



FLREA

Baucus Again Aims to Repeal 'Recreation Access Tax'

By Kellyn Brown, 4-27-09

Bill Schneider first reported on this last week. And Sen. Max Baucus sent out an e-mail Monday confirming that he has teamed up with Republican Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho in sponsoring a bill that would repeal the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act (FLREA).

FLREA was attached to a 2004 omnibus spending bill by Congressman Ralph Regula, R-Ohio, and fees for using federal lands subsequently increased. According to Schneider:

Since then, federal agencies, especially the Forest Service (FS), have been in a frenzy creating and raising fees for use and access to federal lands. Idaho and Montana have had fewer fees and fee increases than most states because the FS knew their local senators didn't support the fee-charging policy to pay for use and access of land owned by all Americans, believing instead that people pay for this on April 15 every year. But in most other states with significant acreages of national forests such as Arizona, California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington fees have experienced a steady increase in fees since 2004.

"Every tax day we pay to use our public lands, we shouldn't be taxed twice to go fishing, hiking, or camping on our public lands," Baucus said in Monday's press release.

Here's Baucus' entire e-mail:

(Washington, D.C.) – As a steadfast advocate of Montana's outdoor heritage, Senator Max Baucus introduced legislation that would block The U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies from charging Montanans higher fees to access their public lands

Baucus introduced the Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act of 2009. Joining him as the lead cosponsor is Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho.

The bill would revoke authority given to the Forrest Service in 2004 to institute new fees and increase existing fees at campgrounds, trailheads, and other public areas.

Specifically, the bill repeals the 2004-passed Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act, sometimes called the recreational access tax, and reinstates legislation dating back to 1965 that limits the use of fees on public lands.

Baucus, a long-time critic of the fees, said the current system amounts to double taxation.

"Every tax day we pay to use our public lands, we shouldn't be taxed twice to go fishing, hiking, or camping on OUR public lands," Baucus said. "Paying twice just doesn't make any sense."

Montana Senator Jon Tester also cosponsored the legislation.

"Raising fees on hardworking families who want to enjoy their public land isn't a card we should be playing," said Tester, who serves as vice chairman of the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus. "Americans already pay their share for our national forests every April 15. This bill is just common sense."

Kitty Benzar, president of the Western Slope No-Fee Coalition, hailed the bill.

"This is an exciting step toward restoring access to public lands for all Americans, and not just access for those who can afford to pay extra," Benzar said. "I'm pleased and grateful for Senator Baucus's support and we will work hard to get this bill passed and signed into law."

Baucus' bill would:

- Repeal the FLREA
- Reinststate the fee authorities established by the 1965 Land and Water Conservation Act
- Reinststate the National Parks Pass system
- Cap the amount that can be charged for entrance to national parks.

Baucus and Crapo introduced similar legislation in 2007.

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