

**NEWS****Guest Comment: Arizona has another tax**[Print Page](#)**By Philip Gray**

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A letter to the editor appeared in the October 17th Green Valley News from Clair Flatt bemoaning the outrageous actions by the State Trust Land Commission in establishing their new fee structure.

Mr. Flatt only touched upon the tip of the iceberg. Not only have fees been raised for individuals, but the Commission has abolished use permits by Non-profit organizations.

Instead, any group wishing to walk upon state trust lands must apply for an "Event" permit which allows for no more than 14 days of use for a total of 120 linear miles per year.

Furthermore, every person in that group must also have an individual recreation permit in addition to the group "Event" permit.

The letter sent out by the Commission also notes that applications for such permits will take anywhere from three to six months to process.

Mr. Flatt also observed that any taxpaying citizen of Arizona ought to be entitled to walk on state trust lands.

I spoke with a representative of the commission who stated quite firmly that state trust lands are not public lands.

When I suggested that they were owned by the citizens of Arizona I received a repeat that these were not public lands.

The representative also made it quite clear that the only purpose for the new fee arrangements was to increase their budget.

The Commission prefers to call this a fee; in truth it is another tax on Arizona citizens, visitors, and tourists.

It, in effect, wipes out the opportunity for hiking clubs across the state to ever utilize state trust lands since such clubs cannot determine three to six months in advance which specific trails would be used on specific dates.

There are too many variables, such as weather, erosion, fire, etc., to make that possible.

Also, since many clubs have members who are "snowbirds" who would not know to apply for an individual permit, the clubs would have to apply in their behalf.

A club with thirty members would have to come up with \$1,500 plus the cost of an "Event" permit in advance.

It is interesting that the State Trust Land Commission assumes that hikers are detrimental to state trust lands, but they will sell those lands to developers to blade and place thousands of home upon the properties.

Arizona is a free range state so cattle can freely roam across state trust lands unless they are fenced in, but hikers, who usually take out more trash than they bring in when they hike, are to pay this new "tax."

In addition to the problems occurring with the need to apply so far in advance and the excessive costs, how are hikers to know whether or not they might be stepping foot on state trust land.

Most trails in Arizona tend to cross a multitude of boundaries, BLM, National Park, National Forest, private property, etc.

Does the Commission plan on fencing in all state trust lands and posting them at every trail crossing?

A final concern not pointed out by Mr. Flatt is that the bulk of this new tax is being applied to senior citizens in the state who utilize trails for physical fitness as well as pleasure.

If any readers are as concerned about this issue as is Mr. Flatt and myself, I encourage you to write to Mark Winkleman, State Land Commissioner, 1616 West Adams, Phoenix, AZ 885007, Governor Janet Napolitano, and to your state senator and state representative for your district.

As a last observation, I noted that the e-mail address supplied in the letter did not work, and that there is little use in phoning the State Land Department as you'll probably get a bureaucrat who tells you he isn't responsible for any of this and has probably never hiked a trail in his/her life.

Philip Gray moved to Green Valley almost 10 years ago and has been active in a number of GVR clubs., as well as the Green Valley Hiking Club. The views expressed are the writer's own and do not necessarily reflect those of this newspaper.

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