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## Walks in the woods could cost a lot more

By PAULA TRACY

New Hampshire Union Leader Staff

**Saturday, Feb. 28, 2009**

**CAMPTON** – The White Mountain National Forest is considering plans to increase its fees for recreation passes.

Since 1997, the forest service has used recreation fees in parking areas to maintain facilities, no longer paid for under federal budget appropriations.

It is seeking public comment on the proposals, which would change the cost of a daily recreation pass from \$3 to \$5, a weekly pass from \$5 to \$10, an annual pass from \$20 to \$30, and a household pass from \$25 to \$40.

This is the first proposed fee increase since the program began in 1997.

The proposal also calls for dropping fees at some locations, due to changes in amenities and services.

Under the plan, fees will no longer be charged at: Sawyer Rock Picnic Area, Elbow Pond Day Use Area, Russell Pond Day Use Area, Cherry Mountain Dispersed Camping Area, Gale River East/West Dispersed Camping Area, Haystack Road Dispersed Camping Area, Little Larry/Bull Brook Dispersed Camping Area, Sawyer Pond Trailhead, Sawyer River Road Trailhead, Signal Ridge Trailhead, Caribou Trailhead, East Royce Trailhead and Hastings Trailhead.

Fees for Doublehead and Black Mountain cabins would change from \$20 to \$30 per night, Fourth Iron Tentsite from \$8 to \$10 per night, and Crocker Pond Campground from \$14 to \$16 per night. The forest service is also proposing adding two sites to the fee program: Cabot Cabin would have an overnight rental fee of \$30, and a recreation pass would be required for Zealand Picnic Area.

Hikers such as Tess Price of Rumney aren't happy about the fee increases, but she notes that the money helps pay for bridges, picnic benches, bathrooms and services in the forest.

She bought the annual pass in the past, but said the price increase might affect her willingness to buy a new pass.

"I might avoid hiking in places where a pass is required or leave my car at a friend's house or walk from my mom's home," Price said.

More than 50 percent of her town is in the White Mountain National Forest but the town does not share in those fees. They do, however, get patrol help with crowd control at the busy Rumney Rocks rock climbing area, which is on the national forest land.

During the past 12 years, \$7,013,700 has been collected and returned to the White Mountain National Forest. Fees are used to do backcountry patrols and maintain highly used trails, shelters, and campsites, to assist visitors with information and education services such as Leave No Trace and hikeSafe, to maintain day-use sites including trash pickup, painting, and cleaning and to address the backlog of deferred maintenance at our recreation sites.

The Eastern Region Recreation Resource Advisory Committee (RRAC) will review the proposal for fee increases this spring. If approved, fee increases will be implemented over the next year. For more specific information visit [www.fs.fed.us/r9/white](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/white). To provide feedback on this proposal, contact Marianne Leberman, Recreation & Wilderness Program Leader at [wmnfplan@fs.fed.us](mailto:wmnfplan@fs.fed.us) or 603-528-8751, or Marianne Leberman, White Mountain National Forest, 719 N Main St., Laconia 03246 by May 1.

#### YOUR COMMENTS

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I have never purchased a pass and never will. I also hope no Forest Service employee wants to walk or hunt on my property. If they do, it will cost them to use my private property. Charging a fee to walk on federal property is absurd. It is public property, purchased with public funds, and should be available for public use just as readily as my private property.  
- **Calvin Perkins, Rumney**

If you don't like the fees then don't pay them. I don't, sometimes a ticket will be left on the vehicle, sometime there isn't. Don't pay that either. No one will ever bother you about it. I can assure you that you won't lose any sleep over it, especially knowing you already send 1/3 to 1/2 of your income to the government anyway. This whole thing started out 12 years ago because the Forest Service was cut out of the budget under the guise of "balancing the budget" in Washington. So in a scramble the bureaucrats at the Forest Service came up with this wonderful idea. Now you have to pay to go for a walk in the woods. If it was managed properly, timber sales would more than cover what the forest "needs" in order to function. Cut a few positions at the FS that "manage" the forest and it could just work out where you wouldn't have any fees at all. For all those who think that the fees are well justified, just keep sending more and more of your hard earned money to Uncle Sam, he needs it, after all it's very expensive to save us all from the plight that we are in.  
- **Jeff, Meredith**

I haven't bought a pass yet and I won't buy one if the fees go up. Govt of the people, by the people and for the people. I just wonder which people they are talking about.  
- **John, Concord**

I would love to see an accounting of the monies collected and monies spent -- it should be posted on-line in an easy to read format that can be understood by all. There should also be a list of "projects" or expenses that the increase fee would pay for. I have no problem with a fee increase if we are given ALL the information before the comment period expires.  
- **Tom, Rumney**

Why doesn't this money pay for all the Search and Rescue missions on the mountains???? Why is the state of NH and the sportsman paying for them?? If the Federal government doesn't pay for rescues, and the campsites are leased what are they paying for?? Someone to check and make sure the cars have a pass. Fire them! and don't charge more.  
- **Jim, Alton**

It's a hoot listening to the free-staters here complaining about this gummint fee. It is, after all, what you're always asking for on this blog - a user fee to cover the expenses of a government service.

Anyone who's been to the Whites realizes that it hosts a huge number of visitors. Free staters notwithstanding, that large crowd has to be managed, and facilities built, repaired, maintained etc.

If the shift from a \$20 fee 12 years ago to a \$30 fee now has you outraged, you should seriously consider some stress management ... Might I suggest getting out from behind the

keyboard and taking a good long walk - maybe even in the WMNF?

- **tom, candia**

i don't mind paying a fee if it keeps trails maintained and parking lots available. i do have an issue if fees are going up to cover all these winter rescues - charge the people getting rescued!

also, wherever we go i always see cars w/o proof of payment showing and (i'm sorry) 90% of the time they're MA cars. i know there are a lot of sites but lets get cracking on these fee evaders!

- **monique, bedford**

I live in the Campton/Thornton area - the White Mountain National Forest is my back yard. I know these areas where the forest service feels it needs to charge for a "walk in the woods" or a dip in "the eddy" which is nothing more than a backwater in the Pemi; and they DON'T own the Pemi. I do not feel that government should be charging people to walk in the woods. If they are maintaining cabins, huts, campgrounds then maybe a few bucks. They don't own the campgrounds anymore, they sold those to private concerns; that's when their moneypot dried up. Now they want to charge you to park on the side of the road to access a hiking trail. It doesn't make sense; and in my book, it's wrong.

Further, it is just getting to be TOO DARN MUCH - this country is caving in around us and the bleeping Government is oblivious to the economic crisis we are in and goes forward wily nily with increases in fees !!!!!!!!!!!!! (I won't even mention the porkulus "stimulus plan) Don't they understand that they ARE the problem?!

- **Sandy, Thornton**

This increase cannot by law be recommended by the Recreation Resource Advisory Committee unless there is documentation of "general public support." So if you don't like it, use the contact information given and let the WMNF officials know how you feel.

- **Kitty Benzar, Durango, CO**

The state just does not get it! My family enjoys hiking, camping in tents, and otherwise enjoying the White Mountains. Looks like we'll be finding alternatives. There are plenty of places to enjoy without being gouged even more by the State of NH's ongoing fees, taxes, and tolls. What a shame.

- **RJ, Concord**

Over half our elected officials are either guilty of a serious crime (like drunk driving), the defendant in a law suit (they probably will loose), or guilty of one corrupt act or another. They vote themselves pay increases, lavishly and unabashedly decorate their offices, hire unnecessary staff, "treat" themselves to perks and priviledges most of us could only dream of (this is if we could actually sleep from worrying about our jobs and retirement accounts), fly around in private jets, and get to act all high and mighty all at our expense. Pretty much all of them are elites who who genuinely believe they have dominion over we the people. Give them a chance to raise fees (taxes), and they will every time. (Of course if any of them are driven up in their limo to hike, they would comp themselves, as they are on official business. We the people can accept a raise in the fees, or we can tell our congress people to pass on the latte, and all their other obsessions they expect us to pay for, and keep the fees where they are. I have always thought that while tourism is the best industry NH could ever have, there are some negative points. Those negatives have me convinced that cars with NH plates should be exempt anyway, much less pay higher fees. By the way, do you know how easy it is for the politicians to raise a state income or sales tax from 2% to 3% to 5% to 10%? Did you also know that sales of firearms are up around 30% and ammo up over 100% from last year???

- **Doug, Franconia**

The fact that there is an increase only makes sense as everything cost more as time goes buy -- especially things that are in demand like natural beauty, of which NH parks and forests have tons of. What should have happened was a natural increase every 2 years of 25c to 50c per increase that was published and maintained. Further, if a rise in cost was not necessary then AN ANNOUNCEMENT SAYING THE FEES WOULD REMAIN THE SAME FOR YET ANOTHER YEAR would have been proper and better taken by the public, you and me. Of course a once in 12 year increase seems high -- we had it too good for the last 11 years and now it seems that it is all part of the economy problem. Communication people, communication. RAP

- **Ray Pendergast, Newport News VA**

Just Increase the Fee for Massachusetts residents.

- **Jacob, Londonderry**

there goes my stimulus money  
i hope plans for the money isn't going towards perpetuating nepotism

- **mort freen, concord**

Parking fees in WMNF are unconstitutional as they have been judged elsewhere in the country. It's only a matter of time before they are abolished here. Someone should tell the forest rangers that we don't need any more roadside toilets and "interpretive" trails.

- **Sandra, Concord**

Some trail maintenance is free. We drive 1300 miles three times a year to do ours. I do it because NH is my real home, I love both its mountains and people.

- **Scott Lang, formerly Jefferson NH**

I never liked the idea of fees for the White Mountains when it was first instituted. I have never bought one, never will. With all the federal taxes I already pay, I can't enjoy the use of this "public land"? Tom, when's that march?

- **Brian, N. Sutton**

Last year they didn't hire a full seasonal field staff and used the money for office bureaucrats. I would like to see a restriction that this money only be used for actual work not program management.

Also the list of no-fee sites should be greatly expanded so that fees are charged only for sites with restrooms, trash removal, etc. not places where you just park on the side of the road like 19-Mile Brook.

- **Roy, Concord**

I bristle a bit at the idea of fees for the mountains, though I hike myself. If this were done on a donation basis, I would gladly donate more than the fee, and would do so when hiking areas that aren't covered by the mandatory pass at the moment. Trail maintenance isn't free, but is this really the best way to pay for it?

Granted, the fees still aren't much, but aesthetically, there must be better alternatives.

- **Brian, Manchester, NH**

I think a fee increase for the first time in 12 years is well justified.

Considering inflation, one could argue that the fees have been going down for the last 12 years.

I can see the new dilemma this will cause for some of you though - "Lets see, should I buy a

Starbucks latte today or park for the day and enjoy a hike in the splendor of the White Mountains?" Decisions, decisions...

As an avid White Mountains hiker and a true beneficiary of the park systems, I'm more than happy to pay the increased fees. I can't think of a better use for my dollars actually.

- **Erik, Candia, NH**

Tom, Let me know where we are all meeting. I couldn't agree more. Literally every day, there is another story in the news of a fee hike, gas tax hike, higher cost on this, increase in that. Interesting, isn't it..... there was no hike two years ago, or six years ago? Since we are all numb to all the news of another tax hike..... why not hit us with a tax hike for a walk in the woods.

- **Gus, Manchester**

I do not normally agree with fee hikes but going from \$3.00 to \$5.00 for an all day pass after twelve years is hardly gouging the people. My only concern is that the money is used to maintain the existing program and not used to expand the size of state workers or divert the funds to other areas of government.

- **Ross, Derry**

Since they seek comment... the revolution is coming .. sure as the sun ..  
Everyday, more more more .. government. Taxes, fees, tolls, .. at some point, the unemployed, underemployed, old, those who feel their lives have been stolen .. will rise up.. a march here, a demonstration ... when government gets too big, and starts to steal from its citizens

- **tom, manchester,nh**

Still sounds cheap to me.

- **Bob, Salem**

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