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[Michael Piraino](#), Contributor
Children's Advocate

Pricing The Public Out Of The Parks

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Michael S. Piraino

My recent experience as a National Park Service employee convinces me that the proposal to [drastically increase fees](#) at these parks will be counterproductive and cause lasting damage to the reputation of the park system. It will discourage park visitation, reduce the diversity of visitors, and lead to an overall decline in public support for the parks.

Our parks should not be turned into playgrounds for those wealthy enough to pay \$70 just to visit their park for a day. This proposal is directly contrary to the fundamental purpose and the very soul of our national park system. Stephen Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, described these lands as [“national properties in which every citizen has a vested interest.”](#) Congress has repeatedly restated the nation’s longstanding commitment that these parks should be [“preserved and managed for the benefit and inspiration of all the people of the United States.”](#)

Through my recent work at [Mount Rainier National Park](#), I can attest that the current single visit fee of \$25 is already high enough to discourage many park visitors. It was a great sadness to see families arrive at the park with great excitement only to turn around and leave crestfallen because they could not justify the \$25 entry fee. This happened repeatedly, day after day (though I proudly confess to personally treating many of these families to free entry).

The idea that the proposed fee increases would [bring in \\$70 million](#) is ridiculously optimistic. My guess is that day-use visits would decline by at least one third, probably much more. And those who reluctantly pay up will go back home with little fondness for the Park Service. It’s too bad that those of us who proudly worked at the parks were not asked about the potential impact of fee increases of this magnitude.

Yes, the [parks are underfunded](#). But how can we expect the public to continue supporting parks that charge them \$70 for a single day’s visit?

I considered every visitor to Mount Rainier to be an honored guest, and worked hard to make their visits enjoyable. I wish I could personally apologize to every one of them who must feel that this fee proposal is thoroughly disrespectful. Though I hoped to return to the park next year, I would be thoroughly ashamed to ask these guests to pay such a high price to visit the park that supposedly belongs to them. And that makes me profoundly sad.

I encourage you to [submit your comments](#) to the National Park Service before the deadline of November 23, 2017 at 11:59 PM Mountain Time