Reject massive fee increases for national parks

Express-News Editorial Board

Published 6:09 pm, Friday, November 3, 2017

It could soon cost $70 to visit the Grand Canyon. That would be the new fee at peak season if a proposal from the National Park Service goes into effect.

Under the proposal, fees would skyrocket at its 17 busiest parks during their peak seasons. This includes popular destinations such as Bryce Canyon National Park, Yellowstone National Park and Yosemite National Park.

The entrance fee would go from $25 or $30 per vehicle (depending on the park) to $70. Motorcycle riders would pay $50. And pedestrians or cyclists would pay $30. The rate for the annual America the Beautiful pass, which grants entrance to all parks, would remain $80.

The National Park Service is taking comments for just a month, ending on Thanksgiving.

Federal officials have said the fee increases will raise about $70 million for needed infrastructure. The infrastructure need at these parks is in the billions.

At the same time, President Donald Trump’s proposed 2018 budget cuts about $300 million from the National Park Service. On the one hand, the administration is cutting its support for these parks. On the other hand, the administration is considering asking Americans to pay more. It’s inconsistent, unfair and nonsensical.

The proposed budget cuts should be rejected, and so should a fee increase that’s far too extreme.

These parks belong to the American people — and they are already inaccessible by distance and the cost of making a trip for far too many people. Raising entrance fees to $70 per vehicle will only make these parks more inaccessible, and it won’t meaningfully address those infrastructure needs. It’s a bad idea posing as a solution.