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Title:

Comments: Comments on Central Cascades limited entry proposal

Dear Forest Service,

I recently attended an informational meeting in Salem where I heard the presentation about the Central Cascades limited entry proposal and was able to ask some questions.

I am an avid hiker and backpacker. I am 65 years old and began backpacking just 5 years ago and part of me feels like I won't be able to get into the places I enjoy anymore. The permit system, while needed, seems restrictive to backpackers. But I do understand the rationale for implementing the permits and limiting the number of hikers. I just want to be able to go backpacking in beautiful Oregon!

And so, armed with more information, I am going to share my thoughts, as you requested at the meeting.

Regarding cancellations and no shows:

I am not sure how recreation.gov handles these things. In the past it has been difficult for me to cancel a reservation. At first I didn't realize that calling recreation.gov was the best option to cancel or change. Now I know this.

Perhaps cancellations can be put into the pool of the reservations that will be available at short notice? Is there a way to track no-shows using the wilderness permit forms and fining the people who do not turn in an unused reservation?

Regarding fees:

I do not feel your fees are excessive. I realize you must pay staff to enforce the permit system. It will probably be a nightmare the first year. I know some 20-somethings who know nothing about the proposal! The fees may actually prevent people from making reservations they are not serious about actually using.

Volunteer pass

This is something I am interested in. I currently have three volunteer jobs but they do not run through the summer. I have my summers available to volunteer elsewhere. I would be interested in finding out more about where I could volunteer in the Detroit district. As far as how many hours should be required before a volunteer receives a pass...I really have no idea! I understand you have a growing group of people assisting you as trail ambassadors. Perhaps they would be the best resource for determining how much volunteer time is reasonable to require in order to receive a volunteer pass.

One question about the pass. Would the pass be for the volunteer only or could the volunteer bring along one other person (for hiking and/or backpacking)?

Permit distribution

At the meeting the ranger suggested backpacking permits would be available in a 60/40 ratio (early vs days

before) and day hikes 40/60. I think these are reasonable ratios. However, I think that people who backpack need a little more notice than a day or two before their trip to go backpacking. Four or five days would be nice - one could know a bit about the weather at four/five days out and have time to buy supplies and pack. For day hikes I would think 48 hrs would be appropriate.

Permits for low income individuals

I am not sure how you would do this equitably. If the library has passes available, it puts them in the position of verifying the people are low income and would these passes come out of the quotas per trailhead? If they do, how are the people receiving them not receiving preferential treatment?

Perhaps instead of getting a pass, the library would give a code to put in the payment option at recreation.gov so they do not have to pay but still have to go through the same system as everyone else. Or they could call recreation.gov if they don't have computer access. Just a thought.

Other concerns

I see PCT hikers, section hikers, and those going around the Sisters as a problem. First of all PCT hikers just cruise through and don't pay our same fees. Section hikers are going to be finding it difficult because of limited trailhead access unless they stagger all over the place. People going around Sisters will take several days worth of group spots at trailheads where they choose to enter. What does this leave for the ordinary backpacker who wants to spend a weekend in the mountains? I was wondering if limits could be put upon the number of section hikers and those who want to loop the Sisters? Perhaps a system similar to the lottery system for WA's Mt Rainier. Just a thought.

Thank you for your concern for the wilderness. I know restrictions are needed - I have seen such destruction on the trails especially since 2015.

Sincerely,
Debbie Cooke Sweet