

Letter to EMNRD re: Fee Study

February 26, 2024

To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for your recent visit to Elephant Butte State Park to speak with our community about the proposed changes to the pricing for New Mexico State Parks. I want to thank you for having a very organized presentation and for behaving so professionally under less than desirable circumstances. It is never easy to give news of price hikes, and I felt that your explanations were clear, concise, and sympathetic.

I am trusting that you are true to your word and that you brought this news to our community with the intent of hearing written feedback from us.

It is obvious that the state parks must establish systems to bring in more money. The work force in the parks not only needs to be sustained, but also grown. Furthermore, the mission of the parks is a statewide vision of preserving space and providing recreation and education throughout the entire span of New Mexico. You've been doing too much with too little for too long, and I am grateful to our current governor for allowing this discussion to begin.

To that end, here are my thoughts:

1) Regarding Day Use:

- a) Offer an annual day pass to New Mexico residents or at least to residents of Sierra County (as well as residents near other state lakes). Most people here don't mind paying the \$40 a year fee now, and I suspect they would not balk at \$80-\$100. Keep the day-use fee for non-state residents.
- b) Allow seniors, veterans, first responders, and foster families a free or reduced pass. Also allow for anyone to apply for a hardship pass (if they take the time to apply and state a reason, they can get a free pass)
- c) If they do not have a pass, then charge a daily fee at the gate--increase the daily fee to \$7 for state residents and \$10 for non-residents.

2) Regarding Kayaks and SUPs: Generally speaking, a \$5 daily fee to put SUPs or Kayak's on the lake seems reasonable. However, for the residents who live near the lake and use it regularly, this fee becomes an unmanageable burden. The folks in my community love the lake and support it with their time and other gifts. We give and raise money for events like the balloon regatta, the fireworks show, and the Easter egg hunt, just to name a few. We walk along the beach and help clean up after big events or active weekends. We also use the lake almost daily during the warmer months--that's why we moved here! Asking someone to pay \$5 a day to bring their SUP to the lake regularly

will result in them paying far more than the registration for a motorized boat! Here are several alternative suggestions to the daily fee:

- a) Offer an option to license non-motorized crafts like kayaks and SUPs, similar to small sailboats.
 - b) Offer an extra sticker for a nominal (less than \$20 per year) fee on the annual day pass
 - c) Offer a 7-14 day pass for families allowing them to bring in a vehicle full of non-motorized crafts like kayaks and SUPs, keeping the cost to around \$10 per month
- 3) Regarding Camping: Obviously, rates need to increase. But the new proposals are not only nearly 200% increased, they are also higher than nearby luxury camp resorts. If such an extreme price hike is necessary, at least do it gradually, increasing only a percentage of the needed monies each year for the next 5 years.
- a) I'd like you to consider leaving the dispersed camping at under \$10 at this park only. The cities of Truth or Consequences, Williamsburg, and Elephant Butte rely on tourism dollars. Keeping campsite fees low at Elephant Butte lake will keep people camping there, which will in turn keep our economies alive.
- 4) Regarding Dump fees: Dumping at the lake is already an occasional issue. PLEASE PLEASE do NOT charge a fee for people to dump their sewer lines. It will result in a disgusting mess that everyone in our community, as well as all those downstream will have to live with for years to come. Asking people to pay to dump their sewage is short-sighted and irresponsible. If someone is bringing their camper in strictly for dumping, they must pay the gate fee or buy an annual pass.

Thank you again for your organized presentation and your willingness to hear our voices. I am extremely hopeful that you will consider these suggestions and find them useful.

Best Regards,

Connie Brown,
Elephant Butte resident