



February 2025

MINNESOTA STATE PARK ENTRANCE FEES

BY THE NUMBERS

80%

Proposed increase in the cost of an annual state park permit since 2015.

38%

Percentage of Minnesotans who don't have money to buy or rent outdoor equipment.¹

28%

Percentage of Minnesotans who don't have money to pay for park permits, licenses, or other fees.²

\$23

The average cost of an annual state park permit in the Upper Midwest.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ State parks are public goods and should be **kept as affordable as possible**.
- ✓ Many Minnesotans **struggle to afford state park fees**.
- ✓ State park **fees are already near historical averages** when adjusting for inflation.
- ✓ Minnesota **state parks fees are increasing faster** than other Midwestern states.
- ✓ There's a **better alternative** that could increase park revenue while lowering costs.

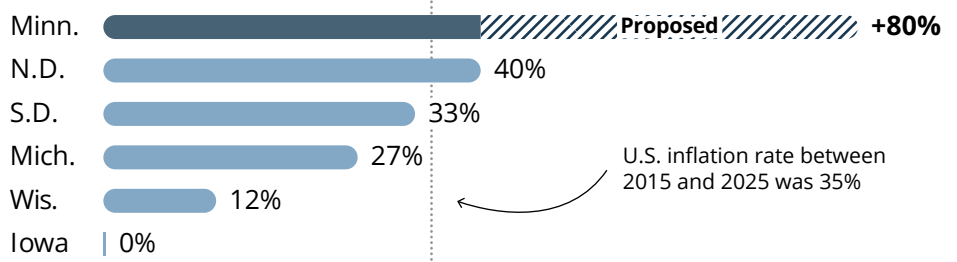
BACKGROUND

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), which DNR projects would generate \$3.4 million in extra revenue to help pay for state parks. But raising fees also has drawbacks: In the short term, it discourages visitation, especially for low-income people, and in turn hurts local businesses that rely on park visitors. In the long term, it can force land managers to favor fee-generating activities over conservation goals. In Minnesota, the price to enter state parks is rising faster than inflation and this proposal would make our annual park permit the most expensive in the Midwest. This wouldn't just affect a few people; 38% of Minnesotans say they have a hard time affording outdoor equipment, 28% say they don't have money to pay for park fees, 9% live below the poverty line, and 28% of households make less than \$50,000 a year.³

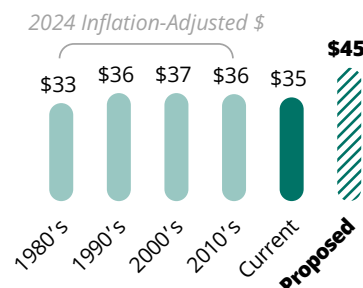
SKYROCKETING PRICES

The proposed fee increase far exceeds the rate of inflation.

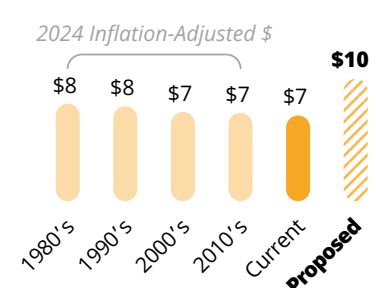
Increase in cost of annual state park permit (2015 - 2025)



Price of Annual Permit



Price of Daily Permit



MINNESOTA STATE PARK ENTRANCE FEES



Fort Snelling State Park • Randy Wendel / P&TC Photo Contest

TWO OPTIONS FOR STATE PARK PERMITS

By studying how other states offer and sell their state park permits, we think there's a way to lower the cost of state park permits while also increasing revenue to better support our parks.

DNR PROPOSAL



Collect park permit fees at state park entrances and online.



Increase the cost to:
\$45 ANNUAL PERMIT



Projected additional revenue for state parks:
≈ \$3.4 MILLION

AFFORDABLE ALTERNATIVE



Offer permits during the vehicle registration process.



Decrease the cost to:
\$14 ANNUAL PERMIT
(\$14 based on Michigan State Park Passport and used only for illustrative purposes)



Projected additional revenue for state parks:
≈ \$3.4 MILLION

HOW THE MATH WORKS

By lowering the permit cost, and putting the choice in front of everyone when registering a motor vehicle, increased sales would offset the price decrease. Currently, DNR sells about 232,000 daily permits and 273,000 annual permits; with the proposed price increase, that equates to about \$14.5 million in revenue. If the price was dropped to \$14, however, only 17% of Minnesotans would need to purchase it with their registration to generate that same revenue.⁴⁻⁵ Based on other states which offer low-priced permits with vehicle registration, a 17% participation rate is an achievable goal.

WHY THIS ALTERNATIVE MAKES SENSE

- ✓ Makes state parks more affordable for more Minnesotans.
- ✓ Generates additional revenue to maintain Minnesota state parks.
- ✓ Park permits are tied to the motor vehicle, so it makes sense to offer them with vehicle registration.
- ✓ It's administratively efficient, so park staff can spend less time at the cash register and more time taking care of our state parks.
- ✓ There's precedent: you can already buy a state park permit with vehicle registration when you buy a state parks specialty plate.

DNR AFFORDABILITY GOAL

The DNR has a long-established goal to provide accessible and affordable parks and trails to all Minnesotans.

- 99 Minnesotans should have parks and trails they can... **use and afford.**
~MnDNR, 2011 ⁶
- 99 **Raising park entrance fees is not a solution** because it would create a barrier... to enjoy the parks and trails.
~MnDNR, 2013 ⁷
- 99 [A strategic direction is to] **Continue to keep costs affordable.**
~MnDNR, 2019 ⁸
- 99 DNR wants to make sure... we **do not price the public out** of access to public spaces.
~MnDNR, 2022 ⁹

SOURCES & NOTES

¹ Minnesota DNR. (2017). 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey; Report on Findings.

² Minnesota DNR. (2017). 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey; Report on Findings.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

⁴ Based on 5.4 million personal vehicles (Minnesota Department of Vehicle Services, 2023).

⁵ We estimate permit revenue from non-residents currently equals approximately \$1.6 million (based on 15% of visitors being from out-of-state; DNR State Park Visitor Survey, 2022).

⁶ Minnesota DNR. (2011). Parks and Trails Legacy Plan.

⁷ Minnesota DNR. (2013). Destination Minnesota: A New Direction for Minnesota State Parks and Trails.

⁸ Minnesota DNR. (2019). Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2020-2024.

⁹ Minnesota DNR. (2022). 4 the Outdoor: 4 steps in 4 years to ensure the future of conservation and outdoor recreation in Minnesota.