



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Interior Regions 3,4,5
601 Riverfront Drive
Omaha, NE 68102

10.C (MWR-RDO)

March 11, 2021

Jim Hagen
Secretary of Tourism
South Dakota Department of Tourism
711 E. Wells Ave.
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Dear Mr. Hagan,

This letter is in response to the permit request you submitted on behalf of the State of South Dakota Tourism, to conduct a firework display at Mount Rushmore National Memorial in July of 2021. We appreciate your interest in the park and recognize the importance of the Memorial to the State of South Dakota and the nation.

After careful consideration, the National Park Service has determined that we are unable to grant a request to have fireworks at the Memorial. The 2019 Memorandum of Agreement between the State of South Dakota and the Department of the Interior commits us to work together to bring fireworks back to the Memorial in a safe and responsible manner. Potential risks to the park itself and to the health and safety of employees and visitors associated with the fireworks demonstration continue to be a concern and are still being evaluated as a result of the 2020 event. In addition, the park's many tribal partners expressly oppose fireworks at the Memorial. These factors, compiled with the COVID-19 pandemic, do not allow a safe and responsible fireworks display to be held at this site.

The health and safety of the public and our employees remain the highest priority for the National Park Service. While we have recently been seeing encouraging progress in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation remains dynamic and it is only prudent to make plans based on the best available science and public health guidance available today. As the nation continues to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, planning an event of this size and magnitude that draws people from across the country raises very serious concerns about the ability to adhere to Center for Disease Control guidance which currently recommends that large gatherings be avoided, particularly those in which physical social distancing cannot be maintained between people who live in different households. With an event this size it would be difficult, if not impossible, to comply with social distancing protocols if they continue to be in place in early July. Also, as we saw last year, most participants were not wearing face coverings, which are now required in all national parks where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

In addition, we are committed to respecting tribal connections with the site and building stronger relationships with associated tribes. The park committed to the 13 affiliated tribes to conduct a Tribal Cultural Sites / Traditional Cultural Properties Survey of the Memorial in 2020; however, due to the pandemic it has been delayed until summer 2021.

The park continues to monitor levels of perchlorates in the water and the potential for wildfire. The 2020 event was limited in attendance due to safety concerns which consequently impacted tens of thousands who were not able to visit the memorial or had their visit cut short. Also, we are in the final phase of a significant construction project in the park. While the work is scheduled to be complete in June 2021, any delay in the project would result in the work not being complete by July. A second demobilization to accommodate an event would be costly to the agency and impact the visiting public further based on the 2020 experience. These factors all weigh into the decision whether to hold a 2021 event.

We value our relationship with the State of Dakota and wish to continue to work with you to commemorate our nation's history at this national icon. The announcement of the new superintendent for the park will be made soon and it will be one of their top priorities to reach out to you to discuss plans for this year's Independence Day celebrations and other ways we can work together in the future.

Sincerely,

Herbert C. Frost
Regional Director