

Rocky Mountain National Park open temporarily, thanks to State of Colorado

Written by Darci Tomky

Rocky Mountain National Park temporarily reopened Saturday, Oct. 12, thanks to funding from Colorado.

The park was one of 400 national parks to close Oct. 1 due to the federal shutdown when the government failed to pass a budget.

Over 10,000 people visited the park over the Columbus Day weekend, surely an economic boost to nearby Estes Park, a town that is simply trying to recover from the recent historic flooding. Five days after Rocky Mountain National Park opened after the flooding, it was forced to close again, this time at the hands of the government.

Gov. John Hickenlooper struck a \$362,700 agreement with the Department of the Interior last Friday, Oct. 11. That means for at least 10 days Colorado will cover the \$40,000 a day needed to operate the park and pay its employees during the shutdown.

The agreement also included plowing and opening Trail Ridge Road, another access point into Estes Park after roads were damaged in the flood.

The governor's office said the money will come from the tourism budget, but eventually the state plans to seek reimbursement for the cost.

Tourists this weekend were met with the bugling of elk and great fishing conditions in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Other states agreed to temporarily pick up the tab for their national parks, including the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore and the Statue of Liberty, among others.

Jim and Mary Jane Bohlender of Holyoke had some bad timing on a recent nine-day bus tour to

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the northeast. If they were going to see it, it was now or never, they said of their trip of a lifetime, even though they knew talks of a shutdown were up in the air when they booked their trip.

Jim had always wanted to see New York City, N.Y., especially the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, where his grandparents went to as immigrants to America. Unfortunately, because of the shutdown, they were only able to take a ferry around those two historic landmarks, unable to actually stop and get out to see the islands.

“We were disappointed,” said Mary Jane, but she didn’t see any real antagonism from tourists, especially their tour group of seniors.

Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pa., was also closed to the Bohlanders, but they found a gate to the grounds was not completely closed, so they were able to sneak in for a short time. The Liberty Bell was also closed, but they could peak in the window for a closer look.

Mary Jane said the guards were not unpleasant and were simply there keeping order. She said they told them of their disappointment, but they never saw anyone give any great displays of their anger toward the government. “I still think it was a slap in the face to anyone visiting those places,” said Mary Jane of the shutdown.

In Phillips County, the shutdown is still affecting residents, namely with the closure of the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service offices at 1280 SW Interocean Dr. in Holyoke.

As of Tuesday morning, Oct. 15, their phone message still stated, “Due to lapse in federal government funding, this office is currently closed. After funding has been restored, the office will reopen.”

Those employees are among 350,000 furloughed federal workers around the country.

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