



*\*\*Submitted online at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?documentID=83652> on Dec.20, 2017\*\**

The Mountaineers submits the following comments in regards to the National Park Service's proposal to increase entrance fees as described in the notice issued October 24, 2017 titled "National Park Service Proposes Targeted Fee Increases at Parks to Address Maintenance Backlog."

Based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, The Mountaineers is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is "to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond." The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. We represent 15,500 members and guests including 1,800 skilled volunteers who lead 3,200 outdoor education courses and activities annually. Our youth programs provide over 6,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

As an organization whose members are active users of our national public lands, we recognize the need to fund the maintenance and repair of critical infrastructure in national parks including campgrounds, bathrooms, waterlines, roads, bridges, and other visitor services in the National Park Service (NPS) system. To that end, in 2014, we supported entrance and recreation fee increases at all three of the national parks in Washington State. We supported these incremental fee increases because we understand that they provide an important source of funds for our national parks, especially with continual declines in agency funding, and we appreciated the agency outreach on the issue along with a 60-day comment period.

However, we do not support the current proposal to increase entrance fees at our country's 17 most-visited national parks, including Washington's own Mt. Rainier and Olympic. Our concerns include:

- 1) The National Park Service's initial 30-day comment period for a fee increase of this magnitude was insufficient to fully understand the impacts this proposal could have on organizations that partner with NPS to foster positive outdoor experiences, as well as potential impacts on the general public. While we appreciate the comment period being extended for another 30 days, we are concerned that the rollout of this proposal does not allow for process around NPS data collection and market-based research, NPS outreach to specific communities impacted, or general public participation. In comparison, 16 of the 17 parks in this proposal - including both Olympic National Park and Mt. Rainier National Park here in Washington state - have implemented fee increases in recent years with significantly longer comment periods and extensive collaboration between the public, commercial service providers, and the park.
- 2) We are concerned the proposed fee increases will be a barrier to getting people outside on our public lands. Here at The Mountaineers, we know how important wild places are to our mental and physical well-being. Experiencing nature shouldn't come with a price tag that discourages newcomers and bars underserved populations. National parks are national treasures intended



to be accessible to all citizens. NPS Management Policies 2006 (*NPS Management Policies 2006, Chapter 8, Section 8.2*) states that parks will have “an atmosphere that is open, inviting, and accessible to every segment of American society.” The proposed entrance fee increases could significantly undermine our ability to serve our members and the goal we share with NPS to make parks “accessible to every segment of American Society.” Our public lands should be accessible to all America.

- 3) This proposal would have little impact on the current maintenance backlog facing our national parks. It would take 173 years for the anticipated additional revenue generation of \$68.6 million/year from this proposal to address the \$11.9 billion maintenance backlog facing our national parks. At the same time, the proposal would place the financial burden on the recreating public. Adding this increased financial burden on the public also contrasts with the administration’s budget proposal that included cutting Department of Interior funding by \$1.5 billion. This fee increase proposal is an unsustainable plan for stewarding our national parks.
- 4) We are concerned this proposal would negatively impact local economies due to fewer visitors contributing to recreational tourism in these gateway communities by the parks. The dramatic fee increase would have negative impacts in rural communities during peak tourism season. Both Rainier and Olympic National Parks offer outstanding day-trip opportunities and are near the large population centers of Puget Sound. High entrance fees could reduce opportunity as well as visitation to Olympic and Mount Rainier, which generate \$398 million and \$58 million to their local economies, respectively.

In summary, we oppose this proposed national park entrance fee increase. We believe that the fee increase would reduce opportunities for people to get outside on our public lands, would not fix the National Park Service funding needs, and would negatively impact local economies.

Sincerely,

Katherine Hollis,  
Conservation and Advocacy Director