

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

17 May 2001

### **Yankee Boy Basin Fee Opponents Plan Protest**

Opposition is building to the U.S. Forest Service's decision to start charging fees to visit several popular hiking and 4-wheeling areas near Ouray and Telluride Colorado.

Beginning May 25<sup>th</sup>, the region encompassing Yankee Boy Basin, Imogene Pass, Canyon Creek, and the Weehawken hiking trail will no longer be free to the public. Fee payment stations will be located at the Canyon Creek Bridge on Ouray County Road 361, and on the Imogene Pass Road at the Tomboy ghost town near Telluride.

The area, which has mixed public and private ownership, has been selected as a "Fee Demo" site. Congress authorized the Fee Demo program in 1996 as a two-year test to see if the public would be willing to "Pay to Play" on publicly owned land that had previously been free. The test program has since been extended but is facing mounting opposition nationally.

State and local governments in California, Oregon, and New Hampshire have adopted official positions opposing Fee Demo, as have over 100 environmental and conservation groups, including the Sierra Club. Now the contentious issue has come to southwestern Colorado.

Opponents of the Fee Demo program plan a peaceful protest on May 25<sup>th</sup>, the day it goes into effect. They will drive in convoy into the fee area, without permits, to protest having to pay to enter public lands that they already support with tax dollars. Since the fee is authorized only for recreational users, protestors state that their purpose of exercising their First Amendment right to Free Speech is exempt. They also hope to convince Congress to fully fund public land management agencies with appropriations instead of by ticket sales.

Efforts are also underway to encourage boycotts of businesses in Ouray and Telluride that agree to sell the permits for the Forest Service. Similar boycotts in California have met with wide success.

Recreational users of the Yankee Boy Basin and Imogene Pass areas will be required buy a permit for \$5 per vehicle. Mountain bikes, ATVs and motorcycles will pay \$2.50. Foot travel will continue to be free, but vehicle access to several popular hiking trailheads will require the permit. Climbing Mt Sneffels, a popular "14er," will require either a vehicle permit or an 8-mile walk to the trailhead.

The USFS claims that 80% of the funds will be used for improvement of the area. In FY2000, however, the USFS nationally spent almost 70% of its Fee Demo receipts on routine operating costs, including 18% on fee collection. Resource Preservation received 3.4% of the total, while Habitat Enhancement got only 0.6%

**More Information: Kitty Benzar, 970/259-4616 or Jan Holt 970/382-8840**