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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

To the U.S. Forest Service:

Your proposal to charge people for taking a walk in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades requires objection.

The fee you've proposed violates both the purpose and intent of the Wilderness Act. Protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification is a central purpose of that Act.

Wilderness areas belong to ALL American people. They are open to ALL OF THE PUBLIC -- not only the people wealthy enough to pay extra fees.

All American citizens throughout our country already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System. We've paid for these irreplaceable lands with our hard-earned tax dollars. How does it make sense to charge people to just to take a walk on Wilderness lands that we already own?

These proposed fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, as well as excluding the American 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. I can support reasonable quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-used by people. But I'm opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee just to take a walk in the Wilderness.

My understanding is that this fee proposal is unprecedented in the United States, and that 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 for 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 intended for that to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding, and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

These kinds of fees would set a terrible precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country. For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you for considering my comment.

Sincerely,
Jeff Kronick

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