



GENERATION RECREATION

Bighorn National Forest Resorts to User Fees at Popular Trailhead

By Michael Pearlman, 11-22-09

Wyoming's state slogan might be "Like No Place on Earth" but next summer another of its National Forest trailheads is going to look a lot like those found in Colorado. And Washington and Oregon. And increasingly, like anywhere in the country the Forest Service can justify charging a "Recreation Access Tax" or RAT.

The West Tensleep Trailhead in the Bighorn National Forest --the most popular access to the Cloud Peak Wilderness-- will have a \$10 parking fee next summer, though forest managers can't legally call it a parking fee (a mistake they made when they first filed a notice on the Federal Register. I've been told it will be replaced with a "correctly worded" version). The RAT is the first of its type at a day-use trailhead in the Bighorn Forest, which is the second forest in the state to implement these fees. The Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest near Laramie implemented a \$5 fee for trailheads a few years ago. The fee is authorized through the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA), legislation passed in 2004 that made permanent the controversial "Fee Demo" program that has been in place since the mid-90s. Bill Schneider has discussed this issue at length here on New West, and I can only echo his arguments.

It's all about a funding shortfall, according to forest service managers who have crunched numbers. The Bighorn National Forest annual budget took a big hit this year due to the bark beetle infestation that's devastated some forests in the same region further south. The FLREA requires certain "amenities" to be in place before a fee may be charged. What amenities does the \$10 get you? At the West Tensleep trailhead, users get to park in the same parking lot that was previously free, you get an odoriferous pit toilet, some scattered picnic tables, the presence of wilderness rangers and thanks to the fee, trash collection, which was never there before. The new fee will pay for that service. Locals who want to use the lot regularly will have to pony up \$50 for an annual permit.

I can't fault forest managers for searching for an additional revenue stream after years of funding shortfalls, but the West Tensleep user fee unfairly targets certain user groups to pay the costs of a larger problem. The seven-mile corridor between U.S. Highway 16 and this trailhead is an enormously popular free-for-all of fifth-wheel and pop-up campers, ATV riders, hunters and fisherman. There's over 100 dispersed campsites in this corridor where forest users don't pay a penny to tear up vegetation, probably because charging these groups would provoke a much larger public outcry. Instead, forest managers have targeted the day hiker, horseback rider and backpacking crowd.

Clearly the issue of Forest Service budget cuts needs to be addressed, but that conversation needs to start in Congress, rather than being foisted off on the public on a piecemeal basis. With public lands visitation declining, fees like the one proposed in this case just gives families one more reason not to head into the forest on foot. Most of the other accesses to the

Cloud Peak Wilderness require punishing drives down two-track roads that require a high-clearance vehicle. In other cases, forest-trailheads are primarily the domain of off-road enthusiasts. The \$10 fee feels to me like a penalty for seeking out the quickest access to the wilderness experience.

The practical effect of this fee being implemented remains to be seen. Visiting backpackers who show up to tag the summit of Cloud Peak from the West Tensleep Trailhead might not mind paying the fee, but the local user who only visits the forest occasionally is probably going to think twice about heading there. More likely, they'll opt to camp for free along the corridor, creating even heavier impacts near West Tensleep Creek. Or else they'll just stay home altogether. Forest managers are by default promoting one type of forest use over another by charging only one user group.

I'm happy Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) have introduced legislation to repeal the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Now it would be nice to see Wyoming's congressional delegation step up and throw their support behind S. 868, the Fee Repeal and Expanded Access Act of 2009. The bill has been referred to the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where hopefully it will get a hearing in 2010. Funding the management of our public lands needs to be approached in a different way.

[End of article]

Comment By Tim M., 11-22-09

Just my opinion, but using the term "RAT" greatly reduces the quality of this article. Perhaps this is not a news article but is instead commentary, but I believe that propaganda (from either side) shouldn't be used in an actual news story.

Comment By Peter W., 11-22-09

The term "RAT" refers to these fees being exactly what they are: A Recreation Access Tax. This year the President has proposed an 8.9% increase in the Forest Service's budget (this is on top of the billions of dollars the agency has already received in "stimulus" funds). Over the last ten years the US Forest Service has received budget increases well in excess of the rate of inflation. The reality is that these dollars are disappearing into the bureaucratic maw, much of it never making it past their Washington DC offices. The latest report to Congress by the General Accounting Office (March, 2009) confirms this blasting the Forest Service for this utter lack of accountability.

I hope Senators Crapo and Baucus are successful in the passage of Senate bill 868.

Comment By Dave Skinner, 11-23-09

Well, the fact is, the users at the trailhead probably are far less supportive of Forest Service revenue generating activities like LOGGING and PETROLEUM LEASING and MINERAL LEASING and other tawdry whatnot than the humble hordes that make up the "other" multiple use spectrum...the "fifth-wheel and pop-up campers, ATV riders, hunters and fisherman" types.

I would bet good money that a user survey on a busy weekend at both facilities would show major differences in support for the multiple use mission of USFS.

Comment By Mike V, 11-24-09

Dave,

LOGGING and PETROLEUM LEASING and MINERAL LEASING do not generate ANY direct revenue for the Forest Service. First of all, ALL of the money from these "leases" goes directly to the national treasury, NOT the Forest Service. The monies collected are then made part of the federal "budget" which our public lands don't get nearly enough of. Secondly, the AMOUNT of money WE get (they are OUR lands after all) for these leases is laughable compared to the money the logging and mining companies make off of them. The bottom line is we should not be charged to access OUR lands.

Comment By Chaos Tamer, 11-24-09

To help revenue, instead of the probably unconstitutional "use fee" for something intended to be covered by taxes paid, I propose a fee on all bureaucrats and contracted "researchers" who use the trailhead, and require that they use non-polluting vehicles to get there -after approval of an EIS on their "mission".

Let's impose a rather substantial "user fee" on AIG super-bonuses gifted under TARP, instead - that I could refer to as a RAT without feeling it to be "inappropriate".

Comment By milburnschmidt, 11-24-09

Years ago when this started as a experiment instead of using it in the area where it was collected it was spread natioProtection of the watershed is now the main mission and that means less of us.n wide which lost a lot of support for it. The money collected is a drop in the bucket of the overall budget. If no roads are being built,no logging or mining and reduced recreation access what do all those people do who work there. It seems cutbacks could be made in their staffs and most of their work now is preparing endless studies that go no where and fighting endless lawsuits by the groups who are now being charged access fees. Recreation on national forests is being slowly cut back thru the excuse of no money and fees are rushing it along.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

This is a result of citizens flocking to one small area. This is the work of backpacker magazine at it's worst. Most folks dont bust out a map and find their own areas to explore anymore. they find some praised hike in backpacker or some website. They want the scenic, easily accesible areas(usually lake basins). These areas recieve a disporportionate amount of use and get trashed. On numerous occasions i've found human waste lying next to creeks on the ground, kids throwing trash around and in general degradation of these coveted places. National forest users are flocking to less places in higher numbers. Users are also not staying as long either. An avg. trip into national forests these days is usually a weekend outing. This results in the first 5-8 miles of a given area recieving the heaviest traffic while areas deeper into the woods are hardly seeing any use.

Find you own way people please.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

shmidt

is'nt this article about a popular trailhead. These areas are full of people. Your paranoia over

recreation access being reduced is certialny out of place in this case. Your just using skinners lame dishonest logic. Oh thers no mining or logging so thay aint got no money. No this is about areas being overused, how can you claim they're shutting you out? The USFS is NOT trying to get you off public lands. They are adressing areas where there frankly too many fing people using it and destroying the area and resource.

Also there are a few field workers left in the USFS who bust their backs to ensure acces for the public by clearing and maintaining trails, picking up the public's trash and clearing the access roads to these areas.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

I must say I despise the idea of fees and permits. In certain areas however I would reluctantly support them due to degradation of an area. The northwest forest pass in WA and OR is different. That pass seeks to charge you no matter where you go on national forests. I've heard most of this money does not go where they claim it does like restroing trails etc. This fee for simply using the national forests anywhere is BS an sets a bad precedence.

Comment By Jim Greer, 11-24-09

A \$10 fee for access to one single trail head? That seems excessive if you asked me (even if I supported the fee concept). After all, I get in to the entire park of Yellowstone for a week for \$25.00.

@Beargrass, I would agree that overuse may (or should) be a factor in the decisin, but in the end, I really do believe this is simply all about money and nothing else.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

Jim-

Of course a \$10 fee for one trailhead is excessive.

All i'm saying what do you expect when all the users flock to one certain area. The money will go somewhere and hopefully do some good. I would reluctantly support permits limiting the number of visitors to a certain area per day/week rather than charing them for access. This permit system has been in use for years in CA High Sierra lake basin areas. Your almost guranteed to have a lake basin to yourslef and probally will not seem any people at all. Go to some high lake basins in the rockies and you will see possibly hundreds of people going, leaving and trashing areas. Does keeping things as they are really offer any kind of solution?

Comment By Chaos Tamer, 11-24-09

First, those who maintain trails and trailheads, and who restore degraded habitats are not "bureaucrats". If any who perform this salutary service feel that the "bureaucrat" label applies to them, they are either being misused by true bureaucrats and need to do something about that abuse, or the "Cinderella Theory" applies: "If the shoe fits, wear it".

Second, Education and presence are better than fees to keep overuses from occuring. Put a few more of the "fee collectors" in the field, no new hires are needed, unless they are laid off Goldman Sachs or AIG executives (oh, wait, they're all in DC making policy).

Third, If the problem is that nasty public wanting to use "our" Forest (subject to reasonable

controls), then Bertold Brecht's 1953 "posting" is appropriately applied to those who see "the public" that way:

"After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts.

Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?"

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

chaos tamer

you seem to neither have a point nor do you seem sane,
I want the public to enjoy access anywhere free of charge.
You right wing nutters jump at any chance to refer to stalin and facists and apply to it those
with any differing views.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

chaos tamer

you disgust me comparing construction worker's uprising against real facism to disputes over
permits/user fees. You have no idea what facism truly is or what our grandfathers fought
against in WWII.

I want the public to enjoy the national forests free of charge.
The USFS wants the public to enjoy and have access to our national forests free of charge.

We're talking about a possible permit/user fee for a hiking trail yet somehow that is
comparable to the systematic murder of millions of human beings in russia.

Your a horrible, fringe whacko who only hurts our land and country.

Comment By Peter W., 11-24-09

These right vs. left, motorized vs non-motorized, tax dollar vs. fee dollar type arguments have
a place but I would expect not until agencies like the Forest Service can account for all of the
money they have been receiving. In the last ten years their allocation from congress has
increased by something like 60%. When it comes to managing the money I find it difficult to
argue with old school Republicans. What about government agencies -and others- being
required to be accountable? Is that not the first question to be asked anymore? I hope the
Baucus-Crapo bill makes it beyond the President's desk.

Comment By Chaos Tamer, 11-24-09

Um, Beargrass:

Had grandfather and brother-in-law I never had the chance to meet and thank, both of whom died fighting fascism - one in its Nazi form, one in its Communism form. I'm carrying shrapnel wounds from a later encounter. None of my forebearers paid fees to use our Forests (other than taxes and their lives) and I don't want to either (beyond reasonable and accountable taxes).

Stalinallee is the (former) name of a street, in the former East Germany about an uprising that (sadly) cost a very few lives at the hands of their own countrymen, not a political statement, used in a famous quote showing an aspect of the falsehood of both fascism and communism (two horrible forms of inhumane totalitarianism) - upon reading, it says that we the people should make these decisions, not bureaucrats claiming to know better than you or me. I have worked to maintain trails (for free) for forty years+ and support our professionals who do the same. I do find my own way in the Forest (but use established trails where they exist). I thought I was on your side, but I clearly misread your intent.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

chaos tamer

You did not justify your comparison.

Why is it so hard for you to understand i DONT want user fees or permits. Using your position as a veteran to justify your comparison of true facism to a \$10 dollar fee at a crowded trail head is not acceptable. I dont think anyone should have to pay nor do i want to see permits. If a popular area was seeing so much use that you cant drink the water in the area, there is severe erosion and degradation of surrounding habitats, and you have to watch your step at night because of white flags and human waste everywhere then maybe a permit system might not be the worst idea. If that is so radical and facist that you feel you can make a comparison to events where human beings were murderd then I believe that you are the radical one chaos.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-24-09

By find your own way people I meant get out there and find some place new there are lots of great places in the bighorns I wouldnt want to be amongs the crowds at popular trailheads anyway. I never denounced the use of trails either like chaos infers.

Comment By Todd, 11-25-09

This is pretty funny. How many of you insist that ranchers should pay "market price" to sue the forests to provide food for you and for me? But you feel abused to pay anything?

Comment By milburnschmidt, 11-25-09

Dear BearGrass take a pill and relax. I live in the Salmon Idaho area and every year more road closures and new travel plans are introduced to limit our access forcing more people in smaller areas which then show more use. I agree that some areas are ganged up thru access such as the Frank Church. If a person walked from town into the Mtns to the trailhead I guarantee you he would not see a soul in hiswalk or very few at least. Our Natl forest here is being destroyed not by people but by Pine beetles. Your description of destroyed is exaggerated. The Forest service is even trying to get out of maintaining the river rd from North Fork to Corn creek saying its a administrative Rd and should be closed in the winter preventing steelhead fisherman and nature watchers like myself from driving the Rd. This has

always been open. I have worked in Trail clearing work parties myself with the Back Country horsemen in the Frank Church but the FS says it doesnt have money for that anymore. We both agree that entrance to our Forest should be free but they keep trying to place more fees on us Not everyone in the FS wants it Feeless.If you remember when the fee system started on a expiriemental basis the FS wanted access fees for each individual forest in Idaho and Mt so if you lived near the Challis,Beaverhead or Salmon Forest you would have needed a permit for each they lost that battle but it keeps coming up.Im sure areas near congested cities are over run with people and need more attention and money.But I doubt if the ten sleep trailhead is over run with people or traffic but I confess Im not familiar with it.. The FS is like a spoiled child demanding a larger allowance when we who live here see the waste.When wolves were introduced in Corn Creek many enviros wanted to close large tracts for them and the defeated Grizzily plan would lock up more. Right now a Bill by New York Rep Carolyn Mullooney would make all of Lemhi County except private land in it a WILDERNESS from Yukon to Yellowstone. Many in in the FS favor this a lot dont.So it is not a exaggeration to say our access is not threatened.Of course I speak only of the Salmon area but other areas in Idaho are facing the same access cutbacks. And as Gump said thats all I got to say about that

Comment By milburnschmidt, 11-25-09

Another thought Beartrack when the expirimental fee use started it was supposed to stay in the system where it was purchased. I fought this and contacted then Senator Craig at a town hall and he supported it to try to increase money for the FS. I continued railing about it over the years and he wrote me he had changed hios position because fees in the West were being sent East to areas with political clout which were not in Idaho. Our contention was if we had to have one it should be a one pass for all Natl Forests instead of aseparate pass for each. In our area we have access to several differnt Forests. The new thrust of the Salmon forests is water quality and Hydrology and those are the reasons we are seeing so many areas closed off not over crowding or litter.Several years ago the Feds claimed control over all water of Fed land . This and wolf reintroduction were tools to close off more areas to road travel.Once fees start they will never go away or get cheaper and they are a pimple on the Forest service Butt. We have also found by not taking action of agregious cases of vandalism or damage to the Forest and enforcing rules they then close access for that reason by saying we have been bad.If you know workers in the FS Im sure you have heard stories of the FS misusing funds or wasteful allocation of resources.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-26-09

shmidt

shouldve known you were from slamon shity. Your not being locked out you have more free, publicly acessible land than alost anywhere. Destruction an exaggeration. Ever been to ship island lake in the crags, well if you have there is human waste and toilet paper both next to the lake and creeks and it;s domnated by bighorn outfitter constantly coming and going. Wolves were already there and grizzlies should be there becuase there certainly is enough room fore them. Your talking about NREPA in reagrd to Maloney and no it wouldnt make all of lemhi county wilderness only existitng roadless areas. The y2y has nothing to do with NREPA. Get your facts right before you start spewing the usual anti-govt right wing dribble. By the way most of the work i've seen done by backcountry horsemen was not cleared to standard.

If anyone sounds like a spoiled child its you shmidt.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-26-09

By the way i've seen relatively little beetle kill in the salmon forest.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-26-09

It's the continual right wing paranoia that hinders any progress in travel management plans.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-26-09

If you really think wolf reintroduction was a tool to close roads it displays your misguided, paranoid, delusional mindset. There are too many damn roads in our forests already the entire side of the bitterroots near salmon shitty is almost roaded what more do you want.

Comment By Beargrass, 11-26-09

Oh I guess you think you know better than the nations leading ecological scientists in regard to public lands management considering your contempt for NREPA. You guys in salmon shitty just have all the answers and know better than everyone.

Comment By Jedediah, 11-26-09

If somebody were to post an instructional piece about tating lace, skinner and garcia would add a contrarian comment.

Comment By bearbait, 12-04-09

In Region 6, or so reports this morning's paper, senior discounts on campground use are going away. The 50% senior discount was too much for the contract campground minders and keepers. They need more money. So, "improved" campground costs are going to be \$25 a day. That is \$750 a month. In much of the New West, you can rent an apartment with lights, indoor plumbing, and not have to bring your own roof and floor. My question is how much the contractors have to pay the USFS to get the contract.

As to the extraction of resources from USFS land, from logging to grazing and outfitter use, there are fees paid that stay in the Ranger District, and in the case of logging and grazing, 25% of the gross revenue goes to the county of origin, which used to pay for most school, road and county government costs in counties with 50% or more of the land in Federal hands. Without logging, schools and local government, local roads, have suffered greatly, as towns devolve and excess government fees keep people who would participate in the local economy now go elsewhere. Or live elsewhere.

I went to a soils and nutrition seminar last week, and it was explained in detail how plants have to have electrical balance to function. The anions and cations have to be equal. Always, we seem to arrive at balance as the driving force in nature and economics and even personal relations. In the public lands ongoing debate, there is no balance, and none in the foreseeable future. Until there is balance, neither side of any issue is being served. No logging or any semblance of anthropogenic landscape management, for the first century in the last ten millennia, is resulting in stand removal fires, vast insect outbreaks, and loss of grandeur of the landscape, which is now a compensable damage if fire from private lands burns public resources. Of course, if public land fire burns private land resources, there are no compensable damages for the private land owner for fire originating on public lands. No

balance there, and no end to the enmity felt by private land owners to all those who participate in the obfuscation of sane vegetation management on public lands.

So paying taxes to the Feds, and then having to pay again to access lands that are not being cared for like a reasonable person would want and expect, is an out of balance action and will gain objections and enmity from the paying public. There will be political careers damaged by the USFS and its now mercenary approach to self serving funding that does nothing for the public but cost it more money. No improvements, no conservation practices, and only road "de-construction", "obliteration", instead of road improvements or maintenance. Can you name a USFS campground or trailhead that was not built next to a road? And how did that road come about? I am afraid fewer roads translates to less access, fewer trailheads, and a more abusive policy of limits on public use of vast areas of public land. The current issue in Region 6 is that a fire burns 60,000 acres, and USFS draws a line around 200,000 acres surrounding the burn and closes it all to public use indefinitely. Access denied: The Obama USFS Plan.

Having to pay for use and access to the USFS, initiated during the term of a liberal Democrat President, is unseemly. After all, by charging all the same price or any price, it becomes an issue of the poor paying the highest cost for use in finite terms of proportion of individual wealth going to the Feds and the Treasury. A tax of the most regressive kind. And a fine tail to pin on the donkey in the next election. Elected officials must take responsibility for their actions or inactions. The vote is the tool that makes them responsible.

Comment By milburnschmidt, 12-04-09

Obviously Beargrass is more at home showing his lack of potty training insulting anyone who comments when its obvious he doesnt know what he is talking about. He has not been in the Salmon area or he would know the Pine Beetle kill is a major problem here as in other areas. There are no standards for routine trail clearing except to clear fallen trees that block the trails and chip out wider spots where the trail has eroded. As far as Ship Island if you have been there I will take your word. I have never been there and if the backpackers who claim to love and protect the wilderness are making that big of a mess it takes away their credibility. Since you dont know anything about the area which is obvious the Forest service for the last few years has been closing off roads and all land that is not private will be included in the Wilderness bill. The original wolf reintroduction was heralded by some its supporters publicly as a way to achieve more locked up land and wilderness. You seem to be a distrbed person who knows not the facts or how to spell. Read your own posts you are pounding out in rage you are more anti Govt than anybody posting. Protesting fees is not anti Govt its anti some of their fees. Im out of here you are not worth exchanging hate mail with

Comment By Dave Skinner, 12-05-09

All that moaning about fees not going to the district...yep, I agree the USFS allocates its funding in a screwed up manner. So the RRNF brought in the wood so the Finger Lakes could have a budget. I would love to see USFS restructured so that each National Forest had to be fiscally self-sufficient, or only allowed to run a certain loss percentage on administration. That would be fun, and fundamentally fairer. But Congress is too stupid, at least currently, to consider such wisdom. Hurry up 2010.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

shmidt your an idiot

how would you know where i've been.

The salmon-challis national forest compared to the BHDL, yellowstone, shoshone nf etc. is not under a pine beetle epidemic.

Wolves were already in the stanley area where there is the most pine beetle kill on the salmon-challis. If you've never even been to ship island lake then obviously you dont know what your talking about. By the way wolf reintroduction added no wilderness. I'm sick of you idiots from central idaho creating your own version of reality. "all land that is prorate will be included in this wilderness bill" LIES LIES LIES

your a liar shmidt and yeah i will hate on liars.

The only people who agree with your wing nut views are skinner and the wing nuts in salmon shitay.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

For the last time shmidt

i'm against the fees and regulations

perhaps you should learn to read before spewing grammar nazi rhetoric.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

also shmidt

there are trail clearing standards. In fact there posted on the backcountry horsemen website. But hey you guys love taking money from the feds when it comes to doing sloppy trail work right smhidit.

Except in fairly rare instances, all U.S. Forest Service trails were originally designed to standards that would accommodate horses. Mainline (easiest) trails were designed for a loaded pack string, with an 8' clearing width and 10' clearing height. They were common throughout backcountry and in western wildernesses up through the 1990s, and comprised about a third of the entire system.

At the other end of the trail design spectrum, the standard for way (most difficult) trails was a clearing width of 3 to 4' and a clearing height of 8'. Although this is recognizably inadequate for fully packed animals, it would accommodate a saddle animal and rider. Not only do a number of people like to enjoy undeveloped land by horseback, hunters have also been known to use way trails to pack out game.

I've caught you lying several times now shmidt.

I think you need the potty training only babies lie that much.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

It's the outfitters at Ship Island and the crags that are ruining the trails and character.

There's no point arguing with someone with blinders on their eyes and lies in their words.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

"There are no standards for routine trail clearing except to clear fallen trees that block the trails and chip out wider spots where the trail has eroded"

LIE

"As far as Ship Island if you have been there I will take your word. I have never been there and if the backpackers who claim to love and protect the wilderness are making that big of a mess it takes away their credibility"

LIE

"The original wolf reintroduction was heralded by some of its supporters publicly as a way to achieve more locked up land and wilderness."

LIE

"Since you don't know anything about the area which is obvious the Forest Service for the last few years has been closing off roads and all land that is not private will be included in the Wilderness bill"

LIE

I'd rather be disturbed and have a point than be a belligerent liar who thinks he knows better than everyone.

Comment By Beargrass, 12-05-09

Lying takes away your credibility as you stated Schmidt.

Served.

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