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Fresno Bee

National parks are no place for Amazon deliveries. What's next, a gondola up Half Dome?

[By Marek Warszawski](#)

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Our national parks face a serious maintenance backlog, nearly \$12 billion according [to official estimates](#), so here's an idea:

Let's allow a private company to build a gondola that whisks Yosemite National Park visitors from Mirror Lake to the top of Half Dome and charge everyone \$100. I can practically hear the cash registers ringing.

What's more, the hike up Half Dome is long and grueling. It requires substantial effort. Who wants to do that anymore? And by the time you [pull yourself up the cables](#) and stand on the summit, there's no Wifi to share your Instagram story. Heck, there isn't even a Starbucks up there.

That's gotta change.

Next week I'll be in Death Valley National Park, a place with abundant heat but scarce water. Wouldn't it be great if I could stand in the middle of Badwater Basin, one of the hottest, driest places on Earth, whip out my smartphone and order a bottle of Evian delivered to me by drone in a matter of minutes?

That kind of "accessibility" sure would've come in handy last summer in Kings Canyon National Park. During my hike to Mist Falls, I got so bored gazing at the Kings River, smelling the incense cedars and admiring the towering cliffs that I wished I could've been streaming the latest Netflix series.

You think I'm being ridiculous, and maybe a tad facetious? OK, maybe I am. But this is the direction we're headed if President Trump and Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt have their way.

As reported [by the Los Angeles Times](#), campground Wifi, food trucks and Amazon deliveries in our 61 national parks [are among the ideas](#) recommended by the Interior Department's ["Made in America" Outdoor Recreation Advisory Committee](#). And, oh yeah, they also want to curtail discounts for seniors during peak times.

Who serves on the committee? Members include Jeremy Jacobs, co-CEO of Delaware North (the same company that [made \\$12 million off naming rights](#) of Yosemite properties), former KOA Chairman and CEO Jim Rogers and 13 other concessionaires and executives whose companies would stand to benefit from these proposals.

Trump's blatant strategy

Conspicuously absent are any conservation advocates or environmentalists, which should not be surprising. Can't have anyone stand in the way of corporate profit under the guise of "modernization."

There is no disputing many of our national parks are crumbling due to decades of neglect. But instead of addressing the problem, [Trump's 2020 budget](#) proposes to slash National Park Service funding by nearly \$500 million, including a \$113 million cut for construction and major maintenance and \$52 million from operations.

The strategy could not be more blatant: Make a bad situation at our national parks even worse so that

there's a greater apparent need for private investment.

Of course, this is perfectly in keeping with Trump's strategy to [privatize services provided by federal agencies](#) such as the U.S. Postal Service or the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mostly so Trump's friends and political donors can make a buck.

Commercialization over conservation

I'm not saying there is no place for private enterprise in our national parks. Of course there is. Visitors need to eat and sleep, and some like to shop for souvenirs. But there has to be a balance. These self-serving ideas, and others that would surely follow, tip the scales in a manner their founders and supporters never intended.

Nature cannot be preserved and exploited at the same time. It's impossible.

Places like Yosemite, Death Valley and Kings Canyon are among our last refuges from the modern world. They cause us to slow down, breathe deep and appreciate forces larger than ourselves.

To suggest younger park-goers can't appreciate these things without being continuously plugged into social media or bombarded with commercialism is, frankly, insulting. They can and do.

President Theodore Roosevelt, who once said, "The farther one gets into the wilderness, the greater is the attraction of its lonely freedom," would be spinning in his grave. If national parks are indeed America's best idea, opening them up to profiteers is a terrible one.