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## User-fee hikes considered at Red Rock

### Meeting planned for officials with BLM to make their case

By KEITH ROGERS  
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George Ralphs isn't thrilled about the prospect of paying to jog in Red Rock Canyon.

Three times a week for 20 years he and a couple of buddies have run free of charge on trails that wind through the canyon's sandstone cliffs, even when motorists had to pay \$5 a carload to drive the 13-mile scenic loop.

Now public lands managers want to charge hikers and bicyclists as well and increase fees on other users. Bureau of Land Management officials will attempt to make their case to citizen advisory panels in a pair of meetings next week.

"It's obvious people are having a hard enough time paying mortgage and making car payments, and now you've got to pay to see that national treasure," said the 52-year-old Ralphs, a Las Vegas real estate attorney.

He spoke about the issue Friday after an early morning jaunt through the park a few miles west of the Las Vegas Beltway, with friends Stacy Slade and Tom Thomas.

They feel that joggers and bicyclists have the least impact and don't leave trash and pollute the air like motorists who drive the loops.

And they've been running free for 13 years.

"It doesn't seem to be enforceable," said Slade, 54. "Joggers run from the early morning through night and there are many different ways in and out of the park.

"It's a far stretch for the government to want to impose a fee on that," he said. "We take out way more garbage than we ever take in."

One of the drawbacks of the BLM's plan is that joggers especially want to be on the trails an hour or so before the scenic drive fee collection stations open. While many joggers already have a \$20 annual pass, friends and family who don't have passes would have to wait for gates to open to pay their \$3.

And, if there's more than a dozen of them jogging together, they're required under existing rules to have a special use permit or letter of agreement with the lands managers.

"I'm going to have a real issue with that," said Ralphs, who is active with a varsity scout group.

"I don't have a problem with paying a fee as a motorist. I just have a problem with charging hikers and joggers," he said.

Since the bureau began collecting entrance fees in November 1997, the cost has remained \$5 per vehicle, \$2 per motorcycle or \$20 for an annual passport. Bicyclists and pedestrians have entered the canyon free, and mountain bicyclists can access trails at the south end of the canyon without paying.

The BLM's business plan calls for increasing daily vehicle passes to \$7 and charging motorcyclists another buck to \$3, the same fee for bicyclists and pedestrians will have to pay. The cost of an annual pass will increase by one-third to \$30.

The bulk of fee collections occur at the entrance to Red Rock Canyon's scenic loop, which put nearly \$1.6 million in the local BLM's till during 2008, when the BLM planners said they were considering a fee-hike.

John Hiatt chairs both the recreation subcommittee and the Mojave-Great Basin Resource Advisory Council that will field comments from the BLM and the public for a recommendation whether or not fees should or should not be increased and if so by how much.

He said he understands the concerns of the hiking and biking public, and motorists on the scenic drive. But he also said the BLM needs financial help to manage the crowds. The money the park gets for improvements through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act doesn't include money for maintenance and operations of facilities, and the BLM's budget lacks sufficient funding to cover those costs without user fee money.

"Personally, I don't like paying fees but I do recognize with very large numbers of people coming to an area, you can't have a free-for-all and damage the resources," Hiatt said Friday.

"You have to have rules and maintenance or it will suffer," there's no easy decisions here."

The BLM's business plan will be discussed 12:30 p.m. Wednesday by the Resource Advisory Council's Recreation Subcommittee at the Red Rock Canyon Visitor Center meeting room.

The Mojave-Southern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council will take up fee-hike proposal 8 a.m. Thursday at the BLM's Southern Nevada District Office, 4701 N. Torrey Pines Drive.

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#### RED ROCK FEE INCREASE PROPOSAL

	From	To
Scenic drive, day pass (car)	\$5	\$7
Scenic drive, day pass (motorcycle)	2	3
Scenic drive, day pass (bicycle)	0	3
Scenic drive, day pass (pedestrian)	0	3
Scenic drive, commercial bus (per person)	2	5
Scenic drive, annual pass	20	30
Red Spring, group picnic area permit	0	40

Campground, individual campsite	10	15
Campground, group campsite	25	40

Source: Bureau of Land Management

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