

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Regarding the Proposal to Increase Great Falls Entrance, Drive-In Campground, and Pavilion Rental Fees

1. Why is the national park proposing to increase fees?

Since 2010, park visitation has risen about 25% while the park's budget has been reduced by about 10% and staffing reduced by about 20%. In the last five years, three visitor centers have been closed, the *Georgetown* canal boat was taken out of commission and routine resurfacing of the towpath has been eliminated. Additionally, the towpath and historic structures have a maintenance backlog of more than \$100 million, which may compromise national park resources and visitor experience.

Nearly all visitors use the towpath, which requires constant maintenance, and many visitors use resources provided by the national park such as restrooms, visitor centers, water fountains, parking lots, access paths to the river and canal prism, and emergency services.

2. Aren't national parks, including C&O Canal, federally funded?

C&O Canal receives federal funding to operate the park. In addition, revenue from park fees has averaged about \$300,000 annually since 1997.

Since 2010, federal funds used for large projects such as roof replacement, towpath repair, culvert repairs, bridge repairs, road and parking lot repairs, and renovation and repairs of historic buildings and aqueducts have remained stable at about \$1,700,000.

However, since 2010, federal funds used for routine maintenance, law enforcement, resource management, education programs and administration have been reduced by about \$1,000,000, or about 10%.

The park has adjusted to the lower level of funding by closing the Hancock, Ferry Hill and Georgetown visitor centers, curtailing visitor activities such as the Georgetown canal boat program, and deferring routine maintenance like towpath resurfacing.

These closures and deferred maintenance have diminished the park experience for neighbors and out-of-town visitors who use the national park for recreation and for the park's historical and natural resources.

3. What percent of fees collected actually go back to C&O Canal facilities and services?

For fees collected up to \$500,000, 100% is invested back into park visitor use resources and services. If the park collects more than \$500,000, 80% is invested in the park, and the remaining 20% benefits national parks across the country, including the C&O Canal.

4. How are entrance fees collected?

The park has rescinded an earlier proposal to expand the collection of entrance fees park-wide. An entrance fee is currently collected in only one location: Great Falls, near Potomac, Maryland. The park is proposing to increase the entrance fee at this one existing location to be in line with the national recommendations for national parks similar to C&O Canal. Fees would not be collected in any other area of the park.

5. What has past fee revenue accomplished?

The park fees collected at Great Falls have been used to:

- Rehabilitate historic structures like the Great Falls Tavern, Hancock visitor center, Lockhouse 44 for educational programming, and lockhouses for the Canal Quarters Interpretive Program;
- Construct visitor facilities such as restrooms and water fountains;
- Remove vegetation from historic buildings and towpath, and patch potholes;
- Support volunteer programs;
- Enhance interpretive programs by building Launch Boats, raising the Railroad Lift Bridge at Williamsport, and constructing new canal lock gates.

Fee revenue projects are highly scrutinized at a park, regional and national level to ensure projects have a direct connection to park visitors and visitor services.

6. What could future fee revenues accomplish?

Future projects could include:

- Improve Towpath Condition
- Maintain Campground Amenities
- Clear Hazard Trees

7. When would these fees be implemented?

No timetable has been set, but no changes would be implemented prior to May 1, 2015.

8. Is it true that children under 16 are not charged an entrance fee?

Yes.

9. Will the fees collected offset the collection costs?

Yes.

10. Does the proposed increase in campground fees provide any increase in service?

Services would remain similar because the current fees collected are less than the cost of operating and maintaining the campgrounds. Proposed rates are based on comparability studies with local campgrounds. Campground fees currently support campground operations including all hiker/biker campgrounds, maintenance of wells, pumping toilets and replacement of picnic tables and fire rings.

11. How much fee revenue did park collect in 2014?

FEES COLLECTED	2014
Park Annual Pass Fees	\$ 61,740
Carderock Pavilion Fees	\$ 17,550
Campground Fees	\$ 23,665
Daily Passes	\$ 237,326
Commercial Pass Fees	\$ 1,160
Golden Age Pass Fees	\$ 8,900
Interagency Annual Pass Fees	\$ 34,930
TOTAL	\$ 387,285

12. How much additional revenue would result from the expanded fees?

Based on the table above, we estimate the annual revenue could increase to about \$900,000 by increasing fees at the locations where we currently collect fees.

13. What happens after the public comment period?

The National Park Service will review all comments and make a determination.