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Tri-City Herald (Kennewick, WA)

## **Editorials**

### **Our Voice: Proposed national parks fees exorbitant**

By the Herald Editorial Board

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A proposal to raise the cost to enter some of our country's most popular national parks is a bad idea.

Our public lands are a national treasure, and many a family memory is made during a summertime visit to Yosemite or Yellowstone or other — mostly Western — park destination.

Officials with the National Park Service think it's a good idea to [increase fees during those busy summer months](#), in some cases nearly tripling the cost of a week-long pass. The proposal would increase peak-season entrance fees from \$25 per car to \$70. The cost to walk or bike in would go from \$10 to \$30, and motorcycle fees would jump from \$20 to \$50.

The parks service says the increase is needed to pay for long-deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure, as well as the impact of visitors whose numbers have grown in recent years.

One of the government's core responsibilities is to care for public lands. While the fee increase would apply at [17 national park sites](#) — including Mount Rainier and Olympic national parks — the additional money anticipated from the move would be just a tiny Band-Aid on a much broader problem.

The park service estimates it has more than \$11 billion in deferred maintenance at its 417 sites. The proposed fee increase would generate \$70 million. That is, unless the increased price of admission causes visits to drop, deflating those revenue projections.

“Asking visitors to pay down a share of this massive debt one trip at a time is not a sound fiscal strategy for our families or our parks,” according to the National Parks Conservation Association.

While the organization does not oppose fees for parks, “These new drastic increases could create a serious financial barrier for many families. Visitors should not be forced to pay today for the years of inadequate federal funding in the past that led to this massive Park Service backlog,” said the association.

We agree. The federal government needs to find another way to take care of these national treasures.

The conservation association and many others point to the U.S. Congress and a bill known as the National Park Service Legacy Act as the solution.

That bill would provide money for parks from a portion of federal mineral revenues. If enacted, it's expected to provide an initial bump of \$50 million to parks and eventually grow to \$500 million.

Using revenue from a natural resource to pay to maintain another seems like a just solution.

Potentially depriving families of visits to some of the most beautiful places in our country with prohibitive fees does not.

And the bulk of the cost of parks should be borne by the government, not by putting a premium on

visitors to a few chosen sites.

The public has an opportunity to make its voice heard on the matter by commenting [at http://bit.ly/ParkFeeComment](http://bit.ly/ParkFeeComment) through Nov. 23. We encourage people to weigh in on this important issue, and oppose the exorbitant fees proposed.

For those who can afford it, the real bargain regardless of the fate of the fee increase proposal is still an annual pass.

The proposal does not include an upcharge to the \$80 pass that gets you into any park in the system for an entire year. Now that's a deal.