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First name: Roger

Last name: O'Neil

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Proposed Special Recreation Permit Fee Structure

Thank you for taking comments on the proposed permit fee structure for the Central Cascades National Forests. As part of our local hiking groups in Bend, Oregon, there are 2 comments, in particular, I/we would like you to consider for the new proposed structure.

1. Limiting day-use groups to 4-5 people: This is a VERY SMALL group that I/we find too restrictive. This would not allow for a family of four to invite other friends or visiting relatives to use the day trails as a group...nor for our hikers to enjoy the trails as a group. This is much too limited in size. We would like to recommend that the maximum size group be increased to at least 6-7. Any smaller group size is too restrictive and, in our view, not necessary...6-7 max group size would likely work.

Further, we would like to strongly recommend that hiking groups with more than 6-7 people be allowed to separate into two groups, but hike at different times, not together, so as not to "crowd" the trails. This would still allow our local residents to enjoy the same great trails and vistas of our public National Forests and share their enthusiasm with others in their groups.

2. Reducing Permitted Trails to 19 Trail areas: The current USFS proposal limit reduction to 19 trail areas is moving in the right direction. We would like to strongly recommend, however, that the first year of permit restrictions (2020) should include a much smaller number of trails, say 3-4 of the most popular trails, e.g. Green Lakes. By reducing this to 3-4 trails in the first year of testing to include the most popular trails only would allow an orderly process of working out potential issues and evaluation of permit limits.

Other issues, such as cancelling hikes, reducing a group size, or returning of permit fees when a hike is cancelled, still appear problematic. Hopefully, flexibility can be added to the permit system to accommodate these changes.

Thank you for your efforts in working to improve the public enjoyment of our national treasures.

Roger O'Neil
Bend,OR