

Wednesday, May 6, 2020

The Honorable James C. Justice
Office of the Governor
1900 Kanawha Blvd. E
Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Governor Justice:

The coronavirus pandemic has brought the travel and tourism industry to a standstill. During this time of an average year, ATV lodging operators and related businesses would be preparing for Memorial Day Weekend, which is the “unofficial” start of the riding season and one of the busiest weekends of the entire year.

Unfortunately, with the Hatfield McCoy Trails closed and with no re-opening date announced, we are edging closer to a catastrophic loss of revenue for small ATV lodging operators and other related businesses that are already struggling to make ends meet due to nearly two months of canceled trips. Each of us have already lost many thousands of dollars in canceled and postponed reservations. Some of us may not be able to reopen our doors if the closure of the trails continues, creating a ripple effect that could impact county hotel/motel tax revenues and other local small businesses that benefit from trail riders.

We believe riding the Hatfield McCoy Trails is a great example of social distancing. The thrill of getting away from the crowds and riding southern West Virginia’s world-class ATV trails through our rugged, isolated mountains is what brings visitors to our state year after year.

Our guests share our concerns for their health and the health of those who live and work in our communities. Many of our guests choose to cook and eat at our lodges. We will encourage all of our guests to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s guidelines if they do choose to order pickup or dine outside at any of our great local restaurants.

We take our responsibility to provide our guests safe, clean accommodations very seriously. We are prepared to follow the American Hotel & Lodging Association’s “Safe Stay” guidelines for washing high-touch surfaces in guest rooms and washing linens, towels and other laundry in accordance with CDC guidelines.¹ If supplies of masks and gloves become available, we would like to provide this personal protective equipment to our staff who enter the rooms to perform cleaning and maintenance to further protect against spread of the coronavirus.

Access to the Great Outdoors and our Wild, Wonderful trails is more critical than ever in this unprecedented time as people look toward safe, social-distanced activities. Without this critical access to the Hatfield McCoy Trails, the viability of our businesses is at risk. ATV trail systems in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Tennessee are already open or will be open in the coming days and weeks. If the Hatfield McCoy Trails remain closed, riders will simply make plans to other states

to ride the trails, leaving West Virginia to miss out on these potential guests both now and for years to come.

In Mercer County alone, visitor spending generated \$9 million in local and state taxes in 2019; there were 1,200 tourism jobs, and the earnings from those jobs amounted to \$27.3 million. Each Mercer County household paid \$357 less in taxes because of tourism revenues, according to the Mercer County Convention & Visitors Bureau's 2019 annual report.² A loss of these jobs and revenues would be damaging to our region, and catastrophic to the livelihoods of so many of us who have invested our livelihoods into our growing tourism industry.

While much of the world has been turned upside down, we believe our trails can prevail as a safe place for our current guests and for a new generation of people who are seeking out social-distanced outdoor activities. For these reasons, we respectfully request that you consider opening the Hatfield McCoy Trails for the safe recreational use of West Virginians and our valued guests.

Sincerely,

Michael Constantino
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Haley Davis
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Sherry Norman
Crane Creek Cabins
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Diana Burnette
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Dale Sizemore
Dale's ATV Getaway
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Jessica Patterson
Hampton Inn
Princeton, WV

Barry & Krista Maness
Browning Lambert ATV
Resort
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Henry Shinn
Hidden Hollow ATV Ranch
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Fairfield by Marriott
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¹ <https://www.ahla.com/safestay>

² https://www.bdtonline.com/news/mercator-visitors-bureau-reports-2019-hit-big-with-tourists/article_95f00dd8-6727-11ea-846e-03c7bd1b69df.html