



About Us

Filming & Still Photography Permits



In most cases, a permit is not necessary for visitors engaging in casual, non-commercial still photography. There are some circumstances when a permit is needed for commercial still photography and filming.

NPS Photo

The National Park Service conserves and protects areas of untold beauty, grandeur and historical importance for current and future generations. The tradition of capturing images of these special places started with explorers who traveled with paint and canvas or primitive cameras. Sharing these images helped inspire the creation of national parks. Today, visitors to national parks continue to memorialize their visits through filming and photography.

Effective October 28, 2022, the National Park Service rescinded interim guidance that was in place during litigation regarding commercial filming and has returned to longstanding laws and regulations governing commercial filming in parks. Questions and answers about filming and photography are provided below.

When is a permit needed for commercial filming?

Under federal law, all commercial filming that occurs within a unit [of the National Park System](https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/national-park-system.htm) requires a permit.

What is considered commercial filming?

"Commercial filming" means the film, electronic, magnetic, digital, or other recording of a moving image by a person, business, or other entity for a market audience with the intent of generating income. Examples include, but are not limited to, feature film, videography, and documentaries. Commercial filming may include the advertisement of a product or service, or the use of actors, models, sets, or props.

Does commercial filming by individuals or small groups require a permit?

Federal law requires a permit for all commercial filming, no matter the size of the crew or the type of equipment. This includes individuals or small groups that don't use much equipment, but generate revenue by posting footage on websites, such as YouTube and TikTok. The primary focus of the NPS, however, is on commercial filming that has the potential to impact park resources and visitors beyond what occurs from normal visitor use of park areas. Examples of this type of filming are productions that use substantial equipment such as sets and lighting, productions with crews that exceed 5 people, and filming in closed areas, wilderness areas, or in locations that would create conflicts with other visitors or harm sensitive resources.

All filmers, no matter the size, must comply with all rules that apply in park areas, just like other visitors.

Does non-commercial filming require a permit?

Individual parks may require a permit for non-commercial filming if necessary to manage the activity, to protect park resources and values, to preserve wilderness character, to minimize conflict between user groups, or to ensure public safety. Examples of non-commercial filming include, but are not limited to, filming for tourism bureaus, convention and visitor bureaus, and student filming. If you have questions about whether a non-commercial film project requires a permit, please contact the park where you intend to film in advance.

In most cases, a permit is not necessary for casual filming for personal enjoyment.

When is a permit needed for still photography?

In most cases, still photography does not require a permit. **A permit is required for still photography only when:**

1. the activity takes place in an area closed to the public; or
2. the activity uses a model, set, or prop; or
3. the National Park Service would incur additional administrative costs to monitor the activity.

A "model" means a person or object that serves as the subject for still photography for the purpose of promoting the sale or use of a product or service. Models include, but are not limited to, individuals, animals, or inanimate objects, such as vehicles, boats, articles of clothing, and food and beverage products. Portrait subjects, such as wedding parties and high school graduates, are not considered models, if the image will not be used to promote or sell a product or service.

How do I apply for a permit?

Permit applications are available through each park's administrative office or website. Contact information for parks can be found on their websites; [Find a park \(https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm\)](https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm) where you would like to film or take photographs. If you believe that your filming or photography activity may require a permit, you should submit a completed application to the park where you want to film or photograph as far in advance of your planned date as possible.

Some parks may require that you provide advance notice a certain amount of days before filming or photography begins. In addition, you should request a meeting with park staff if your proposed activity is unusual or complex. Early consultation with park staff will help them process the submitted application in a timely manner.

What fees will I have to pay for a permit?

Federal law requires the National Park Service to recover its administrative costs for commercial filming and still photography activities that require a permit. Cost recovery includes an **application fee** and **any additional charges to cover the costs incurred by the National Park Service** in processing your request and monitoring the permitted activities. This amount will vary depending on the park and the size and complexity of the permitted activities. The application fee must be submitted with your application.

In addition, Federal law also requires the National Park Service to collect a **location fee** that provides a fair return to the United States for the use of park lands for commercial filming and for still photography requires a permit. The National Park Service uses the following fee schedules for filming and photography:

Commercial Filming

- 1–2 people, camera & tripod only - \$0/day
- 1–10 people - **\$150/day**
- 11–30 people - \$250/day
- 31–49 people - \$500/day
- Over 50 people - \$750/day

Still Photography

- 1–10 people - \$50/day
- 11–30 people - \$150/day
- Over 30 people - \$250/day

Permits issued for non-commercial filming may be subject to cost recovery charges, including an application fee, but a separate location fee will not be charged.

What terms and conditions will the permits have?

Filming and photography permits will contain terms and conditions that are necessary to protect park resources and visitors. They will specify the location and time of the activity and the number of personnel and equipment that may be used. The permits also may require you to obtain liability insurance naming the United States as additionally insured in an amount commensurate with the risk posed to park resources by your proposed activity. You also may be required to post a bond to ensure the payment of all charges and fees and the restoration of the area if necessary.

What about photography workshops?


If you are planning a photography workshop as part of a business, you may need a commercial use authorization.

Last updated: March 15, 2023

Was this page helpful?

Yes

No

 An official form of the United States government. Provided by **Touchpoints**
(<https://touchpoints.app.cloud.gov/>)