

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 21, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We are concerned that the proposal to raise entrance fees at 17 of the country's most visited national parks is at odds with the Department of the Interior's mission to improve access to public lands. We should work together to encourage all Americans to experience the shared legacy of our national parks and public spaces, not raise access barriers that privilege the richest at the expense of those who can least afford it.

More than 100 years ago, Congress established the National Park Service (NPS) with a mission to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."<sup>1</sup> As Wallace Stegner famously said, "National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." Nowhere else can you find a rival system of parks preserved by a national government for the benefit and enjoyment of its citizens and visitors from around the world.

Following years of increases, visitation to national parks broke records during last year's Centennial Celebration. This yearlong celebration of NPS's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary featured the #FindYourPark campaign, the Urban Agenda and Every Kid in a Park, initiatives focused on broadening access and encouraging diverse communities to experience their national parks.

Dramatic increases to entrance fees undermine this success by discouraging lower income Americans from visiting or enjoying our public lands. Indeed, the Department now seems focused on limiting national parks access to a relatively few rich Americans. Our public lands should not be treated as country club where only the privileged are allowed access.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/anps/anps\\_1i.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_1i.htm)

# Congress of the United States

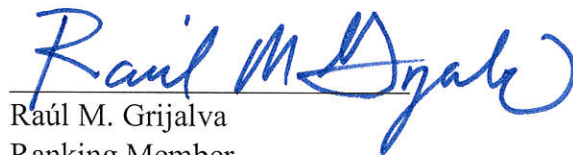
Washington, DC 20515

In 2016 there were a record 331 million visits to national parks across the country, and local economies saw significant economic benefits. Visitors spent as much as \$18.4 billion in gateway regions, leading to 318,000 jobs and \$12 billion in labor income. This is a significant increase from tourist spending levels of just three years ago and represents a bright spot for these largely rural economies. In addition to limiting public access, raising entrance fees may slow gateway community economic progress. The 17 parks targeted for fee increases contributed a total \$6.8 billion in economic output to their local communities in 2016. The risk associated with potential economic losses simply cannot justify these large fee increases.

The NPS news release announcing the fee increase described the move as designed to “improve the visitor experience and increase revenue to help address the deferred maintenance backlog”<sup>2</sup> Congress never intended for entrance fees to become a priority revenue stream for national parks. The deferred or backlog maintenance for these 17 parks currently totals \$2.7 billion. Even if NPS can obtain the projected \$68 million the Department expects from the fee hike, which is not certain, the parks will only retain approximately \$54 million, or 2 percent of the total deferred maintenance. This is not a reasonable justification for the proposed spike in entrance fees. The reality is that any meaningful effort to address the growing backlog of deferred maintenance projects will require additional appropriations from Congress. The administration should be working more closely with Congress to fund the National Park System as it was intended to be funded, not shifting the burden onto visitors.

If the NPS and the Department of the Interior are serious about preserving and protecting our shared history, we encourage stronger cooperation with Congress. The NPS budget is 0.15 percent of the overall federal budget. Proposing to cut the NPS budget by 13 percent and stating, “this is what a balanced budget looks like”<sup>3</sup> while proposing a fee increase funded by park visitors is disingenuous at best. We strongly urge you to reject this proposal and seek other ways to work with Congress to solve the deferred maintenance problem and enhance visitor experiences.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources

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<sup>2</sup> Fee Increase Fact Sheet

file:///X:/NPS/Fact%20Sheet%20and%20Current%20and%20Proposed%20Fee%20Rates%20Spreadsheet%20(1).pdf<sup>3</sup>  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/06/20/zinke-defends-trumps-sharp-cuts-at-interior-this-is-what-a-balanced-budget-looks-like/?utm\\_term=.e8b1889582fb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/06/20/zinke-defends-trumps-sharp-cuts-at-interior-this-is-what-a-balanced-budget-looks-like/?utm_term=.e8b1889582fb)



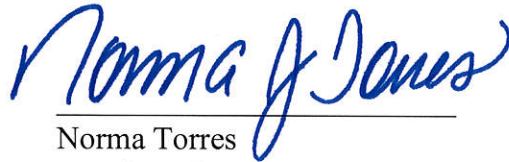
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress



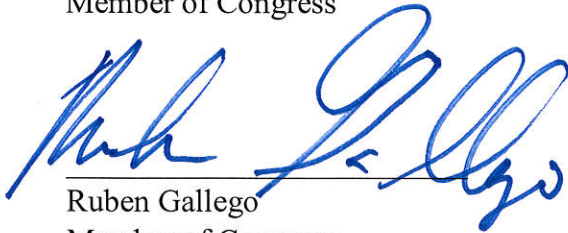
Gregorio Sablan  
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