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Comments: ATTN: Recreation Fees

The proposed quota system and fee structure for wilderness areas on National Forest land in Oregon is concerning to me. While I understand the issues faced with over use in these areas I think you are unnecessarily punishing certain wilderness users, namely long distance backpackers. The quota and reservation system, alongside the proposed fee structure would effectively make a long distance or thru-hike of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in Oregon very difficult to achieve. A long distance backpacking trip requires a somewhat fluid itinerary to account for rest days, difficult terrain (which may slow progress), weather, illness, injury, etc. Requiring that long distance hikers obtain permits for specific entry and exit days is unfair and punishes a small portion of the population that generally leaves a light footprint. Long distance backpackers tend to move through an area quickly and their impact is low as opposed to day users and overnight hikers who tend to congregate in the same, finite areas.

I highly suggest that you examine how the El Dorado National Forest manages their permit and quota system in the Desolation Wilderness. When I thru-hiked the Tahoe Rim Trail, the local ranger district was very helpful in setting up wilderness entry and exit times that accounted for changes in my itinerary (basically, they wrote me a permit that was good for 1 week - crossing the wilderness took me 2 days). Tahoe Rim Trail thru hikers are not counted as part of the quota system, although they do have to take Leave No Trace (LNT) training and pay the \$20 fee for the permit. I think a similar system would work for Oregon as well. My suggestion is that you include a "Long Distance Hike Permit" (100+ miles) and/or a "Oregon PCT Thru Hike Permit" in your proposal. Require that prospective permittees take LNT and campfire safety training (the El Dorado NF does this online) and pay a fee. To avoid abuse of the long distance permits, require a flat fee for each wilderness area and entry and exit dates for each wilderness area but allow for some flexibility by giving the permittee a range of dates (for example, "entry allowed from July 28-30 and exit required by August 2-4" or "permit good for July 28 to August 4"). I also suggest that, like the Desolation Wilderness, the long distance and PCT thru hike permits be obtained directly from the ranger district (by phone or in person) instead of through reservation.gov. It's a lot easier to work out a complicated itinerary with a real person than on a computer. Requiring that the public actually talk to a human being might also discourage abuse of the permit system.

I appreciate your work towards preserving our wilderness areas but please do it in a way that is considerate of all users.

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