

Maggie Whitehead  
2001 E Lohman Ave #110-141  
Las Cruces, NM 88001  
(607)351-7844

03/01/2024

Re: Proposed fee changes for state parks – **additional comments**

To Whom it May Concern (Jared and Toby?),

I have already submitted comments with some specific thoughts and suggestions on the proposed fee changes. I attended the virtual meeting today, which was very informative and well presented. I appreciate the transparency, the thorough answers, and the patience of the presenters in the face of some emotional and repetitive comments. I know this process is a great deal of work. Thank you. After absorbing more information, and being encouraged to write, I am doing so again.

I and others **suggested changes, restrictions and controls, for the annual camping pass rules, rather than elimination.** The answer was that this would mean sales of the pass would have to be solely through the reservation system. I have purchased passes that way. **Certainly given a choice between no ACP, and an ACP obtainable only through a reservation system, I would prefer the latter.** Why is this considered a barrier?

The presentation showed camping prices of various KOAs in NM for comparison. **KOA prices are, universally, among the highest-priced private campsites,** and they offer many amenities SPs don't. **Next door to Percha Dam/Caballo, a private RV park, Lil Abner's, has a rate of \$25/night** (with hookups), only \$5 more than the proposed NMSP fee for a "dry" site, and **only 62% of the proposed fee for a site with hookups.**

<https://www.lilabnersrv.com/rates#>

A rate of nearly **\$100 was shown for KOA Las Cruces (so near Leasburg Dam).** However, this is **by far outside the norm for the area. Siesta RV Park in LC has sites, with hookups, starting at \$40,** before any kind of club discount, and also has more amenities than SPs. There are others in the LC area with similar rates.

<https://www.siestarvparklascruces.com/rv-rates-and-amenities/>

**Mountain Creek Park in T or C (so compare to EBLSP) has rates with hookups starting at \$30/night,** with lower weekly and monthly rates.

<https://www.mountaincreekrvpark.com/rates-sites>

**Low-Hi Ranch near Deming (compare to Rockhound) is one of several private RV parks with rates lower** than those in the proposal, and even lower with discounts, club rates, and weekly/monthly stays. This park's **highest daily rate, hookups, no discounts, is \$34,** only 85% of the proposed NMSP rate for the same. Their **lowest, boondocking with a club rate, monthly (\$140), works out to \*\*\$5/day.\*\***

<https://www.lowhirvranch.com/ratesreservations.html>

The NMSPs are beautiful and have natural resources these small private parks don't, but to suggest that KOAs are generally representative of campsite prices in New Mexico for comparison is wildly inaccurate.

The presentation showed **comparison figures for NM, CO, AZ, TX, and UT state parks** for a weekend campsite rental. **NM was \$180, or 133% of the figure for CO at \$135.** Per census figures, **per capita income in NM (\$32,667) is 68% of PCI in CO (\$47,436).** So per the proposal, you are **suggesting that New Mexicans, who earn 32% less, should pay 33% more.** In 2022, New Mexico's PCI was **47<sup>th</sup>** out of the 50 states. Colorado was **6<sup>th</sup>**, Texas **24<sup>th</sup>**, Arizona **34<sup>th</sup>**, Utah **33<sup>rd</sup>**. Yet **NM's proposed fees would be second highest of these**, trailing the highest (UT) by only \$8.

Having said all this, **the NM state parks urgently need money.** I have already made some suggestions for increasing revenues. An additional **suggestion would be looking at assessing fees for nonstandard vehicles towed into campsites.** Due to an event, there are many people camping in the Caballo system this weekend. I am hosting at Percha Dam, and many here have towed in flatbeds loaded with two or more nonstandard vehicles. The hookup sites are all full, and the primitive/developed area here is also pretty full. **This is great.** Rangers report great revenue for the weekend. (I personally prefer the usual quiet here, but again, full parks, with whatever vehicles, are good.)

However, **because the nonstandard vehicles were towed in, there were no fees charged for them.** **Many of the flatbeds are not contained on the sites** and are parked in common areas, along with semi cabs in some cases. Some of the **nonstandard vehicles are being driven around the park.** So while extra standard vehicles, driven into and parked on a campsite, are charged another camping fee, campers with several nonstandard vehicles, making use of park roads and parking areas, are paying nothing for them. This weekend is unusual, but **these vehicles are towed in regularly. Could this be revisited?**

On the cost side, has the idea of "workampers" been considered? Currently volunteers provide services in exchange for only sites and hookups. **Workampers are paid** (accommodation and wages), but **can perform more involved duties than volunteers, at lower labor costs than rangers** and other full-time park staff, which might help with some of the difficulties mentioned due to staffing issues (overstays, non-occupancy, etc.). I am currently hosting while working full time. I first did this because of a volunteer gap and was invited back, even with reduced availability. Other volunteers do more substantive and scheduled "staffing" (visitor's center, kiosk), but might workampers also be a relatively low-cost staffing source for some parks?

Hypothetical: Base camping fee is raised to \$15, and utilities (water and electric combined) are raised to \$10. Let's say sewage is another \$10. A workamper is then being compensated \$35/day in accommodations. At a wage of \$15/hour, this is a little over two hours of work. For another \$25 a day, you have a half-time employee. Useful?

Thank you again for the opportunity to give input and feedback. **I look forward to a better funded NMSP system. I hope this will be accomplished without pricing me out of them.**

Sincerely,

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Hypothetical: Base camping fee is raised to \$15, and utilities (water and electric combined) are raised to \$10. Let's say sewage is another \$10. A workamper is then being compensated \$35/day in accommodations, so \$245/week. At a wage of \$15/hour, a half-time employee would be \$300, so only another \$55. Useful?

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