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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation User Fees Comments

Hello,

My name is Andy Wellman and I live in Terrebonne, OR, and I am writing to say that I strongly disagree with the proposal to charge user fees AT ALL, at the wilderness trail heads. At the bottom of the press release for this decision it says that the USDA is an "equal opportunity provider," but this action shows that in fact it is not.

Charging user fees as a means of user deterrence, which is exactly what this is, is frankly wrong and not at all in the spirit of public lands being available for public recreation use. Is it even legal?

Beyond that sentiment, I must say that permits should NOT be sold only on recreation.gov, which is once again limiting the access potential of the public, and necessitating fee increases. It only makes sense to make permits available first come, first serve, at the parking lots for trailheads. This is basically already in effect with mandatory wilderness permits that exist at every trail head in these wilderness areas, so why not simply tweak the system slightly. Being able to reserve permits in advance, and having to get them online, with no possibility of getting them at the trailhead, freezes out lots of potential users, especially international tourists who may not know about or understand the system, impulsive locals who may just want to go for a hike near their home without 6 months planning, and underprivileged people who either don't have the money for the permits, or don't have access to the internet. Furthermore, anyone who has stayed at a campground managed by recreation.gov reservations in the past few years has noticed that up to 1/3 of the reserved sites PER NIGHT, are not actually being used. People can simply reserve way too far in advance, then not use their reservation, and these sites are left empty when people who roll in day of are needing sites, are on site, and are then told there is no availability. This system simply isn't right, and needlessly freezes people out. The same thing will happen with hiking reservations. On sight and free user permits is the only reasonable way (and perhaps legal way?) of actually reducing traffic without at the same time unnecessarily limiting the user opportunity, which the USDA is Mandated to do - EQUAL OPPORTUNITY!

Set up an automated permit kiosk at each trailhead parking area, exactly like they have at Oregon State Parks, which can use a computer to count the number of permits issued per day, then simply police by driving through the parking lot and seeing who has a permit on their dashboard and who doesn't. So much simpler, and offering equal opportunity to all.

Thank you, respectfully,  
andy wellman