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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I am adamantly opposed to your proposal to charge people for simply taking a walk in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades. 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 -- an unconscionable idea which would set a dreadful precedent for others.

Your proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright to all our citizens, open to all the public, not just those who can afford the fees you contemplate charging. All citizens across the nation ALREADY OWN the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System; we have paid for them with our taxes. It is shameful to contemplate charging people to visit Wilderness they already own.

These fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, as they would exclude some members of 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. This is a great idea! I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, but am adamantly opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee for taking a walk in their own 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 clause 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 dreadful precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country. I urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Serena Van Buskirk

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