



HILARY S. FRANZ
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS

December 22, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I write to you today to object to the proposed increase in National Park admission fees, especially those at Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks.

As Washington State's Commissioner of Public Lands, I know how important it is that all Americans are able to experience our irreplaceable public parks.

People from all over the country come to Washington State to explore the glaciers and waterfalls that cascade down Mount Rainier or hike through the rainforests and explore the rocky beaches of Olympic National Park.

By hiking trails, swimming in lakes, and camping in rainforests, Americans connect with and learn to value the public lands that make this country so special and unique.

Increasing access fees for our National Parks threatens to sever this connection and will deprive millions of Americans of the chance to experience our shared natural wonders.

The stated rationale for increasing fees from \$25 to \$70 per car is to address backlogged maintenance of our parks. I understand fully the difficulty of finding sustainable sources of revenue to take care of recreational lands.

My agency, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, manages more than 1,100 miles of trails, 70 camp grounds, and 60 trailheads, and we too struggle with funding for maintenance of these areas.

But we must be thoughtful and cautious when balancing the need for access with the need for revenue. And we cannot overly rely on entrance fees, as high fees endanger a core purpose for preserving public lands – making them accessible to the public.

When fees increase, visitors decrease. Visits to Mt. Rainier fell 14% when fees were increased from \$5 to \$10 in 1996; 7.9% when the fee was increased to \$15 in 2006; and fell again when the fee was increased to \$25 in 2015. Olympic National Park had similar decreases.

It is a certainty that nearly tripling the fee to access National Parks will drastically reduce the number of park visitors.



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Not only will this high cost of entry prohibit many of our families from experiencing our national wonders, it will also hurt local economies that depend on visitors to National Parks.

As many as one in four residents of Washington State's rural counties are employed in outdoor recreation. The outdoor recreation industry provides our state with \$7.6 billion in wages, \$26 billion in annual economic impact, and employs 64,000 more people than our famous aerospace industry.

Washington's National Parks inject \$400 million into Washington's economy every year.

When we invest in public lands, we invest in surrounding communities. When we reduce that investment, when we make it harder for people to visit, we deprive rural economies of critical revenue.

This fee increase will hurt the surf shop owner in Port Angeles, the gas station owner in Ashford, the hotelier in Aberdeen, the outfitter in Brinnon, and the teenagers who yearn for opportunities to earn a decent wage in their home towns.

That is why I urge you to reject this fee proposal and seek alternate sources of funding to take care of the lands we inherited from our ancestors and owe to our descendants.

Congress is willing to help. Twelve senators and 54 representatives representing both parties and dozens of states have sponsored the National Park Service Legacy Act of 2017, which dedicates funding from federal mineral leases to maintain national parks.

I believe this is a sensible solution, one which balances the need for maintenance and upkeep with the need for access

I thank you for this opportunity to comment and urge you to rescind this proposal in favor of more forward-looking, sustainable approaches.

Sincerely,

Hilary S. Franz
Commissioner of Public Lands