

**From:** [Joshua Lane](#)  
**To:** [emnrd-parkscomments, EMNRD](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Feedback and comments on proposed NM state parks fee changes  
**Date:** Thursday, March 21, 2024 5:12:43 PM

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BLUF: These proposed fee changes do not make sense, are not equitable for many, make enforcement difficult if not impossible, and are based on many assumptions and not real data. Some proposed simple solutions that would raise more revenue while keeping costs lower are presented, along with comments on why aspects of your proposal cause great concern.

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Good afternoon,

I'm writing in response to the proposed fee changes for NM state parks. I recognize that changes may be required, however I very much disagree with the fee "study" (more on that later) and the proposed fee schedule and urge you to consider other solutions (one is proposed below).

I enjoy NM state parks, with the primary one being Elephant Butte Lake. These recreational opportunities are appreciated and enjoyed by many as a form of relaxation and enjoyment in lieu of fancy vacations as they are more affordable. Not everyone, including myself, can afford a fancy vacation out of state, nor do we want to go elsewhere. Unfortunately, the proposed fee changes drastically change that proposition. Please allow me to explain some of the issues and propose some solutions.

The report includes a table with many ASSUMPTIONS (as stated in the footnotes). These are not real numbers, and actually assume increases to the user demographic. In short, the numbers are made up and this "study" is questionable at best. It also misses a lot of details and proposes unenforceable ideas.

Currently, each vehicle must pay to enter the state park. Many families bring more than one vehicle while they only occupy a single primitive camp spot (beach camping). The reason for multiple vehicles varies, but being able to get unstuck from the sand is one. Another may be the people who use a military vehicle for towing through the sand and a personal vehicle for running to town, to bring in family, etc. This model already doubles (or more sometimes) the cost of a trip for many. Changing the camping fee from \$8 to \$20 per night for essentially no amenities is EXCESSIVE, especially considering how these fees are administered (per vehicle). There is NO REASON that primitive camping fees should be absorbed into the developed camping fee as proposed as these are VERY different in nature and require vastly different infrastructure and maintenance. Camping on the beach (primitive camping) provides very little from the state park (portapotti's, dumpsters and maybe "roads"). The same is true for day visitors, they require the SAME amenities and yet the proposal is to make that entry fee free! In fact, after camping at the Butte for almost 2 decades, I have found that day campers leave more trash and cause more issues than those who stay for several nights, requiring yet more resources. I've personally picked up bags of trash to keep the beach clean while camping for a weekend let behind from day camps caught in strong winds.

The other amenity that's rarely enforced is actual enforcement of the rules, for example quiet hours. Yet, this is almost NEVER enforced, instead signs have been put up in locations that state the quiet hours are not in effect. Why? This is a state park and everyone pays to stay

and should be following the same rules. Generators and music playing thru the night are not acceptable.

I have observed that some visitors abuse the annual camping passes by leaving campers on the beach unattended for days/weeks at a time. This is one area where I agree with the proposed change- eliminate the annual camping pass. Instead, how about offering an annual day pass, and giving a discount to those who hold said day pass for overnight camping. For example, let's say an annual day pass was available for \$50/year. If a person wants to camp overnight while holding a valid day pass, let's offer a \$5/night discount towards the camping fee? This would require everyone to still pay for camping overnight (discouraging those that want to leave a camper vacant on the beach), but also allow those who frequent the state parks most often to get an annual day pass. The day pass would allow/include any vessel launch fees for the year, eliminating that line item from the proposal.

Speaking of vessels, the "study" is misleading in the registration fees. It specifically states that registration fees are \$36 for 3 years, and yet in the table it clearly shows \$28.50 - \$66. I know my boat costs more than \$36 for 3 years. The proposed changes to \$75-\$180 is quite extreme for a vessel that may get used a few times a year, especially old vessels. How about a system similar to car registration where registration fees are proportional to the age and/or size of the vessel? Of course the size doesn't really do damage like a heavy truck vs a car on the roads will. A small fishing boating that's 30 years old shouldn't be paying the same registration as a new \$200k+ boat should. Same with old jet ski's, should they be paying the same as a house boat? How about eliminating registration fees for small watercraft (sub 8ft maybe?) whether powered or not?

There's a much better way to make it fair and equitable for ALL who want to enjoy NM state parks, both in state and out of state. Below is a proposal that I hope will be considered:

- DAY USE FEES: ALL users of a state park pay, whether it's a day fee or an overnight camping fee. The fee is fixed and the same for residents and non-residents alike. This fee covers primitive amenities and any vessel launch fees. Easy to regulate and enforce. \$5-\$7/day seems appropriate for many/most NM state parks. This is in direct contrast to the proposed FREE use for residents and charging for non-residents (which is of questionable enforceability).
- ANNUAL DAY USE pass. Offer this option. This generates revenue and allows those who frequent the state parks often (maybe they live nearby) to enjoy the park for a reasonable annual cost. This allows the holder to visit any NM state park without additional cost. This also includes any vessel launch fees. Or, simply offer one for certain state parks on an individual basis? Cost? \$50-\$80/year.
  - o OVERNIGHT CAMPING DISCOUNT: If a holder of the annual day use pass wants to camp overnight, they would receive a discount on the overnight camping fees (\$3-\$5/night discount). This would require holders to pay a small fee in addition to the annual day use pass for overnight camping, i.e. \$3-\$5/night.
- Eliminate the Annual Camping Pass. The discount for Annual Day Use pass holders would offset this while increasing revenue and discouraging/eliminating the abuse of the existing Annual Camping Pass. Leaving an unattended camper (while still not allowed), or living at a state park for extended periods, would require the owner to pay the overnight camping fees or be in violation. This generates revenue AND/OR eliminates people from abusing the system. This is hard to enforce currently, but I'm sure it can be done better.
- PRIMITIVE CAMPING FEE: Do NOT absorb this into developed camping as it's a VERY DIFFERENT beast. \$8-\$10/night seems appropriate. How about instead of charging per vehicle, charging per campsite? This would be difficult to enforce, and really makes little sense at places like Elephant Butte. Instead, leave it per vehicle but

be reasonable on the cost recognizing that many families already pay 2X and 3X for one campsite simply because of multiple vehicles.

- DEVELOPED CAMPING: These fees should be commensurate with the quality of the campground and amenities afforded. \$12-\$20/night + utilities seems reasonable.

- o UTILITIES: No idea what these cost to install, maintain, or use. The fees charged should be commensurate with those costs.

- DUMP STATION: PLEASE leave these as FREE. This encourages people to dump appropriately. Likewise, they are essentially self-operating as-is. Charging a fee requires enforcement, which will directly REDUCE the revenue and is NOT included in the tables as a cost. Also note that while many currently dump at NM state parks upon exiting, if a fee is charged, that will be reduced drastically as many gas stations have dump facilities that are free of charge. How about installing dump stations at rest stops as well, free of charge to use. This promotes cleanliness and health!

- It is recognized that some parks are ONLY day use, and frequently primarily (nearly all) residents. Fenton Lake State Park is an example. The proposed free day use by residents directly affects the revenue generated at that park. Maybe some parks should charge per user (\$2/day?) instead of per vehicle.

Thank you for reading and considering some of the ideas presented in this letter. I urge you to reconsider the proposed fee structure and base revenue and estimates on real data instead of assumptions. I also urge you to be more equitable towards all users and understand that many help care for and maintain these facilities while using them.

Thank you,

Joshua Lane