



COURIER

The National Park Service Newsletter

ESPECIAL

Why fees?

Should park entrance fees be raised? If so, who should have to pay for them? How much (if any) of the dollars they produce should be returned to the Federal treasury to help offset the national debt? These are only a few of the issues confronting lawmakers trying to come to terms with what's best for the National Park Service and the American people. Raising entrance fees to this country's national parks strikes a deep emotional chord for many, as does almost anything having to do with the nation's park system. The following pages try to summarize where the fee program has been and perhaps where it is going. This special issue of the *Courier* is intended to serve as introduction to some of the challenges the Park Service faces as it strives simultaneously to preserve the resources under its protection and provide for visitor enjoyment in the years ahead.



Crater Lake National Park

What does ten dollars buy? An overview of the NPS fee program

What *does* ten dollars buy? Lunch? Well sometimes. Or what about a trip to one of this nation's amusement parks? In most cases you had better look elsewhere. Ten dollars won't get you in the gate. Wild World (MD) charges \$11.50 per person, Disney World (FL) \$23 (making a day trip for a party of five over \$100), and Kings Dominion (VA) \$14.95. Even taking the family to a historic site runs into money. A pass for Williamsburg costs \$13.50 for thirteen attractions.

But when it comes to the national parks, visitors currently pay much less than ten dollars in entrance fees. And for most parks there is no entrance fee at all.

While this arrangement is economical for the visitor, park managers have watched the price tag for operating our national "pleasuring grounds" go up each year. As a result, the Park Service has had to decide how best to bear the

burden of such expenses without compromising the parks it protects.

Can this be done? Not indefinitely, according to Director Mott. Ultimately, the Service will reach a point when no more notches can be taken in the Federal belt. And so, charged with the preservation of park resources as well as accommodations for visitor use, the NPS has presented Congress a critical, if controversial, solution.

As proposed, fee legislation would remove the freeze on entrance fees enacted in 1979, increase the price of the Golden Eagle Passport, authorize volunteers to collect recreation fees, and, perhaps most importantly, permit 80% of the fees collected over the next ten years to be used directly for NPS operations. An additional \$59 million, or 10% of the agency's present operating budget, is expected to be acquired through this proc-



Fee collector, entrance station, Yosemite NP

ess—not a large sum certainly as Federal budgets go, but enough to make a significant difference after years of "making do."

Considering fees charged by other organizations, the elevation of park entrance fees to, in a few cases, ten dollars, and, in the majority of cases, five dollars

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or less appears modest by comparison. At least this is how the Park Service views the issue—as a creative way to marshal the necessary funds to manage the parks, indeed, as a logical way to accommodate fiscal needs that exceed Congressional allocations. After all, as the Los Angeles Times reported, the NPS budget accounts for less than 1/1000th of federal spending, “yet the parks provide people with a rare experience: a government service that produces pure pleasure and awe.”

As modest as the proposed rates may appear to be, there remain voices of dissent. “We shouldn’t have to pay for anything on a national level,” says one retired Washingtonian. “A \$2 fee for all parks seems reasonable to me. It might just be easier to take the money out of taxes,” comments a New Yorker in a recent USA Today poll. Several editorials even have charged that fee hikes would deny portions of the population access to these “crown jewels” of their national heritage. Opinions solicited from the man or woman on the street also reveal a deep-seated belief that the taxes they pay every April 15 should and must take care of all park needs.

The issues are complex ones and their effects far-reaching. In his first report to Congress in 1918 Stephen Mather stressed the importance of keeping automobile fees “reasonable” in order not to impose a burden upon the motorist.” But over the years “reasonable” has become

synonymous with \$2 or less. Now at a time when parks are being threatened by too much civilization, the cost of maintaining the “pure pleasure” they provide has left the Park Service in a double bind.

At the heart of the NPS dilemma seems to be the question of who should pay for the parks—the taxpayer or the park user. To say that taxes should adequately cover park needs is to expect them to cover a lot of other territory as well—337 park units nationwide, in addition to all the other government agencies whose budgets rise and fall with Congressional allocations.

Parks as “public goods,” those materials or services that benefit all citizens whether all the citizens directly use them or not, are appropriately supported by tax revenues. In the case of the national park system, these general public benefits include:

- preservation of natural areas and wildlife, cultural properties, and unique recreation areas;
- resource protection and its benefits, including oxygen generation, watershed management, habitat preservation, and maintenance of plant and animal species diversity;
- an uncompromised natural and cultural heritage;
- educational and research opportunities for present and future Americans;
- scientific advances based on research conducted in the national park system.

On the other hand, “user benefits,” as distinguished from public benefits, are enjoyed only by those who come to the parks. Overnight accommodations, roadways, recreational activities and facilities, all enhance the visitor’s direct enjoyment of the park. Therefore, many individuals agree, it seems only fair that park users pay a proportionately higher share of operation and maintenance costs.

Park Service and Administration officials stress that charging fees is not a means to full economic self-sufficiency for the Park Service. Nor is the goal to recover all the costs associated with special activities, programs, or services at each and every park. The compelling reason for higher entrance fees is to shift a fairer share of the burden of financing user benefits from general taxpayers to park users. “. . . No one’s talking about total self sufficiency,” said Marsha Lee, Supervisory Personnel Assistant at Yosemite NP, “but we could be doing a lot more. What the Park Service recovered in recreation fees in 1984 represents less than four percent of the ONPS budget.”

But shifting the responsibility from taxpayer to taxpayer and user support is insufficient, if the Service cannot use the fees once they are collected. With very few exceptions, money acquired by Federal agencies during the course of a year goes directly to the U.S. Treasury. The fee legislation, as currently proposed, would permit 80% of entrance fee dollars

Receipts collected from automobiles and motorcycles during seasons, 1914-1918.

Name of park ¹	1914 ²	1915 ²	1916 ²	1917 ³	1918 ⁴
Yellowstone ⁵		\$7,076.57	\$25,387.50	\$39,945.00	\$33,392.50
Sequoia ⁶	\$817.61	1,183.56	1,600.00	2,380.00	1,920.00
Yosemite	4,033.45	13,457.71	19,885.00	26,600.00	27,888.00
General Grant	445.89	1,685.50	7957.50	1,133.50	1,188.50
Mount Rainier	8,147.95	16,371.61	13,194.00	*14,181.50	*18,225.50
Crater Lake	1,167.00	2,102.00	4,402.00	5,253.00	4,902.50
Mesa Verde	38.52	85.07	95.50	184.00	338.00
Glacier	342.52	573.99	312.00	1,292.00	1,012.00
Total	14,992.94	42,536.11	65,833.50	90,969.00	88,867.00

¹No license required for Wind Cave, Hot Springs, Platt, Hawaii, Lassen Volcanic, Sullys Hill, and Rocky Mountain National Parks. No roads in Mount McKinley Park.

²Two forms of permit, single trip and season.

³By regulation of May 1, 1917, single-trip license abolished and all permits made good for entire season.

⁴Received in Washington, to and including Oct. 10, 1918.

⁵Opened to automobiles Aug. 1, 1915.

⁶License required only for Giant Forest Road.

⁷Automobile single-trip fee reduced by regulation, Mar. 1, 1916, from \$1 to 50 cents, season permit from \$5 to \$2.50.

⁸Automobile single-trip and season permit fee reduced by regulation May 1, 1917, from \$4 and \$6, respectively, to \$2.50.

⁹By regulation May 1, 1918, single-trip permit reestablished in this park only; fee, \$1.

to be channeled back into park work; 20% would be returned to the U.S. Treasury in order to help with the national deficit.

Director Mott has indicated that the entrance fee legislation will enable the Service both to handle budget cuts for 1987 and provide the quality park ex-

periences visitors have come to expect at NPS sites. Without the legislation, more drastic measures may be required, including the closing of some parks.

So what *does* ten dollars buy? Entrance to some of the premier national parks for one thing, and, in the case of the Park Service itself, *time*—time to

develop the financial resources necessary to enable it to accomplish its basic mission, as well as time to determine whatever additional ways may be required to guide the agency toward smoother fiscal years ahead.

A "fare" share for parks

Senator Malcolm Wallop

I need not tell you, the people who perhaps most appreciate the out-of-doors, how important Wyoming's national parks are to the State and to the rest of the country. But the parks are in serious trouble. They are virtually being "loved to death."

With a runaway budget and a congressionally mandated deficit reduction law in effect, times are tough and additional Federal funding just isn't the answer. Yet, there is no doubt that Grand Teton and Yellowstone need more money for both general maintenance such as road repairs and general services such as those offered by the park's visitor centers. For many years, tourists and residents alike have cherished the quality experiences found in our national parks, and by increasing the entrance fees paid by those who visit them, we can continue to do so.

As chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, Reserved Water and Resource Conservation, and as someone who has represented Wyoming's public lands interests for years in the United States Senate, I can't help but

think that if people will pay \$5 for a movie, \$10 for a large pizza and \$15 for a case of beer—the \$2 paid by a carload of people to get into Grand Teton and Yellowstone simply must be the World's Greatest Bargain. And frankly, it's one bargain which many Americans are willing to pay more for.

With that in mind, I recently held a Senate hearing on increasing park entrance fees. For several hours, I listened to the testimony of folks representing a broad scale of interests. All witnesses shared a couple of "commonalities"—all used the national parks and all were willing to pay for that use.

The proposal most to my liking comes from the Administration and would likely raise fees from \$2 to \$10 for premium parks. Although the bill must be "fixed" in a variety of ways, I intend to eventually lend it my support, provided that it meets the following stringent requirements demanded by this Wyoming senator:

- new revenues generated by increased fees must be used to improve national parks, not balance the Federal budget;

- funds must supplement Federal appropriations, not replace them;

- increased fees must be reasonable, allowing people to enjoy our national parks, but not nickle-and-dime them with sporadic \$1 or \$2 increases every year or so.

In addition to these primary principles, any suitable legislation must specifically address *exact* revenue distribution to the park of origin, *joint park fees* for Grand Teton and Yellowstone, *park-specific seasonal passes* for area residents and *discounted* senior citizens and disabled passes, just to name a few concerns.

The Senate hearing was a crucial first step toward increasing park entrance fees and, at the same time, improving the quality of our national parks. From here, the bill must be perfected—taking into account the issues I've outlined and addressing many others as well. I will inform you of all significant developments and I welcome your comments in the meantime.

Revenue Projections at Three Fee Rates And Optional 80%-20% Break Down

	<u>Administration</u>	<u>McClure</u>	<u>Durenberger</u>
Proposal	\$10/\$40GE*	\$7.50/\$40GE	\$5/\$25GE
Entrance	\$51.80	\$48.10 **	\$31.20
Golden Eagle	4.80	3.00	3.00
Golden Age	1.90	1.90	1.90
Park Pass	2.55	2.37	1.53
User	12.70	12.70	12.70
Total (NPS 100%)	\$73.75	\$68.07	\$50.33
80/20%			
NPS	\$59.00	\$54.45	\$40.26
Gen. Fund	\$14.75	13.62	\$10.07

* GE-Golden Eagle

** Only Affects the 10 Parks at the \$10 Level.

OMB perspectives on park entrance fees

Inviting OMB to comment on fees may appear a bit like inviting a grizzly bear just out of hibernation to a picnic. With deficits projected in the \$100 to \$200 billion range and the threat of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings sequestrations lurking in the background, we are perceived as eyeing hungrily every fiscal morsel that might fill some corner of that gaping maw. There is no question that OMB is revenue-conscious. But the question of appropriate levels of recreation fees goes far beyond helping to balance the budget.

OMB's principal role is to ensure that Presidential policy is adhered to in programs, budgets, legislation and regulations; to coordinate these so that there is some measure of coherence in Administration action; and to monitor quality control. This is frequently a difficult and controversial role given the diversity and complexity of the Federal government and the conflicts among interest groups trying to shape or control its operations. Against that backdrop OMB staff tries to analyze each proposal, to test alternatives, and to take issues to policy levels for decisions. Once a decision has been reached and a proposal has become Presidential policy, then OMB is firmly behind it, irrespective of the issues and debate prior to decision. And so we are fully supportive of S. 2204, the park entrance fee bill developed by the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior.

OMB staffers recognize, as you do, that park entrance fees are not going to have a large impact on balancing the Federal budget. The hope is that entrance fees can cover some of the future increases in financial resources needed to

maintain and preserve our national parks and prevent backlogs of natural and facility resource needs from occurring. We also believe that it is reasonable that users bear a larger share of the cost of facilitating the use. We were pleased that the park professional staffs and the Director were so heavily involved in the detailed development of the proposal.

General principles on recreation fees were enunciated in a letter from OMB Director Miller to Senator Wallop last year. Those relating to entrance fees included:

- collecting entrance fees wherever feasible and appropriate, recognizing that each park has unique natural, managerial, and visitation characteristics that must be considered;
- removing limitations on increasing and extending entrance fees at units operated by the National Park Service;
- authorizing an increased price for the Golden Eagle passport;
- making entrance (and user) fee revenues available to the collecting agency for operation and maintenance of recreation areas and facilities;
- in setting Federal fee levels, considering the prices charged by the private sector, as well as by State and local governments, for use of comparable outdoor recreation areas and facilities;
- providing for the selling of permits and collection of fees by volunteers, businesses, and non-profit organizations.

Most all of these were reflected directly or indirectly in the proposed legislation.

Questions as to the appropriate balance between coverage of park costs from the general treasury versus from those who get to visit the parks will remain as long as there is a park system. At one point a goal of 25% of recreation costs covered by visitor fees was considered, leaving 75% to be covered by the general taxpayer. Some continue to believe that all expenses should be borne by the taxpayer while others believe that users should cover 100 percent of the costs. Some states cover more than 50% of their park costs from entrance, day use, or other fees. The present entrance fee proposal would cover about 10% of NPS operation and maintenance costs (not all of which are for recreation by some definitions) about what fees covered 30 years ago.

Another long-term issue concerns the lack of coordination and coherence among recreation and wildlife conservation activities and their financing among Federal land management agencies. A citizen must sometimes wonder if there is one Federal government or an anarchy of sometimes conflicting, sometimes competing feudal baronies going their separate ways at taxpayer expense. We hope the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors will address many of the issues in this area.

Comparisons between the bills

	<u>Administration</u>	<u>McClure</u>	<u>Durenberger</u>
Unit cap	\$10	\$7.50	\$5
Fund use	80% to NPS	100% to NPS 50% back to units	100% to NPS resources
Golden Eagle	Increase from \$10 to \$40	Increase from \$10 to \$40	Increase from \$10 to \$25
Golden Age	Increase from zero to \$10	N/A	Increase from zero to \$10

National parks are priceless, but they still cost money

Don Hodel
Secretary of the Interior

Last August my wife and I shared a wonderful experience with thousands of other Americans. We visited several national parks in the west. It was an experience we will remember always, one that is truly priceless. While I would never put a dollar figure on the worth of a visit to a national park, those same parks require the expenditure of many millions of dollars—taxpayers' dollars—for the construction, operation and maintenance of the roads, water and sewer systems, campgrounds, visitor centers and for the salaries of the park rangers and other park staff.

A family of four persons in an automobile is admitted to Grand Canyon National Park for two weeks for \$2. Just outside the park an enterprising businessman operates a theater which shows a 30-minute movie on the highlights of the park. To see this movie our same family of four would spend \$20.

I suspect that the movie is worth the \$5 admission charge, and I know that admission to Grand Canyon or Yellowstone is worth more than the \$2 per carload currently charged. Only 60 of our more than 300 national park units charge any entrance fee. This Administration has proposed a selective increase in national park entrance fees as an equitable means of financing a small portion of the national park budget. I believe it is entirely fair that those who use a public resource should pay somewhat more for its operation and maintenance than those who do not; although I am sure that visitor or not, most Americans support the concept of maintaining the crown jewels of our natural and historic heritage for generations yet to come.

Park entrance fees, now frozen by the Congress, have not been changed significantly since 1972, which means that the inflationary cycle of recent unhappy memory has reduced the real value of the existing fee collections. Historically, park fees were much higher than they are. In 1918, when the dollar bought several times more than it currently does, it cost \$7.50 for an "automobile ticket of passage" to Yellowstone National Park.

Any increase in entrance fees would be implemented on a park-by-park basis. For many parks no entrance fee should ever be charged, either because of their unique nature—the Lincoln Memorial comes to mind—or because it would be

impossible to collect fees in an efficient manner. Urban recreation areas and parkways would be exempted.

In 1984, entrance and user fees amounted to \$21 million, less than 3 percent of the National Park Service's budget for that year. I think we should do better than that since, as a nation, we must face the reality of the need to balance the Federal budget within this decade. Raising park entrance fees would be a very small, but measurable, contribution to that effort. It would put us all on record in sup-

port of a reasonable payment for a very special experience and a willingness to support those places and activities that provide direct and personal enrichment.

America pioneered the concept of national parks. Those parks give us endless recreational opportunities in the spirit of the word, re-creation.

As we take renewed pride in our national parks, we can make a reasonable contribution to those parks so that they can renew generations of Americans in centuries to come.



Director Mott testifies for S. 2204



Statement of William Penn Mott, Jr., Director, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, Reserved Water, and Resource Conservation, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in support of S. 2204, a bill to amend the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, to permit the use of park entrance, admission, and recreation use fees for the operation of the National Park System, June 12, 1986

Mr. Chairman, I would like to add my personal views as Director of the National Park Service to what Assistant Secretary Horn has described.

First, as I stated at the oversight hearing which your Subcommittee held on June 27, 1985, I believe people expect and are willing to assist in the development and maintenance of park facilities by paying a reasonable fee for their special use and enjoyment. The key to the visitors' willingness to pay a reasonable fee is the commitment in the legislation that visitor fees will be collected and kept by the National Park Service, to be used strictly for park purposes. The legislation the Administration has recommended, and which Chairman McClure has introduced, is a contract. In return for increased admission fees, we promise to do the necessary research in order that we can maintain the quality of the park's resources and continue to build and increase our interpretive services that our park users have come to value.

Under our proposal \$59 million would be available to the National Park Service beginning in fiscal year 1987 to carry out a variety of programs and projects. For fiscal year 1987, to offset Gramm-

Rudman reductions, we are proposing that activities financed in prior years from appropriated funds, totalling approximately \$44.9 million, will be financed from entrance and user fees. These include fee collection costs, informational publications, exhibit rehabilitation programs, cultural and natural resources management, volunteers in parks, and repair and rehabilitation. The remaining approximately \$14.2 million will be used to supplement the budgets of individual parks that do not collect fees for interpretation, research, and resources management.

My experience as Director of the California State parks during a period of severe fiscal constraint was that those individuals who use parks do not object to reasonable entrance and user fees, provided those fees are retained by the park to help finance the operation of parks.

Fees are presently charged at 60 units of the National Park System. The proposed plan envisions collecting entrance fees at approximately 194 units of the system. We have worked hard to develop a sound, equitable proposal for charging reasonable entrance fees and identifying those parks where the fees should be collected; S. 2204, if enacted, will enable us to enter into and fulfill a contract with park visitors by assuring that a substantial portion of the entrance and user fees they pay will make it possible for us to do a better job of education and interpretation, resource management and improved maintenance in the National Park System.

This concludes my prepared remarks Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.

Legislative synopsis

An overview of the two bills concerning fee legislation presently before Congress follow. Senate bill 2204 is endorsed by the Park Service.

Senate Bill 2130

Introduced by Senators Durenberger (D-Minn.) and Baucus (D-Mont.)

This bill was introduced on February 28, 1986, and referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. While Senate bill 2092 expands the ability of agencies to charge entrance fees, this bill also adds the following prohibition and limitation, which would:

1. Prohibit the assessment of an entrance fee at any urban environment¹ that provides significant outdoor recreational opportunities and to which numerous access points exist. (This provision is identical to S.2204.)
2. Require the Secretary of the Interior to designate 1 day each month of the year as a fee free day at those locations where an entrance fee is charged.

The remaining provisions of the bill would do the following:

1. Raise the cost of the Golden Eagle Passport from not more than \$10.00 to not more than \$25.00. (This provision is identical to S.2092. However, S.2204 raises the fee to not more than \$40.00.)
 2. Assess a one-time \$10.00 fee for the issuance of the Golden Age Passport. LWCFA states that the Golden Age Passport be issued as a lifetime passport free of charge. (This provision is identical to S.2204.)
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3. Establish a new admission permit² issued free of charge, for persons or groups undertaking educational or research activities on a not-for-profit basis. This provision is similar to Senate bill 740, except that Senate bill 740 allows the assessment of a fee and does not specify what the group activities could involve.
4. Authorize volunteers to collect fees and sell permits. A Comptroller General Decision dated April 22, 1983, does not permit the use of volunteers to collect fees. However, another Comptroller General Decision dated March 25, 1985, permits contractor employees to collect recreational fees. (This provision is identical to S.2204.)
5. Exclude the NPS fees—entrance, use, and special recreational use permits—from being deposited into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for 10 years. (This provision is identical to S.2204 and S.2092, except S.2092 does not have the 10-year limit.)
6. Allow, without further appropriation, recreational fees collected by NPS to be expended under guidelines to be developed by the Secretary of the Interior.
7. Repeal part of Section 402 of Public Law 96-87. This repealer would remove (a) the freeze on NPS entrance fees but establish an entrance fee ceiling of \$5.00 and (b) the prohibition of charging entrance fees at NPS units that did not have such a fee in effect as of January 1, 1979. (This provision is similar to S.2092 and S.2204, except this bill does not repeal the prohibition on a transportation use fee at Denali National Park in Alaska.)

¹Neither this bill nor S.2204 define what an urban environment encompasses.

²The proposal uses the term "special permit." In order to avoid confusion with "Special Recreational Use Permits" under Section 4(c) of LWCFA, we are using the term "new admission permit." The bill does not specifically assign a name to the permit as in the case of the Golden Eagle and Golden Age Passports.

Senate Bill 2204

Administration Bill

This bill was introduced on March 18, 1986, and contains the legislative proposal on recreational fees contained in the President's Fiscal Year 1987 Budget Submission. The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. This proposed bill would do the following:

1. Prohibit the assessment of an entrance fee at any urban environment³ that provides significant outdoor recreational opportunities and to which numerous access points exist. This provision will further limit the application of entrance fees. (This provision is identical to S.2130.)
2. Raise the cost of the Golden Eagle Passport from not more than \$10.00 to not more than \$40.00. (S.2092 and S.2130 raise the fee to not more than \$25.00.)
3. Establish an annual admission permit⁴ that is valid only for admission into a specific NPS unit. The permit will be subject to the same terms and conditions as the Golden Eagle Passport. However, the bill does not specify a fee. The provision only calls for a "reasonable fee."

4. Assess a one-time \$10.00 fee for the issuance of the Golden Age Passport. LWCFA states that the Golden Age Passport be issued as a lifetime passport free of charge. (This provision is identical to S.2130.)
5. Authorize volunteers to collect fees and sell permits. A Comptroller General Decision dated April 22, 1983, does not allow the use of volunteers to collect fees. However, another Comptroller General Decision dated March 25, 1985, permits contractor employees to collect recreational fees. (This provision is identical to S.2130.)
6. Exclude the NPS fees—entrance, use, and special recreational use permits—from being deposited into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for 10 years. (This provision is identical to S.2130 and S.2092, except S.2092 does not have the 10-year limit.)
7. Allocate recreational fees collected by NPS for a period of 10 years on the following basis:

Eighty percent of all fees—entrance, use, and special recreational use permits—collected shall be available without further appropriations for operation of NPS. Twenty percent of all fees collected will be deposited into the general treasury.

8. Repeal Public Law 96-87, Section 402, of the Act approved October 12, 1979, which froze all entrance fees at the January 1, 1979 level, prohibited the establishment of any new entrance fee sites if not already established as of January 1, 1979, and prohibited a transportation use fee at Denali National Park in Alaska. (This provision is identical to S.2092 and S.2130, except that S.2130 does not repeal the prohibition on the transportation use fee at Denali National Park.)

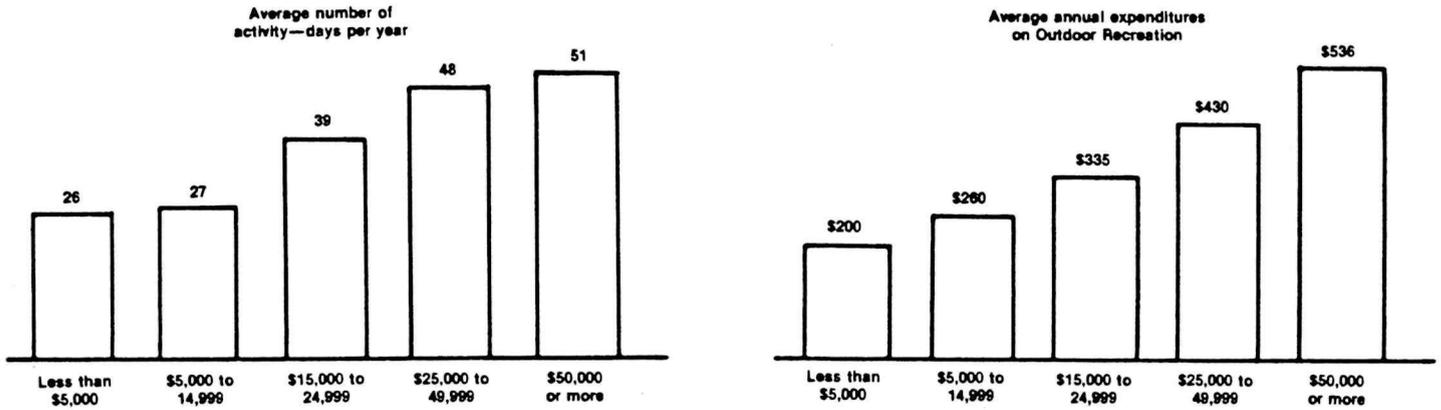
³Neither this bill nor S.2130 defines what an urban environment encompasses.

⁴The bill does not specifically assign a name to the permit as in the case of the Golden Eagle and Golden Age Passports.

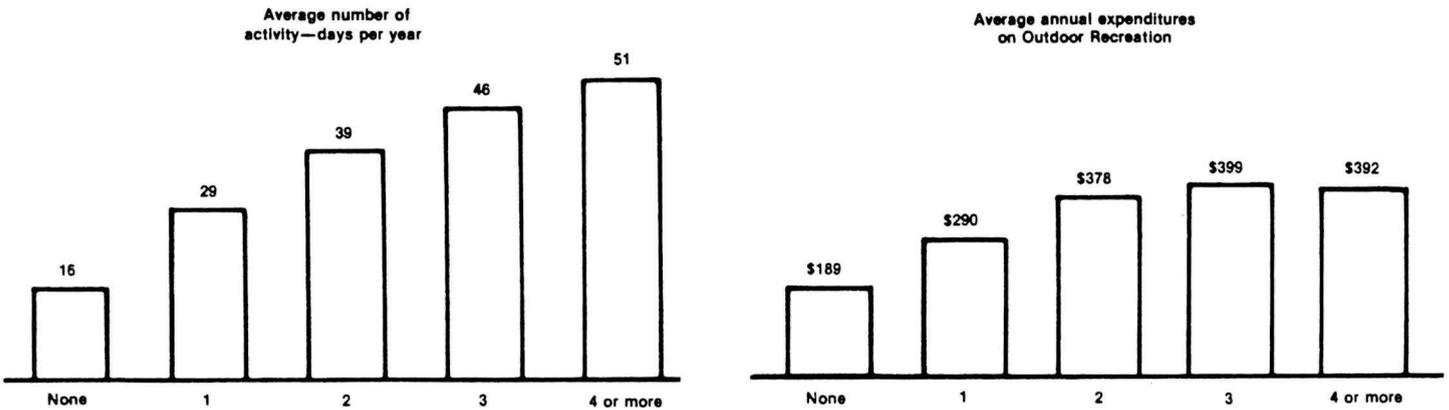
Bulletin

As this special edition of the Courier was being prepared, entrance fee legislation similar to the Administration's proposal was being introduced in the House of Representatives. On August 15, Representative Young (R-Alaska) introduced H.R. 5481, for himself and Representatives Udall (D-Arizona), Lagomarsino (R-California), Cheney (R-Wyoming) and Regula (R-Ohio), which was referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. Representative Udall is Chairman of that Committee. This legislation would limit the fee for a single visit to \$10.00 per vehicle, and permit one increase every five-year period following 180 days advance notice to the Congress. It would authorize annual specific park entrance passes but for a fee of no more than \$15.00. It would make available for expenditure by the Director of the National Park Service 100% of all entrance fees and user fees. Receipts would be earmarked for the cost of collection, interpretation, and resources management, including research, in units of the National Park System. It also provides that priority shall be given to resource needs within the collecting parks. Congress adjourned for its summer recess until September 8, and accordingly no hearings have been scheduled on the bill.

**Involvement in Outdoor Recreation, by
Family Income**



**Involvement in Outdoor Recreation, by Number
of Cars Owned by Household**



(Graphs courtesy of 1982-1983 Nationwide Recreation Survey)

Visitor fees in the national park system: a look back

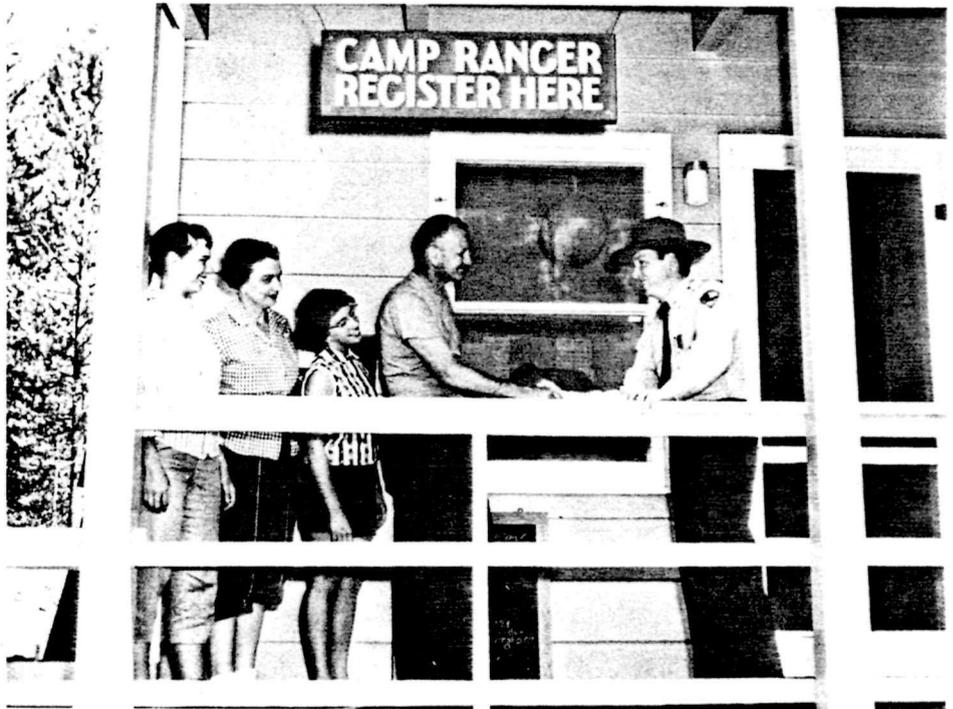
Barry Mackintosh
Bureau Historian, WASO

The national parklands are not free. They represent major financial investments by the Federal government. The older parks were established on the public domain or donated lands, but they still needed and continue to need expensive development, staffing, and maintenance. Many later additions to the National Park System have also required large public expenditures for land acquisition.

Throughout the history of the System there have been differences of opinion—often sharp—as to how these expenses should be borne. One side has held that admission to the parks and the use of most park facilities and services should be without specific charge to the visiting public, which is to say that the full cost of the parks should be paid by the general taxpayer. The other side has held that people actually using the parks should pay, through entrance and user fees,* a proportionately greater share than the public at large. In recent times few have contended either that the parks should be entirely supported by their users or that all facilities, such as developed campsites, should be “free”; the issue has narrowed for the most part to whether and where entrance fees should be levied and how much should be charged for park entry and use of developed facilities.

In these high-deficit times, there is more pressure than ever to cut Federal expenditures and increase revenues. National parks represent “nonessential” spending (as much as we hate to admit it), and most of their visitors are relatively prosperous folk who have the money and leisure to travel, who willingly pay the higher charges levied at commercial attractions, and who would be unlikely to forego the park if fees there were raised to levels commensurate with their values. These considerations have inspired proposals under both the last Democratic and current Republican administrations to increase entrance and user fees, in effect reducing the extent to which the general taxpayer subsidizes the park goer. Such proposals have encountered opposition in Congress, where key members have led the fight to freeze or hold down direct charges to the visiting public.

*In this article as in current official parlance, “user fees” are charges for specific facilities within parks and exclude entrance fees, even though the latter are charges for the use of parks as a whole.



Camp ranger registration office, Yellowstone National Park

In common with other government innovations before and since, the first national park was promoted to Congress as requiring no appropriated funds. Yellowstone’s backers contended that concessioner rents would provide all the income needed for its administration. Six years after its establishment in 1872, the park did start receiving appropriations for boundary marking and protection, but the need was billed as temporary.

In 1908 Mount Rainier became the first park at which the government (as opposed to concessioners) levied visitor fees. The charges were for auto permits, Mount Rainier also being the first to admit automobiles. Cars and fees for their entry followed at General Grant (Kings Canyon’s forerunner) in 1910, Crater Lake in 1911, Glacier in 1912, Yosemite and Sequoia in 1913, Mesa Verde in 1914, and Yellowstone in 1915. In 1916 seasonal auto permits ranged from \$2 at Glacier and Mesa Verde to \$10 at Yellowstone, with lower rates for single trips. A year later single-trip permits were abolished and the season trip rate was reduced in most cases to the former single-trip rate, from \$7.50 at Yellowstone down to 50 cents at General Grant.

The ideal of self-supporting parks still received rhetorical homage and was actually achieved on occasion. Yosemite turned a profit, primarily from concessions, in 1907; and Yellowstone’s receipts exceeded expenditures in 1915 and 1916,

when automobiles were first admitted there. During the 1914 season 1,594 auto permits were issued at Mount Rainier, and its superintendent “confidently predicted that park revenues will be sufficient to meet the expenses of an economical administration of park affairs as soon as the present road is permanently improved and safety and comfort assured to automobile users.” In the 1917 annual report of the National Park Service, Acting Director Horace M. Albright was equally optimistic, foreseeing that “the time will soon come when Yellowstone, Yosemite, Mount Rainier, Sequoia, and General Grant National Parks and probably one or two more members of the system will yield sufficient revenue to cover costs of administration and maintenance of improvements.”

Far more than would later be the case, the Park Service was then highly motivated to levy and collect auto fees, which were justified as offsetting the cost of park road construction. The receipts were held in a special account and could be spent for park purposes without congressional appropriation. Congress viewed this arrangement as circumventing its prerogatives, however, and beginning in 1918 required fee receipts to go to the general Treasury. Inevitably, this reduced the Service’s incentive for fee collection.

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A key policy letter the Service prepared for Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane's signature in 1918 directed that "automobile fees in the parks should be reduced as the volume of motor travel increases." The volume increased rapidly, and the fees—high by current standards even after the 1917 reduction—were cut again in 1926. Rep. Louis C. Cramton, chairman of the House Interior appropriations subcommittee, wanted still lower charges. In his view, auto permits should serve only a regulatory function, not be expected to produce revenue. He suggested a seasonal pass that would admit a car to all national parks "for one or two dollars."

The Bureau of the Budget opposed this revenue curtailment, and Director Stephen T. Mather objected to the concept on other grounds, telling Cramton: "In connection with the general fee for the parks there is a little question of psychology. You know yourself if a man goes to a park like Mesa Verde he should spend the entire summer there. Under your plan I am afraid that if there is one fee for all parks you would stimulate the desire to keep moving around, and they would only spend a few hours in one park." Cramton called Mather's argument "quite fanciful," seeing no reason why a single permit would cause people to slight the parks more than they did already. Some 40 years later his idea would be adopted.

Secretary Lane's letter also called for "a system of free camp sites . . . with adequate water and sanitation facilities" in the parks. When the auto permit fees were cut in 1926, the Budget Bureau pressed for campground charges to offset the lost income. Mather and Cramton were united against such charges, believing that people would stay outside the developed campgrounds to avoid them. Cramton inserted in the fiscal 1928 Interior appropriations bill a provision forbidding appropriations to any park collecting campground fees. Horace Albright, who succeeded Mather as director in 1929, was more sympathetic to the idea. "That is a more equitable fee than the automobile fee, because if you come in a national park and you bring your own camp equipment, you pay \$3 and go to these camp grounds where you have comfort stations and tables and water, and you can stay there all summer and enjoy yourself," he told the appropriations subcommittee in 1932. "Someone else might go to the hotel, not getting any use of the Government facilities except the road, but it would cost them just as much money." But the campground fee prohibition was legally perpetuated until 1965.



Jean Griggs and Frederick Herrick, hiking trip, Yellowstone, 1932



Park entrance, Everglades National Park

The tremendous expansion of the Park System in the 1930s, when numerous historic sites and structures needing costly restoration and maintenance were acquired, increased the servicewide disparity between income and outgo. Although the old vision of a self-supporting park system was largely forgotten, most concerned members of Congress now agreed that park users should do more to share the cost. In 1935 President Franklin D.

Roosevelt's Budget Bureau instructed the Service to develop a more broadly based visitor fee structure. Announcing new fees for more parks and services in 1939, Secretary Harold L. Ickes stated that "those who actually visit the national parks and monuments should make small contributions to their upkeep for the services those visitors receive which are not received by other citizens who do not visit the parks that are available to them,

but who contribute to the support of these parks." Charges remained nominal, ranging from 10 cents at some historical areas to \$3 at Yellowstone.

Following World War II, greatly increased visitation boosted revenues, but deteriorating park facilities, the addition of still more areas with low or no fees, and inflation further reduced their ratio to appropriations. Pressure from the House appropriations committee forced a fee increase in 1953, but the costly Mission 66 development program inaugurated three years later made for a still bigger deficit. "Does this seem fair, equitable, and wise, or should the visitors to the parks pay a larger proportion of the expenses—more than about 6 per cent in 1959?" historian John Ise asked at the end of the decade.

In 1962 the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission reported to the President and Congress on the nation's recreational needs. Its report inspired what would become the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. Frequently amended, this act served thereafter as the basic fee collection authority for the National Park Service and other federal bureaus administering recreational lands.

Under the act, all proceeds from visitor fees collected by the bureaus, together with income from other specified sources, would go in a separate Treasury account for recreational land acquisition. The act authorized a \$7 annual permit—the "Golden Eagle"—good for all areas with entrance fees, lesser charges for visits to single areas, and user fees for developed facilities within areas, such as campgrounds.

Revenues under the act fell far short of estimates, causing its amendment in 1968 to add offshore oil and gas leasing receipts to the fund. Of the several fee collecting bureaus, only the Park Service contributed enough to justify its participation. Even so, it did not begin to levy campground fees until 1970. Another amendment to the act that year raised the Golden Eagle permit to \$10. A free Golden Age Passport for persons 62 and older was authorized in 1972.

Also beginning in 1972, visitor fee revenues no longer went to the Land and Water Conservation Fund but to a special Treasury account "for appropriation, without prejudice to appropriations from other sources for the same purposes, for any authorized outdoor recreation function of the agency by which the fees were collected. . . ." Although this arrangement was envisioned as an incentive to fee collection, in practice it would prove impossible for the Office of Management and Budget and Congress to ignore the existence level of fee receipts in recommending and making appropriations to



Special Counsel to the President Lee White accepts one of the first Recreation/Conservation Stickers from Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall in payment of \$7.00, 1965

the agencies from other sources. Rather than treating fee income as a bonus, OMB came to see it as a means of offsetting the Service's budget requests and urged higher fees for just that purpose.

The Corps of Engineers, which administered recreational facilities at certain reservoirs, was a reluctant partner in the interagency fee system. It succeeded in exempting itself from entrance fees in 1972, and the next year its friends in Congress prepared an amendment to earlier Corps legislation that would prohibit user fees in Corps areas for common day use facilities and for campgrounds without flush toilets, showers, and other specified amenities. As enacted, the provision amended the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and thus applied to all Federal recreation providers, including the Park Service. Few Service or other government campgrounds qualified for fee collection under the new law, forcing the agencies to drop their charges in the middle of the 1973 season. Congress corrected this unintended result in 1974 with yet another amendment requiring fewer amenities for campground charges. Coincidentally, the Forest Service discontinued entrance fees at its national recreation areas, leaving the Park Service the sole bureau charging for entry. The Golden Eagle thus lost its interagency status, becoming a Park System permit only.

The Park Service undertook a study of its visitor fee system in 1976-77. It found that in 1976, entrance and/or user fees had been levied at 116 units of the System (less than half the total) and had yielded \$16.9 million: \$9 million (53%) from entrance fees, \$6.4 million (38%) from user fees, and \$1.6 million (9%) from Golden Eagle sales. Of the 66 parks charging entrance fees, 10 collected two-thirds of the revenue; of the 77 charging user fees (mostly for camping), 10 collected three-fifths of the total. It was clear that entrance fees were more profitable than user fees and that a few areas—for the most part the large western parks—brought in a disproportionate share of revenues in both categories. The latter factor made Service managers reluctant to adopt an incentive system, proposed by Interior officials, whereby parks collecting more fees would receive more in return. As the study report noted, fee receipts were not necessarily within a park's control, and incentive system might cause superintendents to overly stress collection, and the parks that received the most revenue were not always those most in need of more money.

Under pressure from OMB, which slashed \$12 million from the Service's fiscal 1980 budget request and advised it

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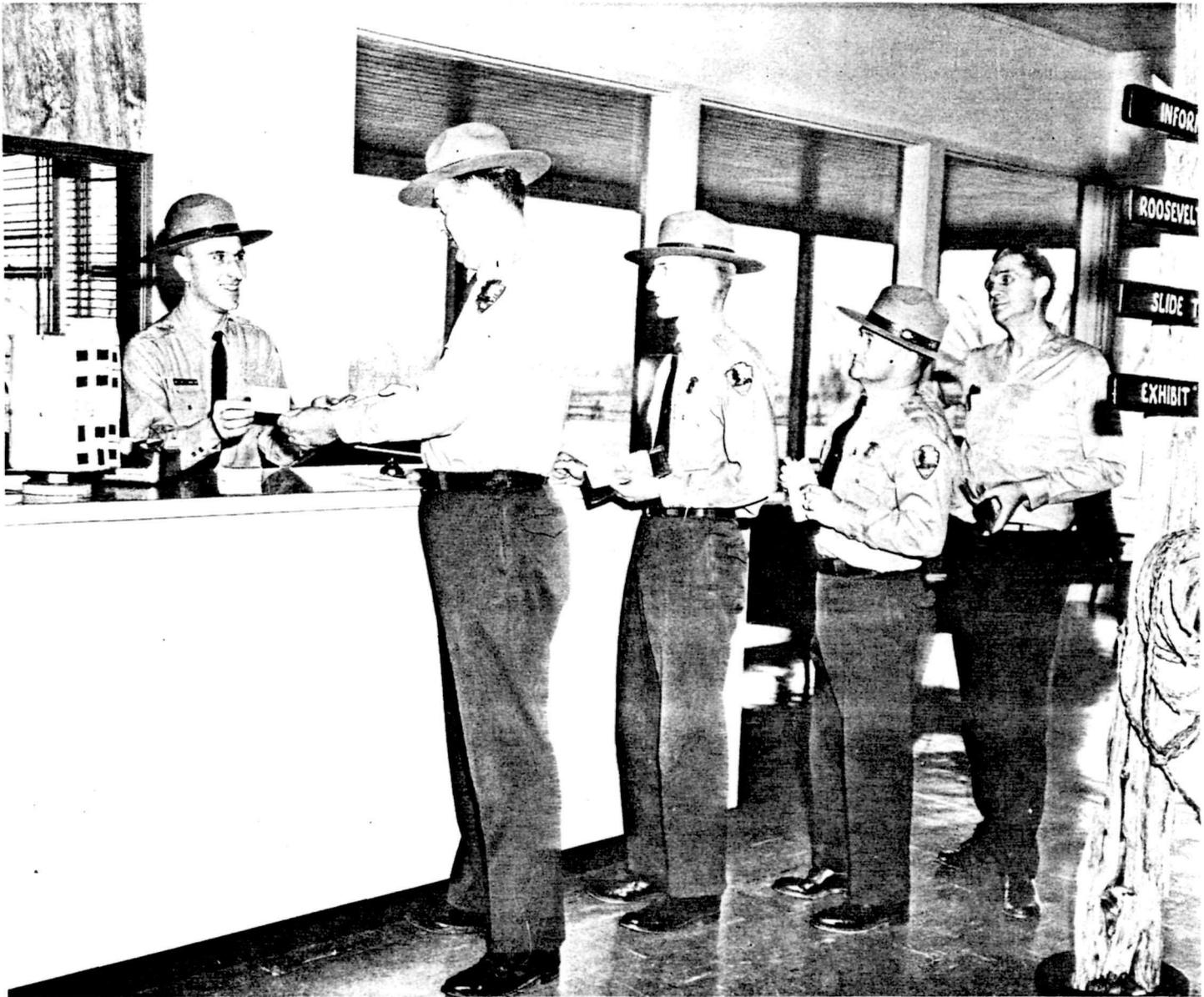
to raise the money itself, the service planned more and higher fees to become effective that year. The additional revenues, forecast at more than 70 percent over the 1978 level, were to go for park maintenance. Sen. Dale Bumpers and Rep. Philip Burton, chairmen of the congressional subcommittees on parks, condemned the proposed increase. Burton, an heir of Cramton in his philosophical opposition to fees, put through a bill freezing entrance fees at their January 1, 1979, levels, and forbidding them where they did not then exist. Greater income from the most lucrative revenue source was thus sharply limited, leaving camping and other user fees the only means of significantly increasing the visitor's share of park costs.

The Service's fee collection program suffered a further blow in 1980, when Congress required all fee income to be deposited again in the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The effect was to virtually eliminate whatever financial incentive remained to park managers: their costs could no longer be reimbursed from their receipts, as they were under the special account, and their parks would benefit little or not at all from the proceeds.

The new administration of President Ronald Reagan was in full agreement with the outgoing Carter administration on visitor fees as a desirable way to offset general revenue appropriations for the parks and other Federal recreation areas. It sought to regain the initiative with its "Recreation Fees and Improvements Act

of 1982," a draft bill sent to Congress that February. Returning to an interagency approach, the bill would authorize all federal recreation providers to collect entrance fees, repeal most legal restrictions on collection, eliminate the \$10 ceiling on the Golden Eagle, and enable each agency's revenues to be returned to a special account for its use. But a provision allowing agencies "to require an admission permit for the occupancy and use of Federal lands for hunting and fishing" caused such an outcry that the bill was hastily withdrawn.

The administration tried again in July with a bill titled "National Park System Fee Dedication and Park Improvement Act of 1982," a more modest proposal affecting only the Park System. The new bill would place the Service's fee receipts

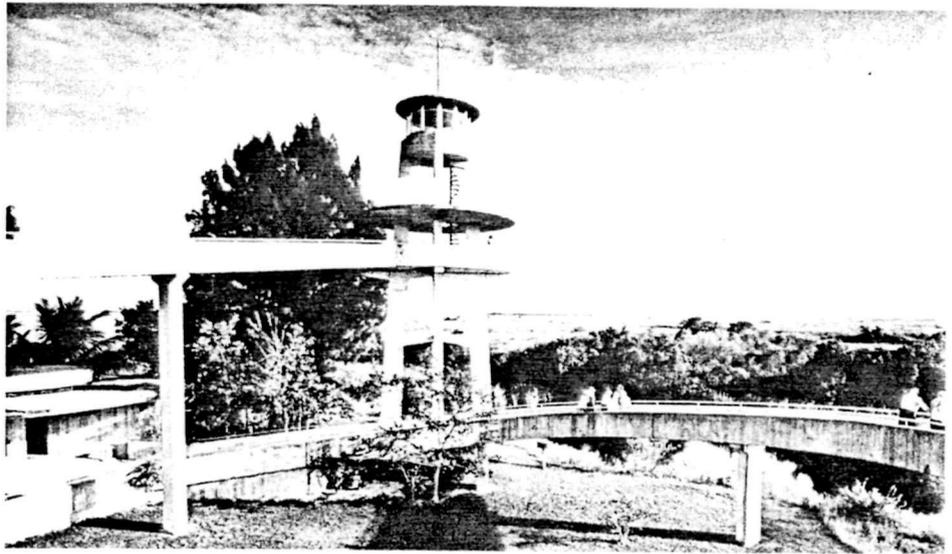


Operation "Golden Eagle" at Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, 1966, where park staff are purchasing a \$7.00 Annual Permit from Park Ranger M.O. Wintch

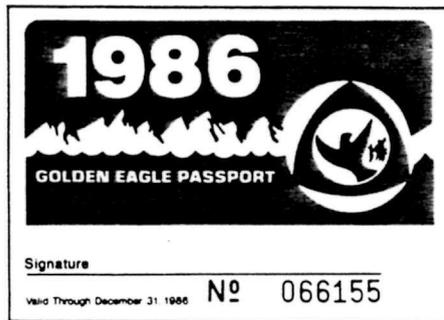
in a special appropriations account for "the repair, maintenance, and improvement of facilities, the provision of safety and services, and the restoration, protection, and preservation of natural and cultural resources, for the benefit and enjoyment of visitors to the National Park System." The freeze on entrance fees would be eliminated (but not the \$10 ceiling on the Golden Eagle).

Congress did not act on the bill before adjournment. A similar bill was transmitted to the next Congress in March 1983, but as of mid-1984 its passage appeared unlikely.

Why the reluctance? A General Accounting Office study of park entrance fees in 1982 documented how low they were by historical standards and relative to those at comparable private attractions. It suggested that the fees be raised an average 150 percent, commensurate



Everglades National Park



with a Golden Eagle increase to \$25. It also noted some of the incidental benefits of entrance fee collection, such as the contact engendered between Service personnel and visitors. But Congress was unpersuaded, apparently preferring to spread park costs among the public at large rather than risk offending park visitors by asking them to pick up more of the tab. Although park supporters favored the purposes for which the administration proposed to allocate fee revenues, they were well aware that higher fees were wanted to supplant, rather than supplement, normal appropriations. Under the circumstances, their support for such initiatives tended to be nominal at best.

A carload now pays \$3 for admission to Yosemite, currently the highest entrance fee area in the National Park System. Considering that the maximum fee levied in 1926 was also \$3 (at Yellowstone), the national parks must be among the biggest tourist bargains anywhere. Whether they should be quite such bargains remains a matter for debate.

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George Washington Birthplace: note fee area symbol (1969)

How fees and charges are defined



Sequoia National Park

Perhaps one of the greatest sources of confusion in the fees issue revolves around the question of just exactly what fees are. The Park Service collects fee revenues based on several different forms of park use. To clearly identify revenue producing activities, the American Institute of Park Executives has developed a common classification system. Generally, the term fees and charges can be classified into seven basic categories:

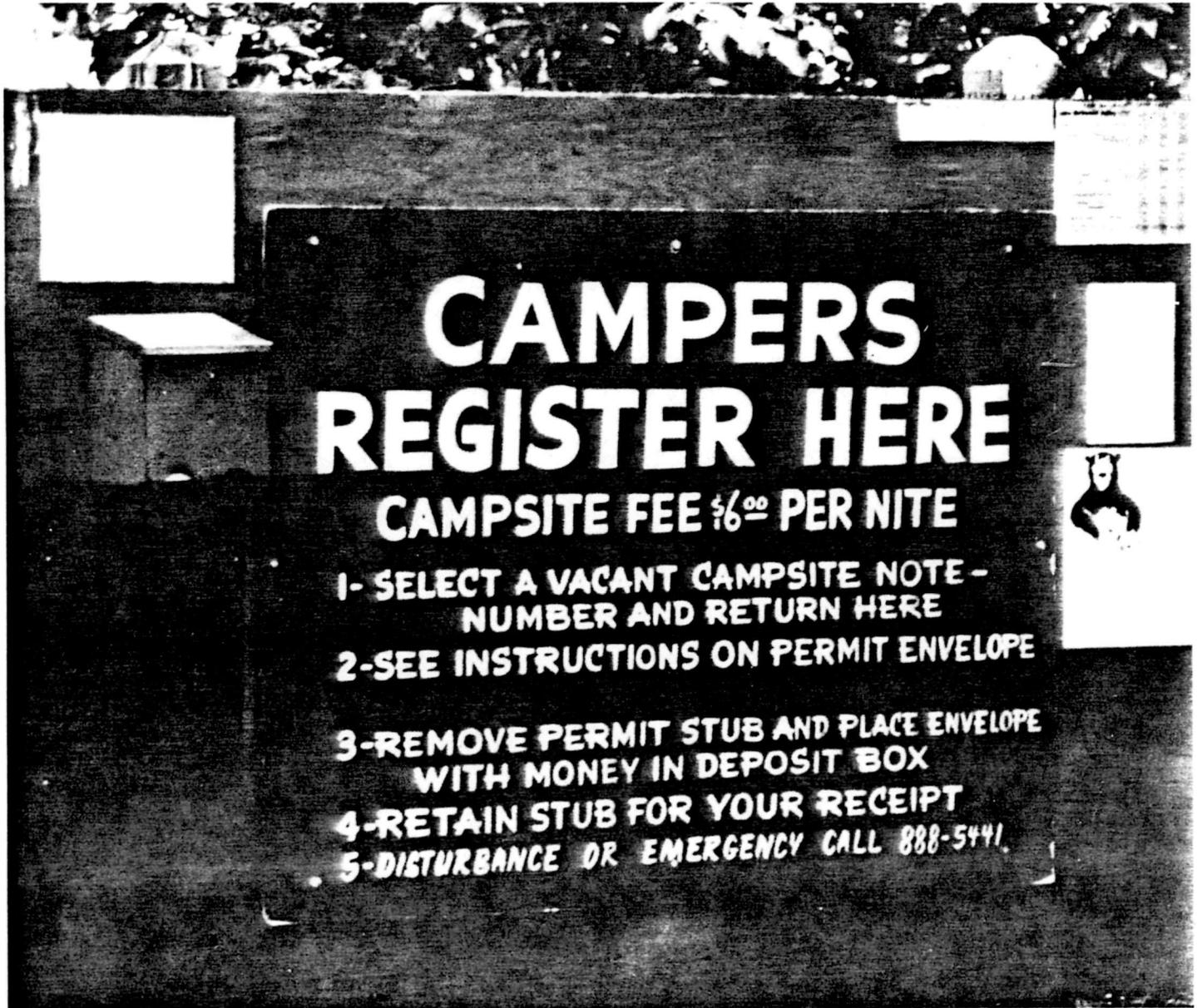
- *Entrance fees* are levied to enter a large park, botanical garden, zoological garden, or other developed recreational or historic area. The areas are usually well-defined, but not necessarily enclosed. The entrance is usually the patron's first contact with the area and the area may contain additional facilities or activities for which fees are charged.
- *Admission fees* are paid to enter a building, structure, or natural chamber. Facilities such as arenas, exhibit halls, museums, conservatories, and historic buildings usually offer an exhibit, show, ceremony, performance, demonstration, or use of special equipment. Entry and exit is normally controlled and attendance regulated.
- *User fees* are charges for the use of a facility, for participation in an activity, or a fare for a ride. The patron usually shares the privilege with others.
- *Rental fees* are payments made for the privilege of exclusive use of tangible property of any kind. This fee gives the patron the right to enjoy all the advantages of using the property without consuming, destroying, or injuring it in any way. Examples include use of cabins, boats, multi-purpose rooms, public address systems, and recreation equipment.
- *License and permit fees* are similar. A license ordinarily involves written permission to perform an action such as fishing, fire building, or exhibiting wares but it seldom grants authority to occupy space or property.
- *Special service fees* are paid for supplying extraordinary articles, commodities, activities, or services as an accommodation to the public. These accommodations must be unusual in character and not normally considered a required governmental service. Examples include overtime associated with special events, night lighting, class materials, or equipment storage.
- *Sales revenues* are obtained from the operation of stores, concessions, restaurants, or other types of retail operations and from the sale of merchandise or other property. Unconditional ownership of the item passes

from the seller to the buyer with each sale.

For the Federal government, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965 was the first Federal legislation to authorize specific fees for outdoor recreation. The LWCF Act gave the Secretary of the Interior specific authority to designate outdoor recreation areas, including units of the national park system, at which entrance and user fees could be charged. The National Park Service is authorized to collect:

- *Entrance fees*—charged either on an annual or single-visit basis, for admission to any “designated entrance fee area;”
- *Daily recreation use fees*—charged for the use of specialized sites, facilities, equipment, or services furnished at federal expense;
- *Special recreation permit fees*—for specialized recreation uses, such as group activities, recreation events, and the use of motorized recreation vehicles.

“Recreation fees” is a generic term used to refer to the three types of fees that NPS is allowed to collect. The term “recreation fees” should not be confused with the term *recreation use fee*, which as described above, is a specific charge for the use of specialized sites, facilities, equipment, or services such as campsite use or charges for interpretive talks provided at government expense.



Campground honor system, Glacier NP

METHODS OF FEE COLLECTION

	Entrance Stations & Kiosks	Honor System
When Used	For entry to well-defined but not necessarily enclosed area having limited access points and possibly containing facilities or services where additional fees could be charged; station generally located at the visitor's first contact point with the area	For isolated locations where visitor flow fluctuates; can be used year-round, even when staff-collection isn't cost-effective; suitable for parks where most visitors pass through a central point like a visitor center.
Advantages	Ease of collection and administration; provides personal visitor contact for distribution of information about the park; enables correct fee collection, making change, etc.; allows monitoring traffic flow and volume; improves security; makes it easy for visitors to multi-use parks to gain entry to available facilities and services after paying only one entrance fee	Gets rangers out of the booth and into the camp-ground; saves in salaries; represents lower capital improvement, equipment, and maintenance costs than other forms; allows 24-hour collection, resulting in higher receipts than 8- to 10-hour staff operation; can be used on temporary basis; meets Land and Water Conservation Fund Act criterion for "personalized" collection.
Disadvantages	High personnel and construction costs; some difficulty controlling all access points; requires upkeep on stations	Minimizes public contact; makes equipment vulnerable to vandalism; induces some visitors to avoid paying fees; may not work in campgrounds with high percentage of site jumping.
Advice	If collecting at all access points is impractical, collect only at well-defined, heavily used areas; if access roads converge within the park, place the entrance station at that point; parking first, then paying may reduce traffic congestion; assign fee-collectors collateral duties as possible	Staff visibility will encourage orderliness and honesty; occasional drive-thrus in official vehicles boosts compliance; sign design, maintenance of pay station, and fee envelope design influence the visitor's willingness to register; campground hosts should be employed to help campers register, etc.; pipe safes, with inner locked cannisters, require only one designated collection officer to make the rounds

Centralized Collections	Automated Devices	Reservation Systems
<p>During periods when kiosk operations are not cost-effective (off-season or low-visitation parks, etc.).</p>	<p>Coin-operated vending machines dispense maps, tickets, etc.; toll gates control entry to well-defined areas such as day-use parking; turnstiles collect admission fees in controlled pedestrian entrance ways.</p>	<p>For facilities or activities with high demand (cave, boat tours, etc.); useful when gathering user data.</p>
<p>Reduces equipment, staffing, and capital improvements costs; simplifies administration and fee program coordination; frees staff for other tasks; maintains visitor contact; enables the hand-out of park information; retains park flexibility to apply differential rates.</p>	<p>Allow salary savings; enable staff to work on more pressing jobs; can be operated year-round; permits directing, counting, and controlling passage of people efficiently.</p>	<p>Allows for efficient planning and control of use, especially in high-demand areas; provides accurate count of use; improves accountability; reduces cash handling by park staff (i.e., Ticketron); creates less park congestion and reduces user conflicts.</p>
<p>Some visitors may try to avoid paying fees; compliance may be difficult to enforce.</p>	<p>Requires initial investment in equipment and set-up; presents an impersonal appearance; has less flexibility to accommodate differential rates, while inability to make exact change may deter some users; equipment may be vulnerable to vandalism as well as require specialized maintenance.</p>	<p>Down time on terminals due to poor telephone or power lines; more personnel required to monitor and secure facilities.</p>
<p>Centralized collection can serve as an interim system while an honor system is being set up; campground fees can be collected at the entrance station during the off-season; entry passes allowing holders to visit a variety of fee sites or exhibits can be sold at one location, then punched each time entry is made to a fee area.</p>	<p>Locate vending machines where staff can keep an eye on them; protect against weather damage; design permits with park logo to encourage visitors to collect rather than discard them along the road; find local manufacturer that will ensure reliable service.</p>	<p>Computerizing reservation systems can trim staff time and costs; limited reservation systems could be set up for sites filling only on weekends; for popular sites, entry could be controlled by an advance reservation system; computer terminals could be installed in areas with high traffic (e.g. campgrounds).</p>

Calling on the campground host



Campground host Tom Bennett, Yosemite NP

This summer, volunteer campground hosts will again be a source of welcome personalized, round-the-clock service in quite a few of our national parks.

What does a camp host do? Basically, the hosts are back-up to the rangers, an extra pair of eyes and ears, if you will. Contacting campers, roving through the campgrounds to keep an eye on activities, and alerting rangers, when necessary, to particular problems are key aspects of the job. Because they live in the campground,

they're available 24 hours a day and are usually the sole contact person after-hours. Any camper needing assistance appreciates having a camp host nearby. For some, routine light maintenance is also part of the job.

In addition they're often called upon to run a campground kiosk while regular staff are on breaks or called away. This means registering campers, making site assignments, providing general park information, and in some areas, explaining

and ensuring compliance with the honor method of fee payment. [A word of advice: volunteers can direct visitors to fee boxes, explain the honor system and check for compliance, but they cannot now collect or handle government funds.]

In exchange, the hosts are usually provided with a camp site, rent free, a VIP uniform, and some basic utilities such as electricity, water, and propane . . . and, the chance to make a meaningful contribution.

Ready Reference

Revenue Management, Excellence in NPS series, Division of Park and Recreation Technical Services—This handbook provides information on why and when user fees and other revenues are appropriate for most NPS units.

Report to the Congress of the United States: Increasing Entrance Fees—National Park Service, GAO/CED-82-84, August 4, 1982. Available from U.S. General Accounting Office, Document Handling and Information Services Facility, P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20760—This report discusses the potential entrance fee revenue that the NPS could collect by raising or initiating fees at various NPS units.

Visitor Fees in the National Park System: A Legislative and Administrative History, Barry Mackintosh, History Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., 1983—As the title indicates, this report covers the history of the fee program.

1982-1983 Nationwide Recreation Survey, Merle J. Van Horne, et al., U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Available from Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.—This survey provides current information on what Americans do for recreation in the outdoors and on their perceptions and aspirations with respect to recreation opportunities.

Fee Collection Equipment (1986)—An information kit that illustrates the range of equipment and its functions in fee collection. Cost and manufacturer information included.

Fee Collection Alternatives Slide Show (1985)—A slide show highlighting the variety of fee collection approaches parks can take.

Fee Collection Equipment Loan Slides (July 1986)—Slides illustrate usage of some fee collection equipment discussed in the information kit described above.

Revenue Management: Tradition and Challenge Slide Show (1985)—An overview.

U.S. Forest Service Camp Stamp Program (June 1986)—Summary information packet that answers questions about how the program works and how it is administered by the Forest Service.

Contact regional fee coordinators for materials not available elsewhere.

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Campground kiosk operation, Yosemite NP

A Yellowstone visitor - 1922



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