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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation/Hiking Fee Comments

Dear USFS Officials,

I am writing to express my disgust at your attempt to exclude a segment of the public who use public lands by implementing a fee-for-hiking scheme in two of our national forests.

I am an avid hiker who loves the outdoors and am finding it more difficult than ever to access public lands, which we own, because land managers are implementing fees that present a barrier to participating in outdoor activities on our lands. I use the trails in the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests regularly along with trails in other forests in Western States. The proposed fees for accessing the trail systems in these forests will prevent me and others from using these trails in the future.

The Willamette National Forest and Deschutes National Forest are the first national forests in the U.S. to try to implement a fee system across three wilderness areas that will charge all overnight users and 19 trailhead day users across over 450,000 acres. The proposed access and reservation fees are exorbitant and they violate FLREA, which prohibits charging for general access, hiking, horseback riding, dispersed camping, and other uses.

What you are attempting is a clear violation of law! Traveling on foot through a Wilderness Area is not a specialized recreation use within the meaning of FLREA. The plain language of the statute limits permit fees specifically to uses such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicle use. Activities such as hiking, horseback riding, and dispersed camping are wholly outside the scope of the specialized activities Congress intended to cover.

I am writing to register my objections to your illegal and unethical attempt to exclude segments of the population from accessing our lands based on socioeconomic considerations.

Please add these comments to the record in advance of your meeting to consider the matter on November 21, 2019 at the Hilyard Community Center in Eugene.

Regards,

Andrew Eatchel

United States of America