

**Methow Valley (WA) News**  
**January 6, 2010**

**A rock, a hard place**

Dear Editor,

Thank you for Marcy Stamper's informative interview with Mike Liu, the new Forest Service Ranger for the Methow Valley Ranger District (Interview, Dec. 23). In the interview, Ranger Liu contends that the reasons citizens are required to pay fees to hike on public lands is that Congress has not appropriated enough money to keep the trails open absent these fees. The fact is that Congressional appropriations to the U.S. Forest Service increased by 66 percent between 1999 and 2009 according to USDA Forest Service Budget Overviews, FY2008-FY2010. USFS' discretionary funding increased by 72 percent during this time. While it is true that the Methow Valley Ranger District has seen a sharp decline in their trail maintenance budget, it is not Congress who is cutting it and requiring them to make up the difference by charging locals to access their own land – it is USFS administration in Washington, D.C. The question then becomes, where is our taxpayer money going?

Suggesting that low-income families volunteer to work off their fees is an easy thing to say for people with adequate income and time. Unfortunately, research shows that struggling parents working multiple jobs to support their children have neither.

Ranger Liu failed to mention that the fees they are charging people to access the National Forests in so-called High Impact Recreation Areas do not appear to be legally defensible. When Congress passed the Federal Lands Recreation Area Enhancement Act in 2004, they did not provide for charging the public fees in HIRAs where required services were not available. When I challenged my ticket on these grounds in U.S. District Court last fall, the district attorney's office dropped the charge, as they did the challenged ticket of another local hiker. The documents around this court challenge can be found on my website at [www.klbcommunityconsulting.com](http://www.klbcommunityconsulting.com) under "Graduate Research."

I am sympathetic to the fact that the Methow Valley Ranger District is caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to funding trail maintenance – but so are struggling families. Perhaps it's time for citizens to push this issue back upstream where it belongs, and demand that our taxes be spent funding services for which we have already paid.

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