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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 in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades. The U.S. Forest Service (FS) is proposing to charge people for simply walking in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades. Specifically, the FS wants to require fees for all overnight access to these Wildernesses-plus for day use at 19 trailheads-claiming hiking is a "specialized recreation use."

The proposed fees violate the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wilderness from commercialization and commodification.

The proposed fees are illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which prohibits charging fees for parking at, hiking through, horseback riding in, or camping in undeveloped federal sites such as Wildernesses. Despite Forest Service claims, traveling on foot or horseback through a Wilderness is not a "specialized recreation use," which applies to group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicle use.

The fees are tied to the Forest Service's limited-access permit system starting next summer for the Mount Jefferson, Mont Washington, and Three Sisters Wildernesses to prevent overcrowding and resource damage. While Wilderness Watch supports quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, we are adamantly opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee simply to take a walk in the Wilderness.

The fees are another part of the effort to commercialize Wilderness, and would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands.

This fee proposal is unprecedented, with the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests implementing fees across 450,000-plus acres in three Wildernesses for all overnight users plus day use at 19 trailheads. This fee system would set a horrible national precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country.

Your proposed fee also 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 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.

Thank you for taking action against these fees.

Sincerely, Rocco Frangione

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Rocco Frangione

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