

VETERAN BENEFITS FIELD GUIDE

2026

PREMIUM
EDITION

THE FREE

LIFETIME PARK PASS

YOU ALREADY EARNED

PREMIUM 2026 EDITION

FEDERAL PASSES • FAMILY • STATE PARKS



FREE
IN PERSON



LIFETIME
FEDERAL ACCESS



FAMILY
RIDES WITH YOU



ACCESS
CAMPING DISCOUNTS



VETERAN'S STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS
LLC

VSG
VETERAN GUIDES

VETERAN'S STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS LLC
USE THE BENEFIT YOU EARNED.

Start here: you do not have to pay anything

There are two free lifetime federal passes. **Neither one requires a disability rating, and neither one costs a cent if you pick it up in person.**

Every fee you will read about below exists only because you asked for it to be mailed to you. Walk into a park and the pass is free.

Part 1 — The two federal passes

	Military Lifetime Pass	Interagency Access Pass
Who it is for	Veterans and Gold Star families	Anyone with a permanent disability
Disability needed	None	A permanent disability, medically determined
In person	Free	Free
Digital, at Recreation.gov	Free	Not offered
Physical card via Recreation.gov	\$7.50 shipping	Not offered
By mail from the USGS Store	\$10 processing	\$5 processing + \$7.50 handling
Entrance and day-use fees	Covered	Covered
Camping, tours, boat launches	Not covered	50% off at most sites

The Military Lifetime Pass

Created by the National Defense Authorization Act. The National Park Service defines a veteran for this purpose as **anyone who has served in the US Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves.**

No disability rating is required. None. If you served, this is yours.

Gold Star families are also eligible. Eligibility follows section 3.2 of Department of Defense Instruction 1348.36.

The Interagency Access Pass

Read this part carefully, because it is where most write-ups get it wrong.

The Access Pass is not keyed to a VA percentage. It is for people **medically determined to have a permanent physical, mental or sensory impairment that severely limits one or more major life activities** — the definition at 29 U.S.C. 705(20). The Park Service says plainly it does not have to be a 100 percent disability.

A VA award letter is one of the accepted ways to *prove* that. It is not the test itself. A rating on its own does not automatically qualify you, and a high rating is not required.

Why it can be worth more than the veteran pass: both get you in the gate, but only the Access Pass carries the roughly 50 percent discount on camping, guided tours and boat launches. If you camp, that discount is worth more every year than the entrance fee ever was.

You can only hold and use one pass at a time, so if you qualify for both, the Access Pass is usually the better choice.

WHICH FEDERAL PASS FITS?

MILITARY LIFETIME PASS



- Veterans + Gold Star families
- No disability rating
- Free in person

INTERAGENCY ACCESS PASS



- Permanent disability
- Free in person
- About 50% amenity discount

Part 2 — How to get it, cheapest first

Free, in person — do this one

Walk into a park or federal recreation site that issues passes, show your ID, walk out with the card. No fee, no waiting, no shipping.

Not every site issues passes. Check the list before you drive: nps.gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm

Free, digital, on your phone

Go to **Recreation.gov**, search for the Military Lifetime Pass, verify your service, and the digital pass is free. If you ask for a plastic card during that same checkout, a \$7.50 shipping charge is added.

By mail — the most expensive route

The **USGS Store** will mail you a physical card. The Military Lifetime Pass costs \$10 to process. The Access Pass costs \$5 processing plus \$7.50 handling. Expect it to take weeks.

GET THE PASS — CHEAPEST FIRST



Part 3 — What you need to show

For the Military Lifetime Pass, any one of these:

- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card (VIC)
- A driver's licence or state ID with a veteran designation printed on it
- DD Form 2, DD Form 2765, or another DoD card showing retired or veteran status

For the Access Pass, a photo ID plus any one of these:

- A signed letter from a licensed physician stating three things: that the impairment is **permanent**, that it **severely limits** one or more aspects of daily life, and **what those limitations are**
- A document from a federal agency — VA, SSDI or SSI — showing entitlement to disability benefits
- A document from a state agency such as vocational rehabilitation

A disabled parking placard, hang tag or licence plate is not accepted. They do not identify who the permit belongs to.

Part 4 — Your family

Travelling together, you are covered. At parks charging by the vehicle, your one pass covers everybody in your private, non-commercial vehicle. At parks charging per person, it covers you plus three other adults. Children 15 and under are free everywhere.



A spouse cannot get their own veteran pass. If your spouse visits without you, they pay — unless they qualify separately as a senior (62+) or through a permanent disability of their own.

Dependents of currently serving members can. They are eligible for their own free Military Annual Pass with a valid DoD dependent ID.

Gold Star families get the lifetime pass, same as veterans.

Part 5 — State parks are a completely separate thing

Your federal pass does not work at state parks. Not one of them. State parks are funded by state governments and every state sets its own rule.

This catches people out constantly. A veteran with a lifetime federal pass drives to a state park an hour away and gets charged at the gate.



The three questions that decide it in every state

Do you need a disability rating, and how much? Some states give it to every honourably discharged veteran. Some require 100 percent. Several sit in between at 30, 40, 50 or 60 percent, and a handful accept any rating at all.

Do you have to live there? Most states restrict it to residents. A few — Maryland and Oklahoma among them — extend it to any US veteran.

What does it actually cover? Entry is the common one. Camping is much rarer and worth far more.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR STATE



How to check your state in two minutes

Search for “[your state] state parks veteran pass” and use the result on the state’s own .gov site. Nothing else is authoritative.

For your state’s veterans department, the national directory of state agencies is at nasdva.us/resources.

Ask the park office directly if the website is unclear. State park rules change with the legislature and the web pages lag behind.

Part 6 — What to expect, state by state

This section is a starting point, not an answer. These are the benefits commonly reported by each state. Thresholds and programme names change, and only the state’s own parks agency can tell you what applies today. Confirm before you drive.

States that require no disability rating at all: Maine and Maryland for day use, Oklahoma for day use including non-residents, and Vermont for a one-off nominal fee.

States where any rating qualifies: Alaska, Connecticut, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming are commonly reported as accepting any service-connected percentage.

States with a mid-range threshold: Washington around 30 percent, New York around 40 percent, California, Louisiana and New Mexico around 50 percent, Colorado, Georgia and Texas around 60 percent.

States generally requiring 100 percent: Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Virginia.

States where entry is already free to everyone: Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee do not charge day-use entrance fees at all, so the veteran benefit there is usually a camping discount instead.

States offering a discount rather than free entry: Delaware, Indiana, South Carolina and West Virginia are commonly reported at 25 to 50 percent off.

Where to go

What you want	Where
Free digital pass	Recreation.gov
Pick one up in person	nps.gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm
Order by mail	store.usgs.gov
Federal pass rules	nps.gov/planyourvisit/passes.htm
Access Pass details	nps.gov/subjects/accessibility/interagency-access-pass.htm
Your state veterans agency	nasdva.us/resources

Federal information verified against the National Park Service, the US Forest Service and the USGS Store on 15 August 2026. State park benefits are reported summaries and were not individually verified — confirm with the state’s own parks agency before relying on them.

Informational only. Not legal advice. Nobody should ever charge you for any of this.