

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/21/2019 3:05:10 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I strongly oppose your proposal to charge people for simply taking a walk in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas in the Oregon Cascades.

Your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright to all of our citizens, open to the public and not just to those who are wealthy enough to pay additional fees. All citizens across the nation already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System because we have paid for them with our taxes. It is unjust to charge people to visit the Wilderness they already own.

By excluding the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands, these fees also would be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

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 am 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 in the U.S. to implement a fee system across three Wilderness areas that would charge for all overnight use plus day use at 19 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of Wilderness.

The U.S. Forest Service is incorrectly claiming the authority to charge such fees under a clause in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act that allows a fee for "specialized recreation uses" such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicles. Congress never intended 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,
Marilyn Martin
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