disability, they are allowed wherever visitors are allowed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This permit is non-transferrable.

A permit is required to access Joshua Tree National Park's wilderness for overnight use. 36 CFR §2.10(a)