



T A B O R Issue Brief

The Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR) restricts the amount of revenue that can be spent on state and local services—from health care to transportation to education. In the 1990s, TABOR forced reductions in many state services, and since 2000 the revenue situation has become especially dire. TABOR’s ratchet effect won’t let services recover, even when the economy rebounds, so the cuts caused by revenue shortages remain in place. Services will never be able to catch up or keep pace with real economic growth—and will, in fact, continue to shrink—unless we change TABOR’s spending limits and eliminate the ratchet effect.

According to Legislative Council’s Dec. 2004 forecast, under current revenue projections, the General Assembly will have to reduce FY 2005-06 expenditures by \$244.9 million to accommodate allowable General Fund growth as prescribed by TABOR, while simultaneously giving back \$459.2 million in refunds. Colorado’s improving revenue environment means that programs supported by either General Fund or cash funds will compete against each other under TABOR spending restrictions.

TABOR Briefs:

- Agriculture
- Art and Culture
- Colorado’s Economy
- Community Colleges
- Higher Education
- Judiciary
- Medicaid and Health
- Mental Health
- Public Health
- Public Libraries
- Rural Colorado
- State Parks
- Transportation

Colorado State Parks

- Colorado is recognized for its outdoor recreation opportunities and active lifestyle. The state’s 40 parks serve over 11 million visitors each year. State parks attract tourists and benefit local economies as visitors spend \$200 million annually within 50 miles of state parks.

State decision makers and the public appear determined to maintain spending restrictions outlined in the constitutional Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR), which severely limits the ability of State Parks to maintain adequate growth.

Colorado State Park Strategic Plan, 2005-2009

- Colorado ranks 5th lowest in state support of park operating costs, 7th lowest in the level of support for parks out of total state expenditures, and 9th lowest in state support per park visitor.
- Between 2001 and 2005, the percentage of park operating costs covered by the state’s General Fund fell 37%. This equaled a reduction of \$1.2 million in funding and the elimination of 26 full-time positions.
- If state funding for parks had kept up with inflation and population growth over the last two years, Colorado’s parks would have received \$2.3 million (45%) more General Fund support than was appropriated in 2004.
- In February of 2004, following three years of severe budget cuts, the Joint Budget Committee recommended cutting General Fund support for parks by 50%. Following a public outcry, these cuts were vetoed.

TABOR ISSUE BRIEF: COLORADO STATE PARKS

- As the 2005-2006 budget process gets underway, the Division of Parks is considering applying for enterprise status to avoid TABOR restrictions. Growth in state park funding has been unduly restricted by TABOR's limits on cash funds (i.e. user fees). When park revenue growth exceeds TABOR limits, it drives greater refunds and reduces the amount of General Fund available for parks, as well as other state services.
- If granted enterprise status, state parks would be exempt from TABOR restrictions but would almost certainly have to reduce services or raise user fees to cover all costs. 53% of Colorado residents, both park users and non-users, support increased state funding for parks, and another 43% support maintaining current funding levels.
- Park user fees were raised in 2003 and may have to be raised again, meaning that Colorado residents are paying more and more for the right to access public lands and recreational opportunities. In fact, the Colorado House of Representatives preliminarily approved House Bill 1266 in February of 2005. If passed, this bill would introduce a \$10 fee for all users of state wilderness areas and public lands including hikers, mountain bikers, day-users and backpackers. An increase in hunting and fishing licenses was also approved.
- To overcome budget shortfalls, the Division of Parks is seriously considering increasing fees, charging for trail brochures and guides, building more shooting ranges, and installing video arcades at some popular state parks.

If state parks were required to fully fund themselves by passing on all costs to visitors, “We would be like California, where the annual pass is \$160 a year, and camping is \$39 a night, to be self-sufficient.”

Joe Maurier, Deputy Director of Colorado State Parks, 2004

(SOURCES: Joint Budget Committee FY 05-06 Briefing Document, Dept. of Natural Resources Budget Request FY 03-04; Joint Budget Committee FY 04-05 Figure Setting Document; Joint Budget Committee FY 03-04 Appropriations Report; PriceWaterhouse Coopers, Market Assessment Survey 2002; “Park Fees May Rise” Mike Patty and Dominic Weilminster, Rocky Mountain News, August 1, 2003; “Land Fees Get Early OK.” Bill Scanlon, Rocky Mountain News, March 1, 2005).