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November 16, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I write to inquire about the October 24, 2017, National Park Service (NPS) proposal to increase entrance fees at 17 National Parks. Access to National Parks and other public lands are fundamental to our nation's conservation legacy. I am opposed to this fee increase due to my concern that it will create barriers to access and further marginalize communities that already encounter challenges engaging in the outdoors.

Access to public lands drives Colorado's outdoor economy. Nowhere is this more evident than in gateway communities like Estes Park and Grand Lake near Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). In 2016, more than 4.5 million visitors to RMNP spent an estimated \$298.7 million and supported over 4,000 local jobs. The proposed fee increase, however, would limit the ability of some families to make the trip to RMNP, harming small businesses and local economies. In light of these concerns, please answer the following questions:

- Did the Department consider how the proposed fee increase would affect equitable access to National Parks? What data and models did it use to support these conclusions?
- Did the Department consider how the fee increase would affect existing efforts to make public lands more inclusive, such as the Presidential Memorandum Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in our National Parks, National Forests, and Other Public Lands and Waters?
- How is consumer spending in gateway communities expected to change as a result of the fee increase? What data or models were used to identify these effects?
- Is the fee increase intended to offset proposed cuts to the National Park Service in the President's FY18 budget request? If so, are increases to fees also under consideration at other agencies facing proposed budget cuts, such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)?
- How has the Department of the Interior hiring freeze affected the visitor access and the maintenance backlog during 2017?

I recognize the need to address the \$227 million maintenance backlog at National Parks in Colorado. That is why I have worked in Congress on comprehensive solutions that address maintenance needs and increase access to our parks and public lands. For example, I have worked with Senator McCain to introduce the *21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) Act* to increase partnerships that engage youth and veterans, including individuals from diverse low-income communities, on public lands maintenance and infrastructure projects. This growing backlog in maintenance is due, in part, to the chronic underfunding of our land management agencies. Despite this underfunding, every \$1 invested in the National Park Service still returns \$10 in economic benefit. That is why I will continue to advocate for robust funding for federal land management agencies into the future. Please describe how the Department considered legislation in Congress and the President's FY18 Budget during development of the fee increase proposal.

I will continue to work towards concrete solutions that engage underrepresented communities in the outdoors and reduce the NPS maintenance backlog to ensure our children and grandchildren have a conservation legacy of which they can be proud. Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator