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House Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Proponent Testimony of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
House Bill 2568

February 11, 2026

Chairman Kessler and Members of the Committee,

At its January 2026 meeting, the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission voted to request the introduction of House Bill 2568, which ratifies changes to the park fee regulations.

The Kansas State Parks System is comprised of 28 state parks spanning approximately 32,000 acres of land. State parks are popular attractions for both residents and nonresidents. In January 2026, Wichita State University completed an economic study of the Kansas State Parks System. It found that between 2021 and 2025, about 7.5 million people visited Kansas parks each year. More significantly, it found that Kansas parks generate approximately $152.6 million in economic activity each year. Given their significant economic value to the State's economy, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks seeks to adjust fees to properly maintain and improve park facilities.

The Parks Fee Fund contains all "moneys received from state park permit fees, tolls, rentals and charges derived from the use, lease or operation of state parks . . . including receipts from the park and recreation motor vehicle permit." K.S.A. 32-991. The Department of Wildlife and Parks collects these funds through fees provided in K.A.R. 115-2-2 (Motor vehicle permit fees) and K.A.R. 115-2-3 (Camping, utility, and other fees). The Wildlife and Parks Commission has preliminarily approved the increase of these fees, and both are currently being amended to reflect these increases. While a breakdown of the proposed fee increases is provided below, the draft amended regulations with the accompanying Economic Impact Statement are attached as exhibits.

House Bill 2568 is being introduced to seek ratification of these regulations. The Department expects these amendments will impose at least $1,000,000 or more in implementation and compliance costs over the initial five-year period following their adoption. *See* K.S.A. 77-441. More specifically, the Department estimates a total annual economic impact of $4,603,670, which is derived entirely from the increase in park user fees detailed below.[1]

These fee adjustments are necessary to ensure the continued operation, maintenance, and public safety of our state park system, while remaining fiscally responsible and competitive with our neighboring states. Current fee rates for Kansas parks have remained unchanged since 2017 and 2018. Although prices have not changed, costs to provide the same services have increased significantly.

Costs come in several forms. Utility costs—which are unavoidable expenses necessary to keep campgrounds, restrooms, water systems, and electrical infrastructure safe and operational—have surged. Persistent inflation has compounded the prices for materials and services. And labor pressures that were not present a decade ago continue to grow and hamper the Department's ability to operate efficiently.

In Fiscal Year 2017, the total annual costs to operate all state parks were $11,206,168. By Fiscal Year 2025, those annual costs had increased to $16,233,841. In other words, the cost to provide the same services have increased by $5,027,673, or 45 percent, in only eight years. The growing gap between revenue and the true cost to deliver the same services is unsustainable.

Fee adjustments are also needed to ensure the Kansas Parks System is not unfairly undercutting private businesses that provide the same services. In preparation of this request, the Department reviewed fees of private campgrounds across the state and compared them to its current fees. This analysis demonstrated that state parks have been significantly undercutting private campground operators for years. State parks were never intended to compete with private businesses. By maintaining fee structures well below market rates, private campground operators have been unintentionally harmed.

The Department's current fees are significantly lower than neighboring states. In addition to reviewing rates charged by in-state private businesses, the Department compared its fees to surrounding state park systems within the region. The results demonstrate significant disparities. The following tables illustrate the Department's daily camping rate and annual vehicle permit to surrounding states:

[1] A breakdown of how the Department reached its total economic impact is detailed in the Economic Impact Statement, which is attached to K.A.R. 115-2-2 and K.A.R. 115-2-3.

Daily Camping Rate Comparison:

State	Current Fee Rate
Kansas	$9
Colorado	$22
Oklahoma	$18
Arkansas	$16
Iowa	$16
Nebraska	$15
Missouri	$15

Annual Vehicle Permit Comparison:

State	Current Resident Fee Rate	Current Nonresident Fee Rate
Kansas	$15 (DMV Easy Pass)	$25
Oklahoma	$60	$75
Nebraska	$35	$70
Colorado	$29	$80
Iowa	$40	
Arkansas	Free entry due to dedicated funding	
Missouri	Free entry due to dedicated funding	

To align Kansas with neighboring states and avoid unfair competition with private businesses, the Department has proposed the following fee structure. It is important to note that even with the proposed adjustments, the Department's camping fees will remain at or below regional averages. This ensures Kansas continues to offer affordable outdoor recreation while aligning fees more closely with the actual cost of providing those services.

Proposed Rates:

Fee Type	Current Rate	Proposed Rate
Overnight Camping	$9	$15
One Utility	$9	$11
Two Utility	$11	$13
Three Utility	$12	$15
Annual Vehicle	$25	$40
DMV Passport (Easy Pass)	$15	$30
Senior/Disability Annual Vehicle	$12.50	$20
Daily Vehicle	$5	$8
Senior/Disability Daily Vehicle	$2.50	$4
14-Night Camping Permit	$110	$165
*Elimination of annual camping permit		
**Adjustment of seasonal camping permits to provide a $100 discount on 30-day rate per site type		

Public engagement was a key component of determining the appropriate rates to propose. The Department hosted five public town hall meetings to provide information, gather feedback, and answer questions regarding the proposed camping fee changes. These meetings were held in 2025 at Hillsdale State Park (September 3), El Dorado State Park (September 23), Dodge City (October 24), Hays (November 3), and Manhattan (December 3). In addition, the proposed fees and the rationale for them were presented and discussed during three consecutive Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission meetings held in Garden City (August 14, 2025), Great Bend (November 20, 2025), and Council Grove (January 8, 2026). These meetings provided multiple opportunities for public comment and Commission consideration prior to advancing this request.

In all, the amendments to K.A.R. 115-2-2 and K.A.R. 115-2-3 represent a measured and transparent approach to managing Kansas parks. The amendments are a sensible solution to problems created by a decade of low fees and ever-rising costs. The Department reached this proposal after careful study, extensive public engagement, and conservative economic modeling. Ratifying these camping fee rates will allow Kansas State Parks to continue providing safe, well maintained, and high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities while being fair to park users, taxpayers, and private businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 2568. I am happy to provide additional information at the appropriate time.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Kennedy

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Secretary
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks