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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I'm strongly opposed to any proposal to charge American citizens and other visitors for simply taking a walk in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades.

Your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright to all our citizens, open to all the public and not just those wealthy enough to pay additional fees. All citizens across the nation already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System and we have paid, and continue to pay, for them with our taxes. It is simply unsound to attempt to charge people to visit the Wilderness they already own.

These proposed fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands.

The Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas already plan to require limited-access permits starting next year to prevent overcrowding and resource damage. While I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, I'm adamantly opposed to our own federal government charging hikers a fee simply to take a walk in the Wilderness. I think you'll agree that this would be ridiculous. Rather than charge wilderness-lovers and stewards of our lands a fee to walk, fees must instead be mandated for industry polluters who are negatively changing our climate with their reckless, inadvertent destruction of protected and un-protected wilderness areas, including land/soil, water, air and wildlife habitat worldwide.

This use fee (for just being there) proposal is unfair, unsound, and unprecedented...as the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests, if allowed, would be implementing a fee system across three Wilderness areas that will charge for all overnight use plus day use at 19 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of Wilderness. Citizen's are not going to a movie or an amusement park when they go to the wilderness...they're walking into their own reality in a natural setting...to simply enjoy the lack of commercialism of wilderness.

The USFS is incorrectly claiming authority for charging such fees under a clause in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) that allows a fee for "specialized recreation uses" such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicles. Congress never meant that to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

Such fees are not legal and not acceptable for any Wilderness areas in our nation, and I strongly request that you abandon this poor idea for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Judy Lukasiewicz

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