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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Recreation Fees

Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

Dear U.S. Forest Service:

I am writing because I am seriously concerned about 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.

There is a good argument to be made that the proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, including protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Our Wilderness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceable birthright of all our citizens, open to all the public and not just to those wealthy enough to pay additional fees. All citizens across the nation already own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System and we already pay for them with our taxes. It is simply not appropriate to charge people to visit the Wilderness they already own.

It is my understanding that these fees would be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. In any case, they would be likely to exclude a large segment 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. While I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, I am 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.

I understand that the USFS is 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. I would argue, however, that 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.

I am concerned that enacting the proposed fees would set a harmful precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country. With this in mind, I respectfully urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rachael Denny

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