

U.S. NATIONAL PARKS WILL RAISE PRICES THIS SUMMER



Be prepared to pay a bit more if you are heading to some of the U.S. recreational areas and national parks this summer.

After a 6 year moratorium, the federal government has decided to increase the cost of admission at some of its public lands and raise the fees charged for cave tours, boating, camping and other activities. **The National Park Service says that the money that is expected to be raised is only a fraction of the \$11.5 billion required to maintain and repair park buildings, roads and trails.**

Some members of Congress have expressed their concern about the fee increases. However, at a March congressional hearing the director of the National Park Service, Jonathan Jarvis, said that the visitors are still getting an amazing deal when compared to the other recreational pursuits.

'We cannot welcome them with failing facilities,' Jonathan Jarvis said of the 295 million individuals that are expected to visit the National Park Service properties that also include sites such as the Lincoln Memorial.

The fees have increased in 8 parks, including Yosemite National Park, so far and will probably also increase in a few other parks in the coming months.

Each park is supposed to determine how much they'll charge visitors after approval from Washington and public input. Last September Jonathan Jarvis told the park superintendents to start the public outreach that must accompany the fee increases. The service was offered on Facebook as part of the agency's efforts to ascertain the prospect of higher fees at the Yosemite National Park.

Currently, only approximately one third of the 400 plus properties that are within the National Park Service system charge an entrance fee. Even in those properties that do charge a fee, most visitors are exempted from. For instance, federal law requires that parks issue free passes for the disabled and offer the elderly with the option of purchasing a lifetime pass for only \$10.

Families can also purchase an \$80 annual pass that enables them to visit as many national parks as they want. By comparison, the cost of visiting Disneyland for one day is a minimum of \$99 for one individual age 10 and above.

Fees vary widely from one park to another. At Yosemite National Park, the country's 3rd busiest national park last year, the annual pass rose from \$40 to \$60.

The National Park Service has helped alleviate some of the concerns raised by motorcyclists by phasing in the increase and not charging as much as they had originally proposed. This year, the rate per motorcycle has increased from \$10 to \$15 and will probably jump to \$20 next year.

Jonathan Jarvis said that the National Park Service collects **approximately \$180 million every**

year through fees and had expected to raise more than \$45 million through the fee increases. However, officials have rescinded or delayed some of the proposed increases based on opposition from lawmakers and local residents.

The needs of the agency are many. 50 percent of all the national park system's paved roads have been designated as in fair/poor condition. According to the agency over 24 bridges require repair, as do more than a third of the hiking trails - around 6,700 miles.

Some of the Republican lawmakers have raised concerns about the scale of the impending fee increases. Republican Representative Doug LaMalfa, whose Northern California district includes Lassen Volcanic National Park, said that a modest increase in fees, perhaps 25%, could be understandable. But any increase beyond that would really begin to make a difference in people's budgets.

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