

News Release

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Date: June 5, 2017
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Your Entrance Fee Dollars at Work
Visitors should expect an entrance fee increase this summer.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) offers many unique recreational and educational opportunities to the visiting public. A flagship of the National Wildlife Refuge System, this iconic barrier island refuge on the Mid-Atlantic is a mecca for over one million outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds annually including wildlife-watchers and photographers, cyclists, hikers, anglers, hunters, and beach-goers. The amenities offered to visitors at the Refuge include a one-mile long recreational beach (co-maintained and managed with the National Park Service-Assateague Island National Seashore (Seashore)), two over-sand vehicle areas for access to surf-fishing, miles of hiking and bicycle trails, auto tour routes, the historic Assateague Island Lighthouse, and the Bateman Educational and Administrative Center. The iconic Chincoteague Ponies can be viewed by vehicle year-round along Beach Road and on foot on the Refuge's Service Road. The Sunrise Pony walk, which occurs annually the last week of July, is viewed by thousands of visitors. Pony viewing is also available at the new South Corral during seasonal pony roundups.

All of these visitor amenities and opportunities are made possible through the collection of entrance fees. Eighty percent of all fees collected from the sale of Refuge entrance passes are used to maintain and improve the visitor experience including, repairs to the historic Assateague Lighthouse, annual maintenance of roads, trails, visitor health and safety services, fee collection operations, and providing ranger programs and special events. Refuge Law Enforcement, an important element of ensuring year-round public safety, is also partially funded through the collection of entrance fees.





Importantly, frequent repairs are needed to maintain the current beach parking lots due to their proximity and vulnerability to the Atlantic Ocean. Without the collection of entrance fees, Refuge and Seashore maintenance staff would be unable to make needed repairs to the parking lots built to support 1,000 vehicles.

On June 23, 2017, after seeking and considering public input, the Refuge fee structure will change to replace a fee structure unchanged since 2008. Entrance passes, good for one week, will be priced at \$20. Yearly passes, good for one year, will be priced at \$40. Refuge passes are also good for entrance to Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland. Entrance fee will be waived for passengers of local courtesy shuttles, such as those typically used by hotels and motels. Hikers and cyclists can still enter free of charge.

Refuge Manager Kevin Sloan said, “The increase in entrance fees is sorely needed to cover ever-increasing costs associated with maintaining and improving refuge infrastructure that supports visitor activities. This astonishing beautiful refuge is the gem of the Atlantic Coast, offering exceptional wildlife viewing, surf fishing, and beach recreation found nowhere else. In addition, the Refuge is a very strong economic engine for the surrounding area generating an estimated \$50 million for the Town of Chincoteague and \$200 million for Virginia’s Eastern Shore annually. The fee increase is certainly offset by the plethora of high-quality visitor experiences offered at the Refuge and the fact that our entrance pass is good at Assateague Island National Seashore in Maryland, which offers its own very impressive array of amenities.”



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