

Recreation.gov Provides Digital Wilderness Permits for Olympic National Park

A DIGITAL PLATFORM IMPROVES THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE, REDUCES THE ADMINISTRATIVE WORKLOAD AND COSTS



OUTCOMES:

- Recreation.gov processed 70% of the opening day's volume within an hour of going on-sale and over 3,000 permits in the first couple of weeks.
- The park estimates that it took 15 minutes to manually process a permit. With an average of 20,000 permit requests, Recreation.gov will save Olympic National Park employees approximately 5,000 staff hours and \$100,000-\$150,000 annually.
- Visitors were able to find out immediately if the dates they wanted to visit were available. In the past, they could have waited up to three months for confirmation.



THE CHALLENGE: MANUAL AND OUTDATED PROCESSES KEPT STAFF TIED TO THE OFFICE AND VISITORS WAITING

Like many high-demand parks and facilities offering permits to visitors, Olympic National Park Wilderness Permits were administered via a manual reservation system. Visitors submitted permit requests by phone or via fax machine. For park staff, that meant spending months sorting through the preferred and alternative dates requested, filing the requests in the order in which they were received, and addressing each one accordingly. This process was labor intensive and took a dedicated team of park staff to work through the backlog. In addition, this process presented challenges for the public. Potential visitors were sometimes waiting for months to learn whether they would receive a permit, which delayed trip planning.

In 2018, the park implemented an online application form that visitors could submit by email. While this eliminated the use of reams of fax paper, park staff still spent months manually collecting, filing, and responding to the thousands of requests by hand.



“Recreation.gov provides a huge win for the public. With the new digital platform, individuals now know immediately whether they can complete their trip or not.”

—Brooke Linford, Wilderness Information Center Supervisor



THE SOLUTION: RECREATION.GOV OFFERS A STREAMLINED, MODERN APPROACH TO HIGH-DEMAND PERMITS

Brooke Linford, Olympic National Park Wilderness Information Center Supervisor, joined the park in 2018, and knew that a digital solution could streamline the laborious manual Olympic Wilderness Permit process. Familiar with Recreation.gov and the digital pass solution from prior work with the Interagency pass program, Brooke contacted Rick DeLappe, R1S Program Manager.

Olympic Wilderness Permits are complex as they have numerous dependencies based upon a visitor's starting area, site selection, and dates. Brooke and his team worked closely with the Recreation.gov team to identify the scope of work and develop an intuitive reservation system for the public.



IMPLEMENTATION: COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION HELP THE PARK NAVIGATE THE CHANGE

The Recreation.gov platform has a comprehensive and transparent implementation process. Over a three-month timeframe, the teams held several meetings to ensure all visitor and staff touchpoints, including field sales, were addressed. The Recreation.gov team also shared live demos of the product, providing an opportunity for ongoing feedback during development.

Prior to launch, the teams conducted extensive functionality testing. "Having the ability to play around in the test environment was extremely helpful," said Brooke. The Recreation.gov team also held two live training webinars involving key park staff members.

On March 18, 2019, Olympic National Park Wilderness Permits were released online for the first time. During the release, Recreation.gov hosted a "Launch Event". The event allowed stakeholders - including park representatives and the development team - to monitor the site activity together and access real-time site analytics and transactions processed. It gave the park the opportunity to watch the successful transformation to a digital platform in real time, and to report activity and transactions to management.



THE RESULTS: RECREATION.GOV INCREASES STAFF EFFICIENCY AND DECREASES VISITOR WAIT TIMES

Recreation.gov processed 931 permits the first hour they went on-sale which was 71% of the volume for the entire day. According to Brooke, the transition to Recreation.gov with the ability to process this kind of volume has provided several "huge wins":

- The Olympic Wilderness team has saved literally months of manual work entering, reviewing, and responding to permit requests. This gives park rangers more time to be out in the park and engaging with the public.
- The public now has transparency into the process. They know immediately whether their reservations were secured, and they can complete travel plans.

During summer months, long lines frequently form at the Wilderness Information Center. This summer, visitors will be able to purchase their permits digitally to eliminate the wait, saving time for both staff and visitors. Less time spent in line means more time to enjoy the park!



"I want to compliment everyone involved. We did some outside of the box things, including using dependencies, and that was a big hit with the public."

—Brooke Linford, Wilderness Information Center Supervisor



"One great thing about Recreation.gov is that the administrative tool "The Hub" is very intuitive. Although nobody on our team had used it before, they could get up and running."

—Brooke Linford, Wilderness Information Center Supervisor



The Hub

