

COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

TO: Recreation and Parks Commission

FROM: Dennis Smitherman, Interim Director of Recreation and Parks

DATE: April 14, 2026

SUBJECT: Adoption of the Fee Schedule for Parking at Los Flores Ranch

Description:

Consideration of a \$5 Daily Parking Fee, \$85 Annual Parking Pass for Residents, and \$100 Annual Parking Pass for Non-Residents at Los Flores Ranch.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommend approving fee schedule of \$5 daily parking fee, \$85 annual parking pass for residents, and annual \$100 parking pass for non-residents at Los Flores Ranch.

BACKGROUND

Los Flores Ranch is an approximately 1,800-acre ranch owned by the City of Santa Maria and operated and maintained by the Recreation and Parks Department. The department desires to open the ranch to the public for day use seven days a week beginning in July 2026 to celebrate the 15-year anniversary of the park. Opening the park seven days a week will expand public access to recreation opportunities that are not available anywhere else in the Santa Maria Parks System. The City does not currently charge a parking fee at Los Flores Ranch, but desires to do so to offset General Fund budget reductions and expand park use.

Staff met with the Recreation and Parks Commission Budget Committee on March 27, 2026, where the proposed fees were discussed in preparation for the Public Hearing on April 14, 2026. The noticed Public Hearing has been scheduled to receive public comments and consider the proposed schedule. The Public Hearing scheduled for April 14, 2026, will be the first reading, and the second reading will be held on May 12, 2026.

DISCUSSION

In order to expand recreation opportunities at the ranch, maintain minimum operations, and to close the budget gap due to ongoing General Fund budget reductions, the department proposes adopting a new fee schedule. The department proposes a \$5 daily parking fee (day use only), a \$85 annual parking pass for residents of Santa Maria, and a \$100 annual parking pass for non-residents.

Implementation of a \$5 daily parking fee at rural recreation sites represents a modest, widely accepted pricing strategy that balances affordability with revenue generation. This fee level is consistent with comparable park systems and is unlikely to deter

visitation while providing a sustainable funding source for maintenance, operations, and capital improvements. Specifically, the proposed parking fee is intended to offset expenditures related to ongoing operations and maintenance costs for Los Flores Ranch, including site upkeep, trash removal, infrastructure repairs, habitat management, and staff support.

Importantly, the additional revenue generated from this fee will allow the City of Santa Maria to open Los Flores Ranch to the public 365 days per year, rather than the current limited schedule of four days per week, providing greater public access and recreational opportunities while maintaining financial sustainability.

At \$5 per vehicle, even low to moderate usage sites can generate meaningful revenue. For example:

- 20 vehicles/day = \$100/day (\$36,500 annually)
- 50 vehicles/day = \$250/day (\$91,250 annually)
- 100 vehicles/day = \$500/day (\$182,500 annually)

The implementation of an annual pass fee will further support regular visitors to the Los Flores Ranch through the economy of scale use. A \$85 parking pass will pay for itself after 15 visits.

Alternative(s)

- Approve the fee structure to provide funding for operations and maintenance while expanding park access and use.
- Do not approve the fee structure which would restrict park access and use due to the inability to maintain safe trails and infrastructure.

Environmental Determination

This proposal is in alignment with the appropriate use of Los Flores Ranch as described in the Environmental Impact Report adopted April 20, 2010 by the City of Santa Maria.

Fiscal Considerations

The City of Santa Maria is currently preparing the upcoming biennial budget that includes General Fund budget reductions. Adoption of parking fees at Los Flores Ranch allow the ranch to continue to operate and stay open to the public and have extended hours for use.

Impact to the Community

Approval of this award and funding request will allow the City to continue to deliver unique outdoor opportunities to residents and visitors of the City of Santa Maria. Access outdoors promotes health and wellness, and the special program offerings at the ranch enrich learning about the natural environment. The inability to financially support ranch operations at the level needed to provide for safe trails and infrastructure will likely result in the indefinite closure of the ranch, and no access to ranch features for the public.

ATTACHMENT(S)

A: Resolution- Los Flores Ranch Parking Fees