

From: [CS](#)
To: [emnrd-parkscomments, EMNRD; nmdgf@public.govdelivery.com](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: New Mexico State Parks Division Proposes Changes to Fee Structure and Park Rules
Date: Tuesday, February 27, 2024 5:25:28 PM

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As a frequent patron of NM State Parks, I appreciate the notice and opportunity to voice my concerns in advance of the proposed changes being finalized.

Over the past six years, my family - both immediate and extended - significantly increased our utilization of this public service as an affordable means of spending time together, particularly camping. This allows time to be spent with the people we care about but do not otherwise get to see on a regular basis, without the burden of feeling common social burdens like the need to fill gaps in conversation - you can simply enjoy the proximity. When describing the experience, I've compared camping to living in a private cul de sac with my family, but just on the weekends. Nothing else provides the same experience, and it has enabled my family to become closer, especially after the loss of my mother who otherwise previously fulfilled that responsibility. My hope is that my children go to adulthood with the same appreciation for nature and camping that I've acquired.

The purpose of this backstory is to emphasize the negative impact my family will experience if the proposed changes are approved. In 2023, my family spent over 40 nights within a state park. Availability of an annual camping pass played a significant role in making this a possibility. In comparison, within the same budget constraint after accounting for the proposed price hikes, my family will be able to afford two camping trips in 2025, assuming each trip is two nights of primitive camping with a sewage dump at the end and launching two non-motorized kayaks each day.

The projections associated with the proposed changes paint a picture of positive impact, but fail to account for real-world variables that result in negative impact, most notably loss in patronage. As noted, I've leveraged camping in NM state parks as an *affordable* family activity, which is the primary reason I can participate so frequently. I'm confident that if NM State Parks conducted a demographic study of their patrons, they would find that an overwhelming majority fall within the low to middle class income brackets. Returning to the budget example previously noted, the proposed cost increase represents over a **1,000% increase in cost** per two-night/three-day camping trip compared to my current costs via an annual pass. If we omit the annual camping pass savings and consider nightly rates, we are still looking at a **500% increase in cost** per trip. Your low to middle class patrons will now longer be able to justify or afford overnight camping nearly as much as they did historically - it makes a weekend on the couch, allocating funds to streaming services more and more appealing and justified. This factor significantly skews the proposal's projections, which assume historical patronage levels will be maintained.

It is also critical that the longer term effects be considered. With the rate of technological development and advances, younger generations are already showing a declining interest in outdoor activities, opting instead for device-based experiences that can easily be facilitated at home. I take my children camping on a regular basis in hopes that they will perceive the same value I have in our natural resources and continue to utilize the parks system throughout their lives, with their future families. The chances of that happening decline significantly if I can no

longer justify the cost of camping with them on a regular basis. These are NM State Park's *potential, future customers*. Without younger generations' interest, state parks will quickly become obsolete.

Lastly, I'd like to point out that elimination of day pass fees is inappropriately presented as a benefit in this proposal. Of all my visits to NM State Parks in 2023, not one was a day visit. Day visits require that I either be wealthy enough to own property within proximity of the park or pay to stay in a hotel the night I visit, or accept the burden of a lengthy drive home each night. This change benefits only those residents in upper income brackets, not the majority of your patrons.

While I understand the need to account for inflation, at a real-world customer cost increase of 500%+ per weekend camping trip, NM State Parks can no longer claim to provide a public service. The parks instead become a luxury that many can no longer justify. I urge NM State Parks to continue to charge day pass fees, reconsider elimination of the annual camping pass, and propose a new plan that implements the inflation-based price increases over a significantly longer period of time as opposed to decades'-worth all at once.

Thank you,

Charles Sanchez
