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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

First of all, Happy Thanksgiving. It is a day when all Americans give thanks for those things that are special to them. For me, I give thanks for the Wilderness Act and the special places it protects and allows access to.

Therefore I am opposed to a proposal to charge people for simply taking a walk in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades.

I believe this proposal violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification because it charges a fee. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright to all our citizens, open to all the public and not just those wealthy enough to pay additional fees. This is at a time when we are all feeling more crowded together and Wilderness Areas give us solitude and a place to think while we are walking along.

At Thanksgiving time, I like to think that all citizens across the nation already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System. We have paid for them with our taxes. Therefore it is simply unreasonable to charge citizens again to visit the Wilderness areas they already own.

I also believe these fees are illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands.

The Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas already plan to require limited-access permits starting next year to prevent overcrowding and resource damage. While I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, I'm adamantly opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee simply to take a walk in the Wilderness.

This fee proposal is unprecedented as the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests would be the first national forest in the U.S. to implement a fee system across three Wilderness areas that will charge for all overnight use plus day use at 19 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of Wilderness.

The USFS is incorrectly claiming authority for charging such fees under a clause in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) that allows a fee for "specialized recreation uses" such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicles. Congress never meant that to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

Such fees would set a horrible national precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country and I urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Paul Luehrmann
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