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Shenandoah Valley Travel Association Opposes Entrance Fee Increases at National Parks
Urges Passage of the National Park Service Legacy Act

Luray, VA – (November 16, 2017). The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to dramatically increase entrance fees at 17 national parks, including Shenandoah National Park. If approved, our park's entrance fee would increase from \$25 to \$70, for private vehicles, during peak season which is defined as June through October. This would come directly on the heels of a fee increase over the past two years, which moved the fee from \$15 to \$25.

If this proposal passes, entrance fees for motorcycles, bicycles, visitors entering on foot, and commercial users would also increase significantly. An example would be the fee for a standard motorcoach – increasing from \$300 to \$1,200 during peak season.

According to the NPS, the increase revenue from fee increases would be used to restore aging infrastructure, often referred to as the deferred maintenance backlog. Deferred maintenance in national parks is serious. Shenandoah's list of buildings, electrical systems and other structures in need of repair totals \$76 million. Across all national parks, the number is a staggering \$11.3 billion. These projects have stacked up over the past decade and more because federal funding has not kept pace with our parks' needs.

However, placing the burden of repairing our parks on the backs of park visitors is misguided.

The Shenandoah Valley Travel Association (SVTA) strongly opposes this increase since it will create financial barriers for thousands of would-be visitors to the Park and have serious economic consequences for the surrounding counties.

SVTA was instrumental in the creation of Shenandoah National Park, formally calling for the establishment of a new national park in the Shenandoah Valley in 1924. SVTA has promoted Shenandoah as an unparalleled tourist destination continuously since that time.

The argument has been made that \$70 for a week's pass is still an excellent deal for a family vacation. However, as an east coast park, Shenandoah is within a day's drive of millions of Americans. As a result, a large percentage of visitors to Shenandoah spend only a day or a portion of a day in the Park. A \$70 fee for what many use as a day pass would create a barrier to entry and significantly reduce visitation. In 2016 alone, visitors to Shenandoah spent \$96.2

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million in those counties surrounding the Park, supporting or creating 1,278 jobs. A reduction in visitation will negatively impact the economies of small towns and rural areas that depend on that revenue.

Additionally, legislation has already been introduced that would raise funds for the deferred maintenance.

U.S. Senators Mark R. Warner and Tim Kaine (both D-VA) urged the Trump Administration to reconsider these dramatic entrance fee increases. In a letter to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, the senators instead offered bipartisan legislation they introduced earlier this year as a solution to address the long-term national park maintenance backlog.

“These fee increases, many of which are two-to-three times that of current levels, could price out many of our constituents and other individuals and families across the country from visiting these national treasures....we do not believe that shifting the burden to our park visitors in the form of significant fee increases is an appropriate or practical way to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog,” said the senators.

The *National Park Service Legacy Act* would help eradicate the maintenance backlog at the Park Service by directing existing revenues from mineral royalties toward high-priority deferred maintenance needs of the National Park Service, including investing in critical NPS infrastructure.

“This bipartisan legislation would help repair and restore the aging and deteriorating infrastructure of our national parks and ensure that these treasure are preserved for future generations to enjoy. It would allow the Park Service to reduce its maintenance backlog without having to significantly increase the cost of admittance for visitors of our national parks,” the senators added.

This level of financial commitment, levied from within the government framework, is far superior than an increase in visitor entrance fees—in terms of scale and optics—to address the deferred maintenance backlog.

The National Park Service is accepting public comments on this proposal through November 23, 2017, and SVTA urges its members and Valley residents to submit comments at:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/proposedpeakseasonfeerates>

or by mail to:

National Park Service
1849 C Street, NW
Mail Stop: 2346
Washington, DC 20240