

Boulder Daily Camera

Lyons 'deeply concerned' about steep Rocky Mountain National Park fee hike

Mayor sends letter to National Park Service

By John Bear

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Lyons Mayor Connie Sullivan has asked the National Park Service to reconsider a proposed fee hike at Rocky Mountain National Park because, she argues, it will negatively impact the town's economy, which depends on park visitors.

"The economic health of our community depends on a healthy, functioning public lands system that is accessible to all Americans of varying income levels," Sullivan [wrote in a letter to the park service](#) dated Thursday. "We are deeply concerned about the proposal to raise the entrance fee at RMNP."

Currently, it costs \$20 for a day pass into the park for a passenger vehicle. If the price change is approved, that cost would jump to \$70 per car during the peak season at the park, which begins on June 18 and runs five months. An annual pass for a specific park could be purchased for \$75 under the proposed changes.

Reached by phone on Friday evening, Sullivan said the town's Board of Trustees discussed the issue at its most recent meeting and is calling upon residents to submit comments to the National Park Service regarding the proposed price hike.

"It's a very large increase, and it has the potential to divert a lot of money away from Rocky Mountain National Park," Sullivan said. "People might see the value of just getting the annual pass. ... That money doesn't necessarily stay in the park or stay local."

She added that the letter has been sent to Sens. Cory Gardner and Michael Bennet and Rep. Jared Polis.

Lyons lies about 24 miles southeast of Rocky Mountain National Park, and Sullivan said the town of about 2,000 year-round residents relies on people who stop in town before heading up the road.

Officials in Estes Park, which also sits near the park, also have expressed concerns about the proposed fee hike.

Rocky Mountain is just one of several national parks where fee hikes are being considered as a way to generate revenue for infrastructure improvements. As of 2016, the Park Service had a nearly \$12 billion backlog of deferred maintenance and delayed improvement projects.

A spokeswoman at Rocky Mountain National Park referred a request for comment to the National Park Service's Washington, D.C., office, which did not immediately respond on Friday.

Sullivan wrote that the \$70 gate fee and elimination of the \$20 day pass during the peak season might divert travelers to cheaper locales, particularly Front Range residents who might make fewer trips to the park because of the price.

Town officials also are concerned that park visitors might opt for the annual America the Beautiful

pass, which costs \$80 and grants access to all national parks. If someone buys the pass online or at another park, Rocky Mountain doesn't receive any of the money.

The drop-in gate fees might also impact the shuttle service to and from the park, which could cause traffic problems as people will have to drive directly into the park, according to the letter.

"We don't completely oppose a price increase," Sullivan said. "We would certainly welcome a modification to this increase."

Comments can be submitted to the park service online until Thursday at parkplanning.nps.gov/proposedpeakseasonfeerates or mailed to National Park Service, Recreation Fee Program, 1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop: 2346 Washington, D.C. 20240.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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