

February 26, 2024

Dear Jared Langenegger and team,

After attending the Public Meeting in Las Cruces, NM on February 28, 2024, we would like to share some thoughts with you. While we agree with the need to increase the amount charged to use the parks, we see some concerning items that could be a potential loss to our State Parks.

-Drastic Increase in an Untimely Manner:

Our first concern is the drastic increase in fees all at once with such short notice. We think the state has failed to increase over time which we do understand was not the State Parks fault, but passing the consequences on to the state residents and visitors all at one time in an untimely manner discourages State Park RV use and could result in less revenue collected.

On the "Developed Camping Fee Comparison" Slide at the presentation, the most expensive state would be Arizona at a maximum of \$50.00 + \$5 surcharge= \$55.00 or Colorado at a maximum of 41.00+ \$ 10.00/use or \$35.00-120.00 yearly pass depending on needs=\$51.00.

New Mexico proposal for my family:

\$20.00 Developed Site

\$10.00 Water

\$10.00 Electricity

\$10.00 Sewage

\$5.00/day paddle boat fee

\$ 10.00 Dump Station Fee

\$ 12.00 Reservation Fee

This totals \$77.00 for one night stay. Yes, we do understand it would be less for multiple nights, but we travel the state often and stay in a park one night. We recently made a reservation for May at Bernalillo KOA for \$74.00 for one night which includes pool, dump station, store, dog park, power, and water. National Forest Campsite \$28.00, BLM Land free.

There was some confusion between the Executive Summary we read prior to the meeting and the slides presented at the meeting. One of the slides stated there would be a charge of \$10.00 per utility. The executive summary states \$10.00 for all three utilities. We feel \$10.00 for all three utilities is reasonable, not 10.00/per utility.

We feel \$10.00/night for water is too high. Also, will the water spickets throughout the campgrounds be shut down? How will day use users get water? Will they be required to pay the \$10.00/ per day fee? Will RV pads with water and power be available to reserve without power or water?

Another factor to consider is the Average State Income in 2024 for each of your comparison states: (<https://worldpopulationreview.-com/state-rankings/average-income-by-state>)

Arizona \$56,667
Colorado \$74,167
Nevada \$61,282
New Mexico \$51,500
Texas \$61,985
Utah \$57,925

NM Average State Income is lower than our surrounding states, and now our campsites will be more expensive than their campgrounds. It just doesn't seem logical to charge more than our neighboring states. This would force our residents to drive to another state for less expensive accommodations. Also, we have camped in each of these states except Nevada. Their camping facilities are often superior to NM State Parks. We do understand we will be unable to improve our camping facilities without increased revenue, but our fear is that people will quit looking to NM State Parks as an option and our bordering states, private campgrounds, BLM, National Parks will get the business, leaving NM State Parks in worse shape than they already are.

Making these changes as early as July 2024 is a little hasty. Many of us plan our trips for the year in January to assure getting a site. Our budgets do not accommodate for the changes presented. Making these changes mid-summer in your busiest season seems unfair to visitors and staff. January 2025 might be a better option for all concerned.

-The Primitive and Developed Camping sites are initially the same cost prior to utilities. Many of the Developed sites provide more accommodations. We are concerned "primitive" users will reserve developed sites, eliminating the potential for the parks to make money on utilities and taking spaces from RV users. Maybe a better possibility would be \$ 15 for primitive sites and \$ 20 for developed sites.

A more reasonable proposed camping fee might be:

Primitive Site \$15.00

Developed Site \$20.00

Electricity, Water, and Sewer \$10.00 for all three, eliminating the need for the dump station fee as sewer is included. We fear a dump station fee because it has been our experience that campers often dump into the ground or lakes to avoid additional fees.

Reservation Fee \$12.00

This makes our price to camp. \$42.00/night + a yearly paddle boat registration fee of \$50.00 per boat.

-Paddle Boat Fee- It is our understanding that this is to accommodate the increased cost for rescue due to increased paddle boats on the lakes. We do appreciate the emergency services being available, but question how the funds are being generated.

We would prefer paying a yearly registration fee in NM instead of \$5/day. If we kayak 7 days/month, I would be paying \$420/year. If we stay the 14 day camping limit per month, this costs us \$840.00/year. This far exceeds the proposed motor vessel fee of \$75-\$180.00/year. This might be a savings for those that bring MANY paddle boats to the lake, but for the 1- 4 boat family, this is outrageous.

A yearly fee of \$50 per paddle boat for NM residents seems more logical and easier method to enforce.

For out of State paddle boat users, a higher fee could be imposed.

We do not paddle boat every day that we camp. We don't appreciate having to pay \$5 for each day we camp whether we use our Kayaks or not.

Collecting the paddle boat fees on a daily basis also seems quite labor intensive. How will you know when an inflatable boat or a kayak inside an RV enters the park which can't be seen on the top of a vehicle? What happens when someone extends their RV stay through the reservation site AFTER entering the park? Will there be a manned shack at the boat dock collecting the \$5 fee? This is a laborious task for the already burdened staff.

A yearly paddle boat fee seems more logical.

We would prefer a fee imposed for life saving emergencies and towing when rendered like a medical ambulance or tow truck does instead of charging all users on a daily basis.

-Elimination of Yearly Camping Pass:

One reason stated for doing this was that campers are multiple booking campgrounds for a particular date. This problem seems easy to eliminate through the reservation site by a "Warning Message" that you have double booked for a date on one pass and therefore not allowed. This should be a fix in the reservation site. The reservation agency is just making more money by allowing this. We accidentally double booked one day last summer at two different parks. We would have appreciated a warning message that this booking will be rejected.

The other reason given was people using the State Parks as "Cheap Living". We do feel this is not the goal of our state parks and should be dealt with, but not at the expense of honest law-abiding NM citizens. Because of the pass, we feel MANY are encouraged to camp more bringing more revenue to the state. Eliminating this and adding so much to the nightly fee is ridiculous and will lose revenue to the State Parks as well as surrounding communities.

-Day Use Fee: We appreciate the proposal to make the day use for NM residents free, however as a paying camper, we would prefer all parks having a day use designated area to control noise, theft, and the use of paid camping areas.

We are also concerned about the trash buildup of those using the site for free. The inexpensive \$5/day fee can be used for clean-up of the facilities they use, instead of putting all that cost burden on those who use the camping facilities. It was noted in our meeting in Las Cruces that the free Day Use is "Equitable" to all who otherwise would not use the park. A small fee of any sort reminds all users of the Park that there are expenses to keep the park clean for everyone and promotes appreciation for the surroundings.

As frequent users of the New Mexico State Parks, we hope you will consider our recommendations so we can continue enjoying our state parks.

Thank you,

Tracy and Bryan Olson