

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2026

Mr. Tom Schultz
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Schultz,

We write urging against a U.S. Forest Service proposed recreation fee for El Yunque National Forest.

El Yunque is not simply a recreational site. It is an ecological, cultural, and public resource central to Puerto Rico's identity. As the only tropical rainforest in the National Forest System, it holds extraordinary ecological value and deep environmental and historical significance. For generations, Puerto Ricans have experienced the forest as a shared public space tied to heritage, community, recreation, and access to nature. Because of that significance, questions surrounding access to the forest, including any proposed fee structure, warrant careful scrutiny, particularly where they may affect how local communities interact with and benefit from this national resource. These concerns are also informed by discussions with local officials, including the Mayor of Río Grande, who has raised concerns regarding access, affordability, and impacts on surrounding communities.

It is our understanding that the challenges cited in support of the proposed fee structure include restrictions on the use of appropriated funds and longstanding deferred maintenance needs. Those considerations may help explain the pressures facing the forest, but they do not, on their own, establish why a visitor fee is the appropriate response or why other approaches were deemed insufficient. This raises questions as to how the agency determined that a fee structure is warranted in light of these challenges and what analysis informed that conclusion.

The proposed fee structure includes a \$4 per-person fee, a \$20 individual annual pass, and a \$30 family annual pass. This structure raises important questions regarding access, affordability, and whether the Forest Service has evaluated the impact this will have on the people of Puerto Rico and their ability to enjoy the forest.

Accordingly, we request responses to the following questions:


1. If the public comment period yields substantial opposition or significant adverse feedback, how will the agency account for that input in its decision-making?
2. Has the agency conducted, commissioned, or reviewed any studies on how the proposed fee could affect visitors, including locals? If so, what did those studies reflect?
3. How did the agency account for Puerto Rico's socioeconomic conditions and patterns of local use in developing the proposed fee structure?
4. What other funding avenues or non-fee alternatives has the agency considered to address the needs cited in support of the proposal, and how did those considerations inform the decision to advance a recreation fee?

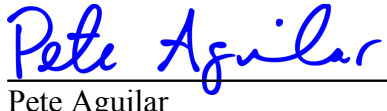
5. Has the agency taken any concrete steps to engage with the Commonwealth government to secure support for ongoing maintenance costs? If so, what proposals have been put forward to help close this funding gap?

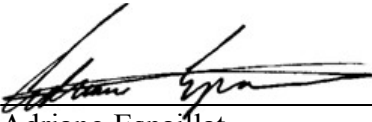
Please provide answers to these questions no later than May 14, 2026. We look forward to reviewing your response.

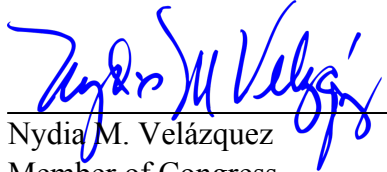
Sincerely,


Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress

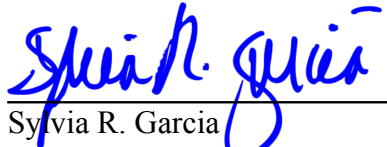

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