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FEES FOR GARDEN OF THE GODS, TRAIL RIDING SCRAPPED

By Brian DeNeal

SHAWNEE NATIONAL FOREST - The Shawnee National Forest proposed last fall to charge fees to visit recreation sites, ride on designated trails and to increase fees for campgrounds.

This morning Supervisor Allen Nicholas announced the agency has changed its mind. The proposal now is to only increase fees at campsites.

The initial proposal included fees of \$5 per visit or \$50 annually at recreation sites like Garden of the Gods, Bell Smith Springs, Little Grand Canyon and Pounds Hollow. Also proposed were \$5 per visit or \$50 annually to ride horses on designated trails. Both of those items are no longer being considered, according to a release from the U.S. Forest Service.

The proposal now is to increase fees for Pine Ridge Campground in Pounds Hollow, Pharaoh Campground at Garden of the Gods, Camp Cadiz and Pine Hills Campground from the current price of \$5 to \$10 per night.

The Johnson Creek Campground per night fee has been \$5 for a single site, \$9 for a double and \$12 for a triple since 1996. The proposed fee is \$10 per night for a single, \$12 for a double and \$15 for a triple site per night.

The final proposal will be forwarded to the Regional Fee Board in Milwaukee, Wis. If approved the proposal goes before the Recreation Resource Advisory Council for consideration Oct. 8. The council's decision will be forwarded to the Regional Forester who will accept it or deny it.

The Forest Service release indicates the proposal was stripped back due to public resistance to fees charged at recreation sites and for equestrian trail use. The agency received 60 letters supporting the proposal, 93 letters opposing it and a petition of several thousand signatures not supporting it.

Several county boards signed resolutions at the urging of "no fee activists" Mike Scott and Saline County Tourism Board Chairman John O'Dell.

"The overwhelming majority of these letters were concerned with the proposal for charging new fees either for day use facilities or for equestrian use of the designated trail system. Increasing existing fees at campgrounds did not emerge as a significant issue among the comments received," the release states.

The release indicates Supervisor Allen Nicholas was not surprised by the public response to the initial proposal.

"I fully understand the concerns expressed and will strive to provide recreational trail experiences within the funding levels we are provided," Nicholas said, in the prepared release.

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