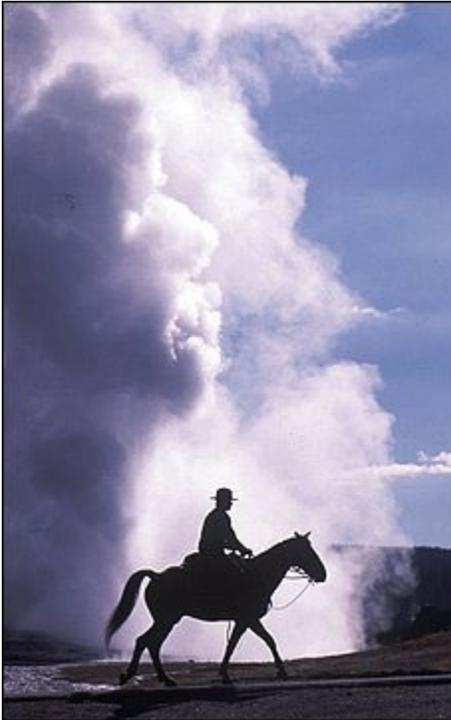


Park Entrance Fees to Be Waived

Initiative Covering 3 Weekends Is Aimed at Penny Pinchers



In 1997, Ranger Dan Scholly rode past Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park before ceremonies commemorating the park's 125th anniversary. (By Robert Bower -- Idaho Falls Post Register Via Associated Press)

By *Ed O'Keefe*

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That trip you have always dreamed of to Yosemite, Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon just got a little cheaper, if you time it right.

The National Park Service announced yesterday that it will waive park fees on three weekends this summer in an effort to attract cost-conscious tourists in the midst of the recession. The waiver was among the announcements made by Cabinet secretaries and senior administration officials as part of a tour of Midwestern communities hurt by the

auto industry's collapse. The visits to Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin continue through Friday.

Under the park initiative, visitors will not have to pay entrance fees on June 20-21, July 18-19 and Aug. 15-16. Entrance fees range from \$3 per person at Great Falls Park along the Potomac River to \$25 per vehicle at Yellowstone National Park. In all, 147 of the 391 national parks charge admission fees.

The summer waiver does not cover other fees for camping, reservations, tours and concessions sales. Businesses near some parks -- including hotels, restaurants, gift shops and tour operators -- also will offer discounts and promotions, according to the Interior Department.

More than 275 million people visited national parks last year, the government has reported, and most Americans live less than a day's drive from a national park.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the fee waivers while visiting Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio.

In Indiana, Energy Secretary Steven Chu announced almost \$50 million in stimulus money for the expanded manufacturing and installation of renewable heating and cooling systems. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced \$4.5 million in grants and infrastructure funding to Hoosier State communities.

President Obama's Cabinet has emerged in recent weeks as a reliable cast dispatched in groups to sell the president's policies. Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan traveled to Montana to mark the first 100 days of the stimulus plan, and other officials have appeared at economic town hall meetings with Vice President Biden.

"Cabinet members have gone out en masse in the past, but usually it's in even-numbered years and in the fall," said Stephen Hess, a Brookings Institution expert on the presidency.

"The idea of using the Cabinet almost as a unit I think is indeed a variation on a theme that I think is quite interesting," he said.