



Mount Rainier National Park

Climbing Program Cost Analysis - 2010

Mount Rainier National Park is proposing to increase the cost of an annual climbing pass. This document describes the rationale for an increase and the cost of the unique programs and services that directly support a world class climbing experience on Mount Rainier.



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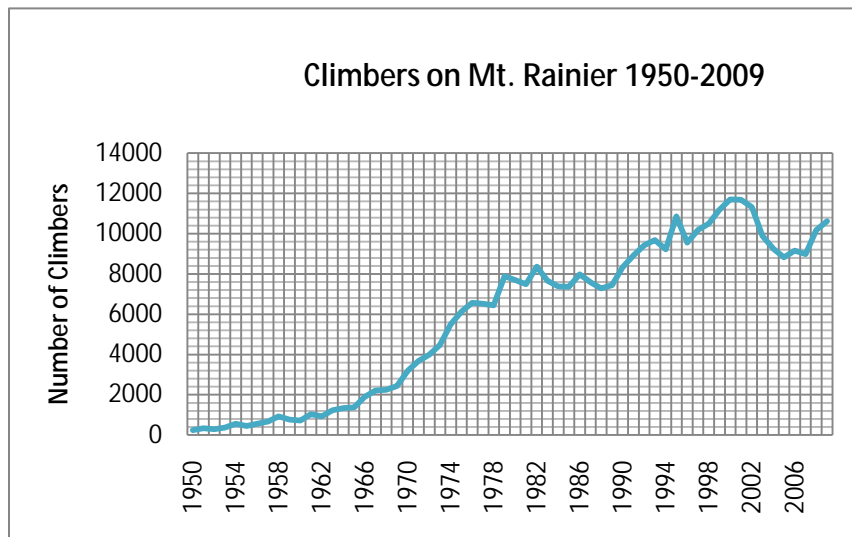
Climbing Program Cost Analysis 2010

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Mount Rainier: A climbing and mountaineering destination

Mount Rainier has been a climbing destination for over 150 years. Hazard Stevens and Philemon Beecher Van Trump documented the first ascent in 1870 and now the number of climbers on the mountain exceeds 10,000 per year. Mount Rainier became the nation’s fifth national park in 1899 through the persistent efforts of Puget Sound business and community leaders, and mountaineering enthusiasts. At 14,411 feet, Mount Rainier is the 5th highest and most heavily glaciated peak in the lower 48 states. “The Mountain,” as locals commonly refer to it, is perhaps the best known icon of the Pacific Northwest. In the last 10 years, over 100,000 people have attempted to climb Mount Rainier!



97% of Mount Rainier National Park is designated wilderness. Climbers from around the world recognize the exceptional mountaineering opportunities found on Mount Rainier. It’s still possible to find solitude and pristine beauty on the mountain. Nowhere else in the lower 48 states can climbers find such a spectacular and challenging combination of glaciers, ice falls, alpine approaches

and limitless views within a two-hour drive of a major metropolitan area. Mount Rainier is North America's premiere mountaineering destination.

Alpine mountaineering differs from other forms of climbing in that it requires a multi-day, expedition-style approach to gain a summit. Cascade Mountain volcanoes and Alaska provide the majority of this kind of climbing opportunity in the United States. Consequently, Mount Rainier has long been the primary training ground and springboard to other technical mountaineering routes around the world. Few other mountains in the United States experience so many people, in such technical terrain, participating in expedition style climbs. In turn, this creates public use, safety and resource protection challenges unique to Mount Rainier National Park.

Climbing Program Goals, Responsibilities and Services

The mission of the National Park Service is to support visitor use and enjoyment consistent with the preservation of each park's unique qualities, features, histories, experiences and values.

A goal of Mount Rainier National Park is to provide visitors with the opportunity for a world-class climbing experience. This goal is achieved through a variety of programs and services that support climber safety, protect the mountain, and otherwise regulate public use, including limits on party size, camping activities and guide operations. Park managers have affirmative responsibilities for public and employee safety, and the protection of the park's resources and values.

Long experience in managing climbing activities at Mount Rainier has demonstrated that certain, essential climber services are necessary to meet the park's goal and responsibilities. These include providing up-to-date information on route conditions, weather forecasts and potential hazards to help people make good decisions and stay safe on the mountain. Orientations are conducted to help prevent accidents and injuries requiring rescue, and also emphasize leave-no-trace and other best practices to minimize the environmental impacts of 10,000+ people/30,000 user days a year. Toilets are provided at the high camps, and a blue bag system is in place, to remove tons of human waste each year. Party sizes and camp limits are regulated to protect the quality of the experience, stay within the physical carrying capacities of the camps and routes, and protect wilderness and other resources. A cadre of highly skilled climbing rangers and volunteers are available to help climbers, share their knowledge, monitor use on the upper mountain, and respond to emergencies.

Workload factors for the Park's Climbing Program include:

- Registration of over 10,000 climbers each year; administering the climbing pass program
- Providing up to date climbing route and safety information
- Keeping weather, climbing, route, and climbing related information updated on a web blog
- Staffing of two Climbing Information Stations at Paradise and White River that provide climber information, orientations and passes

- Staffing of two high camps at 10,000' (Camp Muir and Camp Schurman), briefing hundreds of climbers each evening during peak season.
- Responding to dozens of climbing related searches and rescues; providing emergency medical services
- Maintaining toilets at the high camps and hauling several thousands of pounds of human waste off the upper mountain to processing facilities
- Managing a "blue bag" program to keep human wastes off the climbing routes
- Maintaining and operating high camp facilities and communication systems
- Providing climbing rangers with competencies in core skill areas, including mountaineering, search and rescue, emergency medical services, incident management, and aviation
- Operating a fee collection and point of sale system
- Monitoring the alpine wilderness areas for impacts related to visitor use and climate change

The administrative workload associated with managing and operating a complex Climbing Program involves hiring, scheduling, supervising, tracking and evaluating employees; programming a budget of several hundred thousand dollars; replacing gear, equipment, and supplies; coordinating extensive staff training; maintaining interagency agreements and relationships with partner agencies and organizations; coordinating operations with the guide services and assisting in their annual evaluations; meeting with climber organizations and groups; developing and improving program services; and compiling reports and other program documents.

Climbing Ranger Core Skills

Climbing rangers live and operate in the high risk environment of the upper mountain, one that has already accounted for 87 climbing related fatalities, including the deaths of two park employees in 1995. To function safely in this environment, and serve the needs of the climbing public, Mount Rainier's climbing rangers need proficiency in five core skills areas. It takes several years to achieve these skill and certification levels, and then annual, ongoing education and practice to maintain them.

1. Climbing Ability – US Grade IV Alpine Mountaineering
 - a. Years of climbing experience
 - b. Climbing resumes are evaluated
2. Emergency Medical Technician – Basic (EMT-B)
 - a. 110-160 hours of classroom and field time
 - b. Usually 3-4 months of course work
 - c. 1-3 years of practical experience before proficiency is at an adequate level
3. Technical Rope Rescue
 - a. 1-2 weeks of training, 8 -12 hours per day
 - b. A few years of practical scenarios and real rescue time
4. Helicopter Crewmember/ Helicopter Manager
 - a. 1 week of training / 8-10 hours per day

- b. 1-2 years of practical experience required before certification
 - c. 3-4 years of practical experience and 1 more week of class time for helicopter manager certification
5. US Level 2 or equivalent Avalanche Safety Training
- a. 4-7 days of course work and field time after completing Level 1 training
 - b. 1-2 seasons of practical experience before proficiency is adequate

Climbing rangers also receive training in other subjects such as; 1) Incident Command System, 2) Incident Leadership and Organization, 3) Weather Forecasting for Mountain Weather Phenomena, 4) Ski Patrol Litter Operation, 5) Fee Collection Policy and, 6) Ranger Station Operations, 7) Wilderness Management, etc.

From safety, program effectiveness and cost efficiency standpoints, it's important to keep employees with these specialized skills and abilities coming back to the park each year, and to minimize staff turnover.

The Climbing Program Shortfall

The park's Climbing Program is currently unable to fulfill its service and management responsibilities due to inadequate staffing, in turn, a consequence of inadequate program funding. Below are some examples of how staffing and funding shortfalls are impacting Program services, operations and safety.

1. Often only (1) climbing ranger is on duty at high camp (Camp Muir and Camp Schurman) during peak season, with adverse consequences , including:
 - a. A single ranger cannot effectively contact all the climbers at Camp Muir and Camp Schurman during peak use
 - b. A single ranger may not be able to find another qualified and trained climber with whom to respond to a rescue.
 - c. A single ranger is unable to climb, without incurring unacceptable risk soloing, to obtain accurate route information and monitor resource impacts.
2. Often no climbing rangers are on duty at high camp during peak climbing season.
 - a. In 2010, Camp Schurman was not staffed some days each week throughout the summer.
 - b. In 2010, Camp Muir went unstaffed many nights. Hundreds of people stay at Camp Muir, with highly varying skill and experience levels. Leaving Camp Muir unstaffed is very undesirable and leads to many visitor and rescue related problems.
3. In 2010, climbing rangers were not scheduled in the Climbing Information Centers (CIC).
 - a. It's been a long standing program goal to have rangers who have recently climbed the mountain be the ones actually issuing permits and making the initial contacts at the ranger stations at Paradise and White River. No climbing rangers were available to staff the Paradise CIC in 2010 as the available rangers were dedicated to the upper mountain.
 - b. The result is less accurate and current information relayed to visitors as they begin their climbs. Visitors do not have the opportunity to talk with someone with detailed, current knowledge of climbing conditions and hazards.
4. Reduced Hours at the Paradise Climbing Information Center (CIC)

- a. Historically, the CIC is open around 12 hours / day (6am to 6pm).
 - b. In 2010, the Paradise CIC was only open 6am to 3pm.
5. During searches and rescues in 2010, all the climbing rangers were needed during most of the incidents.
 - a. This meant that the climbing rangers were working through their days off on rescue incidents and were NOT getting a period of rest. This heightened their risk of accident or injury.
 - b. This also meant that there were never enough "contingency" resources available for backup or response to another incident.
6. Web Blog updates were fewer because the available climbing rangers were at high camp by themselves.
 - a. Inadequate staffing required climbing rangers to spend more of their time at high camp. Because they were there by themselves, they could not climb...and by not climbing, were unable to post up-to-date route conditions.
 - b. The inability to update the web blog with real time information may be mitigated in 2011 if the park establishes a data link to the high camps. However, this wouldn't overcome the staffing shortfall problem that has kept rangers off the climbing routes.
 - c. Blog updates are a crucial component of mountain safety and keeping rescues and injuries from happening.
7. Funding shortfalls require most climbing rangers to be laid off work before the end of the climbing season.
 - a. Climbing rangers entered on duty April 5th in 2010 in order to train before the public came.
 - b. Most of the climbing rangers were terminated by Labor Day, well before the end of the climbing season.
8. Compliance with blue bag requirements is decreasing on the climbing routes.
 - a. Rangers are finding more and more inappropriately disposed bluebags and human waste along the climbing routes.
 - b. This could be mitigated by improved staffing that places more rangers on the routes and at the high camps to contact climbers.
9. Yearly Mountaineering Report
 - a. Historically, a report has been completed each year for Mount Rainier.
 - b. Inadequate staffing is available to complete this report in the off-season.
 - c. The report is used by the media, alpine clubs, and is an important public record of the climbing activities on Mount Rainier.
10. Basic Research and Development
 - a. Inadequate staffing to develop and utilize social and other media to provide up to date information or improved orientation materials.
 - b. Lack of staffing to develop user-friendly online registration, payment, and reservation systems.

- c. Lack of overhead staffing to streamline workflow procedures within the climbing unit.

What led to these shortfalls?

Two factors have contributed to the current funding shortfall in the park’s Climbing Program: Climber numbers - and the resulting pass revenues that support the climbing program - were expected to increase over time and this hasn’t happened. Concurrently, eight years of unfunded cost increases since 2003 have taken their toll on the program’s budget and staffing.

During the period from 1989 through 2001, the annual increase in climber numbers on Mount Rainier averaged 4.5% per year. This growth rate was used to project potential climbing pass fee revenues into the future when the climbing cost recovery fee was last analyzed in 2002. Had this growth rate in climber numbers continued, a \$30 climbing pass would have generated approximately \$470,000 in 2010...about \$200,000 more than was collected. Annual climber numbers and pass revenues have essentially remained flat since 2003, as depicted in the below table.

Inflation and other unfunded cost increases have also adversely impacted the program. The annual rate of inflation has averaged 2.9% since 2002; inflation alone accounts for a ~23% decrease in the purchasing power of pass revenues. Program costs have exceeded the rate of inflation in some years.

Year	Climber Numbers	Cost Recovery Fee Revenue*
2003	9897	\$237,504
2004	9251	\$268,961
2005	8824	\$226,739
2006	9154	\$228,220
2007	8976	\$239,442
2008	10180	\$268,000
2009	10616	\$289,000
2010	10650	\$273,000

*Note: Cost recovery fee revenues from annual climber pass sales do not directly equate to the number of climbers each year. The guide services pay franchise fees, but guides are not required to obtain an annual climbing pass. Also, some climbers make multiple summit attempts in a given year, increasing climber numbers, but not pass sales. The collection of fees at the end of the fiscal year (September) can be delayed to October, thereby rolling over that period’s money into the next fiscal year.

Restoring the Program

The following table compares the 2010 Climbing Program with the 2011 program that would be supported by a combination of a higher annual climbing pass fees and additional use of the franchise fees already paid by the guide services. The 2010 Climbing Program was deficient in meeting management’s goals and responsibilities to protect the public, park employees and resources. Two potential programs are described for 2011. The first, described as “Essential” and based on an annual climbing pass fee of \$43, would support

a staffing level and program considered the minimum required. The second, described as “Enhanced” and based on a climbing pass fee of \$58, would enable additional shoulder and winter season staffing and the development of services and other program improvements considered very beneficial. A separate table of program fund sources is also provided.

Climbing Program Proposal - Cost Analysis Summary						
	2010 Deficient Program (\$30 Pass Fee)		Essential 2011 Program (-\$43 Pass Fee)		Enhanced 2011 Program (-\$58 Pass Fee)	
Grade / Job	# of Positions	Cost	# of Positions	Cost	# of Positions	Cost
Program Manager (GS-11)	1	\$100,000.00	1	\$100,000.00	1	\$100,000.00
Permanent Climbing Supervisor (GS-09) (Partial year)	2	\$62,200.00	2	\$83,200.00	3	\$179,400.00
Seasonal Climbing Supervisor (GS-09)			1	\$31,200.00	0	\$0.00
Seasonal Lead Climbing Information Ranger (GS-07)	1	\$25,350.00	1	\$25,350.00	1	\$37,050.00
Seasonal Lead Climbing Rangers (GS-07)	6	\$123,552.00	3	\$61,776.00	3	\$67,392.00
Seasonal Climbing Rangers (GS-05)			7	\$146,432.00	8	\$188,032.00
Seasonal High Camp Laborer (WG-04)	2	\$41,184.00	3	\$61,776.00	3	\$75,504.00
SCA Interns (Climbing Information Center)	2	\$11,700.00	2	\$12,500.00	2	\$13,000.00
Volunteer Climbing Rangers	2	\$10,296.00	3	\$10,296.00	3	\$10,296.00
Utilities Laborer/Lead	1	\$30,000.00	1	\$30,000.00	1	\$30,000.00
Other Base Funded Support	9	\$95,000.00	9	\$95,000.00	9	\$95,000.00
(Subtotal: Personal Services)		\$499,282.00		\$657,530.00		\$795,674.00
Equipment / Supplies/ Aviation/Utilities		\$73,000.00		\$80,000.00		\$90,000.00
Totals	26	\$572,282.00	33	\$737,530.00	34	\$885,674.00

Funding Strategies for Current and Proposed Programs						
	2010 Season		Essential 2011 Program		Enhanced 2011 Program	
Pass Revenue	\$30 Pass	\$273,000.00	\$43 Pass	\$414,950.00	\$58 Pass	\$559,700.00
Park Base		\$225,000.00		\$225,000.00		\$225,000.00
Centennial Initiative		\$26,500.00		\$26,500.00		\$26,500.00
Franchise Fees		\$19,000.00		\$71,000.00		\$71,000.00
Glacier Monitoring		\$1,706.00		\$1,706.00		\$1,706.00
Volunteer In Park		\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
Total		\$547,206.00	Total	\$741,156.00	Total	\$885,906.00

Cost Analysis Table - Personnel and Other Program Costs

NPS budgets can be broken into two categories, personal and non-personal services. Personal services are the direct cost of paying an employee, such as their salaries and overtime, and if a term or permanent employee, their, health and retirement benefit costs. Non-personal services are supplies, equipment, utilities, automobiles, travel costs, training contractors, aircraft, etc. Each year, between \$55,000 and

\$75,000 is spent on non-personal services. The combined personal and non-personal services costs associated with managing human waste on the mountain are approximately \$100,000 per year.

Description of Program Positions

Following is a brief description of the positions listed in the cost analysis and their primary roles and responsibilities:

Program Manager/GS-11 Supervisory Ranger – This person is a permanent, full-time employee and is the only one in the program. He/she is responsible for overall management, supervision, leadership and administration of the Climbing Program. Also serves as the park-wide aviation program manager and SAR program manager. It is funded by park base.

Climbing Supervisors/GS-9 Rangers – There are currently two subject-to-furlough, permanent positions, that work for 6+months per year. They supervise, lead and oversee field and patrol operations, including the high camps.

Seasonal Climbing Supervisor/GS-9 Ranger - Duties as above, except as a seasonal employee. This seasonal position, like all others in the park and federal government, is not covered by retirement or health benefits, and works for less than 6-months each year.

Seasonal Lead Climbing Rangers/GS-7 Rangers - Journey level climbing rangers qualified in all core skill areas. Lead patrols, training climbs, projects, and are field team leaders on search and rescue incidents. Currently 6 positions are funded 4-6 months.

Seasonal Lead/Climbing Information Center (CIC)/GS-7 - Link between the climbing rangers and the public. Leads Climbing Information Center/Ranger Station staff in disseminating the information produced by the climbing rangers; accounts for passes; registers and provides climber orientations; issues blue bags. Develops media and maintains the climbing blog. Currently one position funded 4-6 months.

Seasonal Climbing Rangers/GS-5 - Apprentice /not yet fully qualified climbing rangers that would staff the upper mountain and high camps for 5-6 months. None funded in 2010; seven to eight positions needed in 2011. These would be funded primarily through the proposed cost recovery fee increase.

Seasonal High Camp Laborer/WG-4 - Duty stationed at the high camps, Muir and Schurman, these laborer positions are specifically tasked with maintaining, cleaning, and making repairs to the toilets and blue bag systems. Assist in annual flights to remove human waste from the high camps, and then transport it to processing centers.

Student Conservation Association (SCA) Interns - College-aged interns paid a small stipend for food expenses and provided housing. The proposed fee increase would support up to five SCAs to provide public information and safety patrols on the Muir Snowfield, staff the CIC and work on specific tasks like developing media.

Volunteer Climbing Rangers – Program volunteers are reimbursed a stipend of \$10 / day and work 40-hour weeks for the same 4-6 month season as the other climbing rangers. Attend technical trainings, and staff

the high camps CICs. These are generally teamed with a paid and seasoned climbing ranger. (3) Volunteer Climbing Rangers are needed in 2011.

Lead Utilities Laborer/WG-7 - A permanent, subject-to-furlough position funded about 6- months each year. Supervises the seasonal laborers at the high camps and oversees human waste management operations on the upper mountain. This is a base funded position.

Other Base Funded Support – Estimated cost of other positions or programs directly engaged in the supporting the Climbing Program and its services, including the chief ranger, radio/telecom/IT specialists, concession manager, White River Ranger Station staff, carpenters and fee administrators.

Equipment, Supplies, Aviation and Utilities - Climbing, search and rescue, emergency medical service equipment and supplies; radios, uniforms, communication equipment, GPS devices and computers; specialized climbing clothing and gear; materials to repair high camp facilities; toilet paper, cleaning and maintenance supplies; blue bags; aviation support for high camps; transport of two tons of human waste off the mountain; transport and processing fees for human waste, vehicle lease costs; housing costs for volunteers and SCAs, etc.

Description of Funding Sources

Park Base: Annual funding appropriated by Congress each year for the operation of the National Park Service (also called ONPS funding.) Each national park unit, including, Mount Rainier, has a specific appropriation. Intended to support basic operations for visitor services and resource preservation, it is the park's primary source of funding. Park managers allocate this funding internally to all programs.

Climbing Cost Recovery: Fee revenue collected from the sales of annual climbing passes. This funding is spent exclusively on services and programs that benefit climbers and the upper mountain.

Centennial Initiative: Base funding added to park budgets by Congress in FY2006 with the intent of restoring seasonal staffing to provide visitor services. Though base funding, it is tracked separately within the NPS.

Franchise Fees: Fees paid by the park's five concession contract holders, including the three guide services, for the opportunity to provide certain commercial visitor services. The fee varies based on the specific contract, but is based on a percentage of gross receipts. Primarily used for contracting efforts and to rehabilitate visitor facilities.

Glacier Monitoring: Project funding ...funding that the park must compete for, and that can vary considerably from year-to-year...that is used to cover the cost of climbing ranger participation in a long-standing glacier monitoring study. A small amount is generally available each year so it is described in the funding table.

Volunteer Account: Small amount of funding generally allocated each year to the Climbing Program to offset some costs associated with full-time volunteers, including the \$10/day stipend and housing costs picked up by the benefitting program. Mount Rainier must compete each year with other parks for this funding, a relatively small fund within the NPS. Mount Rainier relies heavily on volunteers to operate the park, serve visitors, and protect or restore resources: 2,016 volunteers have contributed 74,000 hours in 2010!

Essential 2011 Program – \$43 Annual Climbing Pass

Both 2011 Climbing Programs described in the cost analysis would fulfill park and program goals and responsibilities through the primary climbing season (April 15 – September 15). Projected funding from a \$43 Annual Climbing Pass would support the following services and operations, considered essential by park managers:

- 2 climbing rangers on duty at both high camps (Muir and Schurman) 24/7
 - Perhaps the most important aspect of this proposal
 - This affects safety, climbing, public information, resource protection... everything
- 1 climbing ranger on duty at the climbing information center 7-days a week
 - Restores Climber Information Center staffing by climbing rangers, better serving climbers
- Return Climbing Information Center Hours (6:00 am to 6:00 pm)
 - Better service levels that match climber arrival times
 - Substantially lessens registration and fee hassles for the public
- Field GS-09 supervision at high camps
 - Identified as a priority in all of the boards of review from serious employee accidents
- 5-10 conditions updates / week on the climbing blog (mid-May to Sept 30)
 - Climbing and route information is directly linked to public safety
- Yearly Mountaineering Report
 - Used by climbing communities and organizations to gauge use and priorities
 - Historical record of climbing management and priorities of Mount Rainier
- Comprehensive Climbing Ranger skills training (pre-season)
 - A responsibility of the employer to adequately prepare and train its employees; ensures trained staff are available for early season rescues
- Adequate rescue resources on stand-by (on shift)
 - A major factor for employee safety
 - Provides for contingency resources during rescue events,
 - Provides for incident leadership staff who are familiar with the mountain and its resources
- Renewed emphasis on resource protection including bluebags and human waste
- More prompt solo climbing permit processing
 - Currently 60-80 permits are issued each season
 - Could improve turn around time on review and approval by 50%
- Permanent climbing ranger staff development
 - Permits the retention of a staff whom returns through the years (2-4 years ideal)
- Seasonal rangers to cover the main climbing season
 - The majority of this budget proposal provides for field climbing rangers

Enhanced 2011 Program - \$58 Annual Climbing Pass

An annual climbing pass fee exceeding \$43 would support additional services and program improvements that benefit climbers and the mountain. A cost climbing pass in the \$58 range would enable retention of some staff in the shoulder or winter seasons, beyond the April 15 – September 15 period, to improve or establish new services and programs, including:

- More avalanche oriented information in the winter, spring, and early summer seasons
 - This would develop a skill parameter already in the program
 - As demonstrated by a fatality in 2010, avalanche information is necessary for summit climbs
 - Categorized and classified standard route descriptions through avalanche terrain
- Significantly improve climber services and registration systems
 - Develop an online climbing pass purchase system
 - Develop online climbing permit and reservation system
 - Develop public comment and route conditions reporting
 - Develop climbing information newsletter
 - Develop displays in the climbing information center
 - Improved self-registration process
 - Develop visitor experience surveys
 - Standard detailed route descriptions published
 - Develop climbing information and safety videos (registration, avalanche, human waste, etc.)
- Shoulder and winter season blog updates
 - Would prime the climbers with lots of early-season information
 - Would help bring the season to a close in the fall
- Attendance to public meetings, functions, and events
 - Mountain Rescue
 - American Alpine Club
 - Mountaineers
 - REI, etc...
- Shoulder and winter search and rescue resource availability
 - Better SAR organization and response through preplanning
- More coordinated training with cooperators in Resource Protection, SAR, and aviation
 - Climbing guide services
 - Mountain Rescue Units
 - Locals and volunteers

Planning for the Future – Offsetting the Effects of Inflation and Cost Increases

The annual rate of inflation for the last 10 years has averaged 2.9%. Inflation and other unfunded cost increases will again take their toll on the park's Climbing Program unless some provision is made to adjust to incremental cost increases over time. Accordingly, Mount Rainier proposes to institute annual adjustments in the cost of a climbing pass based on increase in the Consumer Price Index, or similar methodology that tracks actual program costs.

Following the proposed increase in the cost of an annual climbing pass to \$43-\$58, the cost of the pass would be recalculated each year based on the prior year's trailing cost increases (or potentially, decreases.) The graph below depicts a hypothetical example of how the cost of a \$43 annual pass in 2011 would change over time if costs increased at an annual rate of 2.9%.

YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Climbing Pass Price	\$43.00	\$44.00	\$45.00	\$47.00	\$48.00	\$49.00	\$50.00

Annual adjustments in the cost of a Mount Rainier climbing pass are necessary to sustain a viable Climbing Program and avoid a repeat of the slow loss of capacity and services that has occurred since 2003.

-END -