# National Park Service: Fee Increases for International Visitors

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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 (EO) 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 EO, NPS announced nonresident fee increases that began on January 1, 2026. Some bills in the 119th Congress also would authorize fee surcharges for international visitors to U.S. national parks and other federal lands.

## President Trump's Executive Order

EO 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 EO 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 managed by multiple federal agencies, including NPS.

The EO directed that the revenues generated from these changes be used to improve infrastructure and enhance enjoyment of or access to federal recreational areas, 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 EO 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 that NPS gives U.S. residents "preferential treatment" (consistent with applicable law) for permits, lotteries, and other types of recreational access.

## NPS Fee Increases

On November 25, 2025, the Department of the Interior (DOI) announced it would increase the fees charged to nonresidents 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).

## Related 119th Congress Legislation

In the 119th Congress, H.R. 9250 (as ordered reported by the House Committee on Natural Resources) and S. 1547 (as reported by the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources) would amend FLREA by directing NPS to establish entrance fee surcharges at its fee-collecting units for "foreign tourists" (H.R. 9250) or "nonresident visitors" (S. 1547). The Secretary of the Interior would be required to determine surcharge amounts that maximize revenue for the NPS unit while retaining international visitation. The surcharge revenues would be deposited in the LRF for deferred maintenance of five federal agencies' assets, under specified conditions (similar but not identical for the House and Senate versions). Other bills, S. 2308 and H.R. 4604, also would authorize NPS surcharges and would further direct a surcharge for multiagency ATB passes. Under these bills, NPS units would retain the surcharges from individual park entrance fees, with ATB pass surcharges deposited in the LRF.

## 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. In 2025, the International Trade Administration (ITA) surveyed passengers on a random sample of scheduled flights departing the United States to overseas or Mexican destinations and found that 31% of those surveyed reported visiting "national parks and monuments." (The ITA estimated 46.4 million international air travelers in total visiting the United States in 2025.) For comparison, total park system recreation visitors in 2025 were estimated at 323.0 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 likely is 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 could make it difficult to assess whether the fee increases 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 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 U.S. residents with ATB passes to show a photo ID when entering parks to confirm eligibility for the resident pass. 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 initially 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.

## Issues for Congress

Congress is considering bills, discussed above, to require NPS entrance fee surcharges for international visitors (and in some bills, also surcharges for multiagency ATB passes). Separately, the Trump Administration has implemented surcharges for 11 parks and for the ATB pass. It is unclear how any pending legislation, if enacted, would interact with the fee changes already implemented administratively (for instance, whether any legislatively directed fees would replace or add to the current surcharges). Under H.R. 9250 and S. 1547, the NPS surcharges generally would go into the LRF for deferred maintenance of multiple agencies' assets, whereas the administratively established surcharges for the 11 parks currently are retained by NPS under FLREA.

Congress may consider which international visitors would be affected by the different bills compared with the current administrative surcharges. For instance, H.R. 9250, as ordered reported, and S. 1547, as reported, define the affected population differently. H.R. 9250 would apply the fee to "foreign tourists," which the bill defines as individuals age 16 or older traveling on B visas or without a visa under the Visa Waiver Program. S. 1547 would apply the fee to "nonresident visitors," which would be broader than the population covered by H.R. 9250, in that it would include anyone without lawful permanent resident status or U.S. citizenship (e.g., tourists, foreign students, and temporary workers).

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern that the fee increases will result in fewer international visitors to national parks. As discussed, it could be difficult to assess any changes and to measure compliance with some of the bills' requirements (such as the requirement to "retain" international visitation) because of a lack of baseline data on international visitors to NPS parks. Some contend that fees like the current $100 surcharge imposed by NPS, while high compared to park fees for U.S. residents, represent a small portion of the overall costs of a U.S. vacation for most international travelers.

Some also have expressed 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 50 countries, reduced the visa validity period for many countries, and imposed a "travel ban" on nationals of 39 countries. (For more information and a map of countries affected, see CRS Report IR10004, *Nationality-Based Immigration Restrictions*.) Because visa fees typically are based on the principle of reciprocity, another concern is whether other countries would impose additional fees for Americans traveling abroad.

## Selected Alternatives

In the 116th Congress, S. 2783 proposed an alternative approach to raise revenue for the National Park System from international tourism. It 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, such as 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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