

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/16/2019 4:15:18 AM

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Comments: Comments on the Central Oregon Wilderness Fee Proposal

I am writing to register my opposition to the proposed special recreation permit fee to access the Central Cascades Wilderness.

Hiking in our public lands is one of the few low or no cost recreation activities left in an increasingly expensive community. By enacting these fees you will create barriers that will disproportionately affect the people that can surmount them the least. I have several issues with the proposal.

First the fees are being categorized under "specialized use" in order to justify adding them under existing regulations. Visiting the wilderness on foot is the very definition of basic use, and trying to shoehorn that activity under specialized use is a mischaracterization that feels disingenuous to the intention of the existing regulations.

In my opinion, the economics of the fees don't line up with the listed claims of helping to pay for forest education, maintenance and to cover the additional cost needed to try and enforce the permits, there simply isn't enough money. So either all the money will be spent on hiring additional staff to enforce the permit system. Which means you put a huge burden on the public to create a system that can do nothing, but just pay for the overhead to enforce it. Which makes the stated claims of adding more funding to education and staff help for forest management incorrect. Alternatively, if the money is spent on education and forest management and enforcement isn't done (similar to the existing permit system where rangers never issue citations for people not using permits). You will have created a system where the people that follow the rules will be burdened with the cost and quotas and the people that don't care will do what they want knowing nobody is there to enforce the "suggested" quotas.

The fact is, the wilderness already had an existing flexible, low maintenance and easy enforcement system in place, it's called a parking lot. If the parking lot is full hikers can know the current carrying capacity for the trail head is full and they are free to flexibly move on to another trail head in the wilderness with less users without dealing with additional costs of a permit system whose quotas don't take into account the current number of people on the trail just a total number on a day. Furthermore instead of having to monitor all over the wilderness to check if the current quota is being exceeded a ranger or county sheriff can take a quick drive through the lot and see if anyone is parking illegally. If we were to actually enforce the existing free permits and parking limits you would achieve what you are hoping for, to limit the maximum capacity on a trail at one time, without implementing a massively unpopular and economically disenfranchising system of quotas and permits that hurts the very people that love the forest the most.

Thank you,
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