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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for your thoughtful and detailed plan to preserve the wilderness character and ecological values of Blue Lakes and improve the visitor experience.

I have backpacked to Blue Lakes, almost always with my father on our annual fishing trip, and often with others including my wife and other family members, every year since 1997 (with the exception of 2020), staying for 1-3 nights each visit. Over those years, we've seen an incredible increase in visitation along with the environmental degradation you document so well.

I generally favor the preferred alternative, and offer a few thoughts and suggestions.

Please do not implement a plan restricting visitation that you cannot enforce. Doing so penalizes those who respect the rules, while allowing those who do not (who are probably also those doing the most damage) to continue to visit without consequences. Dedicate appropriate resources to communicating and then enforcing the plan. Ticketing vehicles at the trailhead that are not displaying permits is probably the most efficient way to accomplish this. All recreation fees collected from permits should be dedicated toward funding enforcement and education.

I tend to favor the most restrictive options, so I'm surprised to find that I think the camping limit is on the low side, especially as many permits will not be for groups of 6. If there are four permits and each is for 2 people, only 8 individuals would be able to spend the night. Please consider a hybrid approach, balancing a maximum number of campsites (6? 8?) with a maximum number of individuals (24?). Permits could be sold until either the campsite or individual quota was filled. This will still dramatically improve the visitor experience.

Please do everything you can to make it easy for people to follow the rules. If, as the EA indicates, camping could be closed to everyone if a few people fail to remove their human waste, you must make it easy for them to do so to avoid penalizing the majority who comply. I do not want to lose my ability to camp and recreate at Blue Lakes because of other irresponsible users. Furthermore, if the lakes may be closed to camping due to human waste violations, they should also be closed to day users unless it can be proven that they do not contribute to those violations. Or if the lakes are closed to camping and waste violations continue, the closure should be reevaluated and new policies implemented to resolve the issue. In order to make compliance easy, please make wag bags available at the trailhead, or even include them in the permit fees, mailing one bag per person per night to the permittee.

My bottom line is that I do not want to lose my access as a responsible user based on the actions of those without permits or violating the conditions of their permits. This means I am strongly in favor of education, enforcement, and making it easy for people to comply.

I do believe that these changes will vastly improve the experience, and more importantly, preserve the landscape. The human waste is disgusting, and the crowds can be awful, especially at midday. I had thought that once my father was too old to make the trip up to the lakes, I would probably never return due to these issues. However, now I believe that I'll look forward to returning when these changes are implemented. I hope I'll enjoy another 25+ years of hiking and camping at Blue Lakes. Thanks.