

USU Institute Of Outdoor Recreation And Tourism Helping To Improve Park Services Under NPS Contract

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Grant Teton National Park, Wyoming

Thanks to funding from the National Park Service, the team at USU's Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism will be working on a series of projects to improve national parks in the intermountain west.

"We're running a project right now where we're looking at the regional economic impact of these dark sky programs that are offered at the five national parks in Utah. And so that's kind of a great example of a project that came through a regional office. But it could easily be run through this award," said Jordan Smith, the director of the Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism at Utah State University.

The institute is part of a team that will receive funding over the next five years from the National Park Service for projects to improve parks around the nation. Individual

park management units contact the team to request projects.

One likely project is how an online reservation system, already in place at some parks, could impact other sites such as Zion National Park. The system would lead to fewer people entering the park at a time, which Smith said raises the question about what people do if they don't get in.

"It means that less people are visiting the park or are able to visit the park but right now, we don't know if that means that the demand for people to actually get into the park has lessened," said Smith. "And if people aren't actually able to get into the parks, because the reservation system is full, what are they doing in the meantime?"

People may spend more time in gateway communities and possibly spend more money, said Smith, potentially bolstering the tourism economies in these communities. Understanding the unintended consequences on park policies is a pressing issue, according to Smith.

Join us tomorrow as we continue the discussion on how gateway communities have been impacted by COVID-19 health and safety restrictions.

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