

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/22/2019 9:01:18 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

Because your proposed hiker fees are illegal under the rules of 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) I'm absolutely opposed to your proposal to charge us for taking a walk in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades. This is my neighborhood! I volunteer here to build and maintain trails and you have NO right to charge us to use them.

By all means, it'd be great to have you hire Rangers, enforce the rules governing user interface, cite offenders, and upgrade facilities. However, your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification.

These, indeed all, Wilderness areas belong to all of "We The People." They are our irreplaceable birthright, open to all citizens, open to all the public--and must not be limited to 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 we already own.

These fees are illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands. Since Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas already have a plan to require limited-access permits starting next year to prevent overcrowding and resource damage, let's actually try and let that happen, see how it works.

While I do support usage rules and 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. That's just wrong.

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 individuals hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest. Indeed, muscle powered use is required to be the way to visit wilderness!

Such illegal and inequitable fees set a horrible national precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country and I thus urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters.

Sincerely,

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