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Comments: Proposed usage fees for high use trails in Deschute and Willamette NF

I read the Decision Notice posted on the USDA Deschutes NF web page and wish to offer the following comments.

First, I agree with and support control and limits on access to wilderness areas. Being a US citizen and tax payer, I understand people arguing that these lands are public and they already pay for management and access to those areas. And in a utopian world where everyone has the discipline to self-monitor and share access that would be a good argument. However, anyone who has spent some time in our wilderness areas has seen too many examples of their favorite areas being "discovered", inundated with people and dogs and horses and (God forbid) off road vehicles and motorcycles, by people who argue "this is public land, I am the public and therefore I can do whatever I want on this land. It's my land". The fact they are destroying the very essence of why that is designated wilderness area and that their behavior ruins it for everyone else does not factor into their argument. Encountering scores of people, some leaving the established trails, making damaging short cuts across switchbacks, building campfires and cutting timber, playing loud music on portable speakers, dropping their Kleenex and granola wrappers on the ground for someone else to pick up, etc. is 100% contrary to the whole idea of "wilderness" and absolutely ruins the experience for most of the people who go into the wilderness to observe and learn about our forests in their natural state. Therefore, some other mechanism is needed to protect the wilderness experience and limit human access and impact. Call it tough love. It's necessary for our own well being and the well being of the wilderness areas. Might I encounter times when I want to go for a hike and not be allowed to because the permit quota has already been reached? Absolutely. But that's a risk I am willing to take if it means those days when I do get to take that hike are truly a wilderness experience absent of human impact. Consider the Grand Canyon access program. It makes it even more special when you do get to actually float the canyon.

Regarding adding a fee for the permit...again I am supportive of that fee PROVIDED those fees are earmarked for the protection and management of wilderness areas. Similar to fishing licenses, I view this as "pay to play". If it's worth it to me to participate in that activity, I should be willing to pay for it. There is no free lunch in this world. What I absolutely abhor is when fees are charged for a specific activity (like wilderness access or fishing) and those fees are then deposited into the general budget for use on initiatives that have nothing to do with activity for which the fee was charged. Or when bureaucrats play games with the budget and actually do earmark those funds for the specific activity but at the same time reduce the amount of money apportioned for that activity from the general budget - the result being the same - bureaucrats get more money for their pet projects while the quality of the specific activity users are paying to protect continues to decline. To that end, I did not see anything in the Decision Notice that stipulates the funds generated from these permits would be earmarked for protecting wilderness areas and that the portion from the general fund for these wilderness areas would not be reduced as a result of this additional revenue. That should be codified as part of this decision.

Finally, I note there is a plethora of comments opposing the fees. I also note, just as am sure you have, that the majority of these comments are simply a cut & pasted form letter. I note that most of them are also from outside of Oregon. In my opinion that form letter was written by lawyers and is being sent in by people who are not in a position to provide objective, substantive comments about this issue to protect Oregon's wilderness

areas. It seems they are more concerned about establishing a fee structure to access public lands and if Oregon is successful at implementing that structure it sets a precedence for wilderness areas in all National Forests. Frankly, that should have no bearing on this decision. If it doesn't mean enough for people to take the time to read the literature and fully understand what is being proposed and then compose their own comments, then it really isn't much of a concern to them, now is it?

Thank you for providing the ability to read and understand what is being proposed and to send in my comments. Hopefully, wilderness areas will be remain truly wild without having to resort to complete restriction of human access.

Sincerely,
Doug Jeffries
Redmond, OR

"I'm talking about a game ... a game that can't be won, only played" Bagger Vance