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Organization:
Title:
Comments: Input on Special Recreation Permit Fees

Willamette National Forest
Attn: Recreation Fees
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Springfield, OR 97477

WillametteRecFeeComments@usda.gov

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed fees and permitting for the Oregon Cascades area trail users. I believe that restricted access only treats the symptoms of irresponsible use and not the root causes. My comments reflect a solution to replace your tactic with a positive strategy - that of responsible use -- instead of the negative restricted use. I think positive approaches sell better to the public and to users building good will toward those agencies funded by our tax dollars. I would like you to carefully consider this approach as a part of your final decision.

I have ridden hundreds of miles on our trails and appreciate the beauty Oregon has to offer and the stewardship of our land managers and volunteers. I am a member of a number of riding clubs: Oregon Equestrian Trails, Back Country Horsemen of Oregon, Redmond Saddle Club, Oregon Pleasure Walking Horse Club, and Crooked River Ranch Riders. I am an equestrian and hiker and was a cyclist in my younger years. In my career I was an international consultant helping private and public organization become more effective in aligning their strategies with tangible results. I believe my comments to be relevant and worth thorough consideration.

One of the key root causes of conflict and trail abuse is lack of responsible use. Programs such as Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly and others, when incorporated into required training to receive a tag or permit, and perhaps in lieu of fees, have been shown to change the dynamic of user conflicts and land management issues.

In addition, in regard to free vs. fee permitting, I suggest the following groups be exempt from paying a permit fee. My reasons are that these groups have likely already "paid their dues" in terms of taxation and volunteerism and understand the concepts of responsible behavior, contributing to the protection of rather downgrading our natural resources and environments.

Non-fee permitting is suggested for these groups and people:

- * Seniors
- * Differently abled users
- * Veterans
- * Documented volunteers
- * Those trained and practicing Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly or similar programming

Suggested Restricted permits, fees:

* The largest user groups, with a specific number for each user type and a breakover number at which groups may need to be dispersed due to trail impacts of large groups. Those with Leave No Trace or similar training would exempt from the total count.

* Motorized use, where allowed, would be subject to fees and limited numbers. Training would be required along with fees for permits.

* Non-motorized but mechanized use, where allowed, would be subject to fees and restricted numbers. Training would be required along with fees for permits.

* Users with dogs, llamas, goats, etc., will pay an additional impact fee/permit fee for each animal and be required to take training in management of animals other than stock on the trail. (It would be very difficult to identify which groups are causing the most mess. If you compare dog poop with horse poop, perception of volume is everything, even though there are different disease risks involved with dogs.

Online camping reservations

* If you have a paid camping spot reserved, you should get accompanying permits at no added cost. This would be done on-line when the reservation is made

The restriction of access without due consideration of root causes, falls short. Please consider the logic outlined below to REWARD POSITIVE BEHAVIORS and create a long-term approach that will build stewardship -- not create conflict between the public and the agencies involved.

Root causes include

1. Too many trail users that are NOT engaged in Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly and other similar practices
2. Widespread use of disposable products instead of (for example) taking home and washing your water bottle/canteen, mess kit
3. Widespread use of prepackaged snacks in disposable but not biodegradable packages

Solutions to root causes

An approach that includes the following:

1. Providing unrestricted free permitting to anyone who has engaged in Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly and similar programs. Details would need to be worked out on this.
2. Recognition of appropriate proof of engagement in Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly, etc.
3. FS offering or subcontracting Leave No Trace, Tread Lightly, etc. for a fee. The training/certification would be fee based and required to be repeated annually.

I believe there would be more revenue from the price of the classes taken by a large group of the population than from a few fee based restricted permits from a limited group of users. This could result in greater revenue to steward the trails, and greater support from a larger population. It is a win-win not a lose-lose.

Your willingness to rethink restricted permitting and consider responsible permitting would also demonstrate good faith in asking for comment and considering these comments.

I am likely not completely versed on all current practices, policies and technologies. I would like to discuss the above ideas in that context. I and the equine community appreciate your consideration of the above methods incorporated in an effort to resolve current usage issues.

Sincerely, Linda Nolte

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