

Frequently Asked Questions

About State Parks Property Group Program Fees

We are a division of 36 unique properties, each with differing program content, staffing levels, and locations around the state. Due to the popularity of our group programs, we have guidelines for our properties to follow when deciding on fees. These guidelines are meant to provide the best experience not only for the user group, but also for other groups and the general public who may be visiting the property at the same time.

A group's final fee will ultimately be determined by the interpretive naturalist and the property manager. Please be sure to contact the chosen property well in advance of your visit to be sure you understand the fee your group will be charged.

Please note these general guidelines regarding group program fees:

Who pays the fees and how much will they pay?

- **Groups lead by DNR staff**

Any group, regardless of age, participating in an educational program specifically scheduled with an interpreter and comprising the main focus of their visit to the state park property pays \$1/person. This \$1/person is the only cost for the group, regardless of whether the entrance gate is open. To qualify for this special fee and not the normal \$2/person gate fee for commercial vehicles, the primary purpose of the visit must be the interpretive program. Groups planning to swim, hike on their own, picnic, or use other property facilities must pay the \$2/person gate fee charged for commercial vehicles. If an interpretive program is requested in addition to using the property for recreational purposes, a possible \$1/person program fee may be charged in addition to the \$2/person gate fee, depending on the complexity of the interpretive program.

In general, a program is considered to be 30-60 minutes in length, depending on participant age and the complexity of the program and may use one, two, or three DNR staff. If the group wishes to have more time and/or staff available to them, then the fee may be increased accordingly.

In addition, if the program includes craft or other supplies, an additional charge or suggested donation may be requested by the interpretive staff. This additional fee (or donation) is dependent on the current budget allotments at each individual property and supplies available.

The final decision of fees to be charged a group is ultimately determined by the property manager and the interpreter.

- **Groups led by teachers when the entrance gate is open.**

Any group entering a state park property on a school bus or in a passenger van for a teacher-led program (no DNR interpretive program) 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 guests 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 staff pays a \$2/person up to a maximum one-day fee of \$500. This fee applies to schools, scouts, garden clubs, service clubs and other organized groups.

An additional travel fee may be assessed depending on distance traveled, generally if more than 30 minutes. Travel fee, if assessed, and group fee will be agreed upon in advance of the program

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 Parks 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 park properties through nearly a century of economic ups and downs. Currently, 90% of our budget comes from user fees. Only 10% comes from legislative appropriations (i.e., tax dollars).

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. When compared to almost any other educational or recreational opportunity for groups today, the \$2/person fee can clearly be seen as a bargain.

Why do groups who request a program as the main point of their day’s activities 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 and to help them better understand the heritage of our state park properties. Keeping fees at a minimum encourages schools to schedule a structured program that may include a guided walk, a talk or an interpreter-led visit to an interpretive center/historic facility. Comments or questions can be directed to the property’s interpretive naturalist, or the interpretive manager at amanuel@dnr.IN.gov or 317-234-4926.

Do we have to pay a gate fee AND a program fee?

Not necessarily. Any group that has the interpretive program as the main focus of their visit pays only the program fee. The total per person charge for an organized group with a scheduled interpretive 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 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.

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, check, or credit card 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 before 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 State Park property 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. These programs may have their own fees attached to them.

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 payment is presented at the entrance gate or to the interpreter.

How will the money be used?

Funds collected will be deposited in the dedicated account for each division, and for state park properties will become a part of that 90% of our funding mentioned above.

Who can I contact if I have questions?

Contact the interpreter or property manager at the state park property you plan to visit. If you have questions or comments about the fee structure, you call the interpretive manager at 317-234-4926.

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