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National parks to offer fee-free weekends

- Story Highlights
- National Park Service sites will waive fees for three summer weekends
- The fee-free dates are June 20 and 21, July 18 and 19, and August 15 and 16
- The government hopes a boost in park visitation will help local businesses

By Kiran Khalid
CNN

(CNN) -- It's hardly a bailout, but the federal government is hoping that waiving fees at national parks will help boost local economies across the country.

On three weekends this summer, the National Park Service will offer fee-free weekends to encourage cash-strapped families to visit the parks.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced the initiative Tuesday at a news conference at Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio.

"National parks also serve as powerful economic engines for local communities, and we hope that promoting visitation will give a small shot in the arm to businesses in the area," Salazar said.

Many national parks were bracing for a busy summer, and this improves the tourism forecast, said George Price, superintendent of Cape Cod National Seashore.

"Sometimes, when the economy downturns, places like the seashore see an upsurge because people choose to stay closer to home," Price said. "Visitation will be very strong this year. The question will be how much people will actually spend when they come to visit."

All 147 [National Park Service](#) sites that charge entry fees will waive them for June 20 and 21, July 18 and 19, and August 15 and 16. Those fees range from \$3 to \$25.

Last year, national parks attracted more than 275 million recreation visits.

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