

From: [Frank Blea](#)
To: [emnrd-parkscomments, EMNRD](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Proposed New Mexico State Park Fee Changes
Date: Friday, March 1, 2024 7:01:59 AM

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To: Jared Langenegger, Field Operations Bureau Chief
New Mexico State Parks Division

Hello Jared,

My name is Frank Blea. I am a 71-year-old New Mexico native who started regularly visiting New Mexico State Parks (primarily next to a lake) in 1975 when I bought my first used boat, and I am writing to provide comments on the New Mexico State Parks Fees Study with Recommendations and Executive Summary. I have thoroughly read and notated both documents. In addition, I visited state park websites for California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to thoroughly understand and verify the information provided in the New Mexico State Parks Study, and to glean any additional information from these state park websites not mentioned in the NM study (like any special discounts-Senior, Handicap, Veteran, Active Military, etc). I agree that there needs to be significant fee and rule changes, but I do not support some of the proposed changes.

My wife and I retired six years ago and began to travel to the lake to camp and fish for 10 to 12 days a month from April through October. Most of our trips were and still are to Conchas Lake which we consider our "home lake", but also, we regularly visit Navajo and Ute Lake. Since retirement we have lived on a fixed income, and the Senior Annual Camping Pass allowed us to affordably camp, fish, and enjoy our favorite New Mexico State Parks as I believe the SACP did for a significant number of the 1,474 SACP holders (According to the Study total ACP revenue is 13% of camping revenue yearly). Without the SACP we could not afford to enjoy the number of trips we made each year. Because we spend a lot of time at Conchas, we have and continue to get to know the State Park employees there, and through them we are very aware of the challenges they and the State Park system face regularly. Most of the State Park employees work very hard to make visitor stays enjoyable, and me and my family greatly appreciate this fact. With this in mind let me provide my observations, comments, and recommendations.

After reading and digesting the Study, Recommendations, and Executive Summary, I got a distinct sense of a lack of appreciation and respect for New Mexico Senior residents that took advantage of the Senior Annual Camping passes. I do not believe this was intentional (at least I hope not), however that is how my wife and I feel. Because there are no recommendations for any discounts or discounted passes for resident seniors in the proposed changes, I visited the above mentioned surrounding nine state park websites to see what special discounts these states were offering their senior as well as other special group residents. We found that six of the

nine states offered some type of senior discount(s) and/or passes. In the Study the only nod to this issue is the proposal to make the Park Day Use entrance free to New Mexico residents which would serve a finite set of New Mexico residents as well as eliminate significant income (my estimate based on the Study is about 20 to 25% FYI) for the New Mexico State Parks. The Study states, "Making day use entrance to parks free increases access to underserved communities and improve equality for all New Mexicans." (Study, page 23) I respectfully disagree as I would probably never need a day use entrance, and there are other ways to provide programs for free day use access for "underserved groups and communities." With this in mind, let me move on.

According to the Study another negative impact for New Mexico State parks is, "Day Use Passes require the most staff processing time of all parks passes." (Study, page 5) No argument here. Using the current processing system is labor intensive (especially with staff shortages) but transitioning to more friendly less labor-intensive electronic fee processing systems like ReserveAmerica and self-serve kiosks (almost everyone under 70 has a debit/credit card or smart phone now) should eliminate "iron rangers" and reduce the need for pay booths inside and outside of visitor centers. Also, although free resident day use access would eliminate the need for Park staff to verify payment for New Mexico plated vehicles, there would still be a need for park staff to go on patrol for out of state plated vehicles and verify payment for out of state and resident camping fees when they could verify all day use payments. With free Resident Day Use how would staff determine who is day use or camping - including second vehicle camping?

I would now like to address the Executive Summary Recommendation and the Study recommendation I prefer with suggestions for changes to 4 Fee Type categories. In regard to the Executive Summary Study Recommendation, my stance on the free Day Use (Resident) fee is noted above, and I will provide suggestions for this category, the Developed Camping and the Annual Day Use Pass categories when I address my following preferred Study recommendation. Otherwise, I agree with the other proposed changes in the Executive Summary Recommendation. However, before I move on to my preferred Study recommendation, I have two questions.

1. How will the developed camping second vehicle charge be handled especially for a last-minute addition?
2. How will unexpired ACPs be handled after July 1, 2024?

My preferred Study option for the State Park fees adjustment is Option 6 on pages 21 and 22. I do have suggestions for changes in 4 categories in this option. I determined these changes based on the research that I did on the surrounding nine states for additional information and discounts for special groups. So, based on this information I would like to propose that the New Mexico State Parks implement with the upcoming fees adjustment a New Mexico State Parks resident only Land of Enchantment Discount Pass/Card (My title choice based on the Texas Parkland Passports) that would be available to New Mexico seniors (65+), disabled persons, active military personnel stationed in New Mexico and New Mexico veterans at an annual \$10 to \$20 per individual fee. Only the assigned individual to each pass/card

can use them for the discounts that are explained below and must be present when the discounted item is used (ie. for an annual day use pass or camping) at the State Park. The four categories and the proposed changes are:

1. Day Use - Keep the proposed rate at \$5 instead of \$10. If a campsite is used for day use, all utility fees apply.
2. Annual Day Use - Resident - Increase proposed rate to \$125 - Offer a 30% discount to \$87.50 for a LED Pass/Card holder. If a campsite is used for day use, all utility fees apply.
3. Annual Day Use - Non-Resident - Increase to \$175. If a campsite is used for day use, all utility fees apply.
4. Camping - Resident - Keep as proposed - Offer a 25% discount on the camping fee for a LED Pass/Card holder. Limit reservations to 10 to 12 days per 28 day period. Only one reservation allowed per individual LED Pass/Card holder in a 28 day period..
5. Keep all remaining categories at proposed rate.

In conclusion, I believe my comments and proposals are reasonable, and in addition I have several notes with comments on other items and proposals in the two documents that I have not addressed in this email. Please feel free to contact me with any questions and comments. I feel that the proposals and comments I presented here fill a void that my wife and I feel existed in the two documents by showing appreciation and respect for important groups of New Mexico residents. I plan to attend the March 12 public meeting in Albuquerque at the Rio Grande Nature Center. Hope to see you there.

Regards,
Frank Blea