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To: Willamette National Forest
ATTN: Recreation Fees
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Subj: Comments on the special recreation permit fee

To whom it may concern:

I am furnishing my comments on your wrongfully decided action to permit by quota, and charge for said permits in three Wilderness Areas in Central Oregon. Since I am not an environmental or land-use attorney, nor am I expert at Administrative Law, I only furnish input based upon my own perspective as a US Citizen, a long-time resident of Oregon, and as a new resident to Bend.

For context, my wife and I are in our 60s and we are retired. We have for our entire lives enjoyed hiking and camping. We've spent countless days on the trail and likely over 300 nights camping in our nearly 40 years spent recreating outdoors. For the last 6 years my wife and I have hiked between 3-4 times each week. Hiking the trails in the great outdoors is our primary activity and one we had planned on for our retirement. We moved to Bend in July 2019 for the main purpose to be close to, and have easy access to the mountains we love. We have been coming to Central Oregon to hike since 1982. We know all the nooks and crannies, the roots and rocks, the streams and peaks. Access to nature is not optional for us, rather it is an essential and central part of our lives. We have hiked for decades and plan on continuing to do so as a source of exercise, inspiration and spirituality through our retirement. Since moving to Bend my wife has been working with Discover Your Forest to volunteer as a naturalist and I have been working with the Deschutes Trail Coalition to volunteer. We are trying to give back in some way for the many benefits that nature and the USFS as its steward provides. We donate yearly to organizations that support the environment and natural lands. We are members of the PCTA and have been for many, many years. We have a NW Forest pass. We have a State of OR park pass.

The USFS and related organizations are stewards of our public lands. You work for the tax payer and citizen to try to manage our Lands of Many Uses. I think we all want to protect our public lands from abuse, to avail their use to those who might use them, and in some way, to maintain their condition for generations to use in the future. As an example, although designated a wilderness, the Three Sisters area is proximal to major population centers, and there are numerous roads throughout the region. Should the USFS wish to keep such areas pristine, there ought not be such easy access for the public. Access equates to use! The Sisters area is not a true wilderness area in the sense of limited human use,

this area provides essential recreational activities to many local residents who use it (some nearly daily including trail runners, hikers, campers, naturalists, forestry students ...). Most of us “Leave Only Footprints and Take Only Memories.” We, the frequent users of the trail system are your allies. We hope to maintain trail conditions so that the many may enjoy it. When we meet folks on the trail we don’t think about our loss of solitude, rather we greet our fellow hikers and show them the respect that they expect and deserve.

Now the personal bit - we wake up, check the weather, and decide whether to head out and where to go. We cannot book a reservation in advance nor should we have to – we live here and these trails are our backyard. We have been on and up South Sister six times since July (and we have climbed it every year for decades on our anniversary). We have been to Green Lakes almost weekly between July and late October. We consider it our right to use these areas unimpeded so long as we don’t disrespect and abuse them. As local residents we choose to live here largely for the easy access to these public resources – resources that we have all paid dearly to support in the form of income taxes. That access to these trails can be taken is wrongly decided and short sighted. The solution to the problem is through influence rather than regulation. The public needs to be educated - teach people what low impact hiking looks like. Teach them to pack everything out. Teach them about sustainability. If human waste is an issue build back country outhouses as is done throughout high-use wilderness areas. The people I meet on the trail largely know how to care for what they (and we) cherish. If you want to limit access by numbers put no parking signs along the highway or outside of the limited space parking areas proximal to busy trail heads. I note the Columbia River Gorge trails popular before the big fire closed many of them limit usage through limited parking. I’ve read of other suggestions whereby local residents could get a pass for weekday usage. This is not heretical – my wife and I already largely avoid high use trails during the weekends during peak months anyway. We would welcome a weekday pass and even consider paying (in addition to our NW Forest Pass) to have one. That said though, this seems a bit unfair to our visitors.

In summary, my wife and I are heartbroken by your decision. It will have a material impact on our lives. The implementation process is likely to be wrongly decided as well. I plead with you not to close these areas to our spontaneous use. These are OUR PUBLIC LANDS.

Yours Sincerely,
Michael R Scheinfein
Bend, OR