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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Permit Fees

Dear National Forest Service,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Recreation Permit Fees for wilderness areas in the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests. While I certainly understand the need for both preventing overuse and mis-use of the wilderness areas, and of generating revenue for their restoration, I continue to have concerns about the proposed fee structure.

My main concerns are as follows:

1. While I have no objection to paying a permit for the purpose of protecting and restoring the wilderness, I resent having to pay a 33% surcharge to fund Recreation.gov. This seems like an exorbitant fee for an IT service that should be managed through a contract between the vendor and the Forest Service, rather than being subsidized repeatedly by everyone who wants to take a hike.

2. I'd like special attention paid to groups that are in unique situations. I hike and lead trips with the Obsidians, a Eugene group that introduces many people to our forests and wilderness areas, teaches "Leave No Trace" practices, and has many members who volunteer countless hours in trail maintenance with the Scorpions, Winter Trails and Shelters, and other groups. When I volunteer to lead an Obsidian trip, I might offer to lead up to 10 people, and presumably would have to buy permits for 10--but I have no way of knowing how many people will actually sign up and go on the hike. The Obsidians are committed to reimbursing leaders for permits purchased--but the club doesn't have any reservoir of funds to take on this obligation. It seems like the Obsidians, despite many decades of good stewardship of the wilderness trails, are being penalized even compared to ordinary hikers, since they might have to pay for excess permits that go unused if the weather turns unfavorable. I hope you will work out a more workable approach with the Obsidians and any other groups in a similar position.

3. I'm also concerned about the workability of the permits that are held available for last-minute use, but I don't have enough details to know if this has been worked out. Specifically, obtaining a permit from a Forest Service office might be unworkable (either because there is no office en route to the trailhead or because the office is closed), and there often is no Internet access from trailheads, so if someone arrived at the trailhead and only then realized that they needed a permit for that hike, they wouldn't be able to obtain one. But I'm sure you've put thought into these issues, so perhaps you have developed solutions.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting and restoring our wilderness areas, and for your attention to public input.

Sincerely,

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