

*Rolf Hechler
Mayor*



*Destiny Mitchell
Commissioner*

*Amanda Forrister
Mayor Pro-Tem*

*Ingo Hoepfner
Commissioner*

*Merry Jo Fahl
Commissioner*

*505 Sims St.
Truth or Consequences, New Mexico 87901
P: 575-894-6673 ♦ F: 575-894-7767
www.torcnm.org*

*Angie Gonzales
City Manager*



CITY OF ELEPHANT BUTTE
103 Water Ave. P. O. Box 1080
Elephant Butte, New Mexico 87935
Office (575) 744-4892 FAX (575) 744-4493

March 4, 2024

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham
New Mexico State Capitol
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

CC: Sen. Crystal Diamond Brantley
Rep. Gail Armstrong
Rep. Tara Jaramillo
State Parks Division, New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD)

Dear Gov. Grisham:

Sierra County is host to Elephant Butte Lake State Park (EBLSP), which welcomes more than one million visitors annually. The cities of Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences are the closest communities to EBLSP. These communities depend heavily on visitors, as they frequent stores, gas stations and hotels, among other businesses in our region, and they participate in a range of activities while camping at the lake. Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences would not exist as we know them today if not for the development and popularity of EBLSP.

By extension, EBLSP is a huge economic driver for New Mexico and surrounding states. People who visit EBLSP purchase groceries, fuel their vehicles and boats, and buy fishing gear and water toys at their origination points as they prepare for their trip to the lake. Those who buy an RV, boat, jet ski or paddle board in any community within several hundred miles of EBLSP most likely will plan an extended camping trip to New Mexico's premier water recreation destination.

The State Parks Division of EMNRD (New Mexico State Parks) will derive most of the overage it expects from its proposed fee increases from EBLSP, which is the largest and most visited state park in the state's 35-park system. We, the undersigned city and community leaders, believe the proposed fee increases are exorbitant and do not reasonably consider the financial status of state residents who frequent this park. Studies commissioned to support the fee increases appear to have relied on fee comparisons of other states exclusively without factoring in the average income in New Mexico. According to census statistics, residents of our state are among the poorest of the surrounding states, with a lower per capita income and a higher percentage of residents living below the poverty line.

Kim Skinner Kim Skinner Mayor Pro Tem City of Elephant Butte

Printed name

signature

Title

Cathy Harmon Cathy Harmon Councilor City of Elephant Butte

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signature

Title

Michael J. Williams Michael J. Williams Councilor City of EB

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Lindsey Colleigh Lindsey Colleigh City Clerk

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ROLF M. HECHLER Rolf Hechler Mayor / Torc
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MERRY D. FANL Merry D. Fanl Torc Commissioner
Printed name signature Title

DESTINY MITCHELL Destiny Mitchell Torc Commissioner
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INGO HOEPPNER Ingo Hoepfner Torc Commissioner
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ANGELA GONZALES Angela Gonzalez Torc City Mgr
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TRACI ALVAREZ Traci Alvarez Asst. City Mgr.
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PHILIP W. MORTENSEN Phillip W. Mortensen Mayor EB
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DEB STUBBLEFIELD Deb Stubblefield Mayor Vow
Printed name signature Title

MAJORIE E. POWEY Majorie E. Powey Trustee
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BRUCE SWINGLE Bruce Swingle BUSINESS DEV. MGR.
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FRANK CORCORAN Frank Corcoran CEO Sierra Vista Hospital
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KIMI SKINNER Kim Skinner Mayor Pro Tem
Printed name signature Title City of Elephant Butte

CATHY HARMON Cathy Harmon Council City of Elephant Butte
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We appreciate the proposed removal of the \$5 day use charge for New Mexico residents — though, realistically, this is of little or no benefit to those residents who live in major communities 70 to 250 miles away and generally visit EBLSP to camp. While the \$40 day pass benefits some residents living close to EBLSP, many others have not bothered to buy this pass, electing instead to visit undeveloped areas around the lake and take their chances without paying, as these areas are infrequently checked.

Indeed, many families visiting EBLSP enjoy the unique experience of camping on miles of sandy beaches — what New Mexico State Parks would call primitive camping. Current fees are low and, understandably, an increase for those areas may be warranted. However, raising those fees from \$8 to \$20 per day, as proposed, represents a steep increase of 150 percent. For the many families who camp on these beaches and bring two vehicles for two nights during the weekend, this increase would mean an outlay of \$80 instead of \$32. A \$20 fee for primitive beach camping is excessive, especially when there are few amenities that would warrant the increase. A \$10 charge per vehicle for these visitors would seem more appropriate, especially as \$20 is the proposed new fee for developed campsites.

Understanding the need to raise developed campsite fees in support of park operations and improving amenities is important to the overall visitor experience. We propose a more modest increase for the developed sites from \$10 to \$15, and from \$4 to \$8 for electric. New Mexico State Parks should diligently lobby the state, which has just seen a \$3 billion surplus in revenue, for the funds needed to pursue additional improvements instead of placing this solely on park users.

Charging non-motorized boat users, which includes paddle boards, kayaks and canoes, \$5 per day is excessive, especially as this activity has minimal environmental and overall impact on the lake and its facilities. Enforcement of this alone would seem problematic — and hardly worth a park ranger’s time, as each contact would take a ranger away from other essential duties. We would like to propose a \$25 fee to run concurrently with the fishing licenses from April 1 through March 31 annually. As with the fishing license, the cost would be the same no matter the time of year purchased. The non-motorized boat user could be issued a card and a waterproof sticker to be placed on the boat to indicate payment.

An affordable outdoor experience is crucial to allowing a new generation of visitors to explore its love for outdoor recreation, which promotes family activities and respect for our environment. New Mexico State Parks should work to maintain this affordability for all state residents instead of pricing them out of the opportunity.

Finally, staffing at EBLSP since the pandemic appears to have been difficult. This has resulted in less contact with our visitors and little to no effort in field collection. Streamlining and modernizing collection procedures would help to reduce the deficit the division is trying to address. Deploying modern technology in the form of a New Mexico State Parks app and utilizing QR codes to collect park fees would improve efficiency, reduce staff time in field collections, and help discourage vandalism and theft at “Iron Ranger” self-pay stations.

EBLSP is essential to the economic welfare of the communities of Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences. Excessive fees will result in fewer visitors to the park and will have a detrimental effect on our economies. Please continue to make EBSP affordable to our visitors and support our communities.



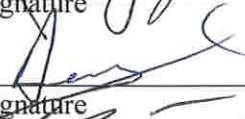
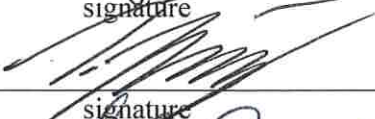
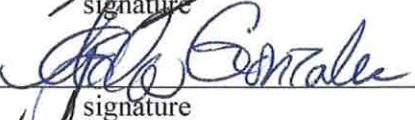
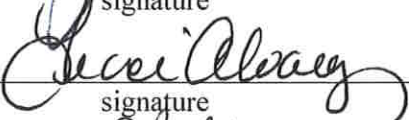

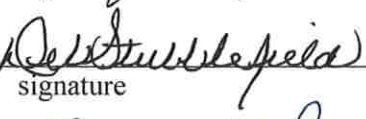
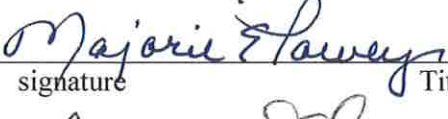


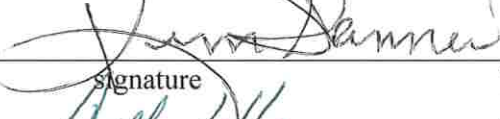
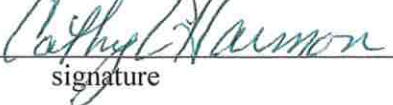
Signed,

City and Community Leaders

Printed name

signature

Title

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Printed name	signature	Title
Merry D. Fahl		Torc Commissioner
Printed name	signature	Title
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ANGELA Gonzales		Torc City Mgr
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Traci Alvarez		ASST. City Mgr.
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Phillip W. MORTENSEN		Mayor EIB
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DEB STUBBLEFIELD		Mayor Vow
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MAJORIE E. POWEY		Trustee
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BRUCE SWINBLE		BUSINESS DEV. MGR.
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Frank Corcoran		CEO Sierra Vista Hospital
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Kimi Skinner		Mayor Pro Tem City of Elephant Butte
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Cathy Harmon		Councilor City of Elephant Butte
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