

## **Wilderness Watch Newsletter Summer 2008**

### **Fees, too, will pass.**

---By Scott Phillips

*“Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul.” ----Edward Abbey*

Well respected Wilderness organizations such as Wilderness Watch, Wild Wilderness, the Sierra Club, Friends of the Clearwater, and Western Lands Project have identified recreation access fees as an important issue because “pay-to-play” provides perverse incentives to manage the public lands in ways that specifically favor high impact (think motorized) users and which inexorably leads to commercialization and privatization. There is virtually no support for the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) within the conservation community.

However some groups have been remarkably complacent in expressing opposition and as a consequence, the fee issue continues to build.

With every passing month, we are seeing additional instances of the Forest Service quite literally harassing forest visitors and charging for simple access in direct violation of the law. Examples include lengthy stretches of State Highways on Mt. Evans (Colorado), Mt. Lemmon (Arizona), and the Pacific Crest Highway (California). The continued and expanded marketization of recreation hangs over recreationists like a dark cloud. In giving agencies authority to charge, collect and, most importantly, to retain recreation fees, FLREA has transformed recreation into another commodity that is now managed as if it were just another extractive industry.

The good news is that there is light at the end of the tunnel! Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced Senate bill S. 2438 to undo most of the fee demo program. Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO) has signed on and other co-sponsors are expected.

In simple terms the bill appropriately repeals FLREA and would eliminate most fees charged by the FS and BLM. National Park fees would be unaffected, except for being capped at \$25. These four Senators deserve a round of applause and our support.

The crucial task now at hand is to convince many more Senators to get on board. I strongly encourage Wilderness Watch members to contact their Senators and write letters and editorials. Your arguments should focus on not just fees in Wilderness, but fees across the public land and waters spectrum.

Fees are appropriate only for highly developed sites such as campgrounds or boat launches with potable water, paved roads, toilets, tables, etc. Fees must not be charged for trailheads, Wilderness or river access, or what the Forest Service calls “High Impact Recreation Areas,” such as the three referenced previously.

The issue of recreation fees is about much more than paying a few bucks to walk in the forest. The importance of your help in repealing the recreation fee authority--- and, by so doing, ending the dismal pay-to-play experiment --- cannot be overstated.

Please contact your respective Senators and urge them to support S.2438. It would also be helpful to send a thank you to Senators Baucus, Tester, Crapo, and Salazar. Let's work together to take action and build further momentum for fee repeal. Thank you all!

Letters to Senators should be addressed to: Senator \_\_\_\_\_, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510

For more specific information please contact Scott Silver ([ssilver@wildwilderness.org](mailto:ssilver@wildwilderness.org)); Kitty Benzar of the Western Slope No Fee Coalition ([wsnofee@gmail.com](mailto:wsnofee@gmail.com)); or myself ([ScottyPhi@cox.net](mailto:ScottyPhi@cox.net))

***Scott Phillips (Retired from USFS in Outdoor Recreation, Public Lands Advocate)***