



December 15, 2017

Secretary Ryan Zinke  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Mail Stop: 2346  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

Our organizations represent tens of thousands of outdoor and national park users in Washington state. Two national parks in Washington, Olympic and Mount Rainier, have been proposed for significant new seasonal fee increases which are of great concern to our members and supporters.

We are concerned that the fee hike 1) is too steep and would price people out of parks they own, 2) is coupled with a budget proposal that would undermine additional fee increases, and 3) would not raise revenue of the scale required to adequately address the backlog, so we urge the Administration to support the National Park Service Legacy Act.

As proposed, both Olympic and Mount Rainier national parks would see entrance fees increase from the current \$25 to \$70 per vehicle, and from \$10 to \$30 for hikers and bicyclists during the best weather and summer vacation season. This is a dramatic increase and we are concerned that this will discourage and prevent many people from considering an outing to these iconic national parks when most people are most likely to visit. The fee increase would have an outsized impact on families

with limited time and with schoolchildren, whose off-time coincides with these peak season rates. It would affect those of socio-economic backgrounds that can perhaps benefit most from exposure to our national parks. The fee increase would also reduce disposable income that could otherwise be spent in gateway communities that rely on the economic stimulus from park visitors.

**The dramatic fee increase would have negative impacts to rural communities during peak tourism season.** Both of these national parks are near the large population centers of Puget Sound, and offer outstanding day-trip opportunities. These parks are key attractions to the Northwest and draw visitors from across America and around the world. High 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.

**Raising national park fees a third time in three years requires more thought and attention.** In 2014 the National Park Service reviewed its fees which resulted in modest entrance fee increases being phased in by 2016 at Olympic, Mount Rainier and certain other national park units after lengthy analysis and a 60-day comment period including public meetings. In addition, Congress approved an increase in the senior pass from \$10 to \$80 effective this past August. If the Administration continues to advance another entrance fee increase we strongly request that the comment period be extended and that public hearings be held to allow the public to be fully informed and engaged. The impact of existing new fees must be examined before proposing additional rate hikes. We urge the Administration not to seek such steep increases in such a short time period.

**The fee increase does not address proposed historic cuts to the National Park Service budget.** We are also concerned that the Administration has proposed a 13% budget cut to the National Park Service even as national park visitation is increasing. The proposed cut would result in a \$200 million loss of funds for park operations, considerably more than the projected \$70 million to be raised by the proposed entrance fee increase. A fee increase on day users to national parks will not make up for this historic budget cut. Furthermore, it is unclear that there will even be capacity to collect higher fees after seasonal staff jobs become casualties of the proposed budget cut. We urge the Administration to restore the proposed National Park Service budget to levels which will allow enough rangers, facilities and programs to be maintained to serve the visiting public.

**There are better and more effective solutions to addressing funding needs for our national parks.** We share the goal of fixing the national parks by addressing the backlog of repair and maintenance needs which have built up over many years of inadequate funding for the National Park Service. The maintenance backlog is now calculated to be in excess of \$11 billion, including more than \$150 million each at Olympic and Mount Rainier national parks for roads, facilities and trails. The \$70 million projected to be raised annually by this proposed fee increase would fall well short of meeting this need. Instead, we urge the Administration to support the National Park Service Legacy Act which has strong bipartisan support in the House and Senate. The National Park Service Legacy Act would commit to rebuilding national park infrastructure over the next 30 years using previously unallocated mineral revenues.

Our national parks are owned by all Americans and have been touted as America's best idea. Charging a 300 percent increase to day users prevents American taxpayers from enjoying our parks during, in many cases, the only time of year they can visit these incredible places.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Rob Smith, Northwest Regional Director  
National Parks Conservation Association

Tom Uniak, Executive Director  
Washington Wild

Heather Hutchinson, Public Lands Organizer  
Conservation Northwest

Connie Gallant, President  
Olympic Forest Coalition

Donna Osseward, President  
Olympic Park Associates

Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Advocacy Director  
The Mountaineers

Tim Manns, Conservation Director  
Skagit Audubon Society

Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director  
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The Mission Continues

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