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First name: Ed

Last name: Gerdes

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I Support A Trailhead Fee Structure With These Suggestions

Dear District Rangers and Decision-Makers on Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

I am a member of the Pacific Crest Trail Association and am a volunteer steward of a section of the PCTA in the Three Sisters Wilderness. Since 2018, I have volunteered on trail crews in three wilderness areas: Three Sisters, Mt. Washington, Sky Lakes.

I have hiked Oregon's wilderness areas since the 1970's as a member of the Hi-Country 4-H Club in Jackson County. then as a guide with the Jackson County Parks and Recreation Dept., and throughout my life with select friends and alone. Over the years, I have witnessed the significant increase in use of our wilderness areas by people who respect and protect the areas and those who trample and destroy the legacy for our future children. The areas are being negatively impacted by too many people and animals which deteriorates the wilderness experience. Additionally, the areas are mostly too small in size to fully protect the ecosystems that they support.

Thus, I write to state my support for trailhead use fees in wilderness areas as a way to minimize numbers of people accessing those areas and to raise funds to patrol, study, restore, and protect those areas.

However, I suggest the following changes and additions to the proposed fee program:

1) Charge the same fee for all animals (including dogs) as are charged for pack animals. Or, ban dogs outright;

2) Limit the total number of people in a party to six (6) and the total number of animals to six (6). Twelve (12) people with twelve (12) animals is far to large a party within a wilderness area which are now heavily over populated with people and their pack animals and pets;

3) Set restrictions on the total number of people and animals that can enter at specific trailheads each day. Set that number such that the areas are minimally impacted;

4)) Require that groups of more than two (2) people submit a travel plan complete with designated camping locations for each night of their stay. Groups of two (2) or fewer people would not be required to submit travel plans but must still pay for multiple nights of a stay. However, it is unclear to me how the USFS will ensure that a person actually a lawful permit from the point of entry and has paid the appropriate fee. How will you distinguish between a person entering the wilderness from a trailhead without a fee from a person who claims to have entered from a trailhead without a fee but really entered from a trailhead with a fee? I have often found that the voluntary permit boxes now in existence are empty of permits. Enforcement may be a challenge.

5) Allow volunteers to purchase permits (or earn permits) through hours volunteered rather than dollars. I suggest establishing a set number of volunteer hours to qualify for a permit and then provide a free permit from a designated trail head covering a specified date range (maybe 10 days). More hours volunteered can result in more permits given for more trailheads. Ensure, however, that the permits are issued in the volunteer's name, require that only the volunteer may use it, and limit the permit to the volunteer only - not to include others who may be in the party with the volunteer.

I suggest:

- a) one permit for every 16 hours of volunteer time working on trail building or trail maintenance or attending trail college/certification classes;
- b) one permit for every 24 hours for all other volunteer time (administrative, planning, etc.)}

I suggest that a limited number of permits be set aside as priority permits for volunteers, but that those permits be released to the general public a designated number of days (like 20) in advance.

6) I propose prohibiting commercial operators from all of the popular trailheads that are subject to the new fees. Require commercial operators to pay fees for permits and restrict them to trailheads with lower usage numbers.

7) Eliminate the distinction of day use permits and overnight permits. Charge everyone the same fee for entering the wilderness from the trailhead. That fee would be \$5 for any portion of first 24-hour period, \$5 for any portion of second 24-hour period, and so on.

I appreciate this opportunity to comment on the proposal for the Special Recreation Permit Fee Management Plan.

Sincerely,

Ed Gerdes, OSB 915248
Consultant and Legal Counselor

