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Title:
Comments: Proposed permit system for Deschutes/Willamette wilderness areas

Let me introduce myself a bit. Back in the 70s, I was a Wilderness Guard for the Sisters Ranger District. Since that time, I have continued to be an active user of the wildernesses, during all seasons. Often, I go off-trail, too. I'm now 70 and with some physical limitations where I doubt I'll be carrying any overnight packs or sleeping on the ground anymore, but day hikes are my bread and butter.

The proposed permit and quota system even for day uses presents several problems for me and users like me. I'll present a brief scenario to illustrate:

Last summer my wife and I were traveling to Bend and stopped atop the Santiam Pass at the major PCT trailhead there for a spur-of-the-moment brief hike. The weather had been unpromising as we drove up from the West, but cleared right at the summit. My back wasn't bothering me for once, so we had a fine, mellow hike of under a mile and resumed our drive... As I read the proposed permit and quota system, I'm alarmed that there will be no more spur of the moment hikes allowed at the 19 problem trailheads. In 2020, apparently, my wife and I might meet a Ranger who would write us a citation! Apparently before we left home we would have had to access a website, see if the quota had not been exceeded for that trail, and then paid a fee, and then, what? I guess we'd have had to access a printer to print out a permit? Really?

My sister has lived in Bend for decades. She's self-employed and a huge wilderness user. Often she'll look out her window in the morning and if the weather is good, pack up her dog and take off into the Three Sisters for a day hike. So in 2020 she'll risk a citation unless she goes online and attempts to buy a permit? What if the internet is having problems that morning? Why not offer an annual pass? Oh, that undoes the quota system.... So apparently in 2020 she either gets online to see if she can buy a permit for the day, or if the answer is no, must instead drive to more distant trailheads? How often or on what basis are the quotas made/updated? What if the weather is poor that day and obviously there will be little use, will the system be responsive on a daily basis?

Why not allow an option to drop $3 into a box at the trailhead? Oh, but that undoes the quota system. Hmm. Certainly there needs to be some creative thinking done on these matters.

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Bruce Johnson
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