



U.S. HOUSE WANTS YOUR OPINION ON RECREATION FEES

Congress Looks at Recreation Access Tax

By Bill Schneider, 6-06-08

The U.S. House of Representatives has decided to take a serious look at the much-criticized implementation, if not over-implementation, of the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act (FLREA). This is the law that has saddled us the pandemic of new and ever-increasing recreation fees to enter and use our public lands, which is why it's called RAT, for Recreation Access Tax, by its detractors.

Those who pay the RAT to use their own land don't get many chances to voice their opinions, but now, our elected officials want to hear what you think.

The U.S. House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands has scheduled a hearing for June 18 in Washington D.C to hear testimony about how the FLREA has been implemented. The Subcommittee is calling the hearing "Paying to Play: Implementation of Fee Authority on Federal Lands."

Detractors primarily led by two nonprofits, the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition and Wild Wilderness, have repeatedly claimed federal agencies have illegally over-implemented FLREA. The agencies, mainly the Forest Service, disagree and claim to be following the letter of the law.

At this point, four anti-fee witnesses will plead their cases before the subcommittee: Kitty Benzar of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, Bill Wade of the Coalition of National Park Retirees, Idaho State Representative George Eskridge, who sponsored Idaho's state resolution calling for the repeal of FLREA, and Peter Wiechers, a teacher and kayaker from Kern River, California, who has been bird-dogging fee abuses by the Sequoia National Forest.

No word yet on who will defend the government's implementation policy.

The public can submit written testimony for the hearing record until July 2. Send testimony as email attachments to Domenick.Carroll@mail.house.gov with a cc to Laurel.Angell@mail.house.gov.

This is not a hearing on the Baucus-Crapo Bill, introduced by Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Mike Crapo (R-ID), which is in the Senate, not the House. "There is no House equivalent of



Caption: Fishing a remote lake on national forest land; how much should it cost? Photo by Bill Schneider.

the Baucus-Crapo bill,” Benzar told *NewWest.Net*. “My hope would be that by highlighting the abuses that are occurring this hearing will inspire a member or members of the House to sponsor one.”

[End of article]

Comment By Tim, 6-06-08

Is this an editorial comment or a news article?

"RAT" is a propaganda term used in this debate. Its one thing to mention that it is what the detractors call it, another to use it in the title of the article.

Comment By Kitty Benzar, 6-06-08

Tim, if you check out Bill's chronology on the topic of public lands fees you will see it is hardly the first time he has used the term RAT in a title. Bill is a columnist, not a news reporter and he clearly has a position on this issue, which he is free to express. Besides, How the heck do you pronounce "FLREA" anyway?

See Bill's chronology at

http://www.newwest.net/topic/article/recreation_fee_chronology/C41/L41/

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