

From: [tj](#)
To: [emnrd-parkscomments, EMNRD](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] You Forgot New Mexico Residents In Your Plan To Raise Camping Fees By Up To 900%!
Date: Wednesday, February 28, 2024 3:04:12 PM

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I am a New Mexico resident who has purchased a resident Annual Camping Pass (ACP) for many years. As a retired senior citizen with some limitations, the ACP has been my 'Golden Ticket' to becoming and then staying active, engaged, and healthy in body, mind, and spirit. It has allowed me to be able to afford to camp frequently, throughout the year, at almost every single one of our fantastic parks. Traveling all over our breathtakingly beautiful state, soaking in nature while recreating in our NMSPs is my lifeline, my medicine, my passion. I am one of NMSP's very biggest, most enthusiastic fans.

Now, specifically because I do love and frequently visit our campgrounds with my ACP, the State Parks Fees Study has apparently given me and all other ACP holders the false and derogatory label of "Non-Recreational User", and proposes to effectively banish me and all senior and disabled ACP users, along with all New Mexicans of modest means, from camping in our own State Parks, by eliminating all ACPs while simultaneously drastically increasing all fees for everyone. What could you be thinking? I am heartbroken and very upset.

The State Parks Fees Study states that "New Mexico has the 3rd highest poverty rate in the Nation with 16.8% of our citizens living in poverty". It also states "This study... was conducted for the purpose of exploring strategies for providing affordable and equitable access for all visitors to New Mexico's thirty-five State Parks".

And yet the Study proceeds to propose that even the poorest of New Mexico residents start paying up to camp in our own State Parks exactly like even the wealthiest people in the surrounding states. It proposes NO equity and NO affordability for New Mexicans of modest means to participate in one of the very, very few opportunities we have to affordably get outside and recreate. You forgot New Mexicans in your Fees Study!

Currently, New Mexicans of modest means simply cannot afford to travel to the expensive out-of-state campgrounds cited in the Study, while wealthier people from out of state can afford to camp in their own State Parks and can also travel to New Mexico State Parks. The new fee schedule will mean little change for our wealthier neighbors, while poorer New Mexicans won't be able to camp at all, not even at home in our own State Parks.

I currently pay \$100 for the ACP, which effectively gives me \$10 a night off of the current camping fees. That means I pay \$4 a night for a \$14 electric site (the vast majority of electric sites also have water) plus a \$12 reservation fee. If I camp for 3 nights, I pay a total of \$24, and if I camp for a week I pay \$40, including the reservation fee. Incidentally, this fact is contrary to the Study's repeated false and insulting claim that after 18 nights as an ACP holder, I "stay for free".

But now, the Fees Study proposes that I will have to pay \$40 a NIGHT for this electric site, plus the reservation fee, so a weeklong camping trip will go from costing \$40 to costing \$292. That is outrageous and is impossible for me and for all New Mexicans of modest means. Many seniors, disabled folks, and others who require electricity for medical supplies or

equipment cannot camp in a non-electric site, which means they cannot even opt for the undeveloped sites.

Not accounting for reservation fees, NMSPD proposes to increase the fee for everyone who currently purchases the ACP-- including New Mexico residents, even seniors and disabled folks-- from \$4 to \$40 per night for a site with electric- a 900 PERCENT PRICE INCREASE. My 2024 Social Security COLA increase was 3.2%. Again, what could you be thinking?

I see a disturbing single-minded determination in the Fees Study to, above all else, eliminate the ACP, specifically in order to rid the campgrounds of people who use the ACP to frequently camp- the so-called "non-recreational users". That goal seems both apparent and perplexing to me, since the pass presumably exists specifically to encourage frequent camping, so to disparage ACP holders for being frequent campers is odd, to say the least.

When there are a few campers who break the rules, addressing that individual violation is the just thing to do- not labelling all ACP holders as 'undesirables' and rewriting the whole fee structure to banish the 99% of us that are clean, quiet, and respectful of the rules.

Whoever wrote the Study must also have a very rigid definition of what 'recreating' is, and must not understand that when retired senior citizens like me are camping, we are recreating!

Also, the study repeatedly asserts that ACP users are hard on park systems, which is nonsensical to me, and clearly tied to the false assertion that ACP holders "stay for free". I would assert that the size and age of camping rigs actually dictates the level of strain put on park systems, with larger, newer rigs consuming massively more park resources than tent campers and those with smaller, more modest rigs. Honest equity and affordability in fees in a more perfect world would charge camping fees by the foot, or charge for actual usage, but that's another story.

I always assumed the New Mexico resident ACP was offered to enable and encourage New Mexican families, seniors, and disabled folks of modest means to get out in nature, exercise, and recreate, but I have never understood why NMSP offered an ACP to non-residents- what was the purpose or goal?

I am camped in one of our state parks as I write this email, in my little 18 foot campervan. My electric needs are mostly met by my solar power, I have no a/c or other high-draw electric appliances, no electric vehicle to plug in, no tanks to dump, and I use about two gallons of water a day, which I draw from the water spigot by hand into gallon jugs. Next to me is camped a beautiful, sleek new out-of-state 40 foot RV with two a/c units on the roof, several people inside, and an ACP on the windshield.

I've occasionally wondered why we are both paying \$4 a night to camp. And now I REALLY wonder why the NMSPD wants to 'fix' this by charging us both \$40 a night. Again, what could you be thinking?

There is a happy middle between letting everyone camp for almost nothing and banning New Mexicans who have almost nothing. My idea of "affordable and equitable access for all" is something like this:

1. Eliminate the ACP for non-residents.

2. Retain the resident ACP at an increased fee of \$250 resident, \$200 for seniors and disabled. Alternately, eliminate the senior and disabled ACP and give us a no-charge 50% off lifetime camping pass like the Federal Access Pass does. That, combined with the fees I suggest below, would make the electric site I'm in right now \$10.50 a night, which is still up from the \$4.00 I'm paying now by 165%!

For comparison, full price at Valley of Fires Recreation Area near Carrizozo, a beautiful Federal campground on the edge of an ancient lava flow, is \$12 for a non-electric site (with water) and \$18 for an electric site (with water). I pay half that with my Access Pass.

3. Enact the proposed free day use for New Mexico residents/\$10 non-residents.
4. Retain the category of primitive camping, as much of this camping is located far from potable water or restrooms, on rugged often unkept roadways, with as little as a table or even nothing at all, and is used by low-impact tent campers and people who bring their own power.
5. Add a category for beach/waterfront camping, which has obvious intrinsic monetary value beyond the 'primitive' category. Charge the undeveloped rate.
6. Institute a bifurcated campsite fee structure by raising current fees 50% for residents and 100% for non-residents:
 - a. Current camping fees of \$8/\$10/\$14/\$18 increased to \$12/\$15/\$21/\$27 for residents.
 - b. Current camping fees of \$8/\$10/\$14/\$18 increased to \$16/\$20/\$28/\$36 for non-residents.

I have no opinion on other proposed camping fee increases, like watercraft, dump fees, or group sites, because I don't participate in those activities so have no knowledge of equitable costs.

These very substantial fee increases would still outpace inflation markers as cited in the Study, would still keep camping fees for non-residents quite reasonable enough for them to keep coming back, would probably generate substantially more revenue than chasing everyone away with the exorbitant fees proposed, and would stay in the range of the possible for New Mexicans of modest means. The huge, regressive proposed flat fees of \$20-\$50 a night for everyone, on the other hand, will have the effect of chasing non-residents to the parks in other states that have, I'm told, more and better amenities for the price, and forcing New Mexico residents to just plain stay home.

Local businesses surrounding State Parks are skimmed over in the Study, which does correctly state that local economies often depend on the revenue that campers bring to their area, but it then neglects to factor the impact of this drastic fee increase on those communities. For example, I've spoken to several local businesses in T or C and Elephant Butte (many who know my face now after all these years of frequent winter camping in the area) about the proposed fee increases, and they are alarmed at the probable very negative impact of off-seasonal campers not showing up anymore to fill the winter gap at the summer hotspots of EB, Percha, and Caballo throughout the lean winter months.

I am just one older woman who, armed with my resident ACP, has been able to heal, recharge, feel joy, and grow stronger through traveling New Mexico via our State Parks. It has been the

gift of a lifetime, one that I am eternally grateful for, and I am utterly devastated at the thought of losing it. I would struggle hard to pay for the fee increases I myself suggest, but if you follow through on the massive fees increases proposed, I will be banished, grounded. And I am not the only resident camping enthusiast out here just like me.

Please, please reconsider pricing poorer residents out of our campgrounds. Thank you so very much for reading all of this lengthy essay, and for taking seriously my concerns, comments, and suggestions.

Sincerely,

Theresa Johnson
Deming and Taos, NM