

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/21/2019 5:24:32 AM

First name: Leon

Last name: Steen

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I'm adamantly opposed to 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 this includes by the Forest Service itself. 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. 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.

In my opinion these fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would exclude the public from fully 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. I support necessary quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people; however there's no reason to associate these quotas to a fee, and 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; day-hiking is in no way a "specialized recreational use" -- at its most fundamental, hiking is what "specialized recreational use" is measured against.

Congress never meant "specialized recreational use" to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and/or tent camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

I urge you to abandon this fee "scheme" for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leon Van Steen

154 Dwight St

San Francisco, CA 94134