



Brewster County Tourism Council

"Visit Big Bend"

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To: Brewster County Judge Eleazar Cano, Commissioner Sara Allen Colando, Commissioner Betse Esparza, Commissioner Ruben Ortega, Commissioner Mike Pallanez, Sheriff Ronny Dodson, County Attorney Steve Houston, BBNP Superintendent Bob Krumenaker, BBRSP Superintendent Nate Gold, Presidio County Judge Cinderella Guevarra, Jeff Davis County Judge Kerith Sproul-Hurley

CC. Brewster County Tourism Council Board Members: Tom Williams, Barbara Trammel, Linda Walker, Travis Roberts, John Price, Carol Peterson, Wendy Little, Louis Carpenter, Mimi Webb Miller, Marsha Roberts.

Greetings,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Brewster County Tourism Council. As a group, we want to ask the County to re-open the lodging industry in the County as quickly as possible. It is our understanding that the hoteliers that we represent are most willing to operate under reasonable restrictions and guidelines recommended or mandated by the County for the added safety of their guests and employees. Please take time to look at the facts and figures that are presented in this letter. Even more important, please take into consideration the human and economic impact concerning your decisions.

Tourism has always been referred to as "The Cleanest Industry". Our region of West Texas is unique in that it has very significant natural resources that attract visitors from out of the County. Big Bend National Park, of course, is the most significant of these. Outside of Alpine, all lodging facilities, restaurants, art galleries, retail stores, a golf course, zipline, and outdoor recreation outfitters are dependent on travelers to this region for their existence.

Since the Big Bend is not easily accessible by commercial air travel, most visitors must travel hundreds of miles to get here by car. If there is no possible way to spend a night in the Tri-County Region, then there is no possible way to visit regardless of whether the Park is open or closed.

The typical demographic of our visitors leans towards a healthier, and more conscientious group that participate in outdoor activities such as hiking, photography, and outdoor recreation. The other most significant group represents an older, retired population that are seeking an outdoor experience but in a less invasive way such as short hikes, birding, and golf to mention a few. Of course, shopping and eating and sleeping are the most popular among all.

Big Bend National Park has over 800,000 acres of wide-open spaces for social distancing. In the first quarter of this year, the Park reported 155,467 visitors to Big Bend. Most of those travelers obviously visited between February 15th and March 15th, and that's just the number that was counted in the Park alone. Yet, not one case of the Corona Virus has been reported in the entire Tri-County Region. This

should be testimony enough that tourists are not justifiably responsible for the transmittal of the Corona Virus. We are equal in that aspect. Furthermore, the only visitors that have stayed in the hotels in Alpine are essential workers or government employees. Don't they arrive from Austin, Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, Washington D.C.? What's the difference?

It is very important for you to give credit to the hoteliers in this region. There are no "drive by" hotels in Brewster County. They are geared to give their guests a safe, enjoyable experience and the pricing structure is testimony to that. The lodging industry is very competitive in the Tri-County Region, and a hotelier simply could not stay in business if they did not operate under a high set of standards.

Please understand that a typical hotel room is cleaned and serviced much like a hospital room. Linens are changed regularly and sanitized. The beds and bathrooms are sanitized daily. Trash is removed on a daily basis. Regardless of the Corona Virus, this is already standard procedure for responsible hoteliers for which this Council supports and represents. I have been unable to find a case anywhere that was attributed to staying in a hotel room. Different standards may apply to long term rentals and short term AirBnB type accommodations and perhaps you should address that industry separately.

Brewster has for several years now been one of the Texas Counties that derives an astonishing percentage of the gross revenues and gross payrolls from tourism.

Looking at the 2018 data from the Travel Stats Dashboard, you will see that 1,600 jobs, representing \$42.6 million in earnings were directly attributable to tourism in this County. In addition, you can look and see what the direct travel expenditures and direct tax receipts were.

(data link located here: <https://www.travelstats.com/dashboard>)

The Dean Runyan reports below have been produced for many years. The data trends are quite interesting but just looking at the most recent published data (2017), we can see the following regarding Brewster County:

Travel Share of County Employment	26.4%	Highest in the State
Travel share of Gross Earnings	16.9%	Highest in the State
County Visitor Share of State Sales Tax Revenue	18.3%	Also Highest in the State

Of course, we have seen a significant upturn in the amount of visitation to the Tri-County region since this report was formulated. I am very confident that these percentages will be much higher now.

It has been mentioned that some of the Commissioners have stated that they have only heard from citizens that have been in favor of keeping the hotels closed. I beg to differ. Practically all hoteliers in Terlingua, Study Butte, Lajitas, and Marathon gave statements at the first 2 Emergency Commissioners Court Meetings regarding the Corona Virus. Those statements were unquestionably against closing the lodging industry in Brewster County. All of those citizens that gave statements are also constituents that have contributed a substantial impact on the economy of this County and are directly responsible for the positive image that Brewster County now has among the State.

I encourage you to consult with the hundreds of citizens that lost their jobs and their livelihood from the decision to close the lodging industry in Brewster County. I'm sure they have a voice to be heard as well. Remember, those voices come from restaurants, galleries, retail stores, outfitters, and a golf course, not just hotels.

Consider the many small businesses that must rely on government loans to try to save or restore their own livelihood. Keeping the hotels closed makes it difficult, if not impossible, for those small businesses to comply with government stipulations attached to the funding.

No one on the Tourism Council would ever advocate anything that would go against the safety or well-being of anyone. Since Brewster, Presidio, and Jeff Davis counties are the only ones that have closed lodging in the State of Texas, we ask that you would consider taking the Governor's advice into consideration and formulate an expedited plan for the benefit of every demographic of this County. We respect your difficult situation and encourage each of you to reach out to us if you have any questions, or concerns.

Again, we ask each of you to consider opening up the lodging industry in Brewster County for the good of the citizens that you represent.

Very respectfully yours,

Bill C. Ivey

President, Brewster County Tourism Council