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Red Rock fee hike advances to BLM official

Plan could start as early as March 1

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A citizens advisory panel Thursday approved increasing entrance fees at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

The new fee schedule, which charges motorists \$7 per vehicle for a daily pass on the scenic drive and \$3 for bicyclists and pedestrians, could take effect as soon as March 1 if the recommendation gets final approval from Bureau of Land Management State Director Ron Wenker.

A daily vehicle pass has been \$5 since the user fee program was launched in 1997. Pedestrians, such as hikers and joggers, and bicyclists have been allowed to enter the park free.

Visitors who hold \$20 annual passes will be allowed to use them through their expiration dates. The new fee schedule sets the price of an "annual support pass" at \$30.

The citizens panel, the Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council, approved the fee changes recommended by a recreation subcommittee by a 14-0 voice vote during a meeting at the BLM's district office.

The recommendation that Wenker is expected to approve comes with four conditions:

- Providing a free pass for people who volunteer 40 hours per year at Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.
- Offering an "annual support pass" for \$30 for everyone including equestrian and mountain bike users who would be asked to pay at parking areas and trail heads where there are no fee collection booths
- Patterning the annual pass after the America the Beautiful federal lands pass, allowing the cardholder and three guests to enter Red Rock Canyon without additional charge whether as pedestrians or bicyclists.
- Establishing an electronic bypass lane at the scenic drive entrance so that annual pass holders can scan their cards and do not have to wait for collection from day-fee users.

BLM planners sought the fee increase to maintain the park's resources over the next 10 years in light of inflation, growing crowds of visitors and less federal funding for day-to-day operations and public safety.

Entrance fees brought in \$1.9 million for park maintenance and operations in 2008, when planners began drawing up plans for a new fee schedule.

BLM officials estimate the new schedule will bring in \$986,000 more per year than the current fee schedule, enough to meet their management goals for 10 years.

If Wenker signs off on the recommendation, law precludes the BLM from increasing fees for at least five years.

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