

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 26, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write to express our serious concern for the National Park Service's proposal to raise the cost of entrance passes at Acadia National Park in Maine and sixteen other highly-visited National Parks. The stated justification for the increases—the chronic maintenance backlog at our National Parks—is a worthy cause, yet this proposal both fails to adequately address that challenge while also raising the possibility of an obvious but unintended consequence: a decrease in attendance at our National Parks. We believe an immediate increase of this magnitude to the fees at Acadia, such as the increase for private vehicles from a \$25 pass to a \$70 pass, poses a risk to the growing visitation at Acadia, especially if no economic analysis has been done to demonstrate the potential impacts on visitation of such a dramatic increase.

365 days a year, Acadia National Park—one of the crown jewels of the National Park System—serves as a tremendous resource for the people of Maine and the visitors who come here. From May through October, it sustains a vibrant economy in the region, bringing millions of visitors across the country and the world to the coast of Maine. Like most other parks, Acadia has felt the strain of the maintenance backlog, in part due to this sustained visitation. While we recognize that this proposal would bring additional revenue to the park, we are not certain that this would either solve the problem or outweigh the risk to the local community of making the park more difficult to visit.

According to the National Park Service, these fee increases are expected to raise \$70 million annually. Given the scale of the maintenance backlog, at almost \$12 billion, it is difficult to see how this represents a long-term solution to the problem, especially while the National Park Service in its 2018 budget request proposes to cut its own operations budget by \$200 million and its maintenance funding by \$93 million. The American people already pay for the maintenance of the National Park System through their tax dollars; if we are going to ask them directly for a greater contribution to the parks, it should be commensurate with service or more clearly justified than this proposal.

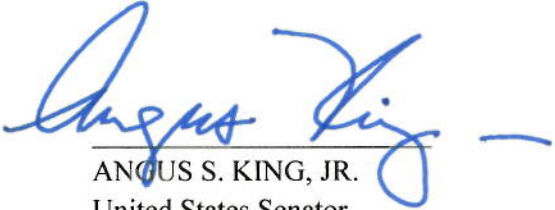
We do believe, however, that in many cases money is being left on the table. To address that, we have advocated for the National Park Service to update its operations, to embrace technology, and to be more creative. Only recently has the Park Service updated the cost of the lifetime Senior Pass from \$10 to \$80, for example. We have also pushed the Park Service to enable online and mobile pass sales to make purchasing passes more visitor friendly. We also believe that the Park Service can and should target more revenue from commercial uses and visitation.

In order to address the scale of the problem with the maintenance backlog, though, we need to think bigger. There have been a number of bipartisan proposals in the Senate to address the backlog, including


S. 751, the National Park Service Legacy Act sponsored by Senators Warner and Portman, which would offer a dedicated revenue source to address the problem from mineral revenues. S.1460, the similarly bipartisan Energy and Natural Resources Act, contains provisions for a similar revenue source. Finally, Senator McCain has also proposed S.1403, the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, which could help address many of these maintenance projects by expanding the contributions of volunteer service members.

As we celebrated the Centennial of the National Park Service last year, we were reminded that these parks are monuments to our nation's heritage. They are indeed America's best idea. Without question, if we want to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy them as we have been able to we must properly care for them. We urge you to work with us and with Congress to adequately do so. But before taking the action of raising fees to this degree, we strongly urge you to consider all available options and to consider the full breadth of the impact of this action on Acadia and the other parks. We look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator



SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senator