In a press release dated Oct. 24, the National Park Service (NPS) opened the 30-day public comment period for their proposed “peak season” fee increases at 17 of our nation’s most-visited parks — Glacier, Yellowstone, and the Tetons are among the 17 listed.

Using the currently acceptable weasel-words of bureaucratic doublespeak, the first paragraph of the press release states, “As part of its commitment to improve the visitor experience and ensure America’s national parks are protected in perpetuity, the National Park Service is considering increases to fees at highly visited national parks during peak visitor seasons. Proposed peak season entrance fees and revised fees for road-based commercial tours would generate badly needed revenue for improvements to the aging infrastructure of national parks. This includes roads, bridges, campgrounds, waterlines, bathrooms, and other visitor services.”

The first sentence of the NPS’s mission statement reads, “The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” That declaration begs the question, “Exactly which people benefit from that “enjoyment, education, and inspiration?”

Googling the “National Park Service,” results in the following statement being displayed. “The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.” That word “all” is very inclusive. No gender, ethnicity, political persuasion, religious belief, or nationality is excluded. In fact, if we are to believe what is stated, every being on earth should be the beneficiary of our national parks.

What the press release fails to mention is that it will take more than 150 years for the proposed fee increases to cover the costs of the needed improvements to infrastructure. By then, all the improvements will be far out of date, again.

The central question that should be asked is, “Why does the NPS want to raise fees? Logic suggests that it is not to cover the cost of improvements. There must be another reason and, there is. Every government agency, except for the military, has been underfunded for many decades. So, the NPS is simply attempting to raise funds any way it can.

It is unfortunate that Congress has been unwilling to adequately fund the NPS along with every other governmental agency that keeps our country operating. The reason, of course, is that the majority of its members have repeatedly proven their only interest is in getting re-elected, not in doing the business of our country’s citizens.

Sadly, we live in a country where elected officials are easily purchased by the rich and powerful for little more than the price of a 32-ounce convenience-store soda. That will continue unless you and I do what is necessary to ensure our elected officials represent every one of us, not just affluent powerful people operating in the dark.
We are headed toward a world where our nation’s parks will only benefit affluent travelers from other countries and the most prosperous of United States citizens. The NPS’s press release is a not-so-subtle message that, henceforth U.S National Parks will be playgrounds for the wealthy and not intended for the benefit of the less well-off among us. Sometime in the near future the statement, “The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage,” will have to be changed to exclude the word ALL.

However insignificant it may seem, raising entry fees is yet another symptom of exclusivity and exclusion.

Michael Hoyt, Corvallis