

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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April 5, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to register my continued opposition to your proposal to dramatically increase entrance fees at seventeen of our nation's most popular national parks, including Mount Rainier and Olympic. The National Park Service has received over 109,000 public comments on the fee proposal, the overwhelming majority of which are opposed. I urge you to withdraw the proposed fee increases immediately and begin a transparent, public process that takes into account public input and fully analyzes the impact on park visitation and local park economies before seeking to impose any other fee increases.

The National Park Service described the fee increases "as part of its commitment to improve the visitor experience..." I am unable to see how doubling or tripling a park entrance fee is anything other than an effort to exclude many Americans from enjoying their national parks. I have heard from many Washington families and students that they won't be able to afford to visit their national parks if you raise the fees to these levels. Visiting our national parks can be a transformative experience for families with school-aged children, but fee increases such as what you have proposed could put these opportunities out of reach.

Under the proposed fee schedule released last October 24, the peak-season entrance fee at the affected national parks will increase to \$70 per private non-commercial vehicle, \$50 per motorcycle, and \$30 per person. These fees are as much as two to three times the current levels. For example, the vehicle entrance fee will increase from \$25 to \$70 during peak visitation months at Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks and from \$30 to \$70 at Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Parks.

During the March 13 hearing before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, you testified that one reason fees needed to be increased was "when you give discounted or free passes to the elderly, fourth graders, veterans, disabled, and you do it by the carload, there's not a whole lot of people that actually pay at our front door." I strongly disagree with the view that fee discounts for specific groups is a legitimate rationale to significantly raise fees on the general public.

- According to the National Park Service, visitors to national parks spend an estimated \$18.4 billion in park gateway communities and generate almost \$35 billion annually in economic output. We should be encouraging visitation to our national parks and other public lands, not seeking to raise new barriers to access that undercut our outdoor recreation economy.

Your October 24 fee increase proposal was announced without providing the public with any analysis of the effect on visitation used to justify the proposed fees. Failure to have a transparent process in developing fee policy will result in continued public opposition. And failing to fully analyze the impact of fee increases on visitation and local park economies will result in fees that are arbitrary and unjustifiable.

I urge you to immediately withdraw the proposed park fee increases and instead undertake a transparent and public process that will ensure that all Americans have affordable access to their national parks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maria Cantwell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator