



□ *Editor's note: This is one of several upcoming stories that will focus on bills introduced in the 2013 Nebraska Legislature and how they affect Imperial area residents.*

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Trying to remove those extremely sticky Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) park entry permit stickers from your windshield may be a thing of the past if LB 362 is passed by the Legislature.

Introduced by Sen. Bill Avery of Lincoln, LB 362 would do away with stickers in favor of a \$7 registration fee on most motor vehicles and trailers.

The proposal would spread out parks funding across a larger number of Nebraskans and would depart from a user system that's been in place for decades.

Currently, an annual \$25 or \$5 daily park-entry permit is required to enter any NGPC park or recreation area such as Enders Lake Recreation Area.

If passed, the law would raise nearly \$12 million annually for state parks. Last year \$5.6 million was raised by park permit sales.

NGPC budgets about \$22 million annually for state park operations.

The permit fees charged will be credited to the State Park Cash Revolving Fund and would be disbursed for the administration, improvement, operation and maintenance of areas of the state park system which are designated as permit areas.

The \$7 fee would be tacked onto a vehicle's registration fee. The bill specifically exempts semi trailers, buses, taxis and other commercial vehicles from the registration fee.

NGPC Wildlife Officer Dirk Greene of Imperial said he thinks the bill has pros and cons.

"People who use the lake quite a bit who own one or two vehicles, it will be cheaper for them," he recognized. "On the other hand, if you have several vehicles it (registration fee) would add up."

Greene said a convenience provided by LB 362 would be not having to "run down to the store to buy one."

Non-resident vehicles are not included in the change. Those vehicle owners would still have to purchase a permit online or at a vendor. The permit could either be a one-day one or an annual one, not to exceed \$30.

As in the past, those vehicle owners leave the printout of the permit purchase laying on their dashboards so that officers like Greene can see that they're in the park legitimately.

It doesn't affect Greene's job that much. "I wouldn't have to look for park permits" on Nebraska residents' vehicles, "but would see that the license plates are valid. It may take some getting used to."

Greene pointed out that camp areas not patrolled regularly by an officer, such as Rock Creek, have an "iron ranger" in place to provide an envelope that takes both park permit fees and camping fees.

If passed, LB 362 won't go into effect until 2014. A hearing before the Legislature's Natural Resources Committee Feb. 7 showed mostly support for the bill.