

Daily Vehicle Entrance and front-country campground overnight fees

Civic Engagement Summary

Overview

On November 18, 2021, Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) issued a press release announcing a comment period on proposed changes in its current Daily Vehicle Entrance and front-country campground overnight fees. The public could submit their comments through the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website from November 18 to January 7, 2021. Comments were also accepted via mail. In addition to the press release, the park website was updated to inform the public on the proposed fee increases and open comment period.

Two topic questions were presented to the public on PEPC: 1) “How would an increase in Daily Vehicle Entrance fees affect your visit the park?” and 2) “How would an increase in front-country campground overnight fees affect your visit to the park?” The public were able to include additional feedback in a “Comments” section.

A total of 264 correspondences (261 PEPC entries, 2 letters, 1 email) were received in response the changes to Daily Vehicle Entrance and front-country campground overnight fees. Correspondences were coded with 18 qualitative codes resulting in 757 individually coded statements, with 16 qualitative codes identifying statements in support or in opposition of proposed changes to fees. The other 2 qualitative codes were either unrelated to the proposed fee increases or related solely to process. This review process found 147 statements in support of and 99 statements in opposition to changes to front-country campground overnight fees, and 214 statements in support of and 117 in opposition to changes to Daily Vehicle Entrance fees.

General Feedback

Most commenters expressed support for the proposed changes to the Daily Vehicle Entrance and front-country campground overnight fees, often highlighting the importance of funding for park maintenance, operation, and resource protection. Commenters who opposed fee increases often cited socioeconomic concerns and affordability for all visitors.

Daily Vehicle Entrance Fees

Comments in support of changes to Daily Vehicle Entrance fees stated that the increase in fees would benefit the park maintenance, operations, and resource protection, referencing projects listed in the press release, and suggested increased visitation creates extra stressors on park operations. Many of these comments connected the proposed use of funds to the benefit of overall visitor experience at the park. Other commenters in support of this change stated the proposed fee increase is reasonable and/or believed the park is underfunded to maintain its high visitation and use, and, therefore, support a fee increase to supplement other funding avenues. Commenters also expressed support for the proposed change to fees though they purchase or use other entrance passes (i.e., ROMO weekly or annual passes, America the Beautiful passes, or lifetime passes).

Front-country Camping Overnight Fees

Many comments supported changes to front-country campground overnight fees stating the change would not impact their decision to visit, or commenters were in support of the change though they do not use front-country campgrounds. Over a third of comments in support of this fee change cited the benefits of funds for park maintenance, operations, and resource protection. Commenters conveyed the unique value of front-country camping in the park compared to other local options, and that the experience of front-country camping outweighs the proposed fee increase.

Concerns

Commenters in opposition to the proposed fee changes expressed concern about the affordability of the fee increases and the subsequent impact to opportunities to visit or camp in the park, especially for low-income and/or marginalized communities. Several commenters recognized the proposed changes in fees were affordable for themselves but expressed concerns for visitors who may experience a greater financial impact from an increase in Daily Vehicle Entrance passes and front-country campground overnight fees.

Some concerns about the proposed Daily Vehicle Entrance fee increase were discussed together with the park's Timed-Entry Permit System, citing them together as barriers to visitor access, casting permitted visitation as a source of reduced revenue, or that the permit system would reduce overall impacts to the park making a fee increase unnecessary.

Some concerns about the proposed changes to front-country campground overnight fees cited the different experiences between summer and winter campground use, with less amenities available at front-country campgrounds during winter months, as reason for opposition to a change to winter camping fees and compared the proposed fee structure to other public land management agencies and NPS units. Some commenters cited concerns about front-country campground management strategies and/or concerns about the overall park funding structure.