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Greene County (VA) Record

Editorial

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Major fee increase at SNP uncalled for

It's ironic that within the same week that the Blue Ridge Heritage Project dedicated its Greene County Memorial to those displaced from the mountains to make way for Shenandoah National Park that the National Park Service is trying to disenfranchise local residents from what could soon become a playground for the rich.

Last week, the National Park Service revealed a plan to increase the entrance fees at 17 of its most popular parks — including Shenandoah National Park — during the peak season.

While definitely not the same caliber of disregard 80 or 90 years for the generations of families raised in the hills and hollows of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the National Park Service's proposal has the same type disconnect that folks in Washington, D.C., seem to have for those not living within the Beltway. Ninety years ago, federal and state officials, in making their case for moving whole generations of families off their homesteads, said that it was too hard to bring the modern conveniences of life to those living back in the woods — they'd be better living closer to towns where they could allegedly be better educated and have more access to food, services and medicine.

According to the SNP today, the proposal for nearly tripling of fees from \$25 to \$70 for the most-popular type of visitor pass, would generate revenue to offer more conveniences and make improvements to aging roads, bridges, campgrounds, waterlines, bathrooms, etc. Sound familiar?

From the local communities at the base of SNP's entrances to regional organizations that have an interest in maintaining the park's character versus the demands of modern society, the message to the National Park Service is the same: Don't do it.

"I have a real concern that this could have a significant impact on the local economy," said Alan Yost, Greene County Economic Development Authority and Tourism Director. "Are people going to pay \$70 for a hike? I'm concerned about that."

"Although there was little pushback via public comments when Shenandoah's entrance fees were proposed to increase recently, that fee increase was modest compared to NPS' proposed increase to \$70," the Shenandoah National Park Trust officials said. "We are concerned that if approved, visitation to our park will drop off. This would affect not only our park, but [also] the local communities who depend on national park-related tourism revenue to thrive."

It's easy to complain about these proposed increases, but there is a way to take action. Comments on the proposed peak season fee increases can be made through Nov. 23 at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/proposedpeakseasonfeerates>.

For those who want make their voices heard the old-fashioned way, comments can also be mailed to: National Park Service, 1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop: 2346, Washington, D.C. 20240.

"They call us displaced," Lillie "Peachie" Morris Batten, whose family was forced off the mountain when she was 5 years old, told those gathering to dedicate the Blue Heritage Project's Greene County

Memorial on Sunday. “To me, we weren’t displaced — we were disregarded. They forgot us.”
Government officials took away land from local people once — let’s not let them do it again.