Commentary: Fee hikes for national parks is a bad idea

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The Trump administration won't stop my hiking boots, but I'm outraged by its quest to radically raise the price of a single-vehicle pass at 17 of our most popular national parks, including Rocky Mountain, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone. The weekly entrance fees at those three parks would increase from $30 to $70 under the plan.

Some chatterboxes on NPR recently compared the proposed fees to the cost of visiting Disney World or other amusement parks, as if national parks can be likened to private enterprise. They can't. We own them. And we've paid a lot of tax dollars over the years to prove it.

Yes, our parks need $12 billion worth of deferred maintenance. But the higher fees would cover less than 1 percent of those needs. What the parks really need is for Congress to pass the National Park Service Legacy Act, providing a sustainable investment in parks - not the current one-15th of 1 percent of money they got in the 1980s.

So what would the higher fees accomplish? They would prevent many families from entering the parks set aside for Americans' enjoyment. And they would cripple the economies of gateway communities dependent on that visitation.

I'm all set. I plunked down $10 on my 62nd birthday for a lifetime pass to our nation's most cherished treasures. But my daughter and other millennials desperately need a whiff of Mother Nature to offset their technology addiction. And I worry about stressed people without means who until now have been able to find solace, solitude and peace in the sanctuary of our parks.

The National Parks Conservation Association opposes the fee increase. So does the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks - current, former and retired National Park Service employees who long have fought for more park maintenance money. The coalition notes that entrance fees already were raised in 2015 and 2016, and the new increases would exceed any in NPS history.

National parks are "the best idea we ever had," Wallace Stegner said. You only have until Nov. 23 to comment on this proposal. Tell the NPS what you think: https://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?documentID=83652