

Proposed Recreation Fee Changes at Voyageurs National Park

Voyageurs National Park is seeking public comment on a proposal for fee changes within the park. The authority to charge recreational fees at national parks stems from the 2004 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Annual comparability studies are conducted to determine if amenity fees are in line with other public and private locations offering similar visitor services, to ensure the park does not undercut local options, and so rates are adjusted accordingly.

This proposal seeks to increase current rates on existing amenity and tour fees and establish new fees for low-use season camping, primitive campsites, winter equipment rentals, and special ranger-led interpretive programs. Voyageurs National Park has not proposed increases since tour fees were last approved in 2010 and since camping and houseboat fees were approved in 2013.

As a park that collects less than \$500,000 in recreation fees annually, ninety-seven percent of that revenue stays at Voyageurs National Park to fund projects that directly enhance the visitor experience and to support the operation of the reservation system. For parks that collect over \$500,000 annually, 80% of revenue stays at the park, and the remaining 20% goes to a national fund that helps support projects in park units that do not charge entrance fees. Since Voyageurs National Park has no entrance fee the fund is available for our use. Recreation fee dollars at Voyageurs have funded the cleaning and maintaining of park sites, the ongoing improvement and rehabilitation of campsite structures, and backcountry trail repairs. Recreation fees have also purchased fire rings, picnic tables and bear lockers to replace deteriorating amenities.

Since the implementation of the reservation system in 2014, the park's recreation use has been more accurately monitored, showing an average increase in camping activity of 11% per year. Like many recreation areas, 2020 brought a spike in usage to Voyageurs at 40% over the previous 5-year average for camping and 35% over the previous 3-year average for houseboating. This trend appears to be persisting, as camping reservations made on the day they became available for the 2021 season increased 56% from that of the 2020 season. With this increased pressure on park sites comes greater maintenance and resource protection needs.

"We are committed to keeping the park affordable, but we also want to provide visitors with the best possible experience," said Voyageurs National Park Superintendent Bob DeGross. "The proposed rate changes would allow us to do just that. Additional revenue would help sustain existing programs, allow for the enhancement of visitor destination sites throughout the park, support resource monitoring at campsites and houseboat sites, and offset the annual increased cost of maintaining and improving the park's camping and recreational infrastructure."

Proposed increases to existing amenity fees:

Amenity	Current Rate	Proposed Rate
Small campsite without dock	\$20/night	\$22/night
Small campsite with dock	\$20/night	\$26/night
Large campsite without dock	\$24/night	\$28/night
Large campsite with dock	\$24/night	\$32/night
Group campsite	\$35/night	\$60/night
Backcountry boat rental	\$12/day	\$14/day
Houseboat permit	\$10/night	\$15/night
A \$10 service fee is charged per reservation to cover online reservation service contractor costs		

Tour fees cover costs associated with operating the tour boat program, including fuel, boat repair and maintenance, supplies and educational tools for interpretive programs, and approximately 75% of the seasonal staff that captain the vessels and conduct tours.

Proposed increases to existing tour fees:

Tour Name & Location	Adult		Child (Ages 4-16)		Toddler (Up to 3yr)	
	From	To	From	To	From	To
Grand Tour (Rainy Lake)	\$30	\$50	\$15	\$25	\$3	\$5
Life on the Lake (Rainy Lake)	\$25	\$40	\$15	\$20	\$3	\$5
Kettle Falls (Rainy Lake)	\$50	\$85	\$25	\$40	\$3	\$5
Kettle Falls (Kabetogama Lake)	\$40	\$60	\$20	\$30	\$3	\$5
Ellsworth Rock Gardens (Kabetogama Lake)	\$25	\$40	\$15	\$20	\$3	\$5
Tour ticket prices include a \$1 service fee to cover online reservation service contractor costs						
Discount of 50% is honored for Interagency Senior and Access Pass card holders						

In addition, this rate change proposal includes the implementation of the following new fees:

- Low-Use Season camping at designated park campsites, from October 1st through April 30th, currently requires a Reservation System Fee of \$10, with no nightly fee. This proposal would establish a nominal nightly rate at all campsites.
- The park has developed two trailside camping areas along the 26-mile Kab-Ash Trail, aptly named Primitive Campsites due to their remote locations and minimal amenities of cleared areas for tents and a fire ring, which will be added to the reservation system in 2022.
- Winter Equipment Rental fees will help make that program self-sustaining so we can continue to offer these traditional means of exploring the park, and replace and upgrade snowshoes and cross-country skis, poles and boots as needed.
- A Special Interpretive Program Fee would provide the funding needed for programs that require special preparation and supplies. This includes north canoe tours and new programming being developed to highlight the park's recent dark sky certification.

Voyageurs will always continue to provide free interpretive programs, like the Ethnobotanical Garden Tour, Fire-Side Talks, Special Speaker Series, and more.

Proposed rates for new fees:

Amenity or Service	Proposed Rate	Effective Year
Low-Use Season Camping at designated sites (October 1 – April 30, annually)	\$10/night	2022
Primitive Camping	\$15/night	2022
Special Ranger-Led Interpretive Programs	\$15 per adult \$7.50 for ages 16 and under	2023
Winter Equipment Rentals (Snowshoes & Cross Country Skis/Boots/Poles)	\$10/day for adults \$5 for ages 16 and under	2023

Park staff would like to encourage the public to provide their comments and concerns. In addition to leaving comments through PEPC between June 28th and July 25th, you can also share input the following ways. Comments in all forms must be received no later than July 25th, 2021.

- Email: voja_rec_fee_comments@nps.gov
- Leave a voice message: (218) 283-6708
- Mail a letter with your comments:

VOYA Rec Fee Comments
360 Highway 11 East
International Falls, MN 56649