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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Comment on fees for wilderness permits

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I am writing to register my comments in regards to the proposed fees for the Three Sisters, Mound Jefferson and Mount Washington wilderness areas. While I understand the need for permits, the day use and backpacking fees are too steep. I am a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner as well as a regular user of the outdoors. I live in Salem. The Mount Jefferson and Mount Washington wilderness areas are the most accessible wilderness areas for those of us who live in the Salem area.

I have several patients who regularly hike and backpack in the areas with the proposed fees. Hiking and being in the wilderness is a very important aspect of my patients' medical treatment plans. Many of my patients are in an income range that is very low, but not low enough to qualify for government benefits. Some of them have expressed concern about being able to afford the permits, especially those with families. Nature and exercise are both proven to be beneficial for the treatment of depression and anxiety as well as the PREVENTION of mental health conditions.

As a medical provider, I am concerned about access to the wilderness for the entire population. I understand the necessity of the permit system to keep our wilderness pristine. However, the fees are too high. A more reasonable and affordable fee is in order. I could support \$2.50/day for hikers, with no extra fees to obtain the permit and no more than \$5/day for backpackers in any area. My preference is to charge less or nothing at all.

There are already fees for obtaining day or season passes.

In addition, it is not fair for those hiking the Pacific Crest Trail to be able to use the same wilderness areas without paying a fee. If anyone gets charged for a permit, everyone should be charged for a permit for the same user rate. Economic privilege should not be a requirement to enjoy and experience our public wilderness areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

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