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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I'm writing to oppose your proposal to charge people for walking in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades.

Wilderness areas belong to all of us as Americans. The imposition of fees goes against the principles of public access. The proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting wilderness areas from commercialization and commodification. We pay for access with our taxes and should not be charged again.

Access to public lands must not become a privilege only the well-off can enjoy.

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. 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 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.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Jacquelyn Pope
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