



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE  
DEPARTMENT of NATURAL and CULTURAL RESOURCES  
**DIVISION of PARKS and RECREATION**  
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January 16, 2024

The Honorable Kevin Avar  
and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
State House Room 103  
Concord, NH 03301

**RE: SB 345-FN relative to state park fees for state residents.**

Dear Chair Avar and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation ("Division") regarding SB 345-FN relative to state park fees for state residents. We are very concerned that this bill would have a substantial impact on state parks revenue and the self-funding model under which New Hampshire's Park system operates.

By way of background, the State Park Fund was established in 1991, creating an operationally self-funded parks system. The House Appropriations Committee report that recommended passage wrote: *"This bill establishes the New Hampshire state park and ski areas as an enterprise-type self-funded, accountable business entity to provide improved park and ski recreation facilities and services to New Hampshire citizens and tourists alike."*

The fee approval process through the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee pursuant to RSA 216-A:3-g, was established *"...to provide the department with the ability to maximize revenues and to adjust fees according to market conditions and trends as is the common practice in private industry."* RSA 216-A:3-g, II states: *"Fees for the use of campgrounds and ski lifts shall be comparable with the fees for use of similar privately owned facilities. The operation of all enterprise functions....shall be as profitable as possible, within the purposes of the park system."*

Hospitality- and tourism-based private businesses do not differentiate fee structures based on residency. Approximately half of visitors to NH State Parks come from out-of-state and a residency-based price structure would likely discourage tourism and related economic activity.

The opportunity to collect revenue at some parks to support the rest of the park system is also at the foundation of our self-funded parks system. RSA 216-A:3-g states that: *"Fees for the use of park areas shall be designed to recover a reasonable portion of budget expenses consistent with the purposes of RSA 216-A:1 and 216-A:3. The general court does not intend that all park facilities be self-supporting."* Of the 93 state park properties, the Division collects a day-use admission fee at only 21 state parks, resulting in 77% of park properties having no day-use admission. The 21 parks that collect fees, only 12 state parks provide surplus revenue to support the rest of the state parks system.

Our intent is to make NH state parks as affordable as possible. The day-use admission fee of \$2 for youth (age 6-11) has not changed since 2008. The \$4 day-use admission fee for adults has

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not changed since 2010, except for six of our high-use parks where a \$1.00 increase was implemented in 2012. We believe that our fees are a great value regardless of residency. NH youth up to age 17 are granted free admission when visiting state parks as part of a school group during the off-season (before June 19 and after Labor Day). Bus Passes are available mid-week, non-holiday for \$35/bus during the peak season. These programs are designed to promote recreational opportunities for NH school and community recreation programs.

If we charge something to everyone, it helps to make state parks available to all. And, to the extent that we generate a surplus, it allows the Division to continue to re-invest in the parks system and address the \$100 million in deferred maintenance identified in the 2010 Ten Year Strategic Plan, thus providing more recreational opportunities and a better visitor experience. Any reduction in revenue would result in a reduction of services.

Please consider the many existing laws and programs that provide free or discounted entry to NH State Parks:

- RSA 216A:3-g, provides free admission to state parks for NH disabled veterans, active military, and NH national guard.
- RSA 216A:3-g, also provide residents with the State Park license plate are provided free entry that includes all other passengers.
- RSA 218:5-c, provides free admission for NH seniors.
- The Division's Fee Package provides free admission to the Governor, Executive Councilors, and members of the General Court.
- The Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA) provide a 50% discount on admission for state employees.
- Other programs that provide for discounted access to state parks include the Individual Season Pass, the Family Season Pass, the NH Bus Pass and the NH Library Pass programs.

The Division continually strives to balance its priorities in part by examining its fee structures, visitation data, and other metrics to inform recommendations for adjustments to its fees. We urge you to please consider fully the impact on revenue, the consistency of this legislation with existing statutes, and New Hampshire's self-funding model for the state park system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and additional information on SB 345.

Sincerely,



Brian J. Wilson  
Director

C: Sarah L. Stewart, Commissioner, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

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