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To:

Willamette and Deschutes National Forests <WillametteRecFeeComments@usda.gov>

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Subject: Recreation Fees

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Dear Willamette and Deschutes National Forests,

 Dear U.S. Forest =

Service:

I=E2=80=99m adamantly opposed to your proposal to charge pe=

ople for simply taking a walk in the in the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washingt=

on and Three Sisters Wilderness areas in the Oregon Cascades.

Your=

proposed fee violates the intent and purpose of the Wilderness Act, includ=

ing protecting Wildernesses from commercialization and commodification. Wil=

derness areas belong to all of the American people. They are an irreplaceab=

le birthright to all our citizens, open to all the public and not just thos=

e wealthy enough to pay additional fees. All citizens across the nation alr=

eady own the Wildernesses in the National Wilderness Preservation System an=

d we have paid for them with our taxes. It is simply unjust to charge peopl=

e to visit the Wilderness they already own.

These fees would also be illegal under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act and would exclude the public from accessing and enjoying their public lands.

The Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness Areas already plan to require limited-access permits starting next year to prevent overcrowding and resource damage. While I support quotas to protect Wilderness areas from being over-run by people, I am adamantly opposed to the federal government charging hikers a fee simply to take a walk in the Wilderness.

This fee proposal is unprecedented as the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests would be the first national forest in the U.S. to implement a fee system across three Wilderness areas that will charge for all overnight use plus day use at 19 trailheads across 450,000-plus acres of Wilderness.

The USFS is incorrectly claiming authority for charging such fees under a clause in the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) that allows a fee for "specialized recreation uses" such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicles. Congress never meant that to apply to private individuals who are hiking, walking, horseback riding and camping in a completely undeveloped part of a national forest.

Such fees would set a horrible national precedent for other Wilderness areas around the country and I urge you to abandon your fee scheme for the Mount Jefferson, Mount Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
 Dita Levstik
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