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Comments: Proposed Hiking & Backpacking Fees for Mt. Jefferson W., Mt Washington W., & Three Sisters W.

These proposed fees, especially in addition to the limitations already placed on the 79 trailheads by the new permitting system slated to begin in 2020, are a poor idea. With the previously announced changes there are already processing fees of $1 for day hikers and $6 per overnight group.
At $5 per person, per night 2 backpackers on a ten day trip would be expected to fork out $100, plus a $6 processing fee. A family with 2 teenagers would be looking at $200 for the same trip. Obviously outdoor gear & food require some significant additional cost. An individual day-use permit would cost $3, plus a $1 processing fee.
These additional fees would be a burden for individuals, families, and groups visiting wilderness areas. One of the main purposes of designated wilderness areas is to preserve and allow individuals to visit our country's most cherished places. Hiking and backpacking are so popular because they are reasonably inexpensive, physically beneficial, and aesthetically pleasing activities. These fees would change that into an activity that only the wealthier could enjoy. That is totally wrong headed in a country that has problems with childhood obesity and other conditions largely due to a lack of physical activity. If there needs to be more funding that should come from Congress appropriating moneys from existing revenues. Public service announcements and other means to raise public awareness of these needs should be utilized to encourage public pressure on the federal government to accomplish this.

I am an avid hiker / backpacker and I have a few thoughts to contribute that would affect the impact of people in designated wilderness areas. The idea is to avoid mandated limits and additional fees on public land use:
1) It's been my experience that most overuse problems stem from poor "Leave No Trace" (LNT) practices by individuals and groups. Mandate that all (each and every individual in a group) who use the areas take an online course in LNT principles ahead of time. This could be an approximately ½ hour to hour long course with a test at the end requiring a 90% score. Much like what is required for the Oregon food handlers card. They would then be issued a card that they would have to show in order to get a wilderness permit. For groups using livestock there should be a specific additional course related to livestock use.
2) Wherever possible increase the distance to travel on foot into the wilderness. This could be done by gating forest service roads several miles away from current trailheads. Most of the worse use occurs at easily accessible areas. Along those same lines, don't spend money to upgrade or improve roads into trailheads. Blacktopping and grading roads increases the crowds into high use areas. This should be a no brainer.
3) Don't "improve" the trails in a wilderness area. The very idea that wilderness should be improved violates the stated principles of the wilderness act. Building bridges, brush clearing, removing down trees and other efforts should be thoughtfully limited. These barriers that naturally occur cut down both foot and horse traffic. By removing barriers you allow more access for unprepared individuals. An example is the rebuilding (with bridges) of the trail into Pamilia Lake after the avalanche of several years ago.
4) Place stricter limitations on horse / livestock packing. These leave some of the biggest impact. I have seen numerous instances of horses tethered in or near streams and lakes at campsites. Very seldom are they 200' away. One horse per person limits might help as well as limits to 4 or fewer "heartbeats" (inclusive of humans and livestock) in a horse group. Just recently I came across a group of 3 people with 7 horses at Santiam Lake in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness. All were tethered to trees next to and in a stream so they could easily drink. This was only 30-40 feet from the lake. Unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. I could give you numerous examples I have personally witnessed. Many (not all) horse packers seem to think LNT principles don't apply to them.

5) More severely restrict the use of campfires in heavily used areas. Already being done, good!
6) Do not grant waivers to limited use areas to thru-hikers using the Pacific Crest Trail. "Thru- hiking" has increased dramatically in the last few years. They are part of the problem and should be subject to the exact same regulations as local users. I would submit that movies like "Wild" have contributed to the numbers of unprepared and under-educated hikers in the backcountry and many of the overuse problems, especially fecal matter disposal.