

WESTERN SLOPE NO-FEE COALITION

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For Immediate Release

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See [November 17 front page article in The Oregonian](#)

(http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/11/national_forests_see_fewer_vis.html)

Forest Service Report Shows Startling Decline In Visitors

Durango, CO A recently released Forest Service report explodes the persistent myth that our National Forests are experiencing increased visitation. In fact, National Forest visits are down, in some cases way down, in almost every part of the country.

The [report](#)

(http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/nvum_national_summary_fy2007.pdf),

based on surveys of forest visitors between 2005 and 2007, shows that Arizona and New Mexico barely held even with 2004 visitation, while every other region of the country saw significant declines. The Pacific Northwest forests saw a dramatic 27% reduction in visits. (See summary [Table](#)

(http://www.westernslopenofee.org/pdfuploads/NVUM_Visitation_Change_2004_to_2007.pdf)

at WSNFC website)

The study, issued by the National Visitor Use Monitoring office of the Forest Service, is the third since the Forest Service began a systematic survey of forest visitation in 2000.

Prior to that, visitation estimates were little more than wildly inflated guesses.

The reports have shown a steady decline, from 214.2 million visitors in 2001 to 204.8 million in 2004, and now 178.6 million in 2007. That's a 16.6% decline overall, which equates to 35.5 million fewer National Forest visits.

The increasingly-common fees charged to visitors on National Forests are cited as one reason for the falling visitation. According to Western Slope No-Fee Coalition President Kitty Benzar, "Fees were already driving many families away from public lands, even while times were good. The economic crisis we're facing now will exacerbate a very worrisome trend. As household budgets are cut to the bare bones, visiting a National Forest will be just another luxury item that can be done without."

Benzar says the declines will have a disproportionate impact on rural residents. "This is hitting rural areas from two directions," she said. "First, they often depend on tourism and anything that adds to travel costs slows that and hits their economies hard. Second, almost half of Forest visitors are locals living within 50 miles, and they are the folks least able to afford these access fees."

The end result, she fears, is that both urban and rural kids will spend more time indoors playing video games because it costs too much to take the family camping or fishing.

Fees for day-use areas, scenic roads, trails, and general access to National Forests, as well as lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies, were first imposed in 1996, under a program known as Fee Demo. That was repealed in late 2004 and replaced with a permanent fee program known as the Federal Lands Recreation

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Enhancement Act. Since the FLREA went into effect, over 200 additional sites have been put under fees, and existing fees have been raised at over 700 recreation sites.