



## Proposed Fee Increase Frequently Asked Questions Updated 11/9/14

### **Why are Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks proposing multiple fee increases?**

The proposed fee increases will allow Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks to maintain consistent revenue to maintain and improve visitor services while adjusting accordingly for inflation.

### **When will proposed fees be implemented?**

New fees could potentially be implemented as early as January 2016; however Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will develop an implementation schedule that supports local communities and interested stakeholders.

### **Do you plan on changing fees again in the future?**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon will continue to review fee rates and may propose, in the future, to increase fee rates to keep up with inflation and maintain visitor services.

### **Why is the park conducting civic engagement?**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are seeking public input to gauge support for proposed entrance, wilderness permit and certain campsite fee increases.

### **How can the public provide feedback?**

The public is invited to comment from November 10, 2014 through December 9, 2014 on proposed fee increases. All public comments must be received by December 9, 2014.

We invite the public to submit comments electronically via the National Park Service (NPS)'s Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/seki>. Click on: Proposal to Increase Fees at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

Comments will also be accepted in writing (hand-delivery, by mail or fax). To submit written comments by letter, you may mail or hand-deliver your comments to Superintendent, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, Attn: Proposal to Increase Fees, 47050 Generals Highway, Three Rivers, CA 93271. In addition, faxed comments will be accepted at (559) 565-4202.

Comments submitted by e-mail and anonymous comments will not be accepted. Bulk comments in any format submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask the NPS in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

### **Why don't congressional appropriations cover all the costs of visitor services?**

While basic operations of the park are funded by direct appropriations from Congress, the fee program is intended to provide for various enhancements to visitor services and facilities. The fee program helps provide a margin of excellence for the visitor experience.



Entrance and camping fees charged to those visiting protected lands were established well before the National Park Service was created in 1916. The philosophy held since the Organic Act was “those that actually visit the national parks and monuments should make small contributions to their upkeep for the services those visitors receive, which are not received by other citizens, who do not visit the parks that are available to them, but who contribute to the support of these parks.” (Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, 1939) This philosophy has been upheld through the establishment of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

With the passing of the Fee Demonstration Legislation in 1997 and the current Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004, 100% of revenue is retained in the NPS with 80% kept in the park unit that collects it with congressional direction to invest those dollars in projects that have a direct visitor benefit.

### ***Entrance Fees***

#### **What are the proposed entrance fee rates?**

The proposed single vehicle entrance fee would increase from \$20 to \$30 for a seven-day pass to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The parks’ annual pass would increase from \$30 to \$50. The current rate of \$10 per individual (walk-in, bicycle) would increase to \$15. Currently the charge of \$10 per individual traveling on motorcycle would change to \$25 per motorcycle for a seven-day pass. There would be no changes to flat-rate fees for commercial groups. The Interagency Annual Pass, which is honored at U.S. national parks and federal recreation lands, will not be affected by the proposed fee increase and will remain at \$80. The Interagency Senior Pass will remain at \$10 (one lifetime fee), and the Annual Military Pass and the Senior Pass will remain free.

#### **Will there still be entrance fee free days?**

The National Park Service will continue to offer entrance fee-free opportunities to enjoy the parks. In 2015, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks will offer twelve fee-free days. For more information, visit <http://www.nps.gov/seki/parknews/seki2015feefreeentrancedates.htm>.

#### **Why is Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks raising the entrance fee?**

This fee increase is part of a larger National Park Service initiative to standardize fees in similar parks across the country. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks were classified with parks of comparable size and visitation and given the corresponding fee schedule. Current entrance fees have been in place since 2006, when a seven day pass was increased from \$10 to \$20 per vehicle.

#### **How does the entrance fee compare to inflation?**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon have been collecting fees for over 100 years. The current park entrance fees have been in place since 2006 when a seven-day pass for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks was increased from \$10 to \$20 per vehicle. In 1913, Sequoia National Park was collecting a \$1.00 entrance fee and General Grant National Park (now part of Kings Canyon National Park) collected a \$.50 fee. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, \$1.50 in 1913 is equivalent to \$36.07 in 2014.



## **How are entrance fees calculated?**

The NPS fee structure is a tiered approach that classifies Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks with parks of comparable size and visitation. The NPS analysis of fees is based on relevant academic studies, private and public sector benchmarks, and existing NPS data, and seeks to provide fair, equitable and consistent fees to the public across the National Park System. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are part of Group 4, which generally includes larger parks with higher operating costs due to high levels of visitation and infrastructure, such as Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and Yellowstone.

Group 4 park specific annual pass rates are calculated at twice the vehicle entrance fee. Instead of using the national standardized annual rate of \$60, Sequoia and Kings Canyon are proposing to only charge \$50 to allow it to be affordable for frequent visitors, including those that live in local communities.

## **Does this affect Concession Fees?**

No. Concession fees must go through a systematic rate approval process. This process ensures that rates charged to the public for the use of concessioner-assigned facilities and services are in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and NPS policy. Rates are reviewed on an annual basis and are approved by Park Superintendents. Depending on the type of product or service being priced, various rate methods are applied to determine rate administration.

## **What have the current fees been used for?**

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 authorized 100% of the revenue generated by charging fees to be returned to the National Park Service, with 80% remaining at the site where it is collected and 20% to be used Servicewide to fund programs at parks that don't collect fees. Revenues from entrance fees are used to fund projects in the parks that directly benefit park visitors, providing enhanced visitor services including repair and maintenance of facilities, capital improvements, enhanced amenities, resource protection and additional visitor programs and services.

Funds generated by the fees are used to accomplish projects the parks have been unable to fund through annual Congressional allocations. Examples of recent park projects funded with fee revenue include:

- *Restoration of disturbed land and waters* through the eradication of invasive plants in several front-country and high use wilderness trails and pasture areas and assessment of suitability of Wilderness Meadows and camps with traveling pack stock.
- *Addressing deferred maintenance needs* such as the reconstruction of Big Stump entrance station, rehabilitation of public restrooms and picnic areas, rehabilitation of campground amphitheaters at Cedar Grove and Lodgepole, replacement of dilapidated wilderness ranger stations at Crabtree, Rae Lakes and LaConte, rehabilitation of HVAC system at the Foothills Visitor Center, as well as rehabilitation of hundreds of miles of trails in frontcountry and high use wilderness areas.
- *Improvements to wayside exhibits and other information media* such as the replacement of exhibits and new park film at the Kings Canyon Visitor Center, design and install new self-service orientation and interpretation exhibits at visitor centers, completed captioning, audio description and listening devices at Visitor Centers and Amphitheaters.

## **What will the new entrance fee revenues be used for?**

Forecasted revenue from proposed entrance fee increases is approximately \$1 million annually. The new revenue from the fee increases will be used to provide enhanced visitor services including repair and maintenance of facilities, capital improvements, enhanced amenities, resource protection and additional visitor programs and services. There will be an emphasis on park improvements prior to the NPS centennial anniversary in 2016. Some specific examples that are planned include:



- *Restoration of disturbed lands and waters.* We will undertake projects to remove or control invasive species along trail and river corridors. We will also rehabilitate the Lost Grove area in Sequoia NP, including removing social trail damage and creating a more attractive setting and visitor experience. Other projects include on-going restoration and maintenance at Halstead and restoring high elevation aquatic ecosystems and associated biodiversity.
- *Improvements to wayside exhibits and other information media.* Wayside exhibits at various popular destinations in the parks will be installed or updated to better tell the story of the parks and their natural and cultural setting. Our web page, which receives 3 million hits annually, will be updated with more interactive features and richer content. A beautiful collection of historic wilderness photos in our archives will be digitized and uploaded for web access. The park map and guide will also be printed and stocked to meet visitor demand. Self-service visitor orientation exhibits will be placed outside the five park visitor centers.
- *Improving the visitor experience at Crystal Cave.* We will be improving visitor facilities consistent with approved plans at the very popular Crystal Cave. This includes improving the parking area, restrooms, picnic area, and historic trail to the cave. We will also be working with Sequoia Natural History Association and Sequoia Parks Foundation to raise private funding for other improvements that will elevate the overall visitor experience.
- *Updating Lodgepole Visitor Center exhibits.* We will be undertaking efforts to bring the visitor center exhibits and features up to a more contemporary standard, including development of new content and use of state-of-art exhibit design standards and features.
- *Wilderness character and visitor management.* We will be undertaking several efforts to support a quality visitor experience in wilderness, including services to monitor and protect wilderness character and support appropriate wilderness access and safety.
- *Recreation trail improvements.* A number of critical trail repairs and improvement will be performed in both parks to protect resources and provide safe access for a growing diversity of visitors. This includes performing repairs to the John Muir and Pacific Crest Trails, and over 100 miles of front country and back country trails in both parks.
- *Completing critical stewardship plans and studies.* Several plans and studies will be conducted to better understand visitor preferences, protect resources, and support improvements to visitor services and facilities. These include comprehensive management plans for Lodgepole and Mineral King to guide management and future improvements and stewardship actions. The plans will incorporate appropriate responses to our changing climate, including establishment of a science research and learning program.
- *Improving the visitor experience at Lodgepole and Wolverton.* Funding has been scheduled late in the plan to implement priority recommendations for facility improvements and visitor services in Lodgepole and Wolverton. The scope of improvements will be determined by a comprehensive management plan and related compliance.
- *Education programs and Junior Rangers.* Funding for Rangers in the Classroom and improvements to distance learning capabilities will allow us to introduce the parks and stewardship in K-12 classrooms. A new strategic plan will be developed to identify future investment needs for curriculum-based education.
- *Shuttle transportation program.* Entrance fee revenue will also continue to provide enhanced public transportation/transit services inside the park. The shuttle system operates in the Wuksachi-Lodgepole-Giant Forest area during the peak visitor season where 75% of the parks' annual visitation occurs and when parking in this area is often filled to capacity. Since its inception in 2007 ridership has increased from 136,111 to 424,310 in 2014, an increase of 211%. Not only does the shuttle provide an enhanced service for visitors' experience during the peak season, but the program protects resources from opportunistic informal parking for visitors to



park at their destination of choice; roadside impacts are evident including vegetation loss, soil compaction, and erosion. Additionally, from 2007 to 2014, metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 65% by the shuttle service itself. Further, in 2014, there was a 62% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions when compared to the alternative of only passenger car use by visitors.

### **How does this fee compare to other national park sites?**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks currently charge a \$20 per vehicle entrance rate. Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Yellowstone/Grand Teton all currently collect \$25. The servicewide proposal includes increasing the vehicle entrance rate for all these parks to \$30. Parks that have raised entrance fees in the last 20 years, such as Grand Canyon, Zion, Bryce Canyon, Yellowstone/Grand Teton, as well as Sequoia and Kings Canyon did not find that their visitation decreased when they raised fees.

### ***Wilderness Fees***

#### **What are the proposed changes to wilderness fee?**

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks currently charge \$15 for wilderness permit. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks are proposing modifying wilderness fees to \$10 per permit + \$5 per person.

Single hikers (22% of all groups) will continue to pay \$15. Those who are part of small groups of two, three or four people (42%, 13%, and 10% of all groups), will experience price increases of \$5 to 15. Note: 87% of groups are comprised of 4 or fewer people. Those large groups of from five people to 15 people will see larger increases, with groups of 15 subject to a fee of \$85 (0.5% of all groups).

#### **When are wilderness permits required?**

Wilderness permits are required year-round for all overnight trips. Day hiking and camping in designated car campgrounds does not require a wilderness permit.

Currently there are approximately 8,500 wilderness permits issued annually to approximately 30,000 visitors for wilderness trips in these parks. Of these, approximately 85% of wilderness permits are issued for the “high” season.

#### **When are wilderness fees collected?**

The wilderness fee is only collected during the parks “high” wilderness use season when the parks use a trailhead quota system to regulate the number of backpackers starting each trail, each day, to protect wilderness areas. This “high” wilderness use season begins on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, and ends on a Saturday in late September (either second to last or last Saturday, depending), comprising a period of 18 weeks.

#### **What are current wilderness fee revenues used for?**

The wilderness fee supports staffing for the Wilderness trailheads and office to reach the public on multiple wilderness related topics, including: general trip planning, public safety (weather and other environmental hazards), proper low-impact behavior in the wilderness environment, and protection of wilderness resources and character.

#### **What will the new wilderness fee revenues be used for?**

The proposed fee increase would allow the park to maintain current staffing levels and continue to provide both a wilderness reservation service and face-to-face permit issuance at park trailheads.



### **Why is Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks proposing to raise the wilderness fee?**

The fee is being implemented to keep up with inflation and to ensure we maintain the same level of visitor services. In addition the proposed fee structure will make the fee more equitable to wilderness users. The structure is consistent with many other National Park Service wilderness fees. It is anticipated that this structure will allow this visitor service to continue without any further fee changes for the next 5-8 years.

The current system charges the same fee, whether for a group of one or a group of 15. Changing the fee to a \$10 base permit charge plus a \$5 per person charge will also be more equitable to the large number of smaller user groups.

### **When was the last time the park raised the wilderness fees?**

In 1998, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks first began charging a \$10 per reservation fee for wilderness permit reservations. In 2003, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks began our current fee structure with an increase to \$15 per permit issuance, whether through a reservation or as a walk-up charge. The fee will have remained unchanged for 13 years if it continues, as is expected, through the summer of 2015.

### **Why are wilderness fees collected in addition to entrance fees?**

Wilderness resources require specialized management, including a reservation and quota system, resource protection and restoration efforts. Wilderness fees help the park provide a high quality visitor experience.

### ***Campground Fees***

#### **What are the proposed changes to campground rates?**

The proposed campground fee changes are as follows:

	2014 Fee	Proposed Fee	Campground
Sunset Campsite (1-6 people)	\$18	\$22	Sunset
Mid-size Group Site (7-19 people)	\$35	\$40	Crystal Springs (14) and Canyon View (12)
Large Group Site (15-30 people)	\$40	\$50	Dorst Creek (2), Canyon View (1), Sunset (2)
Large Group Site (15-40 people)	\$50	\$60	Dorst Creek (1), Canyon View (3)
Large Group Site (15-50 people)	\$60	\$70	Dorst Creek (1)

### **Why is Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks raising campground fees?**

The proposed increase to the campsite fees for Sunset campground and the mid-size group campsites are needed to cover the costs of using the recreation.gov reservation system and additional projects to benefit park users. These campsites are underutilized and not well marketed as available before campers arrive. In addition, by placing mid-size group campsites on the reservation system, the sites will be utilized by groups of the appropriate size.





The proposed fee increase for the large group campsites is based on comparability study with other large group campsites.

### **Are there still campgrounds available first-come first serve, without a reservation?**

Yes, three campgrounds in Cedar Grove (Sheep Creek, Sentinel, and Moraine) and one campground and half of another in Grant Grove (Azalea and Crystal Springs), Kings Canyon National Park, plus three campgrounds in Sequoia National Park (Cold Springs, Atwell Mill, and South Fork) are available first-come, first serve.

Reservable campsites may also be available for walk up sales if all campsites have not been sold in advance, if campers have left early, or if a reservation did not show up after the first night.

### **What are the benefits of being on the reservation system?**

With the fee increase for placement onto the [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) reservation system, the public would see the following improvements to customer service:

- Reservable campgrounds and group campsites in the park would allay concerns about not finding campsites after arrival.
- The cost of the reservation system would be paid by campground users.
- Once the reservation system has been set up, campground reservations may be made by calling Recreation.gov at 1-877-444-6777 from 10 a.m.-12 midnight EST or at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) (available 24 hours a day). Expanded trip-planning information will available on the website, too.

Two other campgrounds with a 19-year track record on the reservation system—Lodgepole and Dorst Creek—serve as successful models for how the reservation system is expected to work in the new locations. Over 42,000 people benefit from reservations at Lodgepole and Dorst Creek campgrounds each summer (*This statistic is based upon a three-year average of reserved campsites from 2010 through 2012 for Lodgepole Campground from late May through late September and for Dorst Creek Campground from the end of June through early September.*)

### **What do the current campground fees pay for?**

Campground fees pay for some operational costs and additional projects to benefit park users.

### **What will the new campground revenues be used for?**

Campground fees will be continued to cover increasing operational costs due to inflation and it will also help cover the cost of the [recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) reservation system.

### **How do these campground fees compare to other national park sites?**

The recent comparability study revealed that Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is currently charging less than other campgrounds in our surrounding area and in other national parks. Even with the proposed increase, camping in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks would remain one of the least expensive camping experiences that visitors in our area can enjoy.

### **Why are campground fees collected in addition to entrance fees?**

Entrance fees cover the core amenities and services that a park offers. Charging campgrounds fees keeps fees equitable, only charging visitors that directly benefit from the facilities and services including a reservation system.