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First name: CJ
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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I oppose 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. Fees are illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act because they exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands.

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.

Starting next year, the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington, and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas plan to require limited-access permits to prevent overcrowding and resource damage. While I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, 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 --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 by charging for overnight and day use at 19 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of Wilderness.

The USFS incorrectly claims authority for charging this type of fee 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.

These fees would set a horrible 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,
CJ Stevens
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