

November 16, 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:

Lyons is a gateway community to Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) with an outdoor recreation and tourism-based economy. Lyons is home to approximately 2000 year-round residents and serves as a popular place for visitors to stop on their way to Rocky Mountain National Park. The economic health of our community depends on a healthy, functioning public lands system that is accessible to all Americans of varying income levels. We are deeply concerned about the proposal to raise the entrance fee at RMNP to \$70 and elimination of the day pass during peak season. This change results in a 250% increase in the daily fee to access the Park which may divert visitors to alternative destinations that do not charge entrance fees.

DOUBLE GATEWAY
TO THE ROCKIES

We support and understand the need for additional revenue to address the deferred maintenance of our national parks. While it's logical to consider fees as a way to address the shortfall placing the financial burden on visitors to these 17 parks is not a comprehensive solution to the NPS budget shortfall, particularly when the federal contributions for operations are being reduced. The net impact of these changes to the park budgets will make serving visitors more challenging.

The proposal disproportionately affects day users at parks like RMNP. Unlike other destination parks like Yellowstone and Grand Canyon, RMNP receives a significant amount of day use from nearby population centers on the Front Range of Colorado, spanning from Denver to Fort Collins. 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, potentially reducing the frequency of visits from families from Front Range communities. The proposal must be revised to reflect differences in visitation patterns across the park system.

We strongly urge you keep a day pass rate with a reasonable increase from the current \$20 per day to \$25 or \$30 per day. Maintaining day pass visitation is critical to the health of our local economy in Lyons, which is one of the last places visitors can break for gas and food when traveling west to RMNP from I-25.

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.

TELEPHONE

303.823.6622

FACSIMILE

303.823.8257

432 5TH AVENUE • P.O. BOX 41
LYONS • COLORADO 80541

TOWNOFLYONS.COM

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), then none of the funds go to transportation. Hence, there could be a decline in transportation fees and a direct reduction in shuttle service which will increase vehicle congestion. Providing alternatives to single vehicles entering the park 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 availability.

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 Lyons.

We strongly urge you to reconsider the proposed rate increase in favor of a more responsible, inclusive, and comprehensive funding strategy considers 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 Lyons,



Connie Sullivan, Mayor

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