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First name: Keri

Last name: Sprenger

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Central Cascades Wilderness Project

Keri Sprenger

14913 SE Mill Plain

Vancouver, WA 98684

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Dear Willamette National Forest,

I wish to provide feedback on the limited access plan for Central Oregon. My issues with this plan can be broken up into three different areas: education, accessibility, and safety.

The Forest Service should implement other, less restrictive management tools prior to implementing limited-entry day-use permits. Examples include educational programs focused on leave no trace practices, administrative signage, revegetation and restoration projects to address areas of concern, and installation of toilet facilities and/or wag bag stations to address human waste issues. This is what we have done as Wilderness Stewards in Mt Hood National Forest and that program has been quite successful. We also work as Trailhead Ambassadors in the Columbia River Gorge, providing educational resources and information to hikers at trailheads. Both of these programs serve a metro area with more than a million people. If we can do it without adding additional restrictions, you guys can as well.

Adding fees to permits creates additional barriers to access for low-income individuals and families. If you must pass this plan, please consider NOT charging fees so that the wilderness can remain accessible to all. Many families are already struggling to make ends meet, and none of us have enough time in the day to get out as much as we need to for health reasons. All this will do is create another obstacle to stop people from getting out there.

Also, when Mt St Helens moved to a limited access system, people have been shown to be more likely to stick to their plans to climb, even when weather conditions are not good. We have dozens of rescues each year because of this. People know they only get one shot (the date on their permit) and they stick to their plans because they've already paid for the permit. They downplay weather risks because of this and end up in a dangerous situation. A surefire way to ensure that an unequal burden of services falls on SAR teams is to force daily limitations on climbing South Sister.

I hope you will consider these points when you make your final decision.

Sincerely,

Keri Sprenger