

## **Kern River (CA) Sun**

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### **Valley Viewpoint - Proposed Forest Service fees to affect the entire valley**

Barrie Mann - President Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce

Hang on to your wallet, because if the US Forest Service has its way you will be paying a fee next year to enjoy your favorite activity around the lake or the river. The Forest Service, specifically the Sequoia National Forest, is proposing a fee for the use of certain areas around the lake along the Upper River as well as Lloyd Meadow Rd.

The intent by the Forest Service is to establish additional 'High Impact Recreation Areas' or HIRA's. One along the Upper Kern River, another along Lloyd Meadow Rd. and to expand an existing HIRA at the Auxiliary Dam to cover all National Forest System land around the lake. The purpose of establishing new HIRA's and expanding the existing one is to allow for a fee structure to be set for the use of the areas by the public. The proposed fees are \$10 for day use, or an annual fee of \$50. These fees will purchase a pass that must be present and displayed when you are using the HIRA for recreational purposes.

The Forest Service is stating that the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 allows them to impose these fees. The Act also allows the Forest Service to retain 95% of the fees to operate, maintain, and improve recreation sites and services. On the surface this sounds good, but in reality may not happen.

There is a misconception that the proposed fees are only for campsites. This is not correct. The proposed fees are for recreational use, and may definitely have an effect on you if put into place. What does this mean for the average Joe and Jane that want to sit around the lake in a chair and wet a line, or take a hike along the river, or just go up and spend some quiet time watching the water flow by? Simply put, it means that you will need to pay the proposed fee. If you don't and a Ranger stops you, you could face a penalty, although that aspect of the proposal by the Forest Service hasn't been divulged.

So, what can you do about these proposed fees? Well you can voice your opinion at a workshop that has been scheduled for the public on June 5th at the Ranger District Office located at 105 Whitney Road in Kernville. The workshop hours are from 5:30 until 8:00 PM. We urge you to attend and get the information from the Forest Service yourself, ask questions and voice your opinion. If you're not able to attend that meeting you can still voice your opinion, or concerns. Mary Cole of the Forest Service at 559-784-1500, extension 1133 will take your comments or you can write those opinions or concerns to Tina Terrell, Forest Supervisor at 1839 South Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257.

Some of the Valley's community leaders are combining their efforts to mitigate the impact the proposed fees will have. The two Chambers of Commerce and the Revitalization Committee are spearheading this effort and are committed to protecting the

economy of our valley, which is very dependent on the tourism industry. Let there be no mistake, these proposed fees will impact the tourists who come to our valley for recreation. Also, you will feel the impact in your own wallet.

Please, take action. Attend the meeting on June 5th. Make your voice heard. If you don't and the fees are put in place, you will not be able to ask them to be removed at a later date. Join us in letting the Forest Service know that we are concerned over the fees they are proposing.

Barrie Mann is president of the Kern River Valley Chamber of Commerce and active in many community organizations.