

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 26, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our strong opposition to the National Park Service's proposal to dramatically increase entrance fees at seventeen of our nation's most popular national parks, and to request that you withdraw the proposed fee increases pending further review. The sizes of the fee increases you propose are, by themselves, a serious concern, but we believe that it is especially problematic for your Department to propose fee increases at the same time that the Trump Administration is recommending slashing National Park Service funding levels and holding virtual fire-sales of our public resources at below market value.

Under the proposed fee schedule released on October 24, the peak-season entrance fee will increase to \$70 per private non-commercial vehicle, \$50 per motorcycle, and \$30 per person. These fees are, in most cases, two to three times the current levels. For example, the vehicle entrance fee will increase from \$25 to \$70 during peak visitation months at Mount Rainer and Acadia National Parks and from \$30 to \$70 at Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Parks. Even more concerning is the fact that current fees reflect increases that were implemented just two years ago.

The National Park Service describes the fee increases "as part of its commitment to improve the visitor experience..." We are unable to see how doubling or tripling a park entrance fee is anything other than an effort to exclude many Americans from enjoying their national parks. This proposal seems directly contrary to your often-stated goal of improving public access to our public lands.

The National Park Service has failed to provide any rationale for the proposed fee increase. The new fee levels appear arbitrary and unjustifiable. Why does the National Park Service believe charging \$70 for a 7-day admission pass is a good value when an America the Beautiful annual pass valid nationwide costs \$80? Likewise, prices for park-specific annual passes will also be significantly increased and will be priced only \$5 less than the national annual pass, which makes no economic sense. Does your \$70 million estimated revenue from proposed increased fees take into account the visitors who, instead of buying a high-cost weekly pass, may opt to either buy a national annual pass or not enter the park at all?

The National Park Service press release states that revenues from increased fees are intended to reduce the funding backlog of deferred maintenance projects, but that is undercut by the administration's budget proposal to cut National Park Service operations funding by \$200 million, including a reduction to facility operations and maintenance funding of almost \$93 million. If implemented, your proposals to increase fees while cutting agency funding would serve to shift major costs to park visitors and undermine public access to national parks—actions that would be a disservice to the American people.

We are also troubled that at the same time as you propose to significantly raise fees for national park visitors, you have reversed efforts to charge fair market value for commercial development of resources on public lands. For example, in August the Department repealed the Valuation Rule, allowing private companies to exploit valuation loopholes and ensuring that the American public is denied their fair share of the sale of publicly-owned resources. The administration should stop subsidizing oil, gas, and coal companies for the exploitation of public resources and instead work to ensure that taxpayers receive a fair value for the commercial use and development of public resources.

We request that you provide us with the analysis and justification used to establish the proposed park entrance fees to allow Congress to assess the rationale and need for any fee increase. Pending this review, we ask you to withdraw the proposed park fee increases and work to support a strong National Park Service budget that will ensure that all Americans have affordable access to their national parks.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



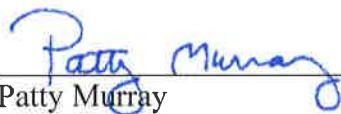
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United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



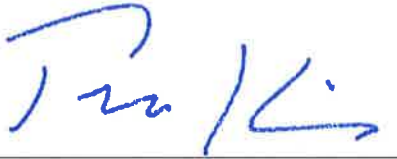
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United States Senator



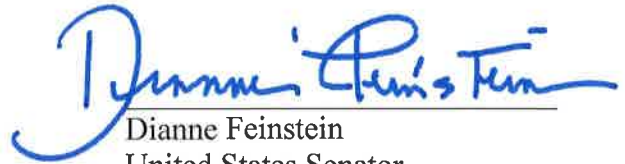
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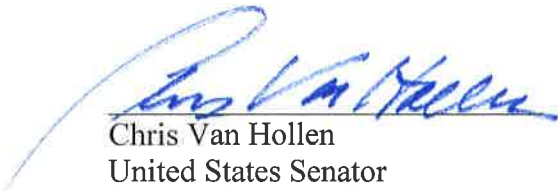
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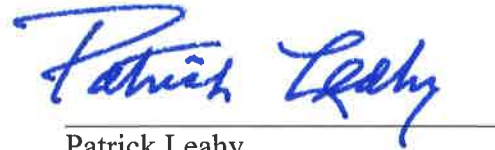
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Patrick Leahy
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