

**From:** [Rebecca Dow](#)  
**To:** [Stacey Dougherty](#)  
**Cc:** [emnrd-parkcomments, EMNRD](#)  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Re: Proposed Parks Fee Increases  
**Date:** Friday, February 23, 2024 6:13:37 AM

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Thank you for your thoughtful comments. Considering you type this last night after the meeting shows how heavy this is on your heart. I was happy to hear Toby state over and over again that this is not a done deal. Your comments matter.

Having watched these hearings play out with no changes based on public comment, to hear his commitment to get this right was very encouraging!

Dow

On Feb 23, 2024, at 1:21 AM, Stacey Dougherty wrote:

Gentlemen:

I attended the public meeting last night at Elephant Butte State Park and wanted to follow up with you.

First, a little about me and how I use the NM State Parks. I am a retired 61 year old widow on SS who is a full time camper. I left Atlanta on June 1, 2023 in my SUV which is outfitted for solo camping. My two Yorkies and I have traveled through 16 states so far. I arrived in NM in November and have spent the winter camping throughout the southern part of the state. In a few weeks I will be traveling to MN to take delivery of my brand new teardrop camper but will be back in NM for my sister's wedding in May.

The Executive Summary states, and you emphasized it last night, that part of the rationale for eliminating the annual passes is to reduce so called non-recreational use of the parks. I'm retired and I've chosen to be a full-time camper. As a retired senior, I spend most of my time recreating. And I am far from alone. I adore New Mexico for its beauty, its people and its wide open spaces, populated by some spectacular wildlife. After spending the winter camping here, my desire was to do it every winter as long as I'm able. But I'm a senior on a fixed income and the proposed increases do not take seniors into consideration, in-state or out-of-state.

The proposed fee increases will raise camping costs by up to 1000% for those

of us who rely on the annual camping pass. For those who do not purchase the pass, their camping costs will go up as high as 285%. These increases would severely curtail my ability to afford any discretionary spending in the surrounding areas. So much so that I could not consider spending 4 months of the year here but would probably wind up in the LTVA areas in AZ or go further south to Baja.

I found several things of interest that were said last night. You say camping fees make up about 20% of revenues but the proposed fees are 285-1000% increases. That's an excessive amount for a one-fifth portion of total revenue. Second, as you itemized in detail, all of these proposed fees are more than the old ones if they were adjusted for inflation. Lastly, the internal feasibility study that resulted in these proposed fees did not take into consideration the possible negative economic impact these increases would have on the surrounding areas of the parks. Even if the number of campers didn't change, would the higher fees reduce campers' spending at businesses around the parks? And how high would the local economic loss be if camper numbers did decline? The absence of these projections seems short-sighted. Were any Chambers of Commerce consulted to get their feedback on these proposed fee changes?

The problem with looking solely to park users to raise all the funds is that it dismisses the fact that the parks are a Public Good. As such, ways to fund operations, maintenance and capital improvements should come from all New Mexicans and tourists to the state, not just the end user. Options to raise revenue statewide could include any or a combination of the following:

- 1) a special statewide sales tax
- 2) a special statewide lodging tax on all hotel rooms
- 3) a special statewide gas tax

Also, poor performing parks are still drivers of employment and economic activity in their surrounding areas, hence an extension of the parks as a Public Good. For these reasons as well, it should be important to maintain their operations.

For park users, more affordable and creative options should be considered to keep camping attendance and revenue growing. Some options to consider:

Keep offering annual camping passes in creative ways to fit the particular camper and how they camp. And let people know these passes exist.

- 1) Annual Camping Pass (no distinction for in/out of state) - for anyone under 62 y/o - priced higher than the Annual Senior Pass.
- 2) Annual Senior Pass (no distinction for in/out of state) - for anyone 62+ - cheaper pass price, same or deeper camping discount.
- 3) Annual Pass for Disabled Military - same camping discounts as Seniors but pass price is nominal (\$25-\$35) or no charge.
- 4) Offer a Seasonal Winter Pass (available to any adult regardless of age) - good from Nov 1 to Mar 1 for the snowbirds. (The Snowbird Pass!) Price prorated based on the price of a regular annual pass.

With two major types of Annual Pass, the Senior Pass should be priced a little lower than the non-Senior Pass, say \$275 versus \$350. Or both can be the same price but with a little steeper camping discount for Seniors. If the latter, raising the price for both to between \$275 to \$350 for the year would generate revenue of \$907,500 to \$1,155,000, based on numbers cited at the meeting - I believe it was 3300 that purchase annual camping passes, both residents and non-residents. That would easily exceed the combined revenue of both the annual Resident and annual Non-Resident passes shown in the table in the Executive Summary. (Roughly \$750,000).

A reasonable increase of actual camping fees for Annual Pass holders should be the goal since they are paying upfront for the discount and their savings will be spread around the local areas of the parks, making a positive economic impact. To keep the reservation process as simple as possible, Annual Pass holders should not be charged for utilities, and consider campsite fees of \$10 to \$12 for sites with W&E and \$12- \$14 for those that also have sewer hookups. The lower prices could be earmarked for those holding the Senior pass if both types of passes initially cost the same. That is still a sizable percentage increase from the current discount. All other campers without a discount pass of any kind should pay no more than \$32 for their developed campsite with no separate charge for utilities. Unless they camp frequently at NM parks, the higher cost for the annual pass will make it cost prohibitive to purchase and the non-discounted rate is more in line with other nearby states. Also, all attempts should be made to not charge separately for utilities even if offset with an initially lower campsite fee. Separate charges have negative psychological effects and the camper's perception of being nickled and dimed will leave a bad taste in their mouth. It's not in the parks' interest to give campers a reason to camp elsewhere.

Thank you for holding these public meetings and listening to the folks who will be impacted by the decisions made regarding new state park fees. I hope you will give serious consideration to my suggestions or use them to develop similar solutions that will be fair and thoughtful to the economic effect these changes will have on campers as well as all the small business owners across the state who provide them goods and services.

Sincerely,

Stacey Dougherty

P. S. - I took a survey of folks at South Monticello where I'm camping now. Folks have told me they will not camp in NM if the Annual Pass is eliminated. One woman in her Sprinter van has been camping full time all over the state for 3 years but is retiring from it because of the proposed changes. Others say they will boondock on BLM and NF land but more likely will head to the LTVA in AZ for the winter. These seasonal campers have a positive impact on surrounding towns in this very rural part of the state. Small business owners don't deserve to lose these customers in the very slow season.