



## Proposal to Institute a Backcountry Overnight Permit Fee

Yellowstone National Park is seeking public input on a proposal to institute a backcountry overnight permit fee to help recover costs associated with operating the park's backcountry program. In the past, Yellowstone has not charged an overnight backcountry permit fee, but a reservation fee has been charged since 1996.

The proposed backcountry camping permit fee would be \$3 per person (age 9 and older) per night with a maximum party limit of \$15 per night for backpackers. Stock groups would be charged \$5 per person per night with no maximum fee limit. The current \$25 fee for trips reserved more than 48 hours in advance would remain the same.

Users would be able to purchase an Annual Backcountry Pass for \$25 which would exempt that individual from the per-person per-night fee.

Additional revenue from overnight backcountry permit fees would be used to help to sustain the current level of service that visitors expect and ensure that Yellowstone can continue to provide service at multiple locations throughout the park.

The current revenue stream from advance reservations covers 17% of the cost to operate all backcountry offices, while the proposed fee is expected to raise backcountry fee revenue to approximately 43% of the cost to operate backcountry offices.

Comments may be hand-delivered during normal business hours to the mailroom in the park's Administration Building in Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming, mailed to: Management Assistant Office, Attn: Fee Proposal, P.O. Box 168, Yellowstone National Park, WY, 82190, or on this website, <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/fees>.

## Overnight Backcountry Permit Fees Frequently Asked Questions

### How are overnight backcountry permit fees calculated?

The proposed overnight backcountry permit fee was developed by considering the proportionality of cost to visitors and resource impacts and by examining backcountry permit models of other national parks. For example, the proposed model closely resembles that of Glacier National Park, which charges a per-person per-night permit fee of \$2.50- \$5 in addition to a \$30 reservation fee. Great Smokey Mountains National Park also charges a per-person per-night fee (\$4) with a \$20.00 maximum per person.

### Why is the park implementing an overnight backcountry fee?

Yellowstone is implementing an overnight backcountry fee to assist with recovering costs associated with managing overnight backcountry use. The current backcountry fee revenue stream only pays for approximately 17% of costs associated with managing the backcountry permit system



in Yellowstone. As base budgets decline, this overnight backcountry permit fee will help ensure the park is able to maintain the current level of service into the future.

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

Current reservation fees pay for staffing of the central backcountry office as well as operational costs at 9 field permit offices.

### **How will the additional backcountry permit fee revenue be used?**

The current backcountry fees revenue stream (comprised solely of advanced reservation fees) is about \$55,000, or 17% of the cost to operate all backcountry offices. The proposed fee is estimated to result in approximately \$86,000 of additional revenue, which would raise backcountry fee revenue to about 43% of the cost to operate backcountry offices. This additional revenue would be used to ensure the park is able to maintain the current level of service into the future and enhance staffing at backcountry offices that lack capacity, particularly at the West Entrance.

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

Many other parks around the National Park Service charge reservation fees and permit fees. For example, Grand Teton charges a \$35 reservation fee and \$25 for walk-up permit, Zion charges a \$25 reservation fee and a permit fee that ranges from \$10-\$30 depending on the number of people, and Glacier charges a \$30 reservation fee and a permit fee that ranges from \$2.50-\$5.00 per person/night. Even with the proposed increase, backcountry camping in Yellowstone would remain one of the least expensive and greatest experiences that NPS visitors can enjoy.

### **When was the last time the park raised the backcountry camping fee?**

Yellowstone has never charged an overnight backcountry camping permit fee, but a reservation fee has been charged since 1996. Reservation fees were last increased in 2012, from \$20 to \$25.

### **When would I pay the reservation fee? The permit fee?**

If you make a reservation more than 48 hours in advance of your trip, you would include your \$25.00 advance reservation fee with your reservation application. You would pay your per-person per-night backcountry overnight fee when you obtain your actual permit in person from one of the park's backcountry offices.

### **Are either of the fees refundable?**

No. Reservation and backcountry fees are not refundable.

### **I am a Continental Divide National Scenic Trail thru-hiker. Do I have to pay a backcountry fee?**

Yes. CDNST hikers who make an advanced reservation will pay their backcountry overnight fee at the same time. Thru hikers who have not made advanced reservations can call the backcountry office and pay by credit card over the phone, or stop by the Old Faithful Backcountry Office.

### **Why is the fee higher for stock users?**

This fee structure is designed to tie fees to impacts on park resources. Pack animals can have high impacts on trails, and trails frequented by stock groups sometimes require more maintenance.

**Is the stock fee per person, per guest, or per number of stock?**

The backcountry overnight fee for stock groups is charged per-person, not per number of guests, staff, or pack animals. At this stage this is simply a proposal, so the park can consider options such as not charging the guides the per-person per-night fee.

**Can stock groups purchase an Annual Backcountry Pass?**

The Annual Backcountry Pass would be offered to backpackers and boaters only. If public comment reveals a strong desire for a similar option for stock users, then the park may consider this option, along with other considerations such as operational and maintenance costs.

**When would these fee changes be implemented?**

If approved, the new fees could be implemented in the spring of 2015. The park also has the authority to consider phasing in new fees. The NPS will notify the public 60 days before the fee goes into effect. The overnight permit fee will only apply to backcountry permits issued from Memorial Day through the September 10<sup>th</sup>.

**How will public comments be used?**

Public comments are important to the National Park Service and will be used to inform the final fee rate structure, along with considerations of park operational costs.