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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

As someone to whom wilderness is essential to life, I strongly oppose your intention to charge for merely taking a walk in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades, and I urge you to reconsider this proposal.

Your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wilderness areas from commercialization and commodification. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright of 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 Wilderness areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System -- we have paid, and continue to pay, for them with our taxes. It is unconscionable to charge people for visiting the Wilderness they already own.

These fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act in that they 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 overrun by visitors, I adamantly oppose 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 terrible 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,

Susan Ellenbogen

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