

# HAVASUPAI TRIBAL COUNCIL

P.O. Box 10 • Supai, Arizona 86435  
(928) 433-8130 • Fax (928) 433-8119

May15, 2020

David Bernhardt, Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

***Re: Request to Keep Grand Canyon National Park Closed for the Duration of COVID-19 Pandemic***

Dear Secretary Bernhardt:

On behalf of the Havasupai Tribe, I would like to express our great alarm that you have partially reopened Grand Canyon National Park ("GCNP") despite the fact that the coronavirus pandemic is continuing to spread across Arizona and the United States. The Havasupai Tribe urges you to close GCNP for as long as this crisis lasts. Doing so is critical to protecting the health and welfare of the Havasupai people who live at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Supai Village and at Supai Camp, a historic and continuous settlement of Havasupai tribal members within our aboriginal territory in what is now known as GCNP.

An outbreak in Supai or Supai Camp would be absolutely devastating to our Tribe due to our isolation, vulnerable population, and lack of medical resources. Recognizing this grave danger, we have taken extensive precautions to prevent COVID-19 from reaching our remote community. The Tribe has declared a state of emergency, restricted all travel in and out of the Reservation, enacted a stay-at-home and mandatory quarantine order for all Reservation residents, placed the Reservation on lockdown, and suspended all tourism visits to the Reservation until further notice. Thus far, these measures are working. Havasupai does not currently have any reported COVID-19 cases, despite the surge of positive cases just outside the GCNP boundaries on the Navajo Nation and on the neighboring Hualapai Reservation.

GCNP must remain closed for us to keep the Havasupai people healthy and safe. Opening GCNP poses an obvious risk to our tribal members living at Supai Camp within the Park's boundaries by bringing more people within close vicinity. But opening GCNP also endangers residents of the Havasupai Reservation. Visitors to GCNP often come onto our Reservation without the Tribe's permission. To access the Bass Trail in the Great Thumb area, hikers must pass through the Reservation. Park visitors using the Colorado River also often disrespect our Reservation boundaries by following Havasu Creek upstream to visit Beaver Falls, Mooney Falls, and Havasu Falls, sometimes even hiking to Supai Village and out from Hualapai Hilltop. Should you keep GCNP open – which we implore you not to do – GCNP must ensure that its visitors not come onto Reservation land. We simply do not have the manpower to police our

Reservation boundaries that abut GCNP, and anyone who enters the Reservation in violation of the Tribe's lockdown threatens our entire community.

The Tribe is continuing to do everything we can to prevent an outbreak, and reopening GCNP undermines our efforts to keep the Havasupai people healthy and safe. We urge you to keep GCNP closed until this public health emergency passes. Please contact me at [htchair@havasupai-nsn.gov](mailto:htchair@havasupai-nsn.gov) or (928) 433-8131 if you have any questions or would like to discuss this important matter further.

Respectfully submitted,

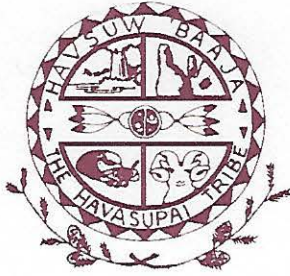
A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Evangeline Kissoon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Evangeline Kissoon, Chairwoman  
The Havasupai Tribe

Enclosure: The Havasupai Tribe's April 2, 2020 Letter to Secretary Bernhardt

Cc: Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent Edward Keable  
National Park Service Deputy Director David Vela  
Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney  
Governor Doug Ducey  
Congressman Tom O'Halleran  
Senator Martha McSally  
Senator Kyrsten Sinema  
Congressman Raul Grijalva





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April 2, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

On behalf of the Havasupai Tribe, thank you for closing Grand Canyon National Park ("GCNP") due to the coronavirus pandemic that is rapidly spreading across Arizona and the United States. This closure is critical to protecting the health and welfare of the Havasupai people who live at the bottom of the Grand Canyon in the Village of Supai and at Supai Camp, a historic and continuous settlement of Havasupai tribal members within our aboriginal territory in what is now known as GCNP. To date, there is one confirmed case of COVID-19 in Grand Canyon Village, and there is a cluster of COVID-19 cases just outside the GCNP boundaries on the Navajo Nation.<sup>1</sup> Closing GCNP to visitors will help all local residents, including Havasupai tribal members, maintain the social distancing that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC") has called for as necessary to stem the spread of coronavirus.

An outbreak in Supai or Supai Camp would be absolutely devastating to our Tribe due to our isolation, vulnerable population, and lack of medical resources. Many of our tribal members living at both Supai and Supai Camp are elderly, diabetic, asthmatic, or otherwise immunocompromised. We are also severely lacking in medical resources. For example, there is almost no flu and cough medication and other medical supplies within Supai or Supai Camp; there is not a single hospital bed at the Tribe's lone Indian Health Service ("IHS") clinic in Supai; there are no ventilators at our IHS clinic, in Supai, or at Supai Camp; and our contract with the IHS provides for only one physician, one clinical nurse, and one public health nurse to serve our community.

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<sup>1</sup> See AZ Central, *First Grand Canyon resident tests positive for coronavirus; park still open* (Mar. 30, 2020), <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-health/2020/03/30/first-grand-canyon-area-resident-has-coronavirus-park-still-open/5092501002/>; Navajo Times, *COVID-19 Across the Navajo Nation* (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://navajotimes.com/coronavirus-updates/covid-19-across-the-navajo-nation/>

The Havasupai Tribal Council recently enacted a series of measures aimed at preventing coronavirus from reaching our remote community. On March 13, 2020, we suspended all tourism visits to the Reservation for 30 days. On March 18, 2020, we declared a state of emergency for the Tribe. On March 20, 2020, we restricted all travel in and out of the Reservation. On March 28, 2020, we enacted a mandatory stay-at-home and quarantine order for all tribal members.

The Tribe is continuing to do everything we can to prevent and prepare for an outbreak, and your closure of GCNP supports our efforts to keep the Havasupai people healthy and safe, especially those living at Supai Camp within GCNP. We are very grateful that you have closed GCNP, and we urge you to keep GCNP closed for as long as this crisis lasts. Please contact me at [htchair@havasupai-nsn.gov](mailto:htchair@havasupai-nsn.gov) or (928) 433-8131 if you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further.

Respectfully submitted,



Evangeline Kissoon, Chairwoman  
The Havasupai Tribe

Cc: Grand Canyon National Park Acting Superintendent Mary Risser  
National Park Service Deputy Director David Vela  
Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney  
Governor Doug Ducey  
Congressman Tom O'Halleran  
Senator Martha McSally  
Senator Kyrsten Sinema  
Congressman Raul Grijalva