



# Minnesota State Parks Entrance Fees

A new proposal would raise state park entrance fees to \$45 for an annual pass (up from \$35) and \$10 for a daily pass (up from \$7). This would be the second large fee increase in six years. **What would another price hike mean for Minnesota's State Parks?**



Tettegouche State Park • Justin Pruden / P&TC Photo Contest

## Reduced Access and Affordability

State parks belong to everyone. Entrance fees help support parks but also discourage use, and thus should always be kept as low as possible. Studies have found that fees, even when priced as low as \$3, displace low-income people and that people will travel three times as far to reach parks with no or lower fees.<sup>1</sup> When Minnesota State Parks increased fees 40% in 2017, visitation declined for the first time in years, bucking national and local trends.<sup>2</sup> The DNR has a long-established goal to provide accessible and affordable parks and trails to all Minnesotans.



Minnesotans should have parks and trails they can... **use and afford.**

~ MnDNR, 2011<sup>5</sup>

**Raising park entrance fees is not a solution** because it would create a barrier... to enjoy the parks and trails.

~ MnDNR, 2013<sup>6</sup>

[A strategic direction is to] **Continue to keep costs affordable.**

~ MnDNR, 2019<sup>7</sup>

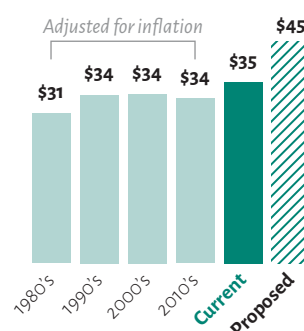
DNR wants to make sure... we **do not price the public out** of access to public spaces.

~ MnDNR, 2022<sup>8</sup>

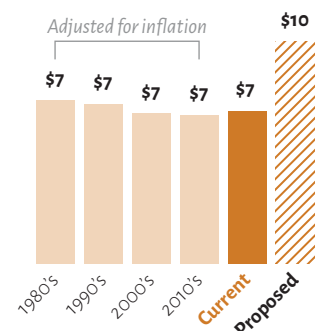
## Historically Expensive Parks

The proposed fee increase would make Minnesota State Parks the most expensive they've ever been, even after adjusting for inflation. Higher entrance fees would disincentivize the benefits state parks provide and disproportionately affect people already underrepresented in outdoor recreation. This wouldn't affect just a few people; 9% of Minnesotans live below the poverty line, and 31% of households make less than \$50,000 a year.<sup>9</sup>

Annual State Park Pass



Daily State Park Pass





## Most Expensive State Parks in the Upper Midwest

### Price of Annual State Park Permit (2023 price; resident rate)



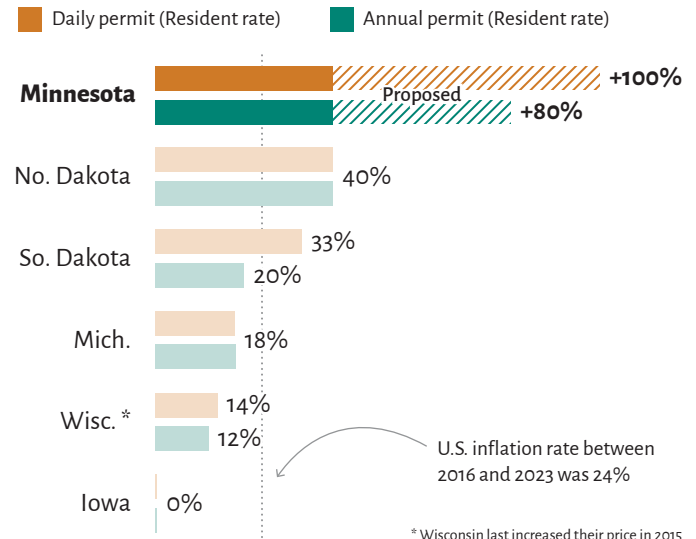
**\$45**

Minnesota Proposed

**\$22**

Upper Midwest Avg.

### Rate of State Park Fee Increases (2016 - 2023)



### Our public investment decisions reflect *who we are* and *what we value*:

Do we value parks as public goods meant for everyone, like libraries and schools?  
Or are they meant to generate revenue regardless of who may be priced out?

## Alternatives to increasing fees?

State Parks are worth investing in: they improve our physical, mental and spiritual health; promote tourism and local economies; and preserve breathtaking landscapes and vital ecosystems. But there's alternatives to continually increasing fees and pricing out low-income Minnesotans. There's a historic \$17.6 billion dollar surplus that could be used to boost spending. There's other options, too: HF 389 / SF 356 would tweak the allocation formula for lottery-in-lieu dollars, increasing funding to parks and trails. Restructuring how we collect fees is also worth exploring: Michigan, Montana, Kansas, Idaho and Colorado have all increased revenue by *lowering* the cost of park permits and coupling them with vehicle registrations.

Split Rock Lighthouse State Park • John Rystad / P&TC Photo Contest

### Sources & Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Lamborn, C. C., Smith, J. W., & Burr, S. W. (2017). User fees displace low-income outdoor recreationists. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 167, 165–176.
- <sup>2</sup> After Minnesota State Park fees increased in 2017, visitation declined in 2018 and 2019 after a decade of growth. Visits to other state park systems (National Association of State Park Directors, 2019) and local regional parks (Metropolitan Council, 2022) continued to increase during this period.
- <sup>3</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2017). *2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey; Report on Findings*.
- <sup>4</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2017). *2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey; Report on Findings*.
- <sup>5</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2011). *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.
- <sup>6</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2013). *Destination Minnesota: A New Direction for Minnesota State Parks and Trails*.
- <sup>7</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2019). *Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024*.
- <sup>8</sup> Minnesota DNR. (2022). *4 the Outdoor: 4 steps in 4 years to ensure the future of conservation and outdoor recreation in Minnesota*.
- <sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.