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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I'm opposed and concerned about your proposal to impose the fee system for use of trails in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades.

Although I deeply resonate with what seems like an action to protect wilderness from overuse, which indeed concerns me, this proposal still first, 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. This second part is concerning in that this proposal basically will be prohibitive for socio-economically disadvantaged families, in my opinion the populations that may benefit most from access to wilderness. Wilderness and its intent should be accessible all of our citizens, 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.

These fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and 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. In addition, The current proposal lacks a direct funding strategy that guarantees, or even shows an intent, to return any of the revenue directly into improving these areas and mediating resource damage, overuse. There simply isn't a financial map that shows this is more than an illegal revenue generator that both uses these areas to fund other FS agendas and branches, AND favors the wealthy users over open access that merely looks at quotas- not dollars.

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 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. We need a more resonant, transparent solution.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Alyce Pearce

Sincerely,  
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