

For Immediate Release

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Recreation Fee Demonstration Bill Passes House Committee

Washington, DC – Today Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-CA) and the House Resources Committee passed H.R. 3283, the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, introduced by Rep. Ralph Regula. The bill would improve recreational facilities and visitor opportunities on federal recreational lands by reinvesting receipts from fair and consistent recreational fees and passes.

"I commend Rep. Regula for working with this committee on improving the public's recreational opportunities on federal lands," Chairman Pombo said. "This legislation protects the public's pocketbook, while enabling federal land managers to assess reasonable fees for specific activities and uses. This will put an end to fears that federal land managers cannot be trusted with recreational fee authority because we lay out very specific circumstances under which these fees can be collected and spent."

The Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (Rec Fee Demo) was originally proposed in 1996 as a tool to generate needed revenue to manage the growing occurrence of recreation on public land. The program has been both praised and assailed by federal land users. Since its inception, federal land managers have been able to actively reinvest fees assessed into the site or activities used.

"Like many, my family enjoys the vast outdoor recreational opportunities our public lands have to offer," said Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR). "For those sites that are developed with facilities such as information centers, picnic tables, security and restrooms, it is understandable that we who use them pay nominal fees to help maintain them. However, fees should not be collected when there are no funds being invested in a given recreational site. When a hiker parks on the side of the road and ventures onto an unmanaged trail with no amenities along the way, they should certainly not have to pay."

Due to the numerous concerns and reauthorizations, the Resources Committee, the committee with authorizing jurisdiction, undertook reauthorizing the Rec Fee Program. Rep. Regula's bill will extend the program for 10 years and specifically states where and what a fee may and may not be charged for, while also establishing types of fees.

"More importantly, fees collected for recreating on public lands should be used directly for those sites," continued Walden. "Collecting fees from individuals and families only to use

the money elsewhere is wholly irresponsible, not to mention unfair. This legislation addresses that very issue, and instructs the Secretary to reinvest fees in ways that will allow those who pay to reap the benefits."

The bill incorporates public participation by establishing Recreation Advisory Committees that will consist of members of the local government and recreation community. This group will provide recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior regarding the establishment, elimination, or adjustment of a fee. Additionally, a Federal Lands Pass will be established for all entrance and amenity fees for federal lands.

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