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Title:

Comments: Wilderness access fees

As a hiker, there is not much to like about the latest proposal released for upcoming wilderness hiking fees.

I typically plan my trips with short lead times and am tracking all conditions (snow levels, weather, events, bugs, etc.) up to the morning of the trip. Having to schedule a trip well in advance does not facilitate all the planning that goes into deciding which hike to do on the next day--especially if one must contend with a much limited number of passes available. Yes, I usually have a list of anticipated hikes and choose the one most conducive for that particular day.

I suspect you will find those who choose to purchase permits with the intent or reselling the permit at a profit. I would hope that you have a means in place that would thwart that activity.

I have not heard much of any discussion on the subject of off-trail hiking and because of that I can't say I know what your policy is on such an activity. I grew up with the forest for my playground, if you will. Hunting added to the addition of new and varied terrains to explore, often without a trail. So I am quite at home just taking to the bush and fending for myself. Recently, with the previous fee structure, I've been seeking untrailed destinations to challenge myself with--and I shall continue to search out new options as these new fees come into affect. I have to say blazing my own trail sure leads to a much more intense outdoor experience and awesome memories in comparison to mindlessly following an existing trail. The scenery is also usually much more enjoyable.

I see trouble, though, if the proposed fees push others to this type of off-trail activity. I'm imagining an increase in incidents of unprepared, injured, and lost travelers and the added expense of rescue and recovery of those who don't fare so well on their journey. I hope you are anticipating that repercussion of the new permit system.

I must comment on the fee structure as proposed. They are too high. The overnight processing fee should not be greater than that of the permit itself. Overall, you are pricing a large group of users off the trail in fees alone. I certainly recall the early days of raising our kids when we didn't have any extra cash, but there was enough gas in the tank to get out of town for some adventure. You may be curtailing that for the next generation. No, we weren't on assistance of any kind--just reaching the end of the month when the paycheck has run out--so we likely would not have qualified for any of your free pass proposals.

I'm still perplexed on whether the trailhead (NW Forest) pass is still a requirement on top of the fee for the permit to be on the trail. I would like to see that clarified. From what I've read on the issue, I'm also unclear if the permit is only for the trail from certain trailheads, or is a permit required for any jumping off point in a wilderness journey no matter where it is beside the road--trail or no trail.

Because of lack of time to properly scout prior to hunting season, I have not hunted for many years. If I'm following this proposal properly, a hunting license will circumvent the need to carry a trail permit. I'd be interested in the qualifications of such a workaround and would certainly be tempted to increase my hunting activity if it means free reign in the region without trail permit. However, I'm wondering how well hunting in a well traveled hiking area would work out without some sort of conflict.

You likely find me a bit out of the ordinary from your typical trail nerd. I wish you well in designing a system best to accommodate all of us hoping to get out and escape the confines of our daily lives.

Sincerely,

Dave Megrath