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Comments: Wilderness Area Fees

I'm sure you have heard it all before but I am taking a stab at this. I understand the reason(s) for starting a fee system but it rankles me.

I am fortunate that I can afford the fees but what I don't like is the "obstacles" to getting a permit for a day hike through recreation.gov. I have not found that to be a particularly customer friendly system and having to pay a reservation fee on top of the permit is BS. Maybe that is the purpose of your plan; make it difficult to get a permit. As of yet I have not read or seen any information about how one can go about obtaining a permit within a reasonable time frame.

Now here is my story. I am a native Oregonian. I have been privileged to be able to hike in both the Willamette and Deschutes National Forest wilderness areas most of my life, usually without a lot of planning beforehand. I remember trailheads with no one around and trails pretty much to myself. My wife and I are both retired now and continue to hike a few times a month in the proposed areas. How far ahead will I have to plan in order to go hiking? Will I have to identify what trail I want to use? Is there going to be a "limit" on the number of permits issued for any particular day, week or month????

Limiting my access and making me jump through hoops to get on a trail makes me wonder "what did I do wrong" to be treated like some kind of malicious invader. If the cause of a lot of the problems stems from too many visitors without a Leave No Trace ethic, how about starting a robust community involvement program emphasizing the need for wilderness visitors to be mindful of the responsibility to practice leave no trace.

How about getting Bend and Eugene visitor bureaus to get out front and start handing out "packets" of information and "limit" their promotion of the area simply for the sake of a few more dollars. Visit Bend has started a program for visitors reminding them to stop acting like idiots and respect the area when visiting. I know it is more than leave no trace but it would be a start.

What about a volunteer program? It should be up to everyone to be aware of the damage being done and work to reverse it and maintain what we have. There are outdoor hiking groups like CONC in Bend, and The Obsidians in Eugene that I think would be willing to help the Forest Service with a strong outreach and information campaign. What about putting volunteers and a part time "ranger" at the most used trailheads. They could hand out leave no trace and other information about how to help maintain the wilderness character they want to experience. The Forest Service could require and remind hiking visitors at the trailheads to carry the 10 essentials including how to dispose of and carry out their waste? If the hiker isn't prepared or smart enough to accept responsibility for maintaining the wilderness, turn them around. That would probably result in some conflict, but if the visitor knows in advance because they have been given information from Visit Bend, etc. and/or picked up information from the hotel they are staying in, "ignorance is no excuse" becomes easier to promote.

To me, just starting a permit program doesn't really address the heart of the issue which is community involvement and activism. It assumes that by limiting access the problem will be solved. Education in a variety of ways seems more appropriate. How is the Forest Service going to "enforce" the need to have a permit? Are there going to be rangers on all the trails in the backcountry asking to see visitors permits? If the FS can have that many rangers on the trails then maybe having them at the trailheads isn't that much of a resource issue?? Yes/No?

Thank you for your interest.