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Organization:

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Comments: Central Cascades Wilderness Project

Terry Hill

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Dear Willamette National Forest,

The current on-line application process appears to lead to abuse. It is the problem we've seen at Mt St Helens, where day-use climbing permits are reserved, but not used. I went online sometime back to acquire permissions for a four person climb of Middle Sister, only to find that there were no available days on the USFS schedule. It looked suspiciously like local citizens booked every available day in order to guarantee access. This, of course, means the permit system might give a false record of use, and unintentionally (or intentionally) discourage interested parties from entering these areas. As a result, I have stopped visiting the Three Sisters, although I often spend time exploring them on Google Earth. Sad. I'm not convinced limiting access & charging fees is the answer. For example, I live in the Columbia River Gorge NSA, where one of the most popular trails in the USA (Eagle Creek Trail) sees a frightful number of users. It is currently closed to the public, due to the EC wildfire, but it will likely reopen next year without restrictions. This trail gets hammered all summer long, but it seems to survive. The same can be said for Mt Hood. There will always be irresponsible users, but our public lands can withstand an enormous amount of wear & tear if the rest of us join efforts to take care of them. From LNT programs to litter patrols, enforcement details and trail crews, there are ways we can educate the public that will resolve many of these problems. Here's a quote from Scott Cook in his book Curious Gorge, where he recalls a conversation with Nancy Russell (Friends of the Columbia River Gorge): "Nancy advised me that if I choose to 'protect' my gorge 'secrets' and not share the knowledge with the public, then often some of these 'secrets' will go away... they will be developed, or closed off, or logged or some such... some of your secrets may already be on some agency's hit list... help preserve them by making them more popular." The idea, although not intuitive, is that granting wider public access may be the best way of preserving public lands.

Sincerely,

Terry Hill