

THE DURANGO HERALD

Campground discount plan stirs debate

by Ann Butler
Herald Staff Writer

Article Last Updated; Saturday, December 05, 2009 12:00AM

To Comment

The proposal to decrease campsite discounts for seniors and permanently disabled campers from 50 percent to 10 percent at concessionaire-operated campgrounds and day-use recreation sites on national forests and grasslands is open to a 60-day public notice and comment period. Comments may be filed online at www.regulations.gov (search for Notice ID FS-2009-0001) or mailed to U.S. Forest Service, Attn. Carolyn Holbrook, Recreation and Heritage Resources Staff, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Stop 1125, Washington, D.C., 20250-1125.

Comments must be received by Feb. 1.

While concessionaires welcome a U.S. Forest Service proposal to drastically reduce discounts to seniors and the disabled at concession-managed campgrounds, another group is railing against the plan.

The Forest Service is proposing to lower the discounts to senior and disabled pass holders from 50 percent to 10 percent at concession-managed campgrounds in national forests and grasslands.

The suggested change, announced publicly for the first time in the Dec. 1 Federal Register, came after concessionaires, who manage 50 percent of national forest camping capacity, requested the Forest Service consider the change.

Kitty Benzar, president of the Western Slope No Fee Coalition, is rallying her organization's members to fight the proposal.

"Under previous policy, lifetime passes and substantial discounts to seniors and the disabled was a way to honor their contribution to our nation and ensure them access to the benefits of outdoor recreation," said Benzar, who lives in Durango. "I guess that's out the window now. No special honor, no more special breaks. 'Pay up or stay home' now applies to everyone."

The concessionaires, particularly the smaller ones, said offering the steep discount is making it difficult for them to be profitable, and thus sustainable, according to a Forest Service notice of the proposed change. As the baby boomer generation reaches 62, the age when a person qualifies for the Senior Pass, the cost of the 50 percent discount for concessionaires is projected to increase from the current \$4 million annually to \$6 million by 2022.

"We need to make sure the American public continues to fully enjoy the opportunity to recreate on national forests and grasslands," Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell said in a news release. "Passes and discounts at concession-operated campgrounds and day-use sites are an important part of ensuring these recreation opportunities remain viable in the future."

Campgrounds operated by the Forest Service will still offer the 50 percent discounts to seniors and disabled campers. The Forest Service also noted that it is the only government

agency that offers such a steep discount and said that a 10 percent discount is more in keeping with senior discounts offered in the public and private sectors.

abutler@durangoherald.com

-
1. Saturday, December 05, 2009
at 10:04:19 AM

[Suggest removal](#)

Wayne Wood says...

I'm opposed to this proposal. However, it should at least remain for "Senior" Veterans - particularly Purple Heart Vets. These are Federal Rec. Sites - Vets served in Federal armed forces - a logical and just recognition & contribution to those who served - and to those who did not serve.

-
2. Saturday, December 05, 2009
at 6:28:04 AM

[Suggest removal](#)

will parallel says...

The dishonor to seniors and people with challenges comes from using their issues to make disparaging remarks about others. What is the motivation for such attacks? Can Mr. Dunning make a positive contribution to the discussion?

-
3. Saturday, December 05, 2009
at 12:06:15 AM

[Suggest removal](#)

Ron Dunning says...

It's too bad the liberal government administration has resorted to dishonoring seniors, by charging them high amounts to recreate in the outdoors. This pattern follows the stimulus checks, which was not free money and everyone who received them, even the disabled will have to pay it back. The Obama administration is ruining America, and i'm very surprised few will speak out about that.

Comments for this article have been closed

Contents copyright ©, the Durango Herald. All rights reserved.