

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/20/2019 10:22:55 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

I strong oppose your proposal to charge recreation fees for people simply taking a walk in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades Mountains.

Your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting legislated wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright for all 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 for them with our taxes. It is simply unjust to charge people to visit the wilderness they already own.

These 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 U.S. Forest Service already intends to require limited-access permits for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas in 2020. While I support management plans to protect wilderness areas from being damaged by over-use and over-crowding, I am opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee simply to take a walk in the wilderness.

This fee proposal is unprecedented; the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests would be the first in the nation to implement a fee system that will charge for day use at 19 trailheads and overnight use at 79 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of legislated wilderness.

The U.S. Forest Service incorrectly claims authority for charging such fees under a clause in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act that allows a fee for "specialized recreation uses" such as group activities, organized recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicles. I do not believe that Congress meant that clause to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

While the fees may seem reasonable at \$3 per person for day use and \$5 per person for overnight use, the processing service fee per transaction of \$1 for day hikers and \$6 per overnight group charged by Recreation.gov suddenly makes these fees a lot more costly and raises them to a level that could discriminate against low-income individuals and families. Such fees could be stacked on top of the requirement to display a Northwest Forest Pass at some trailheads.

Although most of the money collected would be invested in wilderness management, trail maintenance, visitor education and expanding work with volunteers and partners with the three wildernesses, that should be happening anyway.

Such fees would set a horrible national precedent for other wilderness areas both in Oregon and around the country. I urge you to withdraw your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters wildernesses.

Sincerely,
Susan Saul
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