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Comments: Comments about Pending Permit Fees to Access 'Public' Lands

Please add my comments here about your proposal to add a permit and fee system to how the public access wilderness areas in central Oregon.

I understand and appreciate that portions of these areas receive more use and abuse than they can sustain, and it shows. Yes, something must be done, and sooner than later.

The Forest Service proposes to impose both fees and a permit system to access 79 trail heads in five wilderness areas. There was no attempt to isolate the relatively few trails, access points and popular destinations that actually are problem areas. Instead, all of five large wilderness areas on & off trail are included. There appears to be no effort in the Forest Services proposal to spread use out among more trails, lessening the impact on key trails. That could be done by simply detailing the beauty of each of major trail system together with access info. And to suggest to visitors that sharing an area on social media is an invitation to destroy the thing you love.

The Forest Service does not propose ANYTHING that actually addresses much of the root issue, which is poor behavior on the part of users. That includes such things as not removing solid waste, improper camping, wear of along the sides of trails and short cuts between trails. Less restrictive measures would be possible if people saw the connection between their behavior and the degradation of these special places. Again, no mention has been made of any effort whatsoever that would educate users, or provide at a trailhead small bags for waste.

I find that the Forest Service conflates the two methods of control, in part to monetize access. I object to that most strongly.

A permit system with NO fees in and of itself is sufficient to regulate legal access to an area. From what I understand, the permit system with use quotas has already been established. I suggest you simply enforce it.

The fee system is an entirely separate legal technique, and one that is profoundly objectionable. I believe that I should not be paying user fees to access tracts of public land (or to park a car, or to use a naturally occurring hot spring, etc). Because of that, I will be (and have been in other settings) STRONGLY motivated to avoid the area completely. It would violate my values to pay the Forest Service to use what is MINE as a US citizen.

I don't go this far myself, but you feed the antagonism between the libertarian, anti-government crowd and the Forest Service's legitimate efforts to protect our land by putting up exactly this type of barrier. Didn't you hear the message of the Malheur gang, whacko tho it was?

Third, the fees being discussed -- \$1-3 for simple day use and \$5 per night per person PLUS another fee just to apply for permits, together with the logistical difficulty and hassle of obtaining a permit is highly problematic itself. Such a structure is highly regressive such that the wealthy can think nothing of a \$36 fee for a three day weekend camp, while that is a serious expense for someone such as me who earns little. In effect, you make our PUBLIC lands into more of a playground for the wealthy. What this fee structure does is reduce demand for use of the area to a more sustainable level by eliminating people like me who are not wealthy. The wealthy can continue their lifestyle without impact. So, there is a disparate impact on citizens based on their income. And that is not at all fair in this context.

Further, how are these fees justified in their absolute amount? It appears to me that they are a marketing

abstraction; they are what the market will bear. They are largely divorced, in other words, from their stated purpose. Why is day use much less than that for camping? And why are fees assessed for a huge area when only a relative few trails and areas are overused?

The Forest Service as simply selected an easy to administer solution. But one that fails to consider disparate impacts, nor to bear in mind the actual purpose of that solution.

I also object to the permit system due to the difficulty of obtaining a permit for a group in advance, or for a spontaneous hike on a nice day. The former makes it very hard for groups like the Obsidians, who are a volunteer group, to plan in advance for a group hike. They will be forced to pay for no-shows, and they will be forced to turn people away if they get too many for their permit. And yet these groups are exactly the type of educational settings where proper behaviors in such delicate areas can be taught & enforced. How else are you going to kindly persuade people to carry their own poop out with them?

I generally decide where to hike the morning of the hike, or perhaps the night before with 2 or more options. If I have to deal with money grubbing Forest Service people, wait on hold on a phone, pay a significant (to me) amount of money contrary to my values, I just won't do it. The area will become a sacrifice zone to the wealthy.

Lastly, the season for required permits I understand to be Memorial Day to the end of September. Once school begins in late August, and certainly after Labor Day, use drops precipitously. I would like for the permit season to end sooner, perhaps just after Labor Day.

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