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Estes Park News (CO)

Town Of Estes Park Opposes Proposed Fee Increases At RMNP

Nov 15, 2017

This week, Mayor Todd Jirsa sent a letter to the National Park Service (NPS), outlining the Town of Estes Park's concerns and opposition to proposed, drastic fee increases at Rocky Mountain National Park.

We encourage everyone to review the proposed increases and take advantage of the NPS public comment period, which closes next week on Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving Day).

November 13, 2017

National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

RE: National Park Service Proposes Targeted Fee Increases at Parks to Address Maintenance Backlog
To Whom It May Concern:

Estes Park is a gateway community to Rocky Mountain National Park with an outdoor recreation- and tourism-based economy. The Estes Valley is home to approximately 13,000 year-round residents and supports the 4.5 million annual visitors to Rocky Mountain National Park. The economic health of our community - and our livelihoods - depend on a healthy, functioning public lands system that is accessible to all Americans. We are deeply concerned about the proposal to raise the entrance fee at Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) to \$70 and eliminate the day pass during peak season, resulting in a 250% increase in the daily fee to access the Park.

We support the need for new funding to address the maintenance backlog, but this proposed rate hike would only raise a fraction of the needed revenue to address the \$11.3 billion backlog, and would mean millions of Americans would no longer be able to afford to enjoy their public lands. It also has the potential to severely damage the economic health of the surrounding communities, including Estes Park.

The proposal discriminates against day users at parks like RMNP. Unlike other destination parks such as Yellowstone and Grand Canyon, Rocky receives a significant amount of day use from nearby population centers on the Front Range of Colorado, including Denver. Currently 80% of the fee revenue for RMNP comes from day permits. If the current \$20 day pass is eliminated during peak season, day users would have to pay \$70 for a day visit, precluding many families from Front Range communities. The proposal must be revised to reflect differences in visitation patterns across the park system.

Additionally, Trail Ridge Road is a U.S. highway (US 34) and many visitors simply pass through RMNP, using the road as a transportation corridor between Grand Lake/Grand County and the Front Range. The proposal, in effect, creates a \$70 toll to access a U.S. highway. This is unreasonable and will impact the economic health of communities in Grand County by limiting visitors from the

Northern Front Range.

We request that you keep a day pass rate with a reasonable increase from the current \$20 per day to \$25 or \$30 per day.

With the proposed fee increase of \$70 per week being only \$10 less than the "America the Beautiful" pass (access to all federal fee lands for an entire year), people will very likely spend the \$80 for the pass. If they buy that pass online (a very popular option already) or at any other national park, RMNP will receive no revenue from that sale. The passes MUST be bought at Rocky in order for the park to receive 80% of the revenue. The proposed pricing structure has additional unintended negative consequences for RMNP.

RMNP's shuttle system, critical to managing the high number of visitors during the peak season, is funded entirely by RMNP entrance fees (daily, weekly or the RMNP-specific annual pass). If people purchase the "America the Beautiful" pass (for just \$10 more), NO funds go to RMNP's transportation fund. Hence, there could be a decline in transportation fees and a direct reduction in shuttle service. The Town of Estes Park and RMNP have integrated our shuttle systems. Providing alternatives to single vehicles entering the park and driving through town is critical to protecting the resource and improving access to the Park. We should be increasing funding to support alternative transportation options in RMNP, not reducing its availability.

We strongly urge you to reconsider the proposed rate increase in favor of a more responsible, inclusive, and comprehensive funding strategy considering the differences in the visitation bases of these unique national treasures.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

On behalf of the Town of Estes Park, Colorado,

Todd A. Jirsa Mayor

c.c. Senator Michael Bennett Senator Corey Gardner Representative Jared Polis

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