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Comments: Input on Wilderness Fee Structure

Hello!

I am writing in response to the article in the Sisters Nugget News on October 16 regarding input on the impending wilderness fee structure. As a dedicated hiker in Central Oregon for the past 45 years, I have clearly experienced the monumental increase in hikers impacting the environment. I support the need to limit numbers on popular trails but I question the charges you are proposing for the following reasons:

1. The annual National Park / Interagency Pass for U.S. Public lands, which I purchase yearly, should be ample to provide access to all trails in National Forests. At the very least, individuals with current Annual Passes should be charged a discounted fee.

2. Any fee structure that you impose should be consistent with practices on other federal lands throughout the United States... such as charging an entry fee for a car.

3. I currently hike as a member of the Black Butte Ranch hiking group and I'm aware of several other hiking groups in the Sisters and Bend areas. Most, if not all, of these groups teach and promote safe, ethical and low impact practices on the trail (e.g., carrying the 10 essentials, LNT, micro-trash pick-up, WFA training). Thus, your fee structures should encourage rather than discourage the continuation of these groups. Organizing group hikes that require purchase of individual permits will be burdensome and a deterrent to continuing hiking activities. Will the Hike Coordinator need to buy numerous individual permits at a personal cost and hope that all of the committed participants show up? Will each potential hiker have to navigate Recreation.gov to buy her own hiking permit? Or can the Hike Coordinator purchase a group permit for up to 12 people at minimal cost, much like that which is currently in effect for Pamela Lake? I urge you to choose the latter -- a low-cost group permit.

4. In terms of addressing infrastructure and trail maintenance needs and the inherent costs, I encourage you to expand your pool of volunteers more than you already have and tap volunteer groups such as Sisters Trail Alliance to defray costs.

I appreciate your consideration of these points as you implement the new system.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Huntington

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