

Pasadena Star-News

Entrance fees to our national parks shouldn't be doubled

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Some things provide true value in our lives, during good times and bad.

Going to the beach comes to mind. In Southern California we can generally climb into our car and arrive at a local beach within a half hour to 45 minutes. Unless, of course, you already live within walking distance. And the cost is free.

We can also drive up into the mountains without forking over a cent. If you happen to live near Pasadena, Mt. Wilson is a great drive with lots of turnoffs along the way that provide breath-taking views. Ditto for Mt. Baldy near Upland, Mt. Pinos near Frazier Park and Big Bear Lake in San Bernardino County.

And again, they're free.

This brings me to our national parks. They're obviously not free, but they've been a pretty good deal for a long time. That may soon end, however, because the National Park Service is looking to more than double the peak-season entrance fees for private vehicles coming into the parks.

The current entry fee of \$25 to \$30 would jump to \$70 to get into parks like Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Sequoia, Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon.

The cost for a motorcycle entering the park would likewise rise to \$50, from the current fee of \$15 to \$25. And the cost for people entering the park on foot or on bike could jump to \$30 compared with the current rate of \$10 to \$15.

All told, these fee increases would apply to 17 of our most popular national parks. The National Park Service says it would use the extra money to pay for needed upgrades to bridges, campgrounds, waterlines, bathrooms and other visitor services at the parks.

It amounts to a nearly \$12 billion backlog of deferred maintenance.

Each park would continue to keep 80 percent of the entrance fees it brings in, under the terms of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. The remaining 20 percent would be earmarked for projects at other national parks.

"Targeted fee increases at some of our most-visited parks will help ensure that they are protected and preserved in perpetuity and that visitors enjoy a world-class experience that mirrors the amazing destinations they are visiting," Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke said in a statement.

That may be true, but those increases would literally price some families right out of going to these places. Think about it. Families that are on vacation are already spending lots of money on hotels, food, gas and other incidental costs that crop up.

The last thing they'd want to see when they pull up to the entrance of Yosemite is a sign saying they'll have to fork over \$70 to get in — particularly when it used to cost just \$25 to \$30. Some families, when confronted with that kind of expense, will likely turn right around and go do something else. That

shouldn't happen.

People are always looking to find the best bargains when it comes to their discretionary spending. Seventy dollars might not be a lot to some, but it will be to others.

Fortunately, this decision has not been made yet. A public comment period on the proposed fee hikes began Tuesday and will run through Nov. 23. If you want to weigh in, you can do so [here](#).

I suspect that the park service could come up with the money to do the upgrades without doubling its entrance fees. It's kind of like balancing California's budget. Sacramento lawmakers typically wring their hands whenever the state budget is nearing. But when crunch time arrives, they often seem to come across "long-lost funds" that can help bridge the gap.

The same might well be true with the National Park Service.