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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Proposed Wilderness fees

To the Willamette and Deschutes National Forest managers/ directors:

My partner and I have been hiking for over 50 years each and have long been members of several hiking clubs in Oregon. We are both now in our 70s. We still love to hike weekly, and often just with ourselves and our dog, although age has somewhat limited the length and altitude gain of our hikes. Most of our hiking has occurred in Oregon, especially the Columbia Gorge, Mt. Hood Wilderness, and the Three Sisters Wilderness, however, we do travel to and hike in many western states like Idaho, Montana, Utah, Arizona, and N.M. We have never had to apply for a permit to hike anywhere except one place and that was for the Obsidian Trail in the Three Sisters Wilderness. We had to obtain our permits several weeks in advance, not knowing what the weather would be like on the day we reserved. We were younger then and it would not have been as bad an experience if the day we picked was not the best. However, now, we are fair weather hikers and obtaining a permit in advance would be a disappointment in many ways. It is not necessarily the expense of the permit. We are happy to support trail maintenance, etc. with a fee system in place for hiking. However, losing the spontaneity of choosing a place to hike when the weather is good and when it would be safer hiking conditions at our age would affect us very much.

We have been now in Central Oregon for 14 years and have witnessed the excessive crowding and overuse of trails in the Cascades. Because our main purpose for hiking is the serenity and solitude that wilderness offers, we have had to avoid many of the most popular trails anyway. So we often hike the less traveled trails off the Cascade Lakes Hwy. or drive to Newberry Volcanic Monument or the Ochocos to hike where it is less crowded. We also choose middle of the week rather than weekends to hike, and will use the most popular trails like Moraine Lake or Broken top in the fall when summer crowds clear out. We have tried to not add to the disturbing overuse.

Because we have tried to be good stewards of wilderness use, we now feel penalized that we have to obtain permits to hike trails that we love, only to find out that the day we obtain the permit to hike will end up to be rainy, perhaps with a chance of thunder and lightning, cold, or even snowing. To have to reapply and reapply and either have to bail out due to adverse weather or due to lack of available permits will certainly affect our enjoyment of what has been decades of access to our number one form of recreation. We really do not have an alternative to the permit system, other than possibly making an exception for seniors for hiking when they want to...perhaps in the model of the senior pass to National Parks where an issued card at a one time fee would allow us to gain access anytime to trails that will require permits. If such a system was in affect, we would still not abuse its use and would try other less popular trails in different areas not known for overuse, during the times of maddening summer crowds that overrun trails such as to Green Lakes.

If the permit system goes into effect like proposed, I guess all we can say is that we thankfully once had the experience of hiking where and when we chose for decades and now all that has ended, mainly due to the over promotion of recreational opportunities from organizations and businesses like Visit Bend, etc., which we believe are ultimately responsible for ruining Bend, Deschutes national forest and its Wilderness trails.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Harris

Kermit Williams

Sent from my iPad