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First name: Fran

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I'm adamantly opposed to the 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.

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, open to all the public and not just those wealthy enough to pay additional fees. We Americans already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System and we have paid for them with our taxes. It would be wrong, therefore, to charge people to visit the Wilderness they already own.

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 authorized charges applied to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest. Such is the purpose of these lands. Any fees for individual enjoyment and appreciation of these lands would set a horrible national precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country.

Wilderness is a great teacher and a great healer of the spirit. I support substantial fines for violation of any stated rules and regulations, particularly property damage or other miss-use of the lands, including littering, defacement of property, fire damage, and disruptive noise and behaviors. But I strongly urge you to abandon your fee scheme for respectfully visiting the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you for your work that enables all people to visit and be restored by experiencing these beautiful lands.

Fran L.

Sincerely,

Fran Langner
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