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## **Ochoco plans higher fees, less maintenance**

By Kate Ramsayer / The Bulletin

The Bingham Spring Campground in the Ochoco National Forest would lose its tables, grills and fire rings, and basically become a trailhead under a proposal from the U.S. Forest Service.

At the Big Spring Campground, maintenance would be reduced so that the campground would only be open during hunting season, under the same plan. And during those maintenance times, there would be a new, \$5 fee.

But the Mud Spring horse camp would be kept up for more months out of the year, perhaps with the help of volunteers.

The proposed changes at those sites and a slew of others are part of a nationwide Forest Service program designed to determine which campgrounds and other sites the national forests can afford to keep up and how the agency can reduce those maintenance costs.

The proposal for the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland includes the following changes:

- Developed sites or campgrounds to be closed: two.
- Sites that would have new or increased fees: 12.
- Sites that would have a reduced fee: one.
- Sites that would have a reduced maintenance period: 22.
- Sites that would have an increased maintenance period: four.
- Sites that would have reduced features, capacity or services: seven.
- Sites that would have increased capacity: one.
- Campgrounds to be converted to trailheads: three.

Staff with the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland have taken a look at all developed recreation sites, like campgrounds, sno-parks and trailheads that have facilities like restrooms and signs.

They ranked the 38 sites using set criteria, including efficiency and how well they fit with the recreational opportunities the Forest Service is trying to provide, and then developed a plan involving changes to the fees and seasons during which agency staff will maintain the sites.

“It’s the smart thing, the right thing to do, for us to take a look at our developed recreation program and to truly make sure that what we’re providing is consistent with what the public wants and needs,” said Mark Christiansen, recreation program manager with the Deschutes and Ochoco national forests.

Ochoco National Forest representatives are holding a public meeting Monday evening on the proposed plan, called a recreation facility analysis.

The same process is occurring across the country with other national forests, he said, and Deschutes National Forest officials asked people to comment on that forest’s analysis in 2006. None of the proposals under that plan has been implemented yet, he said, but staff are working through the process to change fees suggested under the Deschutes plan, Christiansen said.

In the Ochoco forest, staff first inventoried the 38 developed recreation sites in the forest and grassland, and then created a slogan — or what they call a niche, or description of what kinds of opportunities the forest provides. For the Ochoco National Forest, that niche is “At the Edge of Solitude.”

“We’ve always had kind of a ‘find your own place’ philosophy,” said Cathy Lund, a member of the timber and recreation staff with the Lookout Mountain Ranger District in the Ochoco forest. “When people come here, they’ll find a lot of quieter areas.”

Staff members then ranked the sites based on how well they mesh with the niche’s description, how many visits the sites get, and how much they cost to maintain, among other factors. From that, staff developed possible changes to the campgrounds and trailheads.

Efficiency is one objective, Christiansen said.

“When there’s not a whole bunch of people out there, and we have small campgrounds that are dispersed across the forest, it’s very costly for us to be out there and administer all the facilities to our standards,” he said.

The Ochoco National Forest had a \$63,350 budget for on-the-ground work in 2006 when the analysis was done, and the funding has remained relatively flat, he said.

For about two dozen sites, the agency is proposing to cut back on the season during which it will come in to clean toilets, replace fire rings and do other maintenance facilities. The sites will still be open outside of that season, but they won’t be kept up, Christiansen said.

At other sites, the Forest Service could add a fee or increase an existing one, he said, to help generate more revenue to maintain the campgrounds.

That’s one way to keep more sites open, Lund said.

“We cannot maintain the sites that we have with our current proposed funding for the next five years,” she said. “Increasing fees on some of them will help with the maintenance costs. The other option was to look at not raising fees and closing more campgrounds.”

But still, the Forest Service is considering decommissioning two campgrounds, Scotts Camp and the Wolf Creek Overflow campground, and converting three more into day-use areas or trailheads.

Scott Silver, of the Bend-based nonprofit Wild Wilderness, has been critical of the process and said that it is funneling visitors into areas where fees could be charged or concessionaires can run facilities.

“If it doesn’t pay, it’s going away” is the summary of the process, Silver said. “You’re basically going to have fewer and fewer options to camp out of season.”

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## **Ochoco’s proposed changes**

Some of the changes to campgrounds and other developed sites under the U.S. Forest Service proposal for the Ochoco National Forest:

- Decommission: Scotts Camp, Wolf Creek Overflow
- New or increased fee: Allen Creek Horse Camp, Antelope Reservoir, Cold Springs, Deep Creek, Wildcat, Barnhouse, Big Spring, Mud Spring, Salter’s Cabin, Sugar Creek, Wolf Creek Industrial, Skull Hollow
- Reduced fee: Wolf Creek

- Reduced maintenance: Allen Creek Horse Camp, Antelope Reservoir, Biggs Springs, Bingham Spring, Deep Creek, Double Cabin, Dry Creek Horse Camp, Elkhorn, Marks Creek Sno-park (will remain open and maintained during the regular sno-park season), Ochoco Divide, Ochoco Forest Camp, Twin Pillar South, Walton Lake, Walton Sno-park, Whistler, White Rock, Wildcat, Wildwood, Wiley Flat, Big Spring, Frazier, Cyrus Horse Camp
- Increased maintenance: Ochoco Divide Sno-park, Cottonwood Pit, Mud Spring, Wolf Creek
- Remove features/reduce capacity/reduce service: Bingham Spring, Walton Lake, Whistler, Frazier, Salter's Cabin, Sugar Creek, Rimrock Springs
- Increase capacity: Cyrus Horse Camp
- Operate with partners/increase volunteer help: Allen Creek Horse Camp, Dry Creek Horse Camp, Mud Spring, Cyrus Horse Camp, Haystack Lake, Henderson Flat
- Convert campground to trailhead or day-use area: Bingham Spring, Whistler, Cottonwood Pit

For more information, visit

[www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/recreation/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/recreation/)

If you go

The Forest Service will hold a public meeting to take comments and answer questions about the Ochoco recreation plan from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Ochoco National Forest Headquarters at 3160 N.E. Third St. in Prineville.

People can also e-mail comments to Mark Christiansen at [mchristiansen@fs.fed.us](mailto:mchristiansen@fs.fed.us) or mail them to Mark Christiansen, Deschutes National Forest, 1001 S.W. Emkay Drive, Bend, OR 97702.