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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Wilderness Rec Fee Comments

To Whom It May Concern,

I want to first thank you for taking the time to field all of the public impute regarding the proposed wilderness recreation fees for the Jefferson, Three Sisters, and Mt. Washington Wilderness areas. These areas are very special to me and I want to see them preserved for generations to come.

For a little background about myself. I grew up in McKenzie Bridge just a short drive from all of these wilderness areas. I have fond memories of going backpacking, trail running, and hunting in these areas. I worked 9 summer seasons as a Recreation Technician in Developed Rec on the McKenzie River Ranger District and I loved going back every summer. It gave me a chance to give back and help preserve the beautiful McKenzie River I grew up on. The thoughts that I have about these proposed permits and rec fees might come from a slightly biased background because I'm from that area, but I have also experienced other wilderness areas all over the west coast and worked for the Forest Service for 9 seasons. I hope my background in these areas gives me a broad scope on some ideas I had when I attended the Eugene public meeting in November and read through the documents the Willamette National Forest provided for us.

1: I had some questions about why you chose to go with the "group permit" instead of "individual permits." This can really limit the number of people who will be able to access the wilderness. If you are going off of the maximum number of people on that group permit (12) and very rarely those permits are filled to capacity, then why not have individual permits? My other big question to go along with this is, why have group permits yet you are charging for individual people on that permit. And to add an extra \$5 per night/person fee on top of that. What is the extra night camping fee for? That seems a bit excessive.

2: Having individual permits will also make the percentage of "walk-up" permits the day of easier for people to access. If there are 3 group permits for a particular trailhead and you have 40% of the permits available as "walk-up" and 60% reservable then are you going to have 2 permits available for reservation and only 1 for "walk-up"? That doesn't seem realistic. If you go off of using individual permits then you would have 36 permits at that trailhead, 22 permits would be reservable, and 14 would be "walk-up." This seems more accommodating for people to enjoy the wilderness. In my experience, those 36 permits will never be filled.

Furthermore, it was my understanding, the way you came up with the number of group permits per trailhead is based on the number of people that particular area could withstand per night. My problem is that the area will never reach the maximum number of people if the group permit system stays in place. Not that I would want that many people in the wilderness, because I go into the wilderness to get away from people, but I feel like it wouldn't be close and some people would miss an opportunity to enjoy a wilderness experience.

As I mentioned above, if there is a trailhead with 3 group permits, once those 3 permits are reserved nobody else can go in there. It could be as few as 3 people. You could get closer to the 36 maximum people per/night in that area if you used individual permits. In my experience 2 summers ago, this is the system that Yosemite NP uses for their wilderness areas.

3: I realize there is a fee that cannot be changed for the \$6 processing fee for recreation.gov. I can understand there being an additional fee going towards the rec departments to help fund these wilderness areas and I think that is great and I'm in full support of that. Working in developed rec for 9 seasons, I know how little money the trails crews have. The part that worries me is the overnight fee/person. Camping needs to be an affordable hobby and the more nights you can spend in the wilderness usually the deeper into the wilderness you can go. You can get further away from the crowds and you can see some really special places. I have been on many wilderness trails that become very hard to find because they are so overgrown because of lack of usage. This becomes very exciting for me because I know I probably won't see many people and the wilderness solitude really starts to set in for me. I'm afraid if the per night fee stays in place, it will become more and more difficult for me and others to spend longer trips in the wilderness because it would become too expensive.

If the \$6 rec.gov fee and the \$5 individual person wilderness rec fee stayed in place, you could pay \$11 in the beginning when you get your permit and that would be it. This is still \$11 more than it was before, but this seems like a fee that would be reasonable.

4: Volunteer hours to gain access to a free wilderness pass is a great idea! Being aware of who is volunteering already and who you might try to get help from in the future is going to be important. Right now the majority of your volunteers are retirees or people with part-time jobs who are able to put in more hours. You need to reach the average person who works a full-time job who may only have a few weekends a year to recreate and go backpacking and might be willing to give up some of that time to volunteer for trail maintenance or other projects. This is something I believe needs to happen and would be a win-win for everyone! However, this also needs to be attainable or nobody will be able to do it or they won't even attempt it. In my opinion, I think 20-30 hours would be reasonable. That would be anywhere from 3-4 full-time days. For someone who might only have 4 weekends available per year and who would more than likely have a 2-3 hour drive one way to the trailhead to volunteer seems like a realistic goal.

5: I also noticed the hunting seasons approved were limited and they are only for day use and the hunters would not be able to camp overnight. If someone is going to hunt in the wilderness they are going to hike a day or two to get deep into the wilderness. Why is camping not allowed? And why only allow 3 different tags? I was told this information was gathered from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and they looked at the data and determined the wilderness areas received the most pressure from these three tags. I have a couple of spots I like to bear hunt in the wilderness but that tag was not included on the approved tags. I realize there are some hunting seasons that don't fall under the wilderness permit calendar (May-end of Sept.), but I would like to know if you would be open to considering approving other hunting tags like my bear season which runs from August to the end of the year?

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my extensive email. I apologize for the length. If you have any questions or ideas I would love to continue this conversation either over email or a phone call.

Have a great day,
David Sherman
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