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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Public comment on Central Cascades wilderness Special Recreation Permit Fee

To whom it may concern:

I attended the public meeting held at the Deschutes NF office in Bend on Nov. 12, 2019 to learn more about the proposed fee system. I must tell you that I felt that the format of the meeting was extremely ineffective. After the power point presentation by the USFS, they told us that we had to find one of the USFS employees and form small groups for a Q & A. The meeting attendees asked 3 times if we could have at least 15 minutes of the public meeting to ask questions to the USFS in front of the group so everyone could hear the questions and everyone could hear the answers. We were denied this opportunity. My experience in the small group Q & A was extremely frustrating. The noise in the room was so loud due to so many people speaking at the same time that often times I couldn't even hear the USFS employee answering questions in my group and he was standing right next to me! In the small group situations, there was always (I went to several different groups to try and have a discussion) one or two people who dominated the conversation and most of us couldn't get in a word edgewise. Once again, very frustrating. I am a public servant and work for the OR state government in natural resource protection and I have hosted a few public meetings in my day and I will say that the format of this meeting felt like the USFS was trying to avoid being "put on the spot" by the public, in front of the public and instead tried the "divide and conquer" tactic. It felt like it was more of a "let's check off the box" that we did the public meeting than it was a true conversation about our public land uses and changes. Once again extremely disappointed.

My comments regarding the proposed fee system are still forming as I don't think any of us really know how this change will impact our lives and the precedent it will have on our public lands becoming fee lands.

1) I live in Bend, OR and the fact that I have to apply for a permit to do a day hike after work on the designated trails is absurd. You will have taken away my right to enjoy and recreate in these lands on a whim. It feels like this proposed system is punishing the local people and benefiting the tourists. The same tourists who overuse our trails and don't understand wilderness ethics. I live in Central OR because I enjoy the wilderness as my therapy and I feel like I won't be able to do this because of these day use permit restrictions. Especially since I have to obtain a permit through Recreation.gov, which doesn't allow for a same-day permit. Where's the spontaneity in that? How many of us locals, that aren't retired, that aren't trust funders, and actually work a 8-5 job can have this kind of flexibility in my schedule to obtain a day use permit 2 days in advance?

2) A concern is people being out on trails during unsafe weather conditions due to the fact that they have a permit for a specific day. Once again, this can get a tourist who doesn't know much about being in the backcountry in big trouble if a system moves in or they get on the trail in unsafe weather conditions. According to the OR Office of Emergency Mgmt, 98.6% of the individuals who either need to be found or rescued in the wilderness areas by the Search and Rescue (SAR) are NOT from the County or are from out of state. How many more SAR missions will increase due to folks going out into the wilderness areas in unsafe conditions just because they only have a permit for X date? Who will pay for this cost increase in SAR missions?

3) The major concern is our public lands becoming fee lands and the long term impact this can have on the public's ability to enjoy and use public lands. We pay for public lands through our tax dollars, NW Forest Passes, Day use passes, Sno Park passes, etc. The precedent of making public lands fee lands is very scary as an American citizen. I realize that the federal administrations have been cutting USFS budgets and therefore reducing the amount of \$ and personnel on the ground to maintain our wilderness areas and educate wilderness users on wilderness ethics. However I will say that I feel that education and outreach by the USFS personnel, volunteers, etc are minimal and maybe if more effort was placed on educating people on wilderness ethics, we wouldn't be in this situation. In my experience if people are educated on how their choices and usage impact the wilderness areas they are exploring, they will change their behavior. Most people want to do the right thing, treat our natural resources with respect but a lot of people that come to Central OR to recreate are urbanites and have no idea about wilderness ethics. I feel that the education/outreach piece has really been missing in Central OR wilderness areas and should have been beefed up to avoid this situation in the first place.

Thank you.
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