

Frequently Asked Questions

About State Parks and Reservoirs Group Program Fees

Who pays the fees and how much will they pay?

- **Groups led by DNR staff.** Any group, regardless of age, participating as a part of an educational program scheduled with an interpreter or other staff person at a state park or reservoir pays \$1/person. This \$1/person is the only cost for the group, regardless of whether the entrance gate is open or not.
- **Groups led by teachers when the entrance gate is open.** Any group entering a state park or reservoir on a school bus or in a passenger van for a teacher-led program (no DNR staff participation) when the entrance gate is open pays \$2/person. This applies to any group with participants of any age, including preschool groups. If the entrance gate is not open, teacher-led groups will not be charged (this is the same approach we use with other visitors when the entrance gate is not staffed.) This fee is equivalent to the current passenger van/pedestrian/bicycle fee.
- **Groups requesting a program at their site/school.** Any group requesting an educational program at a school or other location presented by state park or reservoir staff pays a \$2/person up to a maximum one-day fee of \$500.00. This fee applies to schools, scouts, garden clubs, service clubs and other organized groups.

Why are groups required to pay fees?

The staff who lead our field trips and off-site programs are trained in natural and cultural history and in interpretation and education. Teachers and students are provided with a high quality experience during their visit. Richard Lieber, the founder of the Indiana State Park system and the first director of the Department of Conservation, had a strong belief in a “user pays” approach to managing public parks and recreation areas. This philosophy has sustained our state parks and reservoirs through nearly a century of economic ups and downs. Currently, 66% of our budget comes from user fees. Only 33% comes from legislative appropriations (tax dollars). We are actively working to be more self-sufficient so that our funding levels are stable even when the state’s fiscal situation causes reductions in our legislatively appropriated funds. We see approximately 80,000 students, Scouts and other groups annually. The group program fee will provide additional revenue to support our interpretive and education staff and programs.

Why do groups who request a program pay less than groups that come in on their own?

We encourage teachers and group leaders to use the services of our interpretive naturalists to enhance the experiences their students receive at our sites. Keeping fees at a minimum encourages schools to schedule a structured program that may include a guided walk, a talk or a visit to an interpretive center/historic facility. Many groups that come on their own focus primarily on a less structured recreational experience and may have a greater impact on facilities and resources. We will be evaluating the interpretive program fee structure in 2007 and may make adjustments in 2008. Comments or questions can be sent to the Chief Interpreter at vbasman@dnr.IN.gov or 317-234-4926.

Can we still apply for an educational gate waiver?

No. This gate waiver was eliminated in 2002 to reduce paperwork and ensure that program fees are applied fairly.

If waivers are no longer available, do we have to pay a gate fee AND a program fee?

No, not for DNR-led programs. Any group that pays the program fee does not pay a gate fee. The total per person charge for an organized group with a scheduled program is \$1/person. Programs must be scheduled in advance. For teacher-led programs (no DNR staff involved), the passenger van/pedestrian/bicycle fee is required (see above.)

Can our group perform a service project in lieu of a fee?

In general, no. We encourage groups to volunteer for service projects, but it is logistically difficult for us to provide service projects for school or other large groups in lieu of a program fee because of staff preparation time, materials and equipment required for service projects and because of the large number of groups with which we work. If the primary purpose of the group visit is a service project (for example, an Eagle Scout project) a program may be requested as a part of the preparation for the project and the fee may be waived. Requests such as this are evaluated by the property manager at each site based on group size and staff/project availability.

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If a group is teacher-led why is a fee required?

We encourage groups to visit our properties and explore our sites. These groups are using trails, restroom facilities, picnic shelters, playground equipment and other resources that must be maintained. The passenger van/school bus fee provides additional operational dollars to help maintain the natural, cultural and physical resources at our properties.

How are the fees collected?

It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that cash or a single check with the total fee is presented at the entrance gate or to the staff leading the program on the day of the program. An invoice can be provided if needed, and property staff will provide a receipt on the day of the visit if contact is made in advance.

Are there any exceptions to this group fee?

Service clubs or other organizations with whom we have or may be forming partnerships are not charged the off site (\$2/person) fee for presentations promoting the site. This decision will be made by the property manager.

Presentations for off-site groups that are primarily promotional in nature will not require a fee. (For example, a talk about "What's New" at a property for a service club would not require payment of a fee, but a talk about a natural or cultural history topic such as mosquitoes, bats, or the Underground Railroad would require payment of a fee.)

Schools or other groups who work with the property interpreter to set up pre-trip classroom visits prior to a property visit will only be charged for an on-site program at the property. A pre-trip classroom visit includes content that focuses primarily on what the group members can expect during their field trip. (Pre-trip classroom visits may be requested at any property, but are not always possible for every group due to staff availability.)

No group program fee is charged for workshops that have funding from other sources. This includes programs such as Project WILD and Project Learning Tree Workshops, Project WET and Hoosier Riverwatch, Hunter Education, Boater Education, etc.

The DNR director and his/her designee(s) has the option to waive fees for certain justifiable property events.

What if a student cannot pay?

We do not want any student to miss a field trip or program at his/her school because the child cannot afford it. First, check with your principal or your PTO to see if funds are available from those sources. Some schools raise the funds for field trips by collecting aluminum cans or selling items. Some local service clubs will assist with field trip funding. If no school or other funding sources are available, we will waive the fee for any student who is receiving a free school lunch.

I don't want to put a student on the spot who can't pay. How will you know how to waive fees?

We will provide each teacher who asks with a simple form that documents the number of students for whom fee waivers are requested. Again, this is only for students who are receiving a free school lunch. The form will not ask for names or other personal information. This form will be turned in when the check is presented at the entrance gate or to the interpreter.

What will the money be used for?

Funds collected will be deposited in the dedicated account for each division, and for state parks and reservoirs will become a part of that 66% of our funding mentioned above.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

Contact the interpreter or property manager at the state park or reservoir where you plan to visit. If you have questions or comments about the fee structure, you can contact the Chief Interpreter at 317-234-4926.

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Teacher Resources On the Web

The Department of Natural Resources offers several resources and websites to support educators. Go to www.IN.gov/dnr and click on "Education" for more info.

- State Parks and Reservoirs Teacher Resource Guide is available at www.IN.gov/dnr/parklake/pdf/teacherbooklet.pdf. This guide provides an overview of our site resources and themes, and lists contact numbers for scheduling field trips.
- Look for downloadable activities for students on the "Just for Kids" page of the State Parks and Reservoirs webpage at <http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2419.htm>
- The Natural Resources Education Center provides workshops and resources for teachers statewide at www.IN.gov/dnr/nrec.