

Western Slope No-Fee Coalition
P.O. Box 135
Durango, CO 81302
970/259-4616

June 6, 2003

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kitty Benzar, 970/259-4616

The Western Slope No-Fee Coalition will celebrate Flag Day, June 14th, by sponsoring a demonstration in Montrose, Colorado, in support of free public access to BLM lands.

Coalition supporters will be protesting the BLM's Gunnison Gorge Fee Demo project, east of Montrose, where the BLM charges \$3 merely to use the foot trails that access the Gunnison River. The popular fishing and rafting area is downstream from Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. The BLM is also considering designating a National Recreation Area, which the Coalition claims would expand the fees to include a popular OHV site east of Montrose known as "The Adobes."

The demonstrators plan to rally in front of the BLM's Montrose office at 2465 S. Townsend, from 10 A.M. to noon. They will distribute anti-Fee Demo literature and circulate petitions against the National Recreation Area.

"I can't think of a more patriotic way to honor Flag Day than by exercising our right as citizens to speak freely and to mobilize public opinion to influence government policy," said coalition spokesperson Kitty Benzar. "The Gunnison Gorge is a poster child for what's wrong with Fee Demo. It raises little money, spends 36% on the cost of collecting the fees, and has resulted in excessive development of what should remain a primitive area."

Fee Demo was authorized by Congress in 1996 as a trial to see if Americans are willing to "pay to play" on public lands. It has been extended three times and is currently set to expire in September 2004. As Fee Demo has spread nationwide, opposition has become increasingly vocal. Numerous county governments, including ten in western Colorado, and four state legislatures, including Colorado's, have declared their opposition to the program. Legislation to make it permanent failed to move forward in Washington last year due to widespread public opposition.

The Western Slope No-Fee Coalition is one of the most active of over 250 groups around the country that are working to end Fee Demo. "There has never been congressional debate or public hearings on Fee Demo," said Benzar. "Demonstrations like this one are one way to let Congress know that this misguided program must stop. We expect participation from a wide range of recreationists, from fly fishermen and rafters to 4-wheelers and dirt bikers. This is one aspect of public land management that we can all agree on."