

EMNRD-State Parks Division

Via email: EMNRD-ParksComments@emnrd.nm.gov

Re: comment on proposed fee changes

As a 30-year resident of New Mexico, I support the effort of New Mexico State Parks to study the current fee structure and advocate changes for an equitable fee structure that will sustain State Parks infrastructure allow our public resources to prosper.

When my 2 kids were younger, we would pick a different state park every year for our spring break camping trip, sometimes leaving Santa Fe in a snowstorm and arriving at a sunny campsite in Southern New Mexico a few hours later. I believe I've been to 30 of your parks or facilities, often camping with both a tent and a small RV – we also carry kayaks

My comments on the proposed fee changes:

DAY USE: I do not believe opening facilities to day use without a fee is a good idea or equitable policy. Day users do impact infrastructure and a small fee per vehicle (not bikes or pedestrians) would not deter recreational visitation, while limit entry by those looking to smash into vehicles or vandalize property.

I do agree that paying volunteers or rangers to collect fees is not a good use of resources, but if you are proposing self-pay stations for out-of-state visitors, it makes sense to have one fee for all visitors, as some out of state visitors will be arriving in cars with NM license plates anyway.

Travelers are increasingly comfortable using self-pay – and there may be an online app where this fee can be paid using just a phone. The majority of those visiting state parks understand the need to support recreational areas they utilize.

From a management perspective, I also think it would be useful for the State to retrieve as much information on visitor times and locations as possible – so some metered or required registration would be one way to gather this data. And from a law enforcement perspective, it also makes to require payment – so if there is a vandalism or crime incident at a facility, law enforcement would have the right to ask for proof of payment and have a record of visitor license plates to interview witnesses.

ANNUAL PASS – As one who is approaching retirement, I bemoan the potential loss of an annual camping pass, which I have never utilized but will do so in the coming years. I am one who supported an increase at the Federal level of lifetime senior passes, which at one time cost just \$10, was not enough to support the staffing or our vital resources.

Likewise, State Parks fee analysis and research makes sense in that full-time RVers and snowbirds who migrate to New Mexico because of the low-cost camping, limits spaces for others

A compromise might make sense limit the sale of annual passes to in-state residents and/or cap the number of allowed camping nights to between 45-60. Make it also clear that those booking with

an annual pass must have a NM license plate at the site when staying overnight – this would ensure they did not utilize or pay an NM in-state relative or friend to procure the pass for them.

CAMPING FEE – A \$20 per cost per night for developed/primitive camping feels a tad high when compared with BLM/National Forest/BUREC sites in New Mexico, especially after utilities, tax and reservation fees are applied. A \$15 fee seems more reasonable, with future increases than possible depending on needs and utilization.

BOAT LAUNCH FEES - I have no objections to higher fees to launch small boats, but please be mindful of families who may have multiple kayaks or floating devices and impose one fee per party or vehicle for families to lessen this burden.

DUMP FEES - I do wonder about the wisdom of a separate charge for RV dumping. Mostly anyone who camps in an RV more than one than 1 night will use the RV dump – and collecting a separate fee might result in more illegal discharges of waste. Yet, I know dump stations have a cost and that cost should be allocated to users.

My suggestion would be to simply roll in dump costs to the RV camping fees, as you do currently so those who need to use the service will use it without hesitation instead of improperly dumping outside the camp areas. An extra \$1 per reservation night at RV sites might be sufficient for this cost allocation.

Contractual Oversight: As one who supports what you are doing, I also hope that State Parks is looking closely at its contract with Reserve America to ensure the state is retaining as much revenue as possible from a contract covering public lands.

On a trip last summer to Navajo Lake, we had reserved 4 nights at the Simms Point campground but decided to camp at the main area instead. The reservation specifically states there was no charge for moving to another campsite inside a park, which is in part why we made the decision.

But when we got to Navajo Lake in midafternoon on a weekday, the Visitor Center was closed. We found an empty site and called the reservation help number and was told that any change had to be made at the physical location, not the phone. But no one was on site to help us, neither the ranger nor the camp host was authorized to make these changes – so I cancelled at Simms on line, then rebooked for the new site paying substantial fees – every penny going to the contractor.

This has happened several times in the past years as reservation camping has become the norm.

I also suggest reviewing the contract so that if a customer has a same-day cancellation, and the site gets rebooked for that night, the overnight camping fee be refunded to the first customer. Again, the outside contractor is making money twice for the same site reservation and campers are being exploited for utilizing public lands.

Regards,

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