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National Park Service: Fee Increases for International Visitors

Congress has debated various measures to generate additional funds for the National Park System in light of a large backlog of deferred maintenance on system lands. One option under discussion has been to raise park entrance fees for international visitors, in line with policies of some other nations that assess different national park fees for domestic versus international visitors. On July 3, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order (E.O.) 14314, which directed the Secretary of the Interior to increase specified National Park Service (NPS) fees for “nonresidents” of the United States and also directed a price increase for multiagency passes sold to nonresidents. In response to the E.O., NPS announced international visitor fee increases that began on January 1, 2026. Congress may evaluate the fee increases and their implementation. Also, Congress could consider bills introduced in the 119th Congress related to park entrance fees and passes for international visitors.

President Trump’s Executive Order

E.O. 14314 directed the Secretary of the Interior to “appropriately” increase NPS “entrance fees and recreation pass fees for nonresidents,” in order to “increase revenue and improve the recreational experience at national parks.” The E.O. also directed the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, working together, to take steps to increase the price nonresidents pay for the America the Beautiful—National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass (ATB pass), which provides access to recreational lands of multiple federal agencies, including NPS.

The E.O. directed that the revenues generated from these changes be used to improve infrastructure and enhance enjoyment or access, consistent with fee use provisions (16 U.S.C. §6807) in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). FLREA authorizes NPS and other agencies to charge entrance and/or recreation fees on federal recreational lands and to set fee levels according to specified criteria. FLREA also authorizes the establishment and sale of the ATB pass. The act directs the use of fee and pass revenues for certain purposes to benefit visitors, such as facility repair and maintenance, interpretation, and visitor services. Under FLREA, an individual park unit or other federal site generally retains at least 80% of revenues generated at that site from fees and pass sales.

Among its additional provisions, the E.O. directed a review of the NPS maintenance backlog and actions to “fully implement” infrastructure investments, including those funded through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF; 54 U.S.C. Chapter 2004). Also, the Secretary of the Interior must ensure NPS gives U.S. residents “preferential treatment” (consistent with

applicable law) for permits, lotteries, and other types of recreational access.

Related 119th Congress Legislation

In the 119th Congress, S. 2308 and H.R. 4604 would amend FLREA to authorize entrance fee surcharges for “international visitors” to National Park System units. The surcharges could be established at individual park units in an amount that “maximizes revenue ... while retaining international visitation.” Revenues from the surcharges would be retained at the park unit and could be used for “maintenance, visitor services, staffing, and related needs.” The bills also would direct the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to establish a surcharge for the sale of multiagency ATB passes to international visitors, with proceeds to be deposited into the LRF.

NPS Fee Increases

On November 25, 2025, the Department of the Interior (DOI) announced it would increase the fees charged to non-U.S. residents for both multiagency ATB passes and park-specific entrance fees to 11 national parks (Acadia, Bryce Canyon, Everglades, Glacier, Grand Canyon, Grand Teton, Rocky Mountain, Sequoia & Kings Canyon, Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Zion). The price increases took effect on January 1, 2026. The nonresident price for the ATB pass is \$250 (as compared with \$80 for a resident ATB pass), and the nonresident entrance fee for the 11 parks is an additional \$100 per person on top of those parks’ standard entrance fees (e.g., \$35 per private vehicle).

Revenue Potential from Fee Surcharges

In general, potential revenue from fee surcharges for international visitors to the National Park System has been challenging to project, because NPS has not collected systematic data on numbers of international park visitors. The International Trade Administration surveyed a sample of the 48.3 million international air travelers visiting the United States in 2024 and found that 33% of those surveyed visited “national parks and monuments.” (It is unclear whether all these visits were to the National Park System, since some national monuments are managed by other agencies.) For comparison, total park system visits in 2024 were estimated at 331.9 million. Yellowstone National Park conducted summer visitor use surveys in 2016, 2018, and 2024, which found that international visitors to that park constituted 17% of total summer visitors in 2016, 30% in 2018, and 15% in 2024. The percentage of visitors coming from foreign countries could be higher at some parks than others across the system—among other reasons, because some parks may be especially well-known internationally.

The 2026 fee increases may provide new data on international visitation to parks and on revenue amounts

realized by the new surcharges. The lack of prior data on international visitation could make it difficult to assess whether the fee increases may have any negative impact on international visitor numbers. Some researchers have found price elasticity of demand for national parks to be relatively low, meaning that “considerable increases in entry fees would be needed to reduce visitor numbers substantially” (*Eco-Environment & Health*, June 2025). One recent study of Yellowstone National Park projected the park would see revenue benefits from a \$100 international visitor surcharge despite a small dampening effect on international visitation (using assumptions about the proportional cost of the surcharge to the international visitor’s overall travel costs).

Implementation Considerations

To implement the differential pricing, NPS is requiring resident ATB pass holders to show a U.S. passport, U.S. driver’s license or state ID, or permanent resident card (“green card”) when entering parks. For non-ATB pass holders entering the 11 parks with individual surcharges, news reports have cited internal NPS guidance directing park staff to verbally ask about U.S. residency for fee purposes. Previously, NPS staff did not check U.S. residency at park entrance points (although ATB pass holders had to show photo ID to verify pass ownership). The new requirements have led to some reports of delays at park entrances, which could exacerbate existing concerns about overcrowding and long entrance lines at parks. DOI officials reportedly have stated that staffing and traffic flow will be monitored to address any issues. Separately, some Members of Congress have questioned whether residency information collected at park entrances would be stored and whether it would be accessible by other agencies.

Many units of the National Park System do not charge entrance or recreation fees, and a consideration could be whether the international visitor surcharge will benefit non-fee-charging park units. To the extent that E.O. 14314 is interpreted to apply FLREA’s provisions for revenue distribution, that law allows for a portion of fee and pass revenues (typically 20%) to be available for agency-wide expenditures, and NPS has used these funds to address visitor needs at non-fee-charging park units. For ATB passes not purchased at a specific site (e.g., purchased online), FLREA provides for revenues to be shared according to interagency agreements. Some stakeholders have proposed alternative distributions for the international visitor fees; for example, S. 2308 and H.R. 4604 would provide that all proceeds from the NPS surcharge on international visitors would be retained at the unit collecting the surcharge, and revenues from the surcharge on ATB pass sales would be deposited in the LRF, which provides deferred maintenance funding for multiple agencies.

Issues for Congress

Congress could consider whether to conduct oversight of NPS’s implementation of E.O. 14314, such as assessing revenue amounts and uses, collection strategies, or impacts on international visitation. For instance, some Members of Congress have questioned whether DOI’s decisionmaking process for the fee increases complied with requirements in FLREA (16 U.S.C. §6803) to seek public input on fee change proposals. FLREA requires federal officials to

“provide the public with opportunities to participate in the development or changing of a recreation fee” (such as by providing advance notice in local newspapers). Others have questioned whether FLREA’s fee-setting criteria allow for a surcharge on international visitors. Congress could consider whether to explicitly address international visitor surcharges in statute, either by authorizing them (e.g., as proposed in S. 2308 and H.R. 4604) or by prohibiting them. Alternatively, Congress could rely on current authorities as sufficient for agency interpretation.

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern that the fee increases will result in fewer international visitors to national parks. There is also concern that these increases, combined with other recent policy changes affecting travel to the United States, may exacerbate a decline in U.S. tourism more broadly. For example, the FY2025 budget reconciliation act (P.L. 119-21) increased costs for international visitors to the United States, including by adding a new (potentially reimbursable) \$250 “visa integrity fee” and raising admission fees and fees under the Department of Homeland Security’s Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA, a requirement for those traveling under the Visa Waiver Program). In addition, the Trump Administration has implemented visitor visa bonds of up to \$15,000 for nationals of 38 countries (to date), reduced the visa validity period for many countries, and suspended the entry of travelers from 39 countries. Because visa fees typically are based on the principle of reciprocity, another question could be whether other countries would impose additional fees for Americans traveling abroad.

Alternative Proposals

In the 116th Congress, S. 2783 proposed an alternative approach to raise revenue for the National Park System from international tourism. This bill would have increased fees for U.S. tourist visas and ESTA and would have deposited the additional revenue in a new fund to address NPS’s “priority deferred maintenance needs.” Such an approach could be preferred by some over an entrance fee increase, because it would not require NPS to validate U.S. residency at park entrance stations. By imposing charges on all international visitors to the United States (rather than just those who visit national parks), it also could potentially raise more revenue, although it could be seen as unfairly charging nonusers of the park system.

As another alternative, some stakeholders have proposed to supplement NPS funding by raising fees for all park visitors, as opposed to just international travelers. Under FLREA’s authorities, NPS has periodically implemented fee changes across the park system, for example, in 2018. (Individual park units also may alter fees absent a system-wide initiative.) A 2017 proposal to more than double peak-season fees at some parks drew opposition (including from some Members of Congress) based on concerns about the affordability of park visits for Americans with varying income levels. The proposal also generated support from some stakeholders based on the potential for the increased fee revenues to address deferred maintenance and improve visitor services in the National Park System.

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