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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Proposed fees for Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas

To whom it may concern:

I am a relatively frequent user of the subject wilderness areas. I appreciate that the Forest Service is considering action to maintain the recreational viability and natural beauty of the areas. Having hiked and camped both in "open" and "limited entry" areas, I have felt and noticed the difference in crowding, noise, and human encounters that the permit system makes. However, I have a few concerns.

1. I believe the proposed permit fee structure for overnight use is regressive. My personal observation is that most traffic and human impact is caused by day users. Single night users are a close second. Multi-day/night users and through hikers are a distant third. On a recent trip to Sisters Mirror Lake, my party arrived mid-day to find a dozen other groups at the lake. By 4 PM it emptied out and we had it to ourselves for the night. If that is typical, I think it fair to conclude that the mounds of trash and toilet paper that we stumbled upon just off the PCT (and nowhere near a good campsite) were not the result of overnight visitors.

The backpacking community has been practicing leave no trace principles out of necessity for longer than any other user group. We simply can't carry in the amount of trash that day users often leave behind. By charging a per-night fee, the Forest Service discourages longer trips. These trips are more carefully planned and more conscientiously executed than last-minute day hikes and weekend excursions. I would support a slightly steeper day use fee in exchange for a reduced fee for second and subsequent nights in the wilderness.

2. While the reservation system for limited use areas is great, I am suspicious that the slots are reserved in advance and never used. I try to reserve my slots while in advance. However, I often check the reservation system right before my trip just to see how crowded the area might be. On multiple trips through parts of the Obsidian and Pamela Lake areas, I have noted that all slots are booked the day before the trip. Yet I have encountered very few people in the limited entry areas. Either the system is working well and other users are dispersed/hidden well enough to keep the experience pristine. Or (and I fear more likely) people are reserving the slots and not making the trip. While the latter does benefit actual users and the wilderness, it is a disservice to potential users who are excluded by lack of available permits.

I am concerned that enlarging limited entry areas can have unintended consequences. It can also result in more people risking adverse weather or planning trips that are too aggressive for their ability due to limited availability of reservations. My suggestion in this regard would be to study the number of limited entry permits that are actually used for their full reservation and adjust the number of available permits as necessary to allow an appropriate number of "actual" users.

In conclusion, I urge the Forest Service to proceed cautiously with limited entry and use fees. Do not price out your better behaved customers and do not overly incentivize people to take undue risk.

Sincerely,

Jeremiah LeGrue