Illinois OKs hike in license fee to bolster state parks funding

By Tim Anderson [1]
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Concerned about the condition of the state’s parks, Illinois lawmakers voted in November to boost funding for the system through a $2 increase in license-plate fees.

Over the past 10 years, the Chicago Tribune reports [3], staffing and budget levels for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources have been cut by more than half.

Along with the additional dollars that will come from the higher license-plate fee, the DNR is exploring other revenue options as well, including charging out-of-state visitors to the parks. Illinois is one of three Midwestern states (along with Iowa and Ohio) that don’t charge park entrance fees, according to a 2012 National Association of State Park Directors survey.

The same survey found that every state uses a unique mix of revenue sources to fund its parks. Michigan, for example, is the only state in this region where general fund dollars are not used. It instead relies largely on park-based revenue, including a $10 “recreation passport” that motorists can purchase when renewing their vehicle licenses. The passport allows entry into all Michigan state parks. In Minnesota, a significant portion of the state parks budget comes from lottery sales. In addition, some proceeds from a sales tax hike approved by Minnesotans in 2008 go to state parks.

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