

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Mexico State Parks Division (State Parks) of the Energy Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) is an executive branch agency charged with providing recreational opportunities for the citizens of and visitors to New Mexico. The agency's mission is to protect and enhance natural and cultural resources, provide first-class recreational and education facilities and opportunities, and promote public safety to benefit and enrich the lives of visitors. The broad scope of the State Park's mission includes managing and maintaining 35 state parks in 25 of 33 counties all with unique qualities that attract over 5 million visitors per year. State Parks administers and operates the associated and extensive recreational infrastructure and public services required to meet and exceed visitor expectations. Additionally, State Parks is charged with oversight of the New Mexico Boat Act to promote safety for persons and property in and connected with the use, operation, and equipment of vessels and to promote the uniformity of laws across all navigable waters in our state.

As an enterprise agency, State Parks relies heavily on revenue generated through entrance pass sales, concessions, and other revenue streams to accomplish its mission. State Parks fees are set by rule and have not kept pace with inflation leaving New Mexico behind other surrounding states. Camping fees for sites with utilities have not changed in nearly 25 years. Boat registration fees, which fund our statewide boating safety, education, and enforcement program, have not changed in nearly 40 years.

The principal objective of the attached fees study is to explore options to adjust fees, improve our agencies enterprise position, and still provide affordable state park access for New Mexico citizens and visitors to our state. A team of highly qualified State Parks staff with over 200 years of combined outdoor recreation experience gathered information, evaluated options, and provided recommendations. These recommendations are based on the need to address associated fees based on operational issues, inflation, and attaining regional parity with parks and outdoor recreation agencies within our state and surrounding states.

The following table and listing provide an overview of the Division's recommendations, the more detailed supporting information is provided within the attached fees study.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

<b>FEE TYPE</b>	<b>CURRENT COST</b>	<b>PROPOSED COST</b>	<b>REVENUE IMPACT</b>
Day Use (Resident)	\$5.00 per vehicle	Free for Residents	-\$862,500
Day Use (Non-resident)	\$5.00 per vehicle	\$10.00 per vehicle	+\$575,000 <sup>1</sup>
Primitive Camping	\$8.00 per vehicle	\$20.00 per vehicle	+\$1,728,000
Developed Camping	\$10.00 per vehicle	\$20.00 per vehicle	+\$2,048,000
Utilities (water, electric, sewer)	\$4.00 per day	\$10.00 per day	+\$700,000
Dump Station Fee	Free	\$10.00 per use	+\$250,000
Annual Day-Use Pass	\$40	Eliminate	-\$295,400
Annual Camping Pass	\$100-\$225	Eliminate	-\$457,000
Living Desert Entrance Fee	\$0.50 - \$5.00	\$1.00 - \$10.00	+\$107,253

<sup>1</sup> Based on an assumption of 75% of day users being residents and 25% being non-residents. The Division does not currently track the resident status of day users and this information is provided for illustrative purposes only.

<sup>2</sup> Based on an assumption that there is an additional 25% user demographic for paddle craft than motorized boats (MVD Boat Registration Data). The Division does not currently track paddle craft use as an individual activity and this information is provided for illustrative purposes only.

Vessel Registration Fees	\$28.50 - \$66.00	\$75.00 - \$180.00	+\$1,525,601
Vessel Launch Fee (non-motorized)	Free	\$5.00	+\$100,000 <sup>2</sup>
<b>Total potential impact:</b>			<b>\$5,418,954</b>

- 1) Eliminate day-use fees for New Mexico residents: Elimination of day-use fees will provide a safe and managed nearby state park for residents to recreate ensuring equitable access to State Parks and their benefits.
- 2) Implement a \$10 non-resident day-use fee: Implementation of a non-resident day use fee ensures that non-residents are supporting and contributing to the upkeep of park facilities and operations.
- 3) Absorb primitive camping fee category into the developed camping fee category which eliminates the differentiated fee schedule for camping: All visitors have access to various amenities including improved roads, solid waste service, water service, restroom facilities, and public safety officers.
- 4) Increase camping fee to the base of \$20 per night per vehicle: Currently the State Parks camping fee is \$10 per night, and this fee has not changed in nearly 25 years.
- 5) Increase utility fees to \$10 per night per utility and implement a dump station fee: Currently State Parks charge \$4 per night for electric and sewer, but do not charge for water. Larger recreational vehicles and increased demand for utility services place a strain on aging infrastructure. The inflation adjusted cost for each utility is \$7.34. Additionally, State Parks does not currently charge for use of RV dump stations in parks.
- 6) Eliminate the Annual Camping Pass (ACP): State Parks is one of only four states to offer an ACP. This pass encourages non-recreational use of parks, reduces access to high demand camping sites, and allows manipulation of the reservation system resulting in negative impacts to other customers.
- 7) Adjust Living Desert Zoo & Gardens State Park (LDZG) entrance fees for inflation and regional parity: LDZG is unique among state parks as it is our only zoological facility. While having only an average visitation of 35,595 visitors per year, the overhead to maintain animal care and security standards requires significant operational investment.
- 8) Adjust Smokey Bear Historical Park fees for inflation and regional parity: While Smokey Bear Historical Park is operated by the EMNRD - State Forestry Division (Forestry), the associated fee structure for this is included in State Parks rules.
- 9) Adjust boat registration fees for inflation and regional parity: New Mexico's boat registration fees have not been adjusted in nearly 40 years. Currently, the largest class of motorized vessels registered only pays \$36.00 for a three year registration (\$12 per year).
- 10) Implement a \$5 non-motorized vessel launch fee: Non-motorized vessels do not require registration, yet they benefit from boat access and infrastructure, and safety and emergency services primarily funded through motorboat vessel registrations.

New Mexico's State Parks serve "a public good", they are essential to the quality of life for residents and non-residents alike, as they provide protection of natural and cultural resources and an array of opportunities and experiences. State Parks are critical to economic stimulus and development and are a driving force in New Mexico's economy. As State Parks celebrates its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, consideration and implementation of these recommendations will ensure that our State Parks system is more resilient to change and can better fulfill its mission for generations to come.