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National Park Service slashes number of free-access days from 10 to four in 2018

By [Jason Blevins](#) Dec 12, 2017, 4:49 pm

The National Park Service on Tuesday said it will trim the number of free-access days to four in 2018 from 10 this year and 16 last year.

“We hope that these fee-free days offer visitors an extra incentive to enjoy their national parks in 2018,” National Park Service Deputy Director Michael T. Reynolds said in a news release.

But the move comes as the park service weighs public input on a [plan to more than double gate-fees](#) at its most popular parks, including Rocky Mountain National Park. And heat from conservation groups came quickly.

“America’s parks must remain affordable for working families,” Center for Western Priorities’ advocacy director Jesse Prentice-Dunn said in a statement. “Instead of pushing massive increases to entrance fees and cutting fee-free days, (Interior Secretary) Ryan Zinke should ensure all Americans have access to our parks and public lands.”

On the heels of its centennial celebration that saw record-level crowds, the National Park Service in October proposed more than [doubling entrance fees at its 17 busiest parks](#). The entrance fee plan came only a few months after the Trump Administration proposed a budget that slashes park service funding by \$1.5 billion.

The proposal would push peak-season entrance fees in 2018 to \$70 from \$30. The agency said the added revenue is needed to address long overdue maintenance and upgrades at its 417 properties, of which only 118 charge for entry.

Last month the agency extended the initially month-long public comment period to Dec. 22. The agency is [taking comments at its website](#).

Conservation and recreation groups blasted the proposed entrance fee increase. Zinke also harvested fierce criticism for his plan to cut about 2 million acres from the [Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante national monuments in Utah](#).

“Not everyone can book a helicopter or charter a boat when they want to visit our national parks,” Prentice-Dunn said Tuesday, referring to news reports of Zinke using a government helicopter for travel — reports the secretary blasted as “total fabrications.”

Free entrance to national parks in 2018:

- *Jan. 15, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day*
- *Apr. 21, the first day of National Park Week*
- *Sept. 22, National Public Lands Day*
- *Nov. 11, Veterans Day.*