PARK FEESヘADED UP

At Some National Sites, Annual Pass Price May Double

Jeremy P. Meyer

The cost of annual passes to national parks in Colorado could increase anywhere from 43 percent to 167 percent by 2009 in a rate-structure alignment being implemented by the National Park Service.

The federal agency is seeking more fee uniformity across the nation's park system, said Kathy Kupper, spokeswoman for the National Park Service in Washington, D.C.

"There used to be 17 different fees, depending on the park and what the park decided," Kupper said. "Now, there is a synchronized plan for four different fees."

Annual passes will cost between $20 and $50, depending on the park's size and popularity. Vehicle fees will be between $10 and $25.

Increases began in 2006, when 23 parks had their fees adjusted. This year 11 parks will be affected, 85 parks in 2008 and 39 in 2009, Kupper said.

In 2011, the agency may adjust fees based on inflation and seek increases every three years after that.

"This absolutely is excluding Americans from visiting their public lands," said Robert Funkhouser, president of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, a group that has fought fees on public lands.

"The more you force the public away, the more you lose support for the parks," Funkhouser said.

With park visits dropping nationwide, critics say fee increases will not entice more people.

Since 1996, a park has been allowed to keep 80 percent of money spent on entry fees. The remaining 20 percent is spread throughout the agency.

Since 1998, the fee program generated $1.4 billion, which has been spent on nearly 12,000 projects, according to Kupper.

In Rocky Mountain National Park - the most-visited of the 11 national parks, monuments, recreation areas and historic sites in Colorado - fees have paid for $23
million in projects, including building a park-and-ride facility and developing the Hidden Valley Snow-Play area.

The park is authorized to increase entry fees in 2009, lifting its annual pass from $35 to $50, its vehicle fee from $20 to $25 and its per-person charge from $10 to $12.

The public will be consulted before a decision is sent to Washington, said Kyle Patterson, park spokeswoman.

The park already is authorized to charge $40 for an annual pass, but Superintendent Vaughn Baker has not asked for an increase, Patterson said.

"Just because you have the authorization, it doesn't mean we will," she said.

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Prices for park places

Proposed entrance-fee increases at Colorado's seven affected national parks and monuments:

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK
2006: Annual pass, $35; per vehicle, $20; per person, $10
2009: Annual pass, $50; per vehicle, $25; per person, $12

COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT
2006: Annual pass, $20; per vehicle, $7; per person, $4
2009: Annual pass, $30; per vehicle, $15; per person, $7

FLORISSANT FOSSIL BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT
2006: Annual pass, $15; per person, $3
2008: Annual pass, $30; per person, $7

MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK
2006: Annual pass, $20; per vehicle, $10; per person, $5
2007: Annual pass, $30; per vehicle, $15; per person, $8
2009: Annual pass, $40; per vehicle, $20; per person, $10

GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK
2006: Annual pass, $15; per person, $3

2009: Annual pass, $30; per person, $7

HOVENWEEP NATIONAL MONUMENT

2006: Annual pass, $25; per vehicle, $6; per person, $3

2008: Annual pass, $40; per vehicle, $10; per person, $5

Source: National Park Service