

96-497

MARIPOSA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

MINUTE ORDER

TO: JEFFREY G. GREEN, County Counsel
 FROM: MARGIE WILLIAMS, Clerk of the Board *MW*
 SUBJECT: LETTER TO SECRETARY BABBITT

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA,

ADOPTED THIS Order on December 10, 1996

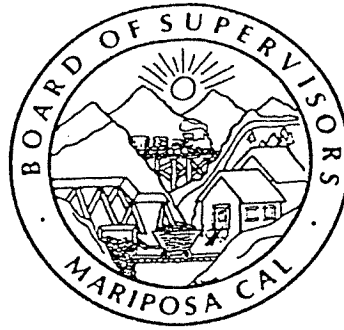
ACTION AND VOTE:

- Supervisor Balmain advised that the letter to Secretary Babbitt relative to Park entrance fees has been prepared pursuant to the direction given by the Board at the last meeting and he intends to mail it this date. Comments were made on the contents of the letter. (M)Pickard, (S)Parker, Board waived its rules requiring 72 hours agenda noticing to further consider this letter, finding it is a matter of timeliness due to the implementation schedule of the fee increases/Ayes: Unanimous. Discussion was held relative to the contents of the letter and distribution. (M)Parker, (S)Pickard, Res. 96-497 adopted approving the letter to Secretary Babbitt with a change in the percentage of the fee increase to reflect 300%, and with the deletion of two paragraphs relative to the Valley Implementation Plan; and with direction for the letter to be copied to the following: Congressman Radanovich, Congressman Condit, surrounding counties, Yosemite Park Superintendent, Senator Feinstein, Senator Boxer, Assemblyman House, and Senator Monteith/Ayes: Balmain, Stewart, Parker, Pickard; Noes: Reilly.

cc: File

Mariposa County
Board of Supervisors

District 1.....PATTI A. REILLY
District 2.....DOUG BALMAIN
District 3.....ROBERT C. STEWART
District 4.....GARRY R. PARKER
District 5.....BOB PICKARD



96-497
VACANT
County Administrative Officer

MARGIE WILLIAMS
Clerk of the Board

P.O. Box 784
MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA 95338
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FAX (209) 966-5147

December 10, 1996

Bruce Babbitt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 "C" Street, Room 6156
Washington, D.C. 20240

Via Facsimile
(202/208-6956)
Original mailed

Re: Entrance Fee Increases for Yosemite National Park/Valley Implementation Plan

Dear Secretary Babbitt:

The Mariposa County Board of Supervisors has directed me to correspond with you relative to the proposed entrance fee increases at Yosemite National Park which are scheduled to take effect January 15, 1997. The Board is extremely concerned relative to the proposed fee increases and the impact the increases will have upon not only the businesses in counties surrounding the Park which depend upon tourism in Yosemite National Park, but also upon low-income families who can ill-afford to visit Yosemite National Park in light of such a substantial increase. The Board of Supervisors' concerns are as follows:

1. To the knowledge of the Board of Supervisors, with the exception of one meeting with Superintendent Griffin of Yosemite National which did not include the general public, there was no consultation with local officials and/or the public relative to possible fee increases. There was clearly no opportunity for the public to be consulted and to provide input relative to proposed fee increases. The Board feels strongly that whenever an action is taken by a governmental entity which will affect large numbers of the public, there should be an opportunity for public comment prior to the governmental entity taking action.

Relative to the use of increased fees, it is our desire that we be given an opportunity for meaningful input regarding how the increased fees will be used for the direct benefit of Yosemite National Park.

2. Our Board believes that any fee increase should be charged on a seasonal basis. As you know, Yosemite National Park on occasion during the summer months suffers from overcrowding. However, Park visitation does not present overcrowding in the shoulder seasons, particularly during the winter. A suggestion by the Board of Supervisors would be to charge fees

based upon these seasonal visitation periods. For example, the summer months should have a higher entrance fee charged than the winter and other shoulder seasons. We see this as an opportunity to help spread the visitation more evenly over a twelve month period. Additionally, most of the visitation during the winter period is for skiers and winter enthusiasts. With the already high cost of those activities, a quadrupling of the entrance fee in addition to the cost of the sporting activities will not have the desired effect of increasing visitation in the off-season, it will, in fact, decrease visitation during the shoulder seasons.

3. While on today's economic scale, \$20 does not seem to be an exorbitant rate, to go from a \$5 entrance fee to a \$20 entrance fee, a 300% increase, seems unconscionable without appropriate forewarning to the public and an opportunity for the public to comment. If a \$20 entrance fee is a reasonable fee, it would be much more reasonable for the increase to be staggered over a two or three year period rather than all at once.

4. The Board of Supervisors believes that a one time fee increase from \$5 to \$20 will have a substantially adverse affect on individuals desiring to use the Park on a day-use basis. While one could argue that \$20 for seven days is a reasonable fee, \$20 for one day seems unreasonable. Part of the Park Service's mission is to make the National Parks available to all members of the public for their enjoyment, not just upper class families.

5. In an effort to provide an incentive to visitors to leave their private vehicles outside the Park, our Board requests that all visitors who enter the Park via public transit do so without charge. This is not only the best incentive possible to reduce private vehicle traffic in the Park, it is also a very practical approach. As you know, Mariposa County provides a very substantial subsidy on an annual basis to assure a public transit system which services the Park and its employees.

We feel confident you will take our concerns and the concerns of the public into consideration before finalizing the Park entrance fees on January 15, 1997.

It is the sincere desire of the Board of Supervisors that the Board be consulted and have the ability to participate fully in the formulation of any policy or policies ultimately adopted by the federal government relative to the Valley Implementation Plan.

Very truly yours,



Doug Balmain
Chairman

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List of parties copied is attached.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt
December 10, 1996

Page 3

cc: Congressman George Radanovich
Congressman Gary Condit
Senator Barbara Boxer
Senator Dianne Feinstein
Senator Dick Monteith
Assemblyman George House
Superintendent B.J. Griffin
Board of Supervisors of Surrounding Counties
(Fresno, Madera, Merced, Mono, Stanislaus, Tuolumne)
Steve Hayes, Mariposa County Visitors Bureau Director

bcc: Mariposa Gazette
Mariposa Tribune
Board Members
Clerk of the Board

*Copy to C/S
1/31/82
Jett
Jeff*

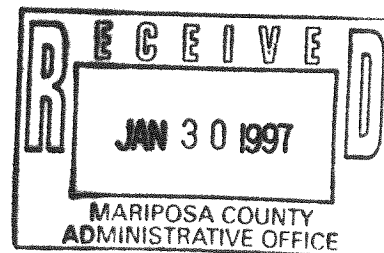


United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

JAN 23 1997



IN REPLY REFER TO:

F5419(2460)

Mr. Doug Balmain
Chairman, Mariposa County Board
of Supervisors
P.O. Box 784
Mariposa, California 95338

Dear Mr. Balmain:

Thank you for your letter of December 10, 1996, to Secretary Babbitt concerning the entrance fee increases for Yosemite National Park. Since our office manages the National Park Service (NPS) Recreation Fee Demonstration Program, we have been asked to respond.

Congress authorized the NPS to begin the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program in 1996. This program, which Yosemite National Park is a part of, is a 3-year experimental program which allows parks to generate additional revenues from those persons who visit the parks. Yosemite, along with Yellowstone, Grand Canyon and Grand Teton National Parks, is considered one of the top echelon national parks in the System. The operational and infrastructure cost to maintain these parks are equally complex and expensive. It was felt that there should be consistency in the admission fee charged for these 4 parks, and that \$20 per vehicle for a 7-day admission at each of the parks was reasonable. All of these parks have identified an annual park specific pass which is \$40 and is good for an entire family for 1-year. This pass allows for unlimited access for 1-year. There is also a \$50 Golden Eagle Passport that allows a family admission into any area managed by the NPS, National Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service or Bureau of Land Management, which charges an admission fee. In the world we live in today, these prices seem extremely reasonable given the price for a first run movie or a 3-day family pass to Disneyland. It might be noted that Yellowstone National Park initiated a new snowmobile fee for the park on December 20. The fee for a snowmobile was raised from \$4 to \$15 per snowmobile for 7 days and so far there has been no decline in snowmobile visitation through the west entrance of the park.


Your letter states that the proposed Yosemite fee "has not had a complete public hearing in the local communities." Yosemite National Park officials did meet with representatives of surrounding communities and counties in November, along with others, in an open meeting to discuss the new fee increases. Your office was represented at this meeting. This meeting was intended to give the Yosemite "community" a heads up concerning the impending fee increases and to allow those at the meeting to spread the word.

The NPS does not believe that the new fees will reduce visitation to national park areas that are part of the demonstration program or discriminate against any persons of low income that may visit a national park area. As part of the demonstration program, the NPS will: conduct an extensive evaluation of the program that will, among other issues, examine visitation statistics to the parks before and after the fee increases, evaluate local and regional economic trends that may have been influenced by increased fees, and visitor response to the new fees. This evaluation report will be submitted to Congress at the end of the 3-year program to help develop permanent fee legislation. Yosemite will be one of the case study parks of this evaluation process. As part of the evaluation, your suggestion on seasonally adjusted fees and not charging visitors who enter on public transportation can be considered.

The NPS believes that revenue generated by the new fees, that stays primarily in the place where it is collected, and that will be utilized to improve the park experience for those who paid more in fees will be fully supported by the visiting public. We believe that fees are a part of the solution for addressing the extensive needs to responsibly manage the National Park System into the 21st century. We ask that Congress fully support this program by ensuring that these new fee revenues are considered in addition to the current appropriated funds, not offset by a reduction in this funding. We see this as a win-win situation for the American public.

Sincerely,



Maureen Finnerty 
Associate Director, Park Operations
and Education