



BUFFALO BULLETIN

www.buffalobulletin.com

NEWS > LOCAL NEWS

Forest Service proposes West Tensleep parking fee

Print Page

Revenue collected will go to maintenance

BY GRANT SMITH

Published:

Wednesday, November 11, 2009 11:24 AM CST

The luxury of free parking in the Big Horn Mountains might be coming to an end following the Powder River Ranger District's proposal to charge \$10 a vehicle per day to park at the West Tensleep Trailhead.

"The necessity is the deferred maintenance and the yearly annual operation and maintenance costs at the most heavily used trailhead on the Bighorn National Forest," said district ranger Mark Booth. "Our hope is to prevent this high use, high demand trailhead from having a negative impact on the services and standard maintenance at other developed recreation sites."

The proposal for the fee implementation was placed on the federal registry on Nov. 3 and by federal law it is required to remain on view for public comment for six months prior to being enacted.

But Booth said that the concept of charging for parking in the Big Horns has been considered for a while.

"Fees were first considered for the West Tensleep Trailhead when the initial 'Fee Demo' authority was authorized by Congress in the early 1990's," Booth said in reference to a piece of legislation passed in 1997 that allowed national parks and forests to retain a portion of monies collected from fees. "The latest effort was analyzed in the final Recreation Facility Analysis of June 2008 for the Bighorn National Forest."

The trailhead located approximately 30 miles west of Buffalo was built in 1989 with 45 single-vehicle spots and four double pull-through spaces.

It hasn't expanded in size since but has become a popular tourist attraction owing to its access for Cloud Peak, the tallest peak in the Big Horn Range, Bomber Mountain and several pristine alpine fishing lakes.

Booth said the area has a 190-person capacity at one time and that 9,000 to 10,000 cars visit the area annually.

"For start-up costs we're looking at about \$4,000 to \$5,000 for new signage, garbage facilities and seasonal staffing dedicate to this site," Booth said. "We hope to have periodic staffing of the facility to help ensure payment of fees as well as to assist the visiting public failure to pay fees at developed recreation sites would be a violation of federal regulations."

Booth said the program is not without precedence and points to similar programs in Wyoming that have implemented a vehicle fee for parking.

"The Medicine Bow and Routt National Forests currently charge site amenity fees at 17 of its trailheads," Booth said. "A minimum of 80 percent of the funds collected come back to deal with the deferred maintenance and yearly operations and maintenance expenses. The 2008 RGA estimated that we have approximately \$23,000 in deferred maintenance. And yearly operation and maintenance costs of around \$9,000 to \$10,000 per year."

Booth said some of the wording of the proposal must be changed to keep in accordance with the

Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Fees cannot be charged for parking but, according to the act, can be charged for site amenities.

Booth also feels that implementation of the final proposal will be a boon to the maintenance of the area.

"We hope it will be effective and that we can actually collect the needed funds to deal with the deferred maintenance of a twenty year old facility," Booth said. "Otherwise, some of the site amenities currently there may need to be removed."

To view the forests service's proposal to implemented a \$10 fee for parking at the West Tensleep Trailhead log on to regulations.justia.com/view/157963.

Copyright © 2009 - Buffalo Bulletin

[x] Close Window