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New Mexico State Parks
Fees Study Public Comment
122 S St Francis Drive
Santa Fe NM 87505

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding proposed fee changes in New Mexico State Parks. I wasn't able to attend any of the public meetings, but was planning to attend the session on April 1 that was cancelled. I watched the zoom meeting this morning and appreciate that being available and the professionalism in the presentation.

I've been a resident of New Mexico for four years and have visited and camped at eighteen New Mexico State Parks (NMSP). I have purchased and fully utilized a resident senior Annual Camping Pass (ACP) for the past three years. I moved here from Minnesota, where I grew up. I've been camping for over fifty years and had a long career in Recreation and Parks, including fifteen years at Minnesota State Parks. I will restrict my comments here to park fees and will address my experiences at New Mexico State Parks separately.

My general reaction to the proposed fee changes is supportive. NMSP has the cheapest camping fees in the country and could be doubled without changing that status. But, the goals of these changes should include **simplifying** the rules for the benefit of both visitors and enforcement, not complicating them even more.

Day Use fees are particularly cumbersome and are therefore enforced sporadically, if at all. Of all the parks I've been to, for example, only one park enforced the fee for a second vehicle in a campsite. The ACP sticker is honored for day use, but a person working the booth at Caballo Lake SP insisted that the vehicle has to be towed in. That would mean the vehicle can only be driven within the park! Doubling the day use fee for a second vehicle in a campsite is similarly confusing and absurd. Two people could arrive in two vehicles, or both vehicles could hold up to six people or more, and I was unable to find a restriction on the number of people in a campsite.

But again, I will just comment on the proposed fee changes here. Attached are my reactions and suggestions to the specific proposed changes.

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New Mexico State Parks
Comments on Proposed Fee Changes
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- Please understand that increasing fees also increases expectations. Visitors will expect fully functional facilities that are clean and well maintained. They will rightfully expect the availability of friendly, helpful staff and recreational amenities. At \$14.00, people are less likely to complain.
- I support doubling the base rate for camping from \$10 to \$20 and doubling the utility fee from \$4 to \$8 (Not \$10! Charging a fee for water would be tricky since most campsites with electricity also have water hookups, so you should hold off on that idea. The new rates might eliminate the need!).
- I have spent the last two winters at state parks in southern New Mexico, utilizing the senior resident Annual Camping Pass. I would be willing to pay double for the ACP, increasing it from \$100 to \$200, commensurate with the increase in camping fees.
- Without the ACP, I'm much more likely to travel outside of New Mexico, and to camp outside of state parks when camping within the state.
- It might make sense to allow ACP use on Sunday through Thursday nights **only** and have pass holders pay the full rate on Fridays, Saturdays and holiday weekends.
- I have called the park directly if I'm not able to honor a reservation. I will not pay a fee to cancel the reservation on top of losing my camping fees! Make cancellation free and enforce 24 hour cancellation for no-shows.
- The philosophy about vehicle permits is: provision of parks that are available to all citizens should come out of the state's General Fund; those who actually use the parks should pay an entry fee.
- Remove the provision of free vehicle passes for the first vehicle in a campsite. They are labor intensive and most campers don't know a pass is on their site post or what to do with it. Since they're not attached, the paper passes are also easily lost, stolen, misplaced or blown away.
- Eliminate the need for paper site post tags, as some parks have already done.
- Require **all** vehicles to display a purchased permit. Minnesota has a windshield sticker for annual permits, punched with the month it was purchased. One day permits for campers are valid until checkout time the next day. Do NOT eliminate day passes for NM residents.
- Minnesota offers the Annual Vehicle Permit at \$12 for additional vehicles owned by the same person who purchased the regular annual permit (\$35), and for disabled persons. A wallet card is available to disabled persons who don't own a vehicle. Do not increase annual vehicle permit. \$40 is reasonable.
- Eliminating the vehicle permit requirement for New Mexico residents is a terrible idea. As a visitor and as a host, I've seen large groups have loud, disruptive gatherings at both picnic areas and campgrounds. Free entrance would likely increase that, as well as "drive throughs." They have no investment in the park, enforcement has no means of knowing who's who and there's no recourse for breaking park rules and leaving trash behind.
- If you decide to eliminate the vehicle permit for NM residents, have free entrance only eligible for vehicles with New Mexico plates. Using NM driver licenses for a vehicle without NM plates would be an enforcement nightmare, and thus probably wouldn't be enforced.
- To achieve equity and accessibility, and encourage visitation, you could offer the discounted annual vehicle permit as described above for disabled persons, and also for seniors and those on public assistance. A permit, voucher or marketing piece for the discount could be mailed out along with public assistance notices via the Income Support Division.
- **NO to charging for use of the dump station!** No other state park system that I know of does that. How would it be enforced? And, really - on top of doubling camping fees? No way! Perhaps, though, charging those who didn't camp at the facility would make sense, but again unenforceable. One case in point to consider: the Pancho Villa SP dump station is closed, so I had to dump at Rockhound SP. Of course, the vehicle would have to have a state park permit to use the dump station.
- Think long and hard about changing reservation systems. ReserveAmerica is very good and we're used to their system. Expect blowback if we have to navigate through a new system and re-register with new access and password codes, and lose our reservations history.
- If you have any questions or need clarification, or want to bounce ideas off me, please call me at 612-750-1821. I would absolutely serve on a focus group or advisory board if invited!

From: [LuAnn Wilcox](#)
To: [emnrd-parkscomments, EMNRD](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] One more thing...
Date: Friday, March 29, 2024 4:35:17 PM

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I forgot to say in my comments: Do not charge more for vehicle permits and camping fees to non-residents. Tourists spend money and pay sales taxes. Non-resident add-on fees only discourage tourism! It's a "false economy" to discourage tourism.

Another point: reduce camping fees for group camps and market them to encourage the aforementioned "large, disruptive group gatherings" to use them instead of regular campsites. And PLEASE enforce capacity rules. I was camped next to a huge loud group at Elephant Butte - four or five tents and about 20 people. They also ran an extension cord through my campsite to another site they had reserved. When I said something to a host or staff member, they said it was okay because the group reserved another site that they didn't occupy.

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