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Take the Word 'Public' and Insert 'Corporate' Into the Phrase 'Public Lands'  
Or Why Citizens Should Refuse to Pay User Fees  
by John F. Borowski

America's 650 million acres of public or federal lands offer the nation's best wildlife habitat, watersheds, camping and hunting opportunities and remain the country's best and possibly last uncommercialized bastions in our society. You may recognize the jewels of the system such as Yellowstone National Park or the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: yet the majority of public lands are inconspicuous tracts of green acreage on maps where people bird watch, house cradles of evolution for biodiversity and provide unmatched tranquility and wildness. The outdoor- recreation industry (an umbrella group called ARC), consisting of a multiple billion- dollar cartel of snowmobile, camping and off road vehicle interests, aided and abetted by sleazy politicians, drools at the possibility of corporate commercialization opportunities on these taxpayer owned lands. Their wish came true this week.

Called a "demonstration-fee" program: Congress imposed temporary fees back in 1996: five dollars for using a public bathroom or a marked trail or ten dollars for using a campsite. For the first time, citizens who's taxes pay for federal lands, were asked to pay a stealth tax, a double fee for hiking or camping on their own federal lands. This week, Congressman Ralph Regula (R-Ohio) inserted language that extends this "temporary program" for another decade! Stealthy, he added this language onto a massive \$388 billion spending bill: a bill that Congress will not read in detail and Regula's measure to screw the public will go mostly unnoticed. We cannot let it happen. Why? Because it is not the issue of helping to fund public lands, rather, it is a big slide down the slippery slope of having our public lands become "pay to play" fee zones. The poor will be excluded financially from public lands and decades of use by locals will be replaced by the commodification of nature for the "haves."

Assistant Interior Secretary Lynn Scarlett called the new law, "a very important accomplishment by the Congress." She went on to state "our number one reason for the fees is to provide enhanced services and facilities to the public." This is a bold- faced lie and a slap in the face of citizens who have been using these lands for years. The key is to look behind the scenes at who is driving this fee scam. Who is this powerful recreation coalition called ARC ? Why do they look to "motorize" public lands and how do they wield the power to dangle politicians like puppets?

A look into the "ARC" and why it needs to be sunk

ARC or the American Recreation Coalition is a "wise use" business consortium that has its eyes on America's uncommercialized wilderness. By moving funding for public lands away from the federal government's responsibility they envision a time when they can operate recreational facilities and steal the rights to develop our national jewels. ARC, a fervent supporter of the initial fees program, is a 130-plus coalition of recreational, motorized user groups and equipment manufacturers. Their goal is now clear: circumvent and eventually repeal the long-standing legal prohibitions upon the charging for

recreation on federally owned lands. Led by their President Derrick Crandall, ARC is using education and environmental consciousness as Trojan Horses to open public lands. When I was made privy to a meeting between ARC, the Superintendent of Public Schools of Los Angeles (Ray Romer) and a cartel of public lands officials (Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and others) back in 2001 I became very suspicious. Crandall and ARC were looking to make urban youth as the poster children for opening more of LA's closest public lands to motorized and commercial adventures. Crandall has initiated "Recreation Roundtables" comprised of chief executives from Disney, L.L. Bean, REI and Coleman to "partner" with federal land-management agencies to provide revenue for maintenance and other programs. These meetings have no public input, no public comment and no public dialogue. For some reason, the issue is flying under the radar screen of even the most mainstream environmental groups.

\* The Walt Disney Corporation, a key ARC member, views the environment from "green tinted glasses" or how to profit from making the illusion of nature profitable and marketable. Their WOW (Wonderful Outdoor World) focuses on teaching kids about "camping and recreation" as if you need motorized vehicles and Disney toys to enjoy the outdoors. On their own web site they explain their "Environmentality concept" as "a fundamental ethic designed to blend the company's needs with the corporate-wide conservation of natural resources." They envision Yellowstone or Crater Lake National Park as theme parks. They see nature as commodities to be exploited and to build fantasies around. Where I live, I have seen "corporate conservation" I call them clear cuts, strip mines and abused resource dependent towns. Disney has explored the possibilities of mini-theme parks along the Lewis and Clark Trail in Montana. Imagine the Disney logos adorning National Parks or Wildlife Refuges;

\* The American Motorcyclist Association, another ARC member, reveals their agenda in an article from their "American Motorcyclist." "Hundreds of dirt bikes and ATVs added to the flow, forming a continuous knobby-tired stream right through the heart of a tough old coal-mining community." What a thought, some 450 dirt bikes and ATVs driving the public lands of West Virginia. How about the wildlife? How about erosion? How about the peace and tranquility of wilderness?

\* The American Council of Snowmobile Associations, an ARC political powerhouse, gleefully praises the anti-environmental Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton on their website. This organization believes it has a birthright to ski mobile in the likes of Yellowstone or Glacier National Park and wildlife be damned. Reports show the air quality of Yellowstone in the winter is horrible and that the noise impact is damaging buffalo herds. Most Americans cannot meet with Gale Norton, she is in the pocket of the recreation industry along with big mining, timber and oil. Yet, just check out the American Council of Snowmobile Associations' webpage and see this gem: "It all comes back to access -- not only to "our" public lands, but also to the decision makers. This administration has really taken the definition "access" to a new level...hopefully a level we will have for another 4 years and from one administration to the next in the years to come!!" Our public lands apparently exist for profit in the eyes of such groups and the fee demo program is paving the way for making private public lands.

I have emailed Gale Norton, sadly, I haven't had a private dinner meeting yet. This weekend, while collecting sea invertebrates for my marine science classes, I stopped at Cape Perpetua, a place called Devil's Churn. As part of the Siuslaw National Forest, Cape Perpetua is public land. Stopping to use the restroom and glance over the basaltic rocks and view the Pacific Ocean my eye was distracted by a sign: Day use area- \$5. My taxes pay for this area and now, just to stop and look upon the ocean I should pay five dollars? To use the woods by my house to observe nature (I live a stone's throw away from the Siuslaw Forest) I should pay \$5 every time I go to observe elk or take my daughters to see old growth fir trees? I refuse to pay. But my protest must be a larger movement of citizens who recognize that nature's best places are on the chopping block!

What can be done?

It is time to act like Americans and not lapdogs to the likes of Congressman Regula. Contact Congressman Regula and tell him to pull this deceitful legislation from the current spending bill. His phone number is 1-202-225-3876 or fax at 1-202-224-3059. Contact the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior and voice your outrage. Say "NO" to the purchase of "passes" that allow you to experience the lands you already pay for and own. Say no to user fees. One of the nation's leading opponents of the fee demo debacle is Scott Silver of Wild Wilderness.

You can email him at ([ssilver@wildwilderness.org](mailto:ssilver@wildwilderness.org)) and check out his website [www.wildwilderness.org](http://www.wildwilderness.org). His website has email petitions to end fee demo programs and a wonderful collection of data and action alerts. This brave American has stood tall against the takeover of our public lands. If you are a National Audubon or National Wildlife Federation member, ask your organization to join ranks with the likes of Scott Silver. Because if you are a bird watcher or a hiker, your public lands are going to slip away and become high priced theme parks for RV's, pricey boat launches, paved roads and motorized trails. Maybe you can rent a jet-ski or see a virtual reality wildlife program: as if those things could ever replace the sight, sounds and touch of nature at its wildest? ARC and Regula hope you can be duped by this scam.

Congressman Regula has aspirations of becoming head of the Appropriations Committee: this would be a disaster for public lands. The continuance of fees steals this wild legacy for all Americans. Close your eyes and imagine this: a McDonalds stand in Yellowstone next to Disney's "Old Faithful" theme park while the background sounds are no longer the bugle of elk, rather the whine of snowmobiles or four-wheelers. Is this the experience we want on our national treasures? Tell ARC and the likes of Regula and Disney that public lands are not for sale. And say no to this un-American fee to use our own lands.

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